

Role-playing in fifth business



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BUSTER**

By examining Fifth Business, it is clear that the characters take part in theatricizing life: they play and cast others into roles founded in archetypes. The characters feel a need to do this because it provides stability in their lives. Playing a role gives a person an identity and purpose so that, even in face of unpredictability, their self-image and future is a given constant. Imposing such roleplaying on the rest of humankind familiarizes the outside world and gives a person an escape from volatile reality. To begin, characters are repeatedly compelled to shape their identities — both public and private — after recognizable archetypes. For example, Dunny Ramsey defines and confines himself in terms of archetypes — the roles he does and doesn't play: I had never, so far as I can tell, been absorbed completely into the character of a Headmaster—a figure of authority, of scholarship, of probity—but I was an historian, a hagiographer, a bachelor of unstained character, a winner of the Victoria Cross, the author of several admired books, a man whose course of life was set and the bounds of whose success were defined. (Davies 205) Dunny rejects playing the part of the foggyish schoolmaster and instead identifies with the archetype of the outsider: an eccentric with an assortment of atypical interests and achievements. His acceptance of this role, the fate of which is defined, supplies constancy in his life. Likewise, Paul Demsper consciously takes on the archetypal persona of the mysterious magician. He says that he must stay in "character all the time" and that "[w]hen people meet [him] [he] must be always the distinguished gentleman conferring a distinction; not a nice fellow, just like the rest of the boys" (Davies 199). This role is characterized as a master of a hidden knowledge. Playing this part as Magnus Eisengrim makes Paul an enigma and emotional detaches him from others. The secrecy and

disconnection conceal and, thus, protect his psyche/inner self. In addition, Boy Staunton comes to view himself as an eminent politician embodying the archetype of the hero. He “came somehow to think of himself as a politician ... with a formidable following among the voters” and “that he should become leader of the Conservative party as fast as possible and deliver the people of Canada from their ignominious thralldom to the Liberals” (Davies 223). Boy plays the grand role of a hero - at least in his own mind. He believes that he has the ability to rescue the Canadian people from a supposed villain and that he is celebrated by the public. Playing this character validates Boy’s existence, giving him pride and purpose. In brief, people find emotional security in acting and perceiving themselves as archetypes. People’s compulsion to typecast not only applies to themselves but, additionally, to others in their lives. For instance, Mary Densper created a mythological story explaining Paul’s disappearance to relieve herself of fault. Years after Paul ran away, Mary still envisions him as a “lost boy” who did not run away but rather stolen “by evil people” she imagined to be gypsies as “gypsies have carried the burden of the irrational dreads of stay-at-homes for many hundreds of years” (Davies 222). In creating this story of Paul’s kidnapping, Mary casts him in the role of the victim child and gypsies as the trickster villain, their stereotype in many tales. By imposing these roles, she can make sense of Paul’s disappearance and is alleviated from having to admit to herself that Paul ran away and that she may have played a role in his decision. Similarly, the people of Deptford are compelled to falsely interpret the relationship between Dunny, Boy, and Leola as an epic love triangle - a classic trope. Deptford resident Melio perceived Leola’s death as “the end of a great romance” (Davies 185). The citizens are blind

to the Stauntons' cold marriage and Dunny's apathy to Leola because they are impelled to mold people into characters, mythologizing the world. This conjured outlook provides an escape from the instable reality of life. Such casting can again be seen on an even larger scale: the public molds celebrities into symbolic figures. When receiving his VC, Dunny describes the King of England and himself as "public icons"; this title indicates that they each perform a role for society: "he an icon of kingship, and I an icon of heroism, unreal yet very necessary" (Davies 79). It is necessary for the populace that people are cast into parts, making them a personification of universal elements, because it familiarizes the world. Overall, people cast those both personal close to themselves and near strangers as archetypes for their own psychological comfort. To conclude, the beliefs and behaviors of the characters of Fifth Business corroborates the mythological critical theory posit that archetypes are a fundamental aspect of humans. People use these recognizable tropes to define both who they themselves and others are precisely because of the familiarity of such tropes. This identification provides the psychological and psychosocial stability needed in an instable world. Through illustrating the importance of archetypes in his novel, Davies seeks to initiate self-exploration on the part of the audience, enlightening the reader on the presence of such typecasting within their own life. Works Cited Davies, Robertson. Fifth Business. New York: Penguin, 2005. Print.