WHAT IS KNOWN OF OLD AND LONG FAMILIAR: THE UNCANNY EFFECT IN *WORLD OF WONDERS*

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John Mills, in his critical essay on Robertson Davies for the *Canadian Writers and Their Works* series, complains of *World of Wonders* that "it is not at all clear what the fiction is *about*."[1] The subject matter, he argues, is not sharply focused. However, the very short opening chapter of this novel suggests one possibility—this is a metafiction, a fiction about fiction and the reader's role in creating fiction.

The obvious and immediate function of the first chapter is to set the plot in motion; hence, we are told that the characters are engaged in making a film which will present "a great magician of today doing honour to a great magician of the past."[2] However, this same information is presented more clearly and with more exact detail in the next chapter by the narrator of the novel, Dunstan Ramsay. Moreover, the opening chapter is presented without narration as an unmediated dialogue between two unidentified speakers. Clues in the dialogue tell us that one speaker is the film-maker and the other speaker is the "great magician of today." A reader familiar with the other books in The Deptford Trilogy would probably identify the latter speaker as Paul Dempster/Magnus Eisengrim; we are given this information only in the second chapter. Thus, the opening chapter would be superfluous if its function were indeed to impart this information.

The conversation itself suggests a second possibility. Magnus defines a great magician as "a man who can stand stark naked in the midst of a crowd and keep it gaping for an hour while he manipulates a few coins, or cards, or billiard balls" (*World of Wonders* 555).[3] He further insists on his own ability to create just such a response:

> I've already been seen all over the world. And I mean *I've been seen*, and the unique personal quality of my performance has been felt by audiences with whom I've created a unique relationship. (556)

Film, Magnus continues, lacks the "inexplicable but beautifully controlled sympathy between the artist and his audience" (557). Lind responds that film also offers its audience the opportunity for active participation: "'Film is like painting, which is also unchanging. But each viewer brings his personal sensibility, his unique response to the completed canvas as he does to the film'" (557). However, Magnus argues that the very nature of the passive television audience belies this possibility:

> Who are your television viewers? Ragtag and bobtail; drunk and sober; attentive or in a nose-picking stupor. With the flabby concentration of people who are getting something for nothing. I am used to audiences who come because they want to see *me*, and have paid to do it. In the first five minutes I have made them attentive as they have never been before in their lives. I can't guarantee to do that on T.V. I can't see my audience, and what I can't see I can't dominate. And what I can't dominate I can't enchant, and humour, and make partners in their own deception. (557)

Two things are immediately apparent. First, the reader is called upon actively to interpret textual clues in order to identify the speakers and to assimilate the information: no narrative directives are offered. Second, what this chapter is "about" is the aesthetic, emotional effect of artistic performance, regardless of medium. The conversation is loaded with key words and phrases: "keep it gaping," "felt by audiences," "sympathy between the artist and his audience," "personal sensibility," "unique response," "dominate," "enchant," "humour," and "make partners in their own deception." This is the vocabulary of reader-response theory which insists that every act of communication must be both encoded and decoded, rendering the creation and interpretation of the text a dual act. As in *Tempest-Tost*, where Davies used the carnival aspects of small-town theatre to signal the absence of footlights or the breakdown of barriers between actors and audience, so here he uses the language of reader response to demonstrate a similar breakdown of the artist/audience opposition in a dual act of creation. By examining the nature of aesthetic effect,

he self-consciously reveals his own role in the artifice. The insistence on audience response established in this chapter is developed throughout the novel. In response to John Mills, therefore, one can reply that at least one of the things this novel "is about" is aesthetic effect.

The concept of aesthetic effect, however, requires some definition. Shortly after publishing *World of Wonders* Davies delivered a series of lectures, which he called the "Masks of Satan," on the effect of evil in literature. The topics range from the Jungian archetypes in melodrama, to theatre-going as a form of "dreaming together," to the melodrama of Dickens through the ghost stories of Henry James to an insistence on an active dualism. Much of what Davies has to say in these lectures serves as a gloss to *World of Wonders*. In the second lecture he agrees with Santayana's claim that our age is "aesthetically snobbish": "And indeed there may be something wrong with us; we hate to have our feelings touched."[4] Perhaps as an alternative, in the initial lecture Davies offers a Jungian conception of literature:

> Literature—poetry, novel and drama—is a product of its creator that draws upon conscious experience and reflection, but important elements in it come from the Unconscious realm.
>
> The reader, or the playgoer, is powerfully affected by the elements of the poem, the novel, or the play that arise from the writer's Unconscious, and anyone who is at all sensitive to literature is sensitive to this dream-like aspect which speaks to the dreamer in himself, and the more powerful this dream-like aspect is the more powerfully it will affect him. (*One Half of Roberstson Davies* 191)

Again, we find the emphasis placed on the audience's being "powerfully affected" by and sensitive to the literary performance. Davies makes one other rather extraordinary claim for the immediacy of the dramatic, artistic effect. Speaking about the power of Dickens's novels as melodrama, and particularly of the powerful effect of Dickens's reading of the death of Nancy in *Oliver Twist*, Davies says,

> It was, among other things, an acting out of Evil that brought audiences to their feet in applause. . . . Dickens' reading of the Murder was a stupendous feat of making external and actual something which had existed as an artistic creation. (*One Half of Robertson Davies* 218)

Davies is arguing here that the reading doubles the work in such a way as to enhance its reality, rendering it "external and actual," giving it a new dynamic effect on audiences.

Davies considers this effect further. Throughout all the lectures, but particularly in the lecture "Gleams and Glooms" dealing with ghost stories, Davies refers specifically and repeatedly to the "uncanny," a reference which links his ideas on dramatic effect to Freud's theory of the aesthetic effect of the "uncanny." Sigmund Freud had conducted his own investigation of aesthetics, which he defined as "not merely the theory of beauty but the theory of the qualities of feeling."[5] The particular province of aesthetics which Freud investigates is "the uncanny," which concerns itself with "feelings of repulsion and distress" ("The Uncanny" 219); more precisely, Freud defines the uncanny as "that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar" (220). He attributes the uncanny to several sources: animism; magic and sorcery; the omnipotence of thought; man's attitude towards death; involuntary repetition; and the castration complex (243). He suggests that "those themes of uncanniness which are most prominent" are "all concerned with the phenomenon of the 'double', which appears in every shape and in every degree of development" (234).

Looking again at the opening chapter, then, we can trace the same concerns which Davies articulated in his lectures. Here, Paul Dempster is *reading* his own life just as Dickens read his own work, and to much the same effect: a heightening, enhancing and ennobling of the emotional impact. We are presented throughout the novel with this double text—Dempster's life story and Eisengrim's reading of his life story, which in turn is doubled in Lind's film. We are offered simultaneously the experience he undergoes and the emotional impact of that experience. The predominant vehicle through which Davies develops and represents this "effect" is the uncanny. Each of the three apprenticeships which Dempster serves in becoming Magnus Eisengrim is presented in terms of a powerful uncanny effect through which Eisengrim learns something about controlling audiences: first as Abdullah, next as Mungo Fetch, and finally as the master clockmaker repairing mechanical dolls.

Given the novel's immediate and constant preoccupation with the effect of magic, and indeed with the uncanny effect, it is appropriate that the concept of the double is developed more

explicitly in this novel than in any other Davies novel. Each effect which Eisengrim is conscious of creating is doubled by an equally strong effect which he unconsciously creates in the people around him. Woven throughout Eisengrim's tale is the constant insistence on the motif of reading, reminding us of the act of reading and the interpretative function and subjective response. Tzvetan Todorov, in his genre study of *The Fantastic*, insists that the response shared by the fantastic and the uncanny, which he defines as a hesitation between the real and the imaginary or the natural and supernatural, must be experienced by the reader—most often through sympathetic identification with a character. Accordingly, each apprenticeship also has a witness to verify Magnus' own interpretation and to inform the audience of the dark side of his experiences of which he is often unaware: Dunstan Ramsay, Roland Ingestree, and Liesl Vitzliputzli. As Magnus attends to his audience, so too does Davies.

Thus, on a general level, *World of Wonders* seems an extension of Davies' self-professed interest in the nature and source of the effect of artistic performances. Furthermore, Freud's paper on the uncanny seems to provide a useful theoretical underpinning to the particular emotional responses represented within Eisengrim's story. What remains is to examine in detail the way Davies uses the uncanny to make "external and actual" something which exists as an artistic effect.

The formal premise of *World of Wonders*, put forth in the opening chapters, also immediately introduces the notion of a dual effect: the conscious, intended effect and the unconscious effect. The film-makers urge Eisengrim to tell them how he came to be a world-renowned magician of a power akin to Houdin's. His story, they argue, will serve as a subtext to Robert-Houdin's:[6] "'A reality running like a subterranean river under the surface; an enriching, but not necessarily edifying, background to what is seen'" (564). This definition, provided by Ingestree, assumes a consciousness on the part of the artist/film-maker which produces an unconscious effect, an "enriching," for the audience. Ramsay defines it in terms of what is unsaid in addition to what is unseen (note the perspectives of author and cameraman): "'What a character thinks and knows, as opposed to what the playwright makes him say'" (567-68). However, Magnus, the magician, understands the source of an effect. When Ramsay insists that there can be no subtext unless Magnus reveals his own life to the film-

makers, Magnus upbraids him: "You're quite wrong. I would know, and I suppose whatever I do is rooted in what I am, and have been" (568). Thus he insists that every conscious effect is rooted in an unconscious source—an assumption which is essential to Freud's theory of the uncanny.

Nonetheless, Magnus does tell his tale. Patricia Monk and others have already explicated his story as a romance, complete with descent into the underworld and return of the hero with new knowledge. Our interest in the story lies elsewhere, in the growth of Magnus as a magician capable of domineering and enchanting his audience, and paradoxically commanding/inviting them to participate in his interpretative act. The telling of the tale is as important as the tale itself, for Magnus is clearly attempting to do more than simply impart information. He is trying to recreate his own experience in a manner vivid enough and emotionally intense enough to allow his audience to experience the events, to participate rather than to listen.

The first stage of Magnus's apprenticeship is his indoctrination into Wanless's World of Wonders. In his telling, Magnus immediately evokes an atmosphere of felt apprehension and emotional intensity. He describes his visit to the Deptford fairgrounds in lingering, sensual detail, but what he stresses is his own building—and ambivalent—response. As he ran off to the fair, Magnus remembers, "My heart was full of terrible joy. I was wicked, but O what a release it was!" (573). "Pleasure now began to be really intense" as he approached, with "awe and some fear," the display from the Indian reservation. For "one hundred and eighty seconds" he rode the merry-go-round "in ecstasy" (574). However, the most intense anticipation is for the World of Wonders: "this was a show that turned my bowels to water" (574).

Both the sensuality of the descriptions and the sense of moral duality are heightened as Magnus describes his first meeting with Willard: "I longed with my whole soul to know what Willard knew. As the hart pants after the water brooks, even so my blasphemous soul panted after Willard" (*World of Wonders* 576). Again, he tries to recreate the actual effect of Willard's show:

> Willard laughed a mocking laugh. Oh, very Mephistophelian! It sounded like a trumpet call to me, because I had never heard anybody laugh like that before. He was laughing at us, for having been deceived. What power! What glorious

> command over lesser humanity! Silly people often say that they are enraptured by something which has merely pleased them, but I was truly enraptured. I was utterly unaware of myself, whirled into a new sort of comprehension of life by what I saw. (577)

When we seek the source of this effect, and therefore its power, Freud is most instructive. Willard is billed as a "Wizard," and he watches the boy with a "dark and wizard-like gaze." To Paul Dempster his power is not an illusion but a reality: "For me the Book of Revelation came alive: here was an angel come down from heaven, having great power, and the earth was lightened with his glory" (577). Thus, Willard represents the principle of omnipotence of thought, which Freud claims as a source of the uncanny effect:

> Our analysis of the uncanny has led us back to the old, animistic conception of the universe. This was characterized by the idea of a world peopled with the spirits of human beings; by the subject's narcissistic overvaluation of his own mental processes; by the belief in the omnipotence of thoughts and the techniques of magic based on that belief; by the attribution to various outside persons and things of carefully graded magical powers, or 'mana'. . . . It seems as if each one of us had been through a phase of individual development corresponding to this animistic stage in primitive men, that none of us has passed through it without preserving some residues and traces of it which are still capable of manifesting themselves, and that everything which now strikes us as 'uncanny' fulfills the condition of touching those residues of animistic mental activity within us and bringing them to expression. ("The Uncanny" 241)

According to Freud's interpretation, then, Willard's power to enchant Paul can be seen as a product of this powerful uncanny effect. However, the manner in which this whole episode is presented suggests that Magnus is trying to create a similar effect in his audience, and indeed that Davies is attempting to stir the same response in us. The episode is presented as a lengthy scene; it is presented in great and sensuous detail; it is presented in a duration which comes very close to synchrony—Magnus takes an evening to tell of this afternoon; and it is presented with almost no interruptions to Magnus's first person narration to diminish its effect—that is, it is presented as a monologue. Yet, despite the

vivid recreation Magnus presents of this experience, we can only achieve a distanced empathy with his emotions: our age and sophistication, and that of Magnus's audience, will not allow Willard to enchant us.

Therefore, the power of this scene for us lies elsewhere, and Magnus unconsciously suggests the source. Describing his immediate fascination with Willard, he quotes Psalm 42, the prayer for deliverance, but he substitutes "my blasphemous soul panted after the Wizard" for "so panteth my soul after thee, O God" (Psalms 42:1). He identifies Willard as "very Mephistophelian." Thus the adult Magnus confesses his childhood blasphemy. Moreover, in assigning Willard god-like powers and then seeking his attention, Paul is breaking a powerful taboo, which, even if unconscious, remains a source of disquiet and anxiety for us. Furthermore, the taboo prohibition underlying Paul's intense response to Willard is also the source of the emotional ambivalence evidenced in this passage. Freud discusses this response to taboo:

> On the one hand it means to us, sacred, consecrated: but on the other hand it means, uncanny, dangerous, forbidden and unclean. The opposite for taboo is designated in Polynesian by the word *noa* and signifies something ordinary and generally accessible. Thus something like the concept of reserve inheres in taboo; taboo expresses itself essentially in prohibitions and restrictions. Our combination of "holy dred" would often express the meaning of taboo.[7]

Freud's oxymoron in the last sentence echoes Magnus's emotions of "terrible joy" and "awe and some fear." Freud also demonstrates that the violator of the taboo himself becomes a forbidden object (*Totem and Taboo* 31) and that he will invite punishment from the gods. Todorov agrees with Freud that the "sentiment of the uncanny originates . . . in certain themes linked to more or less ancient taboos,"[8] but he is more insistent that the emphasis in an uncanny event must always be on the reaction which the event provokes. Thus, even before we learn of Willard's rape of Paul, we are aware of a sense of foreboding evil.

The rape itself evokes a strong uncanny response. It is appropriate, therefore, that the child Paul mistakes the seduction for a magical trick:

> Willard took a clean white handkerchief out of his pocket, twisted it quickly into a roll, and forced it between my teeth.

> No: I should not say 'forced'. I thought this was the beginning of some splendid illusion, and opened my mouth willingly. Then he whirled me round, lifted me up on the seat in a kneeling position, pulled down my pants and sodomized me. (580)

Moreover, he himself recognizes the taboo associations of the rape: "It was something filthy going in where I knew only that filthy things should come out, as secretly as could be managed" (582). Thereafter, the other carnival members treat Paul as himself taboo: "I was part of something shameful and dangerous everybody knew about, but which nobody would have dreamed of bringing into the light" (596). The operative words here are "shameful and dangerous," signalling the effect of taboo violations.

The significance of Paul's rape and its consequences have been presented in mythic terms by Patricia Monk and others. Barbara Godard has also explicated the imagery of Paul's descent into the underworld in Bakhtinian terms: "For in the carnival world, the way up is always the way down. Death must precede resurrection. Abdullah is a 'very nasty coffin' (*World of Wonders* 122), but only the first in which this many reborn figure goes through his metamorphoses."[9]

As Cass Fletcher (appropriately enough, named after a laxative—"Fletcher's Castoria, Children Cry For It"), Paul is stripped of all associations with his former self and his former life. As he loses his own soul, he describes how he "became the soul of Abdullah, and entered into a long servitude to the craft and art of magic" (598). Once again, the adult Eisengrim in recounting his experience tries to recreate the actual emotional experience, primarily by evoking the sense of smell. Adbullah had a "heavy smell" of papier mache and glue, mixed with the smell of Paul's urine and a "strong whiff of hot dwarf" left by the previous operator (602). All of these smells, filtered through Paul's fevered awareness, coalesce to forge the encasement inside Abdullah into a peculiar sensual experience, as the rape is forever associated with the cloying richness of the various tastes he experienced for the first time that day. And, once again, the sense of magic is identified as the primary source of this powerful effect:

> I suppose I became rather feverish, but although I would not describe my emotion as happiness I was possessed of an intensity of interest and ambition that was beyond anything

> I had ever known in my life. When you were teaching me magic, Ramsay, I felt something like it, but not to the same degree . . . . But this was the real thing. I don't know quite what this reality was, but it was wonderful, and I was an important part of it. (603)

The effect Abdullah creates from within, however, is very different from that it creates from without: "Abdullah pulled them in because people cannot resist automata. There is something in humanity that is repelled and entranced by a machine that seems to have more than human powers. People love to frighten themselves" (608). The dual emotions Eisengrim identifies, "repelled and entranced," cue us to an uncanny effect. Freud cites an earlier study by Jentsch which is significant for us here, in which Jentsch explicates Hoffman's tale "The Sandman" and attributes the uncanny effect of the tale to Olympia, the automaton:

> Jentsch believes that a particularly favourable condition for awakening uncanny feelings is created when there is intellectual uncertainty about whether an object is alive or not, and when an inanimate object becomes too much like an animate one. ("The Uncanny" 233)[10]

Thus, the young Paul recognizes in his rubes this same uncertainty which allows Abdullah to trick them.

Paul's apprenticeship with Willard follows a gradual progression from the invisible, inward spirit of Abdullah to an external autonomous being. At first, Paul is nonexistent: "When I was in Abdullah, I was Nobody. I was an extension and a magnification of Willard . . ." (604). As he matures, however, he begins to separate himself from Abdullah, and we begin to get some image of him as he appears to the other performers: "'Get your hair cut. Keep yourself clean. Stop wiping your nose on your sleeve. . . . If you gotta be a hoor, be a clean hoor'" (665). When Paul is finally able to destroy Abdullah in an act of mythical and psychological triumph, he performs on stage as a magician for the first time. His triumph is limited, however, since we must assume that Paul and Willard share the identity of the Wizard; Paul goes on only when Willard is unable to perform. Thus, where previously Paul/Abdullah had operated as a single entity under Willard's control, now Paul/Willard operates as the single persona of the magician. Neither Paul nor Willard can exist without the other.

Freud borrows an explanation of the uncanny nature of the

double from Otto Rank ("The Uncanny" 234-35). Freud attributes the uncanniness to three aspects of the double. First, since the subject is identified with someone else, there is a confusion of identity between the self and the extraneous double, causing the intellectual uncertainty which so often creates this effect. Secondly, Freud reiterates Rank's argument that although the double was initially associated with the soul and was thus accepted as a "preservation against extinction," it eventually reversed its aspect and became "the uncanny harbinger of death." Finally, Freud himself attributes the fear of the double to its association with the super-ego as an agency "which is able to treat the rest of the ego like an object," dissociated from the ego.

Thus, as the double first of Abdullah and then of Willard, Paul must kill the host to secure his own identity. The destruction of Abdullah breaks the spell and releases Paul from his total thralldom, yet Paul himself is unable to recreate the effect he evoked as Abdullah, largely because alone he cannot produce the uncanny sense of a double occurence, of something that is real at the same time that it is illusory. Eisengrim recognizes this inability to create "intellectual uncertainty" as the source of his early incompetence:

> My greatest difficulty was in learning how to perform slowly enough. In my development of a technique while I was concealed in Abdullah I had become so fast and so slick that my work was incomprehensible; the quickness of the hand should certainly deceive the eye, but not so fast the eye doesn't realize it is being deceived. (675)

Again, the emphasis is placed on the need for comprehension and the paradox of knowing deception which is central to the effect and to Davies's self-reflexive thesis.

It is significant, then, that years later, after Eisengrim's second apprenticeship, when he first emerges as an individual, his first work is as a clockmaker patiently mending automata. Samuel Macey, in his study of "Time, Clockwork, and the Devil in the Deptford Trilogy," notes that it is through clockwork (combined with romance, which halts time) that Eisengrim is able to come to terms with "the diabolism of time":

> Eisengrim had been liberated from time by the contempt for it he had "gained sitting inside Abdullah, when time had no significance." Yet, acting intuitively, as he seems always to

> have done, Eisengrim felt the need to empathize completely with the very clockwork that symbolized not only his own hell in Abdullah but also the hell of modern Western man.[11]

It also seems appropriate that as Eisengrim masters time, and accepts its diabolism and his own, Liesl chooses to describe him in terms of the very story which Freud uses as a demonstration of the uncanny—Hoffman's "Sandman." Liesl casts Eisengrim in the role of Spalanzani, the clock-maker who creates the automaton Olympia, identified by Jentsch as the source of uncanny effect in the story. Liesl's casting seems to award Eisengrim the same mastery. Moreover, in repairing the mechanical toys Eisengrim is able to create in them an uncanny effect similar to that of Olympia and of Abdullah (when operated by Paul):

> ". . . Only Magnus could have read, in a cardboard box full of parts, the secret of the tiny performance that the completed figure was meant to give. When he had finished one of his repair jobs, the little bootblack did not simply brisk away at his little boot with his miniature brush, and whistle and tap his foot: he seemed to live, to have a true quality of being as though when you had turned your back he would leap up from his box and dance a jig, or run off for a pot of beer."
>
> (834-35)

Through this reference to Hoffman's text, Davies brings not only Hoffman's but also Freud's text into play in a complex intertextual doubling: Eisengrim is not only compared to Spalanzani—he repeats the actions of Spalanzani in a doubling of the tale of the double which is initially retold by Freud to explain the double's uncanny effect and here retold by Davies in a highly self-reflexive interpretative gesture. The repeated allusions to Hoffman and the attention paid to the automata pinpoint Davies's deliberate focus on effect—and in particular on the paradoxically dual effect of the uncanny. For the reader, tracing the source of an uncanny response often signals the narrative level at which the effect operates. For example, when Paul first appears on stage as a magician he reports that he had no effect on his audience. However, when Eisengrim recounts his experience years later as part of his subtext there is a very powerful effect which can be attributed to several sources.

First, Paul is still "nobody" when he apears on stage under Willard's billing, thus effectively becoming Willard's double. This

recognition of duality can only enhance the taboo associations around the men's complex relationship, for in entering Willard's identity Paul enters his guilt. Moreover, this brief merging of identities allows Paul to fulfill his task of killing his twin (or his parent) to ensure his own survival.[12] Paul gradually takes over the magic act, and Willard is cast in a role which seems to deliver the expected punishment for his taboo violations—"The Shame of The Old South": "The suggestion was that Willard was the outcome of a variety of incestuous matings. I doubt if many of the people who came to see Willard believed it, but the appetite for marvels and monsters is insatiable . . ." (677).

Paul's ascent as Faustus Legrand coincides with Willard's descent, but only Willard's death releases Paul from "the shadow of Willard." Once again, Eisengrim signals the psychological importance of the moment by attempting to recreate the experience through extensive detail:

> He had been blue before, but for a few hours before the end he was a leaden colour, and as his mouth was open it was possible to see that it was almost black inside. His teeth were in very bad condition from geeking, and he looked like one of those terrible drawings by Daumier of a pauper corpse. The pupils of his eyes were barely perceptible. His breath was very faint, but what there was of it stank horribly. . . . Then a surprising thing happened; a short time before he died his pupils dilated extraordinarily, and that, with his wide-stretched mouth and his colour, gave him a look of a man dying of terror. (681)

However, Eisengrim's apprenticeship is not yet over. He escapes from the "shadow of Willard" to emerge "under the shadow of Irving" (702) in a clear repetition of his first apprenticeship. His initiation into the theatrical world, like his initiation into the carnival world, is experienced through the overlay of sweet, cloyish taste—several pink gins for a young man who has never had alcohol. The inversion Godard has identified in the carnival world is signalled here by the location of Eisengrim's interview with Milady—the RAB NOOLAS, or SALOON BAR in reverse (714).

Eisengrim now becomes a "tabula rasa" or "a dear, sweet little zero" (716). His role as the double in "Two, Two"—again Davies uses a linguistic marker—is explained primarily through the effect it creates in the audience:

> Suddenly, before their very eyes, stands Sir John, juggling marvellously, and of course they adore him. Then, a few minutes later, they see Sir John walking the tightrope, and they see half a dozen of his little special tricks of gesture and turns of the head, and they are thunderstruck because they can't believe that he has learned to walk the tightrope. And the marvel of it, you see, is that it's you, all the time! You must use your imagination, my dear boy. You must see what a stunning effect it is. (714-15)

Milady further explains: "'People want to believe that what they see is true, even if only for the time they're in the playhouse. That's what theatre is, don't you understand. Showing people what they wish were true'" (715). In order to achieve this effect, Milady insists that Paul must achieve not only imitation but complete equivalence: "'You must quite simply *be* him'" (716). Thus Davies has neatly repeated the self-reflexive structure of Eisengrim's first apprenticeship. Paul is forced into the role of a double operating on both the figurative and literal level. In turn the apparent doubleness evokes an uncanny response in the audience which Davies explicates, laying bare the device in order to draw attention to the psychological doubling of Paul and Sir John and its intended uncanny effect.

Several critics have questioned the necessity and integrity of this section of the novel. John Mills claims that the "material concerning Sir John Tresize seems to exist in the novel for its own sake, as a means whereby Davies can communicate what he knows about Sir John Martin-Harvey and his troupe, which toured Canada in the 1920's."[13] Similarly, John Dean argues,

> When Davies is at his best his Deptford Trilogy "refreshes dry places in the spirit"...; when he is at his worst, as in some of the theatre remembrances in *World of Wonders*, . . . he can be nostalgically tedious or over-indulgent with his own intellectual gamesmanship.[14]

However, in light of the stress already demonstrated on effect and response, the theatrical section is integral to the novel. Eisengrim stresses the effect of romance—which he defines as "a mode of feeling" (722)—on the audience: "... The theatre I knew was the theatre that makes people forget some things and remember others, and refreshes dry places in the spirit" (774). Eisengrim admits that he thirsted for this refreshment "as the hart pants for

the waterbrooks" (774). The repetition of this allusion to the Psalms, first made in reference to Eisengrim's intense response to Willard's magic, establishes a doubling between the two forms of performance and again establishes the second as a repetition of the first. They share a dependence on allusion, common to both religion and magic, to evoke a wonder in the audience by stirring the uncanny response Freud attaches to those things which remind us of an early primitive animism.

Hence, when Eisengrim slows down his narrative to give complete precis of *The Master of Ballantrae* and the other plays, he does so because he wants to recreate their effect. He wants his listeners to experience for themselves the original power of these plays. He concludes his precis by assuring his companions that "as the Guvnor acted it, the play compelled belief and shook you up pretty bad" (749).

The emotional impact of romance is accentuated further in Eisengrim's account of various attempts to dramatize *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.* Once again Davies uses another story of doubling as an intertext to lay bare the device of the uncanny effect and draw attention to his own technique. Ingestree, as an inexperienced scholar, wants to write a play which operates in the mode of thinking rather than feeling:

> Not only would Jekyll and Hyde wear masks, but the whole company would wear them, and sometimes there would be eight or ten Jekylls on the stage, all wearing masks showing different aspects of that character, and we would see them exchange the masks of Jekyll—because there was to be no nonsense about realism, or pretending to the audience that what they saw had any relationship to what they foolishly thought of as real life—for masks of Hyde. (752-53)

Eisengrim's ironic parody of Ingestree's argument conveys his scorn, for Eisengrim understands that it is precisely the perceived relationship between dramatic event and "real life" which is the source of intense aesthetic response. The masks could be related to automata in that they present a machine-like face coupled with a human form, thus potentially creating the intellectual uncertainty so integral to the uncanny effect. However, by using multiple masks simultaneously Ingestree would emphasize, and therefore belie, the illusory doubleness, thereby negating the intellectual

uncertainty and its associated uncanny effect. When the Tresizes refuse the masks, Ingestree suggests another form for the play:

> "And it came to me that Aldous would have used what we call a distancing technique—you know, he would have written it all apparently straight, but with a choice of vocabulary that gave it all an ironic edge, so that the perceptive listener would realize that the whole play was ambiguous, and could be taken as a hilarious send-up." (769)

Against these extreme revisions Eisengrim sets a performance of the play as straight melodrama, and this time his tone signals his approbation:

> Old Frank Moore had played with Henry Irving's son "H.B." in a Jekyll and Hyde where H.B. made the transformation from the humane doctor to the villainous Hyde before the eyes of the audience, simply by ruffling up his hair and distorting his body. . . . [Old Frank] did this one day in the pub and some strangers, who weren't used to actors, left hurriedly and the landlord asked Frank, as a personal favor, not to do it again. Frank had an extraordinarily gripping quality as an actor. (753)

Lind, who is given aesthetic authority throughout the novel, agrees: "'I've never found that audiences liked ambiguity very much. I've got all my best effects by straight judgement'" (769). The key word, again, is "effect": Eisengrim and the Tresizes believe in making the audience feel; Ingestree wanted them to think, and thought dispells illusion.

The effect Eisengrim achieves off-stage, however, is neither romantic nor salutory. Since he himself is largely unaware of this effect, it is registered primarily through other characters' reactions to him. Holyroyd, the company manager, must explain to Eisengrim why Sir John initially dislikes him:

> "And when the Double comes—and such a Double that you can't deny him—he's a seedy little carnie, with the shifty eyes of a pickpocket and the breath of somebody that eats the cheapest food, and you wouldn't trust him with sixpenn'orth of copper, and every time you look at him you heave. He looks like everything inside yourself that you've choked off and shut out in order to be what you are now." (719)

Holyroyd and Macgregor instinctively realize that Eisengrim is more than a stage double for Sir John. He is his true shadow, a

role which is reflected in the new name assigned to him—Mungo Fetch:

> "He's a double. And what's a double? Well, in Scotland, when I was a boy, we had a name for such things. If a man met a creature like himself in a lane, or in town, maybe, in the dark, it was a sure sign of ill luck or even death. . . . Now: such an uncanny creature was called a fetch. And this lad's a fetch, and we can do no better than to name him Fetch." (736)

While Macgregor sees the double as a harbinger of death, the reaction of Sir John to Eisengrim strongly suggests Freud' s theory of the association of the fear of the double with the fear of dissociation of the super-ego from the ego in a form of psychological death. After Eisengrim convinces an audience of avid fans and intimate friends that he is in fact Sir John, Macgregor urges a change in name in order to ward off ill luck: "'I think it would have been better to give him another name . . . ; a fetch is an uncanny thing, and I don't want anything uncanny in any theatre where I am in a place of responsibility'" (740).

Nor is the superstitious wariness about Eisengrim limited to Sir John and Macgregor. According to Ingestree, the rest of the cast dislikes and distrusts Eisengrim. However, Ingestree offers an important observation in response to Eisengrim's mockery: "'But at least I was living in 1932, but you were aping a man who was still living in 1902, and if there hadn't been a very strong uncanny whiff about you you'd have been a total freak'" (759).[15] This seemingly contradictory comment demonstrates a sensitive awareness of the "long familiar" nature of the uncanny, the sense of something remembered, which keeps it from being freakish. Ingestree also gives a counterview to balance Eisengrim's subjective account of his idolization of Sir John:

> "'. . . to be idolized by you, as you were then, was a terrible, vampire-like feeding on his personality and his spirit—because his personality as an actor was all there was of his spirit. You were a double, right enough, and such a double as Poe and Dostoevsky would have understood." (760)

Again Davies uses intertexts—Poe's "William Wiliams" and Dostoevsky's *The Double*—to lay bare the effect he is creating. And indeed, that is the kind of double Eisengrim turns out to be, for as

he ascends in his mastery of stage craft, Sir John begins to decline (as did Willard). The separation is complete when the double first appears without his host, that is when Sir John temporarily leaves the troupe due to illness. Eisengrim's symbolic role as the harbinger of death is made manifest in the final illness of Sir John, when Milady mistakes Mungo Fetch for her husband, "walking as he had not walked for many a year" (817). Sir John dies shortly afterward.

The death of Sir John releases Eisengrim from his role as shadow, and again the release is presented in mythical terms as the son's triumph over the father. Eisengrim is mistaken at Sir John's graveside for "some sort of ghost from the past, and very probably an illegitimate son" (817). He has achieved the ultimate effect. Eisengrim leaves England directly afterward and begins his personal rise to mastery as a clockmaker, the master of time.

Before concluding it is useful to investigate a second motif which functions as an auxiliary to the foregrounding of aesthetic effect—that is the motif of reading and interpretation. A series of references from different characters keeps this concept in our attention. Mrs. Constantinescu schools the young Paul in the art of "reading" people: "'Look to see what they are showing to the world, then tell them they are the exact opposite. That works for almost everybody'" (664). Paul perfects the technique as he works inside Abdullah, seeing but unseen. And Ingestree suggests that the inner life of Robert-Houdin can be learned by analysing, or reading, his tricks (564).

In fact, the adult Eisengrim is powerfully aware of the interpretative function. Very early in the novel he confesses privately to Ramsay that he is editing his biography as he goes along. He also admits that "'he is looking backward on his early life as a man who has changed decisively in the last forty years'" (686). His companion, Liesl, introduces the problem of point of view into the narrative by telling Kinghoven, the cameraman, "'If you want truth, I suppose you must shoot the film from God's point of view and with God's point of focus, whatever it may be'" (686). However, Kinghoven insists otherwise:

> "If you want your film to look like truth you need somebody like Jurgen to decide what truth is, and somebody like me to shoot it so it never occurs to you that it could appear any other way.. Of course what you get is not truth, but it's

> probably a lot better in more ways than just the cinematic way.... And simply because I can do it to order I don't know how you can pretend it has any special superiority as truth." (685-86)

This statement takes us back to the original idea of the double narrative. The act of reading is a re-creation or doubling of the original text or experience. The narrative Eisengrim's audience hears is his *performance* of his past experience in an attempt to re-create or double that past reality. This is actually a reversal of Dickens's feat which so impressed Davies. Eisengrim takes the "external and actual" experience and reforms it as an artistic creation.

Davies asks us, as the external audience, to respond actively as well. He has Ramsay, in writing his "document," address us with a series of questions about the nature of good and evil (590-91) for which we are the only audience. He must intend us to respond. By having Ingestree and Liesl challenge Eisengrim's interpretations, he forces us to judge whom to trust, if anyone. He repeatedly demonstrates that no experience and no narrative is single—each is doubled by every remembering and recounting and rereading. Yet each doubling is different because it is other. In this aspect of the novel Davies seems to be looking ahead to *What's Bred In The Bone* in which he struggles for some vehicle to represent the truth of a life. His answer there will be what it is here—that absolute truth is not possible because we are denied God's viewpoint. The closest we can get, in Davies's paradigm, is uncovering the personal myth, a task best realized in art.

Davies asks yet more of us. His use of the uncanny in this novel is too specific and too extensive to be insignificant. His reading of and admiration for Freud have been well documented, and he seems here to direct us to Freud's paper. It must be argued that he uses the uncanny deliberately. His purpose is the same as Eisengrim's purpose. He uses the uncanny to evoke a strong, subjective response in us—to make us feel the violation Willard commits, to make us feel the wonder Mungo Fetch creates. Davies tries to recreate for us the magic of illusion.

However, we have also seen how deliberately and continuously Davies works to dispel the illusion by laying bare the devices of its creation. Thus we return to the opening chapter of *World of Wonders* and its insistence on audience participation or

reader response: by continually referring to other texts and to his own text as fiction, Davies refuses "truth" status for his fiction and forces us instead to participate in its creation and interpretation.

NOTES

[1] John Mills, *Robertson Davies, Canadian Writers and Their Works*, Vol. 6 (ECW Press, 1985) 68.

[2] Robertson Davies, *World of Wonders*, In *The Deptford Trilogy* (1975; Markham, Ontario: King Penguin, 1983) 555. All subsequent references will be taken from this edition.

[3] Most of the novel is an oral narrative by Eisengrim and is set within quotation marks by Davies. However, to simplify and clarify quotation I will use quotation marks to signal dialogue only for speakers other than Eisengrim.

[4] Robertson Davies, "Phantasmagoria and the Dream Grotto," *One Half of Robertson Davies* (Markham, Ontario: Penguin, 1978) 219.

[5] Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," 1925 translation in *The Collected Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 17 (1917-1919), trans. James Strachey and Anna Freud (London: Hogarth Press, 1955) 219.

[6] W. J. Keith, in his short paper "Text and Subtext" (*Canadian Literature* 104, Spring 1985), argues that Robert-Houdin's published memoirs act as a subtext to Magnus Eisengrim's story, corresponding on several points. Davies, it seems, can't resist the temptation to double his doubling.

[7] Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, trans. A. A. Brill (1918; New York: Vintage Books, 1946) 27.

[8] Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic*, trans. Richard Howard (1970; Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell UP, 1975) 8.

[9] Barbara Godard, "World of Wonders: Robertson Davies' Carnival," *Essays On Canadian Writing* 30 (Winter 1984/85) 269.

[10] Freud, however, argues that Jentsch's theory is too simple and attributes the same effect in the story to the castration complex. I think that Jentsch's point stands and that intellectual uncertainty is a key factor in many of Eisengrim's effects. Further, although Freud downplays this effect in Hoffman, his discussion of primitive animism and actualized symbols depends upon the concept of intellectual uncertainty.

[11] Samuel Macey, "Time, Clockwork and the Devil in Robertson Davies' Deptford Trilogy," *Studies in Robertson Davies' Deptford Trilogy*, eds. Robert Laurence and Samuel Macey (University of Victoria, B.C.: English Literary Studies, 1980) 43.

[12] The same act can be interpreted as the son subverting his father. In *Fifth Business* Willard is referred to as Paul's "father in art" (King Penguin 151).

[13] John Mills, 68.

[14] John Dean, "Magic and Mystery in Robertson Davies' Deptford Trilogy," *Waves* 7. 1 (Fall 1978) 68.

[15] Actually, Ingestree hasn't gone far enough. Eisengrim is imitating Sir John, who is imitating Irving, who is imitating the comedians of Commedia dell'Arte (*World of Wonders* 717).