

CULTURAL CROSSROADS:

Exploring Canadian Identity in The Salterton Trilogy

A Presentation by Regan Milroy and Selena Sivec

Opening Discussion

**How are you Canadian?
What do you define as Canadian Culture?**

ALLEN TATE

A FOUNDER OF
NEW CRITICISM



CULTURE:

“AN AVAILABLE SOURCE OF IDEAS THAT
ARE EMBEDDED IN A COMPLETE AND
HOMOGENEOUS SOCIETY”

(QTD. IN ARONOFF 6)

Thesis Statement

The Salterton Trilogy both reflects and critiques a lack of a cohesive Canadian cultural identity. This is due to a *societal divide* between the ‘Old World’ and the ‘New World’, the *unstable nature of a forced national identity* and a *collective cultural inferiority to larger powers*.

OLD WORLD

HIGH ART

- “had supported the suggestion that the Little Theatre present a Shakespearean play, for he was strongly in favour of plays which were “worth while”” (Tempest Tost 46)
- themes of colonial expansion, power dynamics, and cultural encounter (Brown 48)

VALUES

- Mrs. Bridgetower’s ‘at home’ hosting

ANXIETIES OF RECEPTION AND PERCEPTION

“There’ll be people here from other Little Theatre groups everywhere within a hundred miles. And they’ll have their tomahawks with them. They’ll be jealous, you see. They’ve never done a pastoral. They’ve never attempted Shakespeare. They’ll be on the lookout for every little flaw (Tempest Tost 26-27)

NEW WORLD



ORPHAN MOTIF: LIBERATION FROM THE BRITISH

- “politically and culturally the severed ties to Great Britain and the construction of new forms of social and governmental organization” (Singley 4)

AMERICAN LITERATURE AND THE SALTERTON TRILOGY



SALTERTON

- Use of satire, wit, and irony reminiscent of British authors like Oscar Wilde
- Culturally, governmentally, politically tied to Britain

Solly Bridgetower as a Manifestation of the Young Canadian Identity

“The Bridgetowers ... are among society’s leading families and exemplify the persistence of the British establishment in Canada” (Jackson 3)



Louisa Bridgetower = The “Old Country” & its influence over Canada
Solly Bridgetower = Young Canada & the effort to define its identity outside of English influence



“[Solly is] held back in his ambitions, career and personal development by his dominant, old-fashioned mother” (Jackson 3)

Solly's Frustration with Amcan & the Need to Create a National Culture

“Amcan. A new field of literary study, particularly the Can half” (Davies 152)

“Why does a country like Canada, so late on the international scene, feel that it must rapidly acquire the trappings of older countries” (Davies 153)

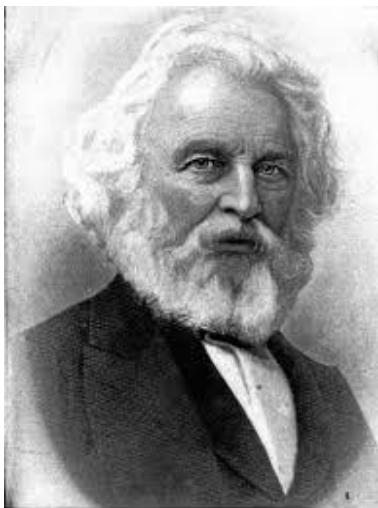
- Solly's frustration also parallels those of Canadian citizens as he questions the need for studying or creating Canadian culture
- underlines Canada's lack of cultural relevance to the rest of the world, specifically in comparison to the United States
 - Their cultural scene is extremely well defined whereas Canada's is largely a mystery



Vs



Who Is Longfellow and Why Does He Matter?



“Had not Longfellow ... declared that Heavysege was the greatest dramatist since Shakespeare” (Davies 151)

- Henry Wadsworth Longfellow is one of the best known and most popular American poets of the 19th century
- He is credited for shaping large portions of American literary style laid the groundwork for the popularisation of poetry in America
- Most famous poem *Evangeline, a tale of Acadie* tells the story of a fictional French-Canadian figure and her journey to find her lost love after the acadian expulsion

- The allusion to Longfellow demonstrates the American influence of Canadian culture
- Solly justifies the study of Saul only because an American has determined him to be a worthy subject

Canada's Cultural Inferiority Complex

Mardi Gras



“That is one of the big troubles with Canada; we have very little ceremonial sense. What have we to compare with Mardi Gras, or the Battle of the Flowers?” (Davies 173)

Battle of the Flowers

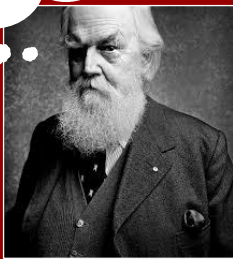


The continued focus on comparison between Canadian and American cultural expression highlights the inferiority complex held by many Canadians



The Play as a Metaphor for Canada's Relevance

Does Davies' use of roman à clef help to inform readers of the novels' overall theme of significance of culture and national identity?



“no nation has achieved real greatness in the past without them [cultural amenities] ... Canada has produced very little in the realm of the mind and spirit which is of more than passing interest to the world at large”

Robertson Davies. “The Report of the Massey Commission.” Editorial. Peterborough Examiner, 5 June 1951, p. 4.

“Our national dislike for doing things on a really big spectacular scale ... You think Shakespeare can be run entirely under his own steam. He can't. You've got to have as much lavishness in costume and setting as you can, or your play will be a flop” (Davies 173)

- Solly links the play with the idea of a national identity/culture
- Without the inclusion of over-the-top, extravagant trappings Canada will fail at creating a globally relevant culture... In other words Canada cannot create a significant culture while remaining true to its somewhat laid back origins
- The ideas expressed in the passage are directly paralleled by Davies own writing outside of the trilogy

GROUP DISCUSSION #3

Would you agree with the notion that Canadians are inherently pessimistic about their own culture? As an English student, do you find similar frustrations with the lack of a notable Canadian culture scene?

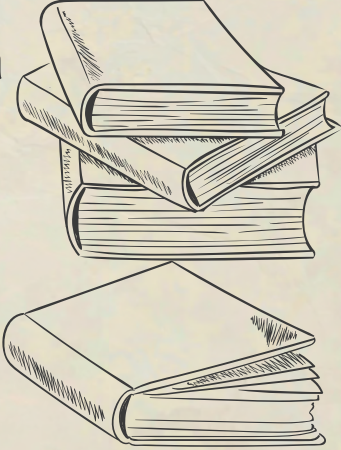
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Lack of Agency to Individuation in Robertson Davies' Salterton Trilogy

Madeline Papadimitriou & Jacob Fong



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01 Jungian Archetypes

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Jungian Theory

Persona:

- a mask that individuals present to the outside world
- "social identity" within societal expectations

Anima:

- Anima is the contrasexual image of a woman for a man

The Self:

- totality of the psyche
- archetype of wholeness and integration

Animus:

- the counterpart to the anima
- represents the contrasexual image of a man for a woman

Shadow:

- represents unconscious aspects of the personality that are often hidden from conscious awareness

Individuation:

- the gradual integration of the various components of the psyche under the guidance of the self

COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS

"a reservoir of shared, universal experiences and symbols that all humans inherit"

THESIS STATEMENT

In order to achieve individuation, an individual is fueled by their lack of agency.



Character in Tempest-Tost

- **Freddy Webster** and her ambitions in pursuing a winery business
- **Her relationship with Tom**, his role as a source of affirmation and approval

Seeking Approval from Parental Figures:

"Tom, you don't understand how serious I am. I really mean it. I'm not just playing. I really have a very professional attitude about the whole thing." (23)

"And if you let me down I don't know what I'll do, for there isn't another soul I can really trust.

Quotes in Tempest-Tost

Qualities found in the Persona

"people treated her as a child or an equal" whichever suited them at the moment (19)

"In her daydreams, Freddy sometimes fancied that her native city would be known to history chiefly as her birthplace, and this as much as anything shows the extent of her ambition." (25-26)

Her Desires and Formation of the Self

"Maybe I'll end up as the Veuve Cliquot of Canada" (22)

"It's the name of a woman. 'Veuve' means widow. Madame Cliquot's champagne is one of the most famous in the world. She's dead of course, but her name lives." (22)

Tom's Agency

Firmly Established as Successful Adult

"Tom was not the man to withstand such an appeal. He was fifty, he had an excellent wife, he had two sons in the Navy, he was the best gardener within fifty miles, he was a respected member of the Sergeant's Club, and he was bass soloist" (21)

Unwritten Code

"If a kid gets her way, she has to take some advice" → "that is part of the unwritten code" (24)

"But they'd never believe it. They'd misunderstand...it's a shocker how people can be misunderstood." (25)

Characters in *Leaven of Malice*

Solly Bridgetower - Controlled by his mother, lacks agency. His shadow.

Pearl Vambrace - The forced engagement brings Pearl into Solly's conscious mind as the counter-image of his mother. Pearl is the celestial anima.

Mrs. Bridgetower - Solly's mother is a demonic anima. He is under immense pressure from his mother. The mother is always the first anima figure.

Monk, Patricia. *The Smaller Infinity: The Jungian Self in the Novels of Robertson Davies*. University of Toronto Press, 15

Dec. 1982, muse-jhu-

edu.proxy.queensu.ca/pub/79/article/694134/pdf

Quotes in Leaven of Malice

Protecting the Celestial Anima

"The sound of Pearl Vambrace's weeping persisted in his ears, he thought it the ugliest sound he had ever heard, but nonetheless disturbing," (Leaven of Malice, 131).

"He was thinking, as he had been thinking all day, of Pearl Vambrace running into her house, pursued by her father." (Leaven of Malice, 145).

Pearl is Solly's celestial anima, so he needs to protect it.

"He made up his mind about one thing: he should have tried to protect Pearl from her father," (Leaven of Malice, 171).

Solly's Journey toward Individuation

Confronting the shadow/the unconscious mind: Our self and our shadow are dualities, we can resolve the binary opposition and thereby become an individual who is not controlled by external forces (Mrs. Bridgetower).



Discussion Questions

Confronting these Social Disparities

Put yourself in Freddy Webster's situation. How might we navigate the treatment of adults belittling or not taking youth's passions/goals seriously?

Too Little Lack of Agency?

As we can see, having some lack of agency can be good in that it prompts an individual to work towards individuation, but how much Lack of Agency is too much? Perhaps too overbearing

Expectations of Society

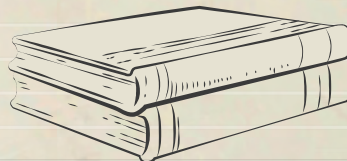
Do you guys think we are obliged to conform to some of society's expectations? For example, should Mr. Webster have to share his riches like his garden to the public? Where do we draw the line of conformity?

Bibliography

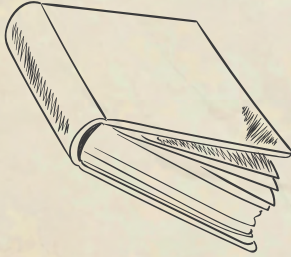
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Thank you!



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