CHAPTER - IV

THE CORNISH TRILOGY:
AN ARCHETYPAL STUDY
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CHAPTER IV

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1.1 INTRODUCTION:

Robertson Davies worked very hard on his *The Deptford Trilogy*. He never seems to be fatigued. On November 10, 1977, then sixty-four, he wrote to Horace Davenport about the continuing urge to spend hours at his desk:

I have a vast programme of work ahead of me, and sometimes I quake and grow pale, for it looks as if the Twilight years, when I ought to be growing roses and sucking my dentures in peace, are going to be passed in back-breaking toil. But I keep hearing my mother’s voice saying ‘It is better to, wear out than rust out.’ That’s what a Calvinist upbringing does to you, and not all my fine Anglican prating about Good and Evil really makes any difference. (Grant 520)

*The Cornish Trilogy* was the chief result of this sustained burst of energy. Davies published *The Rebel Angels* in 1981, having turned sixty-eight and retired from university work, and later published two novels, *What’s Bred in the Bone* (1985), and *The Lyre of Orpheus* (1988). The series explores the life and influence of Francis Cornish. In each novel, Davies looks at how underlying medieval patterns surface in modern lives.
The Salterton Trilogy, The Deptford Trilogy and The Cornish Trilogy – each trilogy is centred on a different Ontario town, and each dominated by a central group of characters through whose varying perceptions and memories the current of events that characterizes the trilogy is perceived. In his article on “A Cycle Completed: The Nine Novels of Robertson Davies”: George Woodcock writes on the nine novels of Davies:

Nine was one of the three mystical numbers of the Pythagoreans, and though three was a perfect number which Pythagoras made the sign of the deity, nine had its specific significance as a trinity of trinities, the perfect plural. For Pythagoras, and later for the great classical astronomer Ptolemy, the universe moved in nine spheres. In various contexts, we find the number particularly associated with inspiration and imagination. (75)

There were nine Muses, nine Gallicenae or Virgin priestesses of the Druid Oracles, and nine Sibylline books transmitted from Cumae to Rome. Echoed constantly in Davies’ novels is the ancient-concept of a nine day’s wonder: as the old proverb has it, “A wonder lasts nine days, and then the puppy’s eyes are open” (Woodcock 33). But most relevant of all in considering The Lyre of Orpheus as the last Davies novel to date – and perhaps the last of the kind to which we have become accustomed since Fifth Business appeared in 1970 – is the role which nine plays in
music, for nine was the Pythagorean diapason, man being the full chord, or eight notes, and nine representing the deity, ultimate harmony.

Davies was still seeing the world through Jungian eyes, but he had now shifted his focus from the psychological development of his characters to much broader concerns, nothing less, indeed, than the nature and the underpinnings of the culture that had nurtured him. These books – *The Rebel Angels* (1982), *What’s Bred in the Bone* (1985), and *The Lyre of Orpheus* (1988) are partly at least based on Davies’ experiences of educational and cultural institutions. With this perspective at the back of mind, let us see the first book of the trilogy, that is, *The Rebel Angels*.

1.2.1 *The Rebel Angels* was not only to tell the story of a number of characters but would take as its subject one of western civilization’s great institutions, the university. He wanted to portray the complexity of the university life: its range, curiosity, idealism and playfulness, its failings and frustrations, its deep medieval roots, the intensity of its intellectual focus and the lack of balance that could produce. The portrait would be highly coloured, because Davies’ university is rife with uncommon interests, zealous pursuits and idiosyncratic individuals. *The Rebel Angels* portrays Davies’ conception of the university and his strong views on the institution’s deficiencies, limitations and peculiarities.
The university, which Davies refers to, is the University of Toronto. Davies keeps in mind the two colleges, Massey College and Trinity College. These two colleges were meant to resemble the University of Toronto. Davies recorded his observations, reflections and ideas about the university and the life within its precincts.

*The Rebel Angels* is what David Lodge calls a campus novel. The story takes place at a large Canadian university during a single academic year, and its twelve sections are narrated alternately by the twenty-three-year-old Maria Magdalena Theotoky and the middle-aged Simon Darcourt. To distinguish their sections, Davies typed Maria’s on blue paper and Darcourt’s on white. These were simply the colours he happened to have on hand, but it is not without relevance that he chose blue, the colour associated with the Virgin Mary, for Maria. According to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, her last name, Theotoky, refers to “the divine motherhood for Mary” (Grant 539).

1.2.2 The mythology of Gnosticism runs through the novel and explains its title. C. G. Jung, in his essay, “Answer to Job” (1954) explains the Gnostic philosophy:

Enoch relates that after conspiring with one another, two hundred angels under the leadership of Samiazaz descended to earth, took the daughters of men to wife, and begat with them giants three thousand ells long. The angels, among
whom Azazel particularly excelled, taught mankind the arts and sciences. They proved to be extraordinarily progressive elements who broadened and developed man’s consciousness. (519)

In 1968, Davies said in a dialogue with Gordon Roper that “life has a strong mythic and fairy tale quality. And people don’t recognize that they are living out myths or mythic patterns or archetypal situations” (Roper 34). This idea would inform his novel, *The Rebel Angels*. Maria Theotoky, whose name means “bringer of God,” is worshipped by Simon Darcourt as “Sophia,” the feminine personification of Divine Wisdom, while she identifies him and Hollier as Samahazai and Azazel, two rebel angels in apocryphal scripture. Simon Darcourt proposed himself to Maria and has been rebuffed. In a conciliatory talk, Maria comforts Darcourt even as she explains how universities came about:

> Oh Simon, you must remember *The Rebel Angels*? They were real angels, SamaLazai and Azazel, and they betrayed the secrets of Heaven to King Solomon, and God threw them out of Heaven. And did they mope and plot vengeance? Not they? They were not sore-headed egotists like Lucifer. Instead they gave mankind another push up the ladder, they came to earth and taught tongues, and healing and laws and hygiene – taught everything – and they were often special successes with “the daughters of men.” It’s a marvelous piece of apocrypha, and I would have expected you to know it, because surely it is the explanation of the origin of
universities! God doesn’t come out in these stories in a very good light, does He? Job had to tell him a few home truths about His injustice and caprice; The Rebel Angels showed him that hiding all knowledge and wisdom and keeping it for Himself was dog-in-the manger behaviour. I’ve always taken it as proof that we’ll civilize God yet. (RA 246-47)

1.2.3 The Cornish Trilogy touches on a number of important issues like gipsies, tarot divination, violin repair, Jungian Psychology, Hermetic alchemy, multiculturalism and scatology. Of these themes, the reflection of personal idiosyncrasy is more important.

The Rebel Angels is the first of the three connected novels of Davies’ The Cornish Trilogy. It was followed by What’s Bred in the Bone, and The Lyre of Orpheus. The Rebel Angels is read and analysed on various grounds. Some of interpretations are as follows:

- David Lodge read on the level of campus novel. He wrote an article. “Robertson Davies and the Campus Novel” (1982).
- The Rebel Angels reflects the issue of multiculturalism, which became an issue in the media and public from that time on.
- The Rebel Angels is read on archetypal level.
- The journey of self-discovery is the major theme of the novel.
- In The Rebel Angels, Davies introduced the readership to Gypsy traditions and magic portions and, for the first time, used a
representative of a visible minority as the female protagonist, who narrates the story from a female point of view.

- The novel reflects on Davies’s vengeance on his enemies.

1.2.3.1 The Rebel Angels is a campus novel, which is related with archetypal themes. In his essay “Robertson Davies and the Campus Novel” (1982) David Lodge, the contemporary British novelist, discusses at length the genre, the Campus novel. What are the sources of the Campus novel? Lodge says, “the university is a kind of microcosm of society at large, in which the principles, drives and conflicts that govern collective human life are displayed and may be studied in a clear light and on a manageable scale” (Lodge 169). One of Davies’s characters is of this opinion: “The University is such a splendid community, you know, every kind of creature here, and all exhibiting what they are so much more freely than if they were in business, or the law, or whatever”(61). Universities are notoriously rich in extravagantly eccentric characters. With this perspective at the back of mind, let us see The Rebel Angels as a campus novel. One of the constituent elements of the campus novel is the setting. Many believe that Davies based the College of St. John and the Holy Ghost (or “Spook” as it is affectionately called in the novel) on Toronto’s Trinity College. Evidence for this connection includes numerous similarities between the fictional and the real life college
According to Lodge, there are two dominant themes in the campus novel – “sex and the will to power” (170). More often sexuality is opposed to the scholar’s professional life, and threatens its stability. An affair between teacher and pupil violates some deep-seated taboo and thrust both parties into a realm of moral danger, excitement and deception, generating the stuff of fiction. “We all know what happens in universities,” says another character in The Rebel Angels.” Nice girls turn up, professors are human, and bingo! Sometimes it’s rough on the girl, sometimes it may be destructive to the professor” (93).
The novel begins well, quickly introducing the sexual theme. The narrator, a young research student of Polish-Hungarian gypsy background who rejoices in the name of Maria Mugdalena Theotoky, is hurrying to see her supervisor, Clement Hollier, at the beginning of the academic year, and hears a report being passed from month to month that “Parlabane is back” (RA 3). When Parlabane comes back, Maria narrates her feelings:

This was what I wanted. It was something to say to Hollier when we met after nearly four months apart. At that meeting he had become my lover, or so I was vain enough to think. Certainly he had become, agonizingly, the man I loved. . . . That was when we had parted, he embarrassed and I overcome with astonishment and devotion, and now I was to face him again. I needed an opening remark. (3-4)

Hollier is an essentially frigid man whose only passion is his subject – “paleo psychology,” or the investigation of popular thought and belief in the early Renaissance period. The professor who falls genuinely in love with Maria is Simon Darcourt, clergyman and biblical scholar, who fancies himself as a new John Aubrey, memorializing the eccentrics of Toronto University in a contemporary Brief Lives. His narrative and Maria’s are plaited together to form the substance of The Rebel Angels, often covering the same event from ironically different perspectives.
Hollier and Darcourt are nominated along with Urquhart McVarish, a historian who claims descent from the seventeenth-century translator of Rabelais, as executors of the will of a great collector, Francis Cornish, who has just died. Much of the story is set in motion by the death of eccentric art patron and collector Francis Cornish. Davies exposes the personalities of these executors of the will. Hollier is dying to get his hands on these letters, partly to assuage his guilt about the seduction of Maria by giving her the task and academic glory of editing them. But Urky Mc Varish, a crotchety and malicious character, has snaffled this prize without admitting that he has done so, much to Hollier’s anger and frustration. Parlabane has come back to Toronto to batten on his old friends, Hollier and Darcourt. He is a sinister figure, often compared to the devil, who finally brings about the restoration of the Rabelais letters in a bizarre climax, which would be unfair to reveal here.

_The Rebel Angels_ is not only the story of a number of characters, but also the story of a university and its complexity: its range, curiosity, idealism and playfulness, its failings and frustrations, its deep medieval roots, the intensity of its intellectual focus and the lack of balance that could produce. Davies had strong views on the institution’s deficiencies, limitations and peculiarities.
1.2.3.2 *The Rebel Angels* reflects the issue of multiculturalism. The researcher would like to make simply a cursory glance on this topic for want of space. Davies was closely connected to the cultural developments of his age. He lived to see Canada, and especially Ontario, develop from a society dominated by Loyalist forbears to a society as diverse as the famous American melting pot. As a record of its cultural context, Davies’s fiction reflects the transition from a colonial, monocultural Canada to a modern, pluralist Canada. In his first two trilogies, Davies made an elaborate discussion. He realized that identity of Canada rests on the nation’s history and the individual’s history. He linked the national psyche with the individual on following the theory of the psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung, who maintained that the collective unconscious is an essential part of an individual’s psyche. This realization is the central image of Davies’s *Cornish Trilogy* – the root must feed the crown regardless of ethnicity and gender.

1.2.3.3 *The Rebel Angels* is analysed on the ground of archetypal approach. The novel contains the mythology of Gnosticism that runs through the novel and explains its title. The story, like many of Davies’, is notable for very strongly drawn and memorable characters. Maria Theotoky is a doctoral candidate whose subject is Rabelais. Her middle name is Magdalena, which suggests she is possessed by devils, and her
surname is Theotoky, which suggests she’s potential God bearer. But she cannot bear God, or represent the Divine Sophia, until she comes to terms with *The Rebel Angels* in her life, all of whom are associated with the university. Hollier, a paleo-psychologist who is vicariously interested in what motivated the ancients, represents the positive aspects of secular humanism. He is supervising Maria’s doctoral research and she is in thrall to him. McVarish, a Renaissance historian, represents the negative aspects of secular humanism. Darcourt, a priest-academic, represents Anglo-Catholicism, which to Davies is the most holistic expression of Reformation religion. He is also vice-warden of a residential College within the university, and near the middle of the novel, he hosts a dinner in its senior common room. At this dinner, eighteen professors, plus Arthur Cornish and a representative of the Canadian government eats at a high table shaped like a coffin. Two rebel angels are absent. Froats is a controversial academic who is conducting groundbreaking research into human excrement, which may bridge the gap between the sciences and the humanities and recover subjugated knowledges. Parlabane is a failed philosopher-monk-genius with a dissolute and destructive but highly seductive character. Parlabane is the most fallen and the most rebellious one. While Parlabane represents the Devil—a character of fundamental importance within the human psyche—he has something important to teach Maria: about how to be herself and not someone else, about the
tree of her life about how the roots of her tree are larger than its crown, about how her roots should nourish her crown. Maria’s roots are revealed to us in her mother, Oraga, and her uncle, Yerko, Gypsies who run an eccentric boarding house in one of Toronto’s wealthier suburbs. They also run a smelly secret business in the basement, as lathiers, restoring old and sick violins, by encasing them in dung, and making new violins, which they invest with the romance of age and sell as authentic old ones. They are the Romantic counterparts of Froats. Hollier, McVarish, and Darcourt are co-executors of the late Francis Cornish’s will. He was Arthur’s rich uncle, an eccentric patron of the arts, who owned an unknown and undiscovered manuscript by Rabelais. McVarish has hidden the manuscript, for petty egocentric reasons, and denies having it. Hollier wants it, for noble altruistic reasons, so it can become the focus of Maria’s doctoral research, launch her on a significant academic career and contribute something significant to Renaissance scholarship. Parlabane who has been secretly servicing McVarish’s sexual fantasies, murders him one evening, during one of their nocturnal rituals, and retrieves the manuscript before killing himself. But Darcourt prevents Hollier from appropriating the manuscript for Maria, and for Hollier himself, as it forms part of the Cornish bequest.
At the end of the novel, Maria and Arthur marry in Darcourt’s college chapel. Hollier toasts her health at their reception:

She is surrounded at this moment by her two families. Her mother and her uncle, who so clearly represent the splendid tradition of the East and of the past, and by Father Darcourt and myself, who are here as devoted servants of that other tradition (the university) which she has claimed as her own and to which she has brought great gifts. . . . Those of you who know of Maria’s enthusiasm for Rabelais will understand why I wish her happiness in words for this: Vogue la galere tout vabien! (RA 304)

Darcourt puts it another way: “Maria. Let your ship sail free” (311).

1.2.3.4 The Rebel Angels focuses on Gypsy traditions. Davies introduced the readership to Gypsy traditions and magic potions, and, for the first time, used a representative of a visible minority as the female protagonist, who narrates the story from a female point of view.

Making Maria herself part Gypsy brought all sorts of personal associations into play for Davies as well – Hugo’s Esmeralda, the beautiful Gypsy girl that he had spotted sitting on the tilt of a caravan in Kingston when he was nineteen and the sense of personal loss he had felt in 1945 on reading of the Nazis’ campaign to exterminate the Gypsies of Europe. Once he began his research, he consulted Jean-Paul Clebert’s factual, scholarly, laconic The Gypsies again and again for details that
would lend authenticity to Maria, Mamusia, and Mamusia’s brother Yerko.

Maria Theotoky is part-Gypsy. Her mother, Mumnsia, descends from a family of Gypsy musicians living in Budapest. Her father was born in Poland. They left Europe on the eve of World War II and immigrated to Canada. Maria is brought up according to the traditions of both her parents and learns to speak Romany, Hungarian and Polish. After her father’s death, her mother returns to pure Gypsy traditions, many of which are at odds with any North American ideals, such as applying olive oil instead of water to wash her body. One of Mumnsia’s biggest Gypsy secrets is the bomari, a special treatment to restore violins similar to but different from what Hollier knows as bain-marie: “I suspect – and you behave as if I were right – that bomari is a corruption, or a Romany form of what is ordinarily called a bain-marie. You find one in every good kitchen; it is simply a water-bath to keep things warm that will curdle or be spoiled if they grow cool (RA 147). Maria is torn between her life as a student, as a normal Canadian woman, and her mother’s heritage. As a result, she lacks a sense of belonging or location:

Nobody could say my life lacked variety. At the University I was Miss Theotoky a valued graduate student somewhat above the rest because I was one of the select groups of Research Assistants, a girl with friends and a quiet, secure
place in the academic hierarchy, with professors who had
marked me as one who might some day join their own Druid
circle. At home I was Maria, one of the Kalderash, the
Lovari, but not quite, because my Father had not been of this
ancient and proud strain, but a gado – and therefore, when
my Mother was displeased with me, she used the offensive
word poshrat, which means half-breed. Everything that was
wrong with me, in her eyes, came of being a poshrat. (120)

Because of her hybrid identity, it is Maria’s main goal to fit in – that is, to
be considered a true Canadian woman. When friends and acquaintances
question her about her heritage, she stresses her Canadianness. Since her
childhood, she has tried to conceal her heritage “wondering what it was
like to be in their skins” (141). She is afraid that being visibly different
automatically places her at the bottom of society. She thinks her academic
excellence does not fit with her Gypsy roots. Parlabane, a member of the
academic world, teaches her that she cannot rid herself of what is bred in
the bone and that she must allow her heritage to be a part of herself in
order for her to be complete:

    Do not suppose I think you are capable of anything so stupid
and low as a desire to conceal your Gypsy blood, my very
dear Molly. I am not so coarse in my perceptions as that. I
think you are trying to suppress it because it is the opposite
of what you are trying to be – the modern woman, the
learned woman, the creature wholly of this age and this
somewhat thin and sour civilization. You are not trying to conceal it; you are trying to tear it out. But you can’t, you know. My advice to you, my dear is to let your root feed your crown. (198)

Finally, Maria does come to terms with her past and her roots. She even goes so far as to include Gypsy traditions in her wedding ceremony: her family demands a purchase price and makes the bride and groom eat bread and salt to strengthen their union.

Maria marries Arthur Cornish, the nephew and heir of Francis Cornish. Her scholarly dealings with Hollier, and the academic’s cerebral approach to the world, have taught her that she cannot focus on mere intellect, but must allow other human capacities to flourish.

1.2.3.5 According to Nicholas Maes, The Rebel Angels reveals “a vindictive spark on Davies’s part: he was someone who believed in taking vengeance on one’s enemies” (Maes 138). Judith Skelton Grant writes in different tone. She observes: “Two of the main characters in The Rebel Angels were to be partly drawn from particular individuals. One of them was John Pearson and Professor W.A.C.H. Dobson” (Grant 528). From an early age, Davies had associated God with vengeful qualities: detesting the “feminine,” forgiving Jesus, he had concentrated more on the Old Testament’s angry overlord who punishes transgressions in an unforgiving manner. In later life, in a chat with his students, Davies had
playfully stated that he approved of capital punishment on the grounds that it allowed society to seek revenge from its outcasts. In *Tempest-Tost*, Davies had parodied his former mathematics teacher at Upper Canada College, Mr. McKenzie, in the character of Hector Mackilwraith who buffoonishly tries to hang himself. In *Fifth Business*, Paul Dempster and Ramsay conspire to bring an end to Boy Staunton. In *The Rebel Angels*, however, this hankering for vengeance was more pointed and personal than on previous occasions.

The character Urquhart Mc Varish was closely modelled on his former colleague Professor W.A.C.H. Dobson. Dobson was a brilliant scholar of Chinese culture and, convinced he had been robbed of the mastership of Massey College, had made life difficult for Davies by supporting students who had found the atmosphere at Massey overly confining. The relationship between the two men reached a boiling point on a winter night in 1969 – nicknamed the “Night of the Green Ghost” by Massey students – when Davies, wearing nothing more than a green dressing gown, broke in on a late-night revel hosted by Dobson. Although he could not dismiss Dobson on the spot, Davis did orchestrate his removal three years later, when the “rabble-rouser’s” senior fellowship came up for renewal. Still smarting from the effects of Dobson’s meddling years later, Davies decided to manhandle him in his novel. In
reply to the many questions raised by the readers in regard to the character of Dobson, Davies admits that Urquhart McVarish was modelled on Dobson. Davies’ intention was to shock the readers. To quote him: “That’s the point. I intended to shock. Shocking readers gladdens my soul” (MM 140).

John Parlabane was modelled on Davies’ friend and fellow John Pearson who was for Davies an example of the brilliant student who throws away his initial promise. A multitude of details from Pearson’s life provide the background for the renegade monk John Parlabane: the brilliance that won him prestigious scholarships to the University of Toronto and a year’s fellowship at Princeton; a doctoral thesis at the University of Toronto on the history of scepticism from the Greeks to the present, a mother preoccupied with one lost cause or another; a face scarred by hot glue from an exploding pot; weak eyes that made heavy spectacles a necessity; the disdain of the girls to whom he was attracted; his sexual initiation by the wife of a poet during his M.A. year at the University of Toronto; and a slide into dissipation after a glorious homosexual love affair at Princeton that came to nothing. Pearson’s persuasive tongue, his thorough-going scepticism, his ruined face and his renounced monasticism reminded Davies of Lucifer, the eloquent angel
who raised a rebellion in Heaven and who ended, his beauty seared and
distorted, by ruling in Hell.

In addition to these themes and interpretations of *The Rebel Angels*
discussed aforesaid, there are still a number of topics that Davies handled
in his novel. The alchemists’ search for the elixir of life, the issue of
multiculturalism, the problems between the two groups on the family
level, the traditions and customs of the older generation, the concept of
Canadian mosaic, understanding and enlightenment, a pursuit of
knowledge towards a pursuit of wisdom – are some of the important
topics that the researcher has not handled comprehensively for want of
space. Davies richly embroidered the tale when he set Arthur Cornish and
professors McVarish, Simon Darcourt, and Clement Hollier to work on
the estate of Francis Cornish.

1.3.1 Introduction:

The next novel of the trilogy is *What’s Bred in the Bone*. The first
novel *The Rebel Angels* concerns the disposal of Francis Cornish’s estate.
Simon Darcourt and Arthur and Maria Cornish are prominent characters
in that novel, Arthur and Maria marrying at the end of the novel. *The Lyre
of Orpheus* deals with the completion and production of an opera by
E.T.A. Hoffmann that is funded by the Cornish Foundation.
What's Bred in the Bone is not easy to classify. When reviewing What’s Bred in the Bone, Gerald Jay Goldberg called it “a peculiar amalgam of mystery story, family saga, espionage adventure and portrait of the artist” (Goldberg 7). All of these are popular twentieth-century genres of which many examples may be found, but Davies’ novel does not fit neatly into any of them. Jo Allen Bradham “sees the novel as joining Virginia Woolf’s Orlando (1928), and Steven Millhauser’s Edwin Mullhouse: The Life and Death of an American Writer, 1943-1954 (1972) as an example of biographical satire” (Bradham 7). Bradham also “sees the novel as containing elements of allegory, a form which was ‘intended to explain man’s journey’ in such classic texts of the late Middle Ages and the early Renaissance as Dante’s Divine Comedy, Chaucer’s uncompleted poem, House of Fame, Longland’s Middle English alliterative poem, Piers Plowman, and Edmund Spenser’s long allegorical poem, Faerie Queene (1590)” (ibid).

1.3.2 The Significance of the title – What’s Bred in the Bone:

The title of What’s Bred in the Bone is taken from an old English proverb: “What’s Bred in the Bone will not Out of the Flesh.” In a prologue to the novel, Simon Darcourt is explains to Arthur and Maria Cornish why he is having trouble writing the official biography of Arthur’s uncle, the late Francis Cornish, for the Cornish Foundation.
Darcourt has discovered that he does not know who Cornish was. The verifiable facts “don’t add up to the man we knew” (WBB 320). Two spirits, the Lesser Zadkiel (the Angel of Biography) and Maimas (Cornish’s personal daimon while he lived) have been observing the proceedings and decide to review the record of the life of Francis Cornish. What follows this prologue is that record, interspersed with brief dialogues between the two spirits on the development of Franci’s character. The record is divided into two sections: “What Was Bred in the Bone?” and “What Would Not Out of the Flesh?” (313). The first section is about Francis’s early life in Canada up to his graduation from the University of Toronto at the age of twenty-three. The second section is about Francis’s later life in Europe and Canada from the time he attended Oxford to his death in Toronto at the age of seventy-two in 1981.

1.3.3 Leading themes and approaches of What’s Bred in the Bone:

What’s Bred in the Bone is analysed on various grounds:

- What’s Bred in the Bone is read on the archetypal approach.
- The theme of fakery in the world of art.
- What’s Bred in the Bone is a fictional biography of Francis Cornish.
- The novel’s chief theme is the meaning of life, or more precisely, the meaning of a life.
• A major theme Davies explores is the influence of early factors in shaping a life.

• The novel explores what it means to be a Canadian in the twentieth century.

• The theme of fraudulence.

1.3.3.1 What’s Bred in the Bone: An Archetypal Approach:

What’s Bred in the Bone is a fictional biography of Francis Cornish. This is seen in The Rebel Angels where Darcourt is writing to support a cultural foundation that grew from Francis’ will. Tensions emerge in the first chapter, once Darcourt voices misgivings about the authenticity of old master drawings Francis left to the National Gallery; he has a hunch Francis drew them himself. The rest of the novel tells Francis story: his history, his myth, what’s bred in his bones.

Francis’ story begins in the small town of Blairlogie. His maternal forbears, the Mc Rorys, are poor Catholics who migrate from Scotland in the 1850s and do well in the New World. Hamish, the maternal grandfather of Francis Cornish, had a daughter by name Mary-Jacobine. She was presented at the court; she ordered a bottle of Champagne; which she shared with a footman, and become pregnant. A respectable Englishman from Cornwall, Major Francis Cornish, who had a good name but no money, offers to marry Mary-Jacobine. After the child is
born, the Cornishes move to Blairlogie where the Major becomes an asset to the Mc Rory empire and a good husband to Mary-Jacobine.

The child fathered by the footman was retarded and developed microcephaly. A gravestone in the family plot tells the world he died young but in fact, he was hidden away in the attic where he was cared for by trusted servants. Another son, Francis Cornish, grows up among this potent mixture of influences--reforming, counter-reforming, and deforming--during which the Mc Rory empire was rebranded with the Cornish name for the sake of social expediency.

Francis, a solitary child by nature, is isolated by his family’s wealth in working class Blairlogie. He turns to art, aided by three sources: his great aunt Mary-Ben’s collection of art prints, a learn-to-draw book by Harry Furniss, and his intimacy with the human body through his association with Zadok. He continues his studies in art at the University of Toronto and Oxford University.

Francis begins by observing the real world, and teaching himself to draw it realistically, using Furniss’s *How to Draw in Pen and Ink* (1914). In the words of the omniscient narrator:

You must develop an eye; you must see everything in terms of line and form. Andrea del Sarto was no Raphael, but he could correct Raphael’s drawing; you could aim at drawing like del Sarto even if you hadn’t a hope of being anything
better than a Harry Furniss – which wasn’t the easiest thing in the world to be, either. (WBB 460)

Francis’s subjects are wide ranging, and include corpses being prepared for burial, but one thing is uppermost and demandingly powerful in his young mind: he wants to draw his older brother, hidden in the attic, who is part of what’s bred in his bones.

Inspired by several Renaissance paintings, and the Renaissance masterpiece of Bronzino’s Allegory of Love, Davies succeeds in combining the reality of the art world with the non-reality of fiction. Francis observed, interpreted and absorbed the essential import of the Bronzino painting. His two masterpieces – Drolling Hansel and The Marriage at Cana depict allegorical subjects. In both of these paintings, the subject matter and iconographic details represent various important and influential aspects of the artist’s own personal life. In the third novel of the trilogy, The Lyre of Orpheus, the mystery which surrounds both of Francis’s painting is finally revealed. The painting is the “allegorical revelation” (LO 466) of Francis’s psyche.

By using an authentic work of art, Davies is able to bestow artistic credibility upon the work of his protagonist. The Bronzino Allegory is initially introduced in the novel as a “profoundly moral picture” which expresses the “erotic splendour and evocation of sensual pleasure” (WBB 565). Because Tancred Saraceni describes the painting in such vivid
terms, it is particularly noteworthy that he goes on to link the morality of the painting to the reality of Francis’s own life:

Venus is tempting her son cupid to a display of love that is certainly not simply filial. Is not that what mothers do? Since Freud there has been a great deal of Cocktail-hour chatter about the Oedipus complex and the love of a son for his mother, but who ventures on the dangerous theme of the mother’s part in that affair? Come now, Francis, has your mother, whose beauty I have heard you praise, never flirted with you? Never caressed you in a way that was not strictly maternal? (566)

Francis’s reaction to this prodding is at first horror and denial. Jung, while writing on the mother archetype says that there are two aspects of mother: she is both loving and terrible. Francis acknowledges that his mother “flirited with everybody, even her elder son” (451). While describing the relationship between the mother Venus and the son Cupid, Davies suggests Francis’ love-hate relationship with his own mother. Francis believes that he loves his mother because she is enchanting and beautiful, but when he is directly asked about loving his mother, he replies by saying: “yes, I think so I’ve always told myself so . . . I’ve never really felt that I knew her” (626). Francis is enchanted by his mother’s beauty, but he resents the fact that she was never a “real mother” to him.
Francis eventually leaves Blairlogie to study at Oxford. There, three fateful meetings take place. He encounters, and later marries, his cousin, the faithless Ismay Glasson who is the false heroine, the temptress and betrayer. She deserts him for a quixotic leftist and a disastrous stint in the Spanish Civil War. At Oxford, he comes under the influence of Saraceni, the world’s foremost restorer and authenticator of old masters. He tells Saraceni of his desire to become a painter, although he is not inspired by Modern artists. Saraceni encourages him to find his legend, his personal myth, rather than imitate Moderns who are not right for him. Saraceni, accused by some of having the power of the evil eye, represents the magus figure, the wizard who acts as father and mentor, to the young artist. Aunt Mary-Ben, the maimed spinster, is the crone who sets Francis on his path. In Bavaria, he also meets his one true love, Ruth Nibsmith, the governess at the castle in Dusterstein. Francis and Ruth develop a relationship at the castle, and years later, they meet each other again in London and rekindle their relationship for a few weeks before Ruth is killed in a bombing. While at the castle, Ruth casts a horoscope for Francis. The horoscope turns out to be very accurate, and at the end of Francis’s life, his Daimon comments on the fact that the two strongest forces of his horoscope have been purposely bred into his bones. Francis’s relationship with Aylwin Ross is more complicated; Ross is a beautiful young man whose career Francis has helped to advance.
Francis’s mixed feelings about sexuality come to a head in the confrontation with Ross. As a child, Francis had been most excited by the picture of Julian Eltinge, a female impersonator, and Francis had tried to imitate Eltinge, finding the results deeply satisfying. In one of their longest dialogues, Daimon Maimas tells the Lesser Zadkiel that Francis:

was looking for The Girl, the girl deep in himself, the feminine ideal that has some sort of existence in every man of any substance. . . . It wasn’t effeminacy. . . . It certainly wasn’t homosexuality, for Francis never had more than the usual dash of that. He was groping for the Mystical Marriage, the unity of the masculine and the feminine in himself, without which he would have been useless in his future life as an artist and as a man who understood art. (230)

The daimon is being Jungian here. This quest to discover the feminine concealed in the masculine has manifested itself in various guises throughout the novel. It is present in its basest form in the climactic scene with Aylwin Ross, the beautiful man who has never married and whom a female cabinet minister is trying to prove “a fairy”.

Like his father, Major Cornish, Francis becomes an intelligence officer during World War II. His cover is working for a wealthy German aristocrat, in her castle, restoring her collection of old masters. Saraceni is there too as his master and fellow corestore. During his time in Germany, Francis paints an allegorical painting in the mannerist style.
The Marriage at Cana, which is eventually accepted as the work of an old master, but is actually a representation of Francis’ myth of wholeness.

The Marriage at Cana is the masterpiece by Francis. This painting, which is executed in the style of the Renaissance masters, represents the symbolic “Mystical Marriage” (341) that occurs between the male and the female aspects of the human psyche. The merging of the two beings into one suggests the alchemical process of combing two separate elements in order to strengthen and purify the resulting element of the soul. By becoming completely individuated, “the soul is strengthened and the individual develops” (Cirlot 8). The result of this process is believed to be the harmonious existence of the soul, and in the novel, Francis ultimately achieves this state of spiritual harmony through his painting, The Marriage at Cana. Francis embodies his inner vision in a painting, The Marriage at Cana. Further, Francis attempts to understand his art and his life in terms of the Grail quest.

Throughout his life, Francis often experiences the desire for a female companion. It is not until he returns to Blairlogie, his birthplace, as a middle-aged man, however, that he learns that the female presence, which he has searched for while in the company of others, is actually present within him:
. . . it was the yearning for a girl companion, and for the mystery and tenderness he thought he might find in such a creature. He had even some intimation that he sought this companion in himself . . . It was not as a lover he wished for her, but as something even nearer, as a completion of himself, as a desired, elusive dimension of his spirit. (WBB 458-459)

The most important archetype of all is the self. The self is the ultimate unity of the personality. The Marriage at Cana is a profound exploration of the self. As Francis finally seeks to unite the many “elusive dimensions of the spirit”, he is able to accept “his strange boyhood, in which there had been so much talk of love and so little to warm the heart” (459). Because of his cold and distant familial relationships, Francis turns to his inner spiritual being for emotional consolation and truth. It is symbolically significant, therefore, that the only memento that Francis takes from his childhood home is the picture entitled “Love Locked Out” (460). The painting signifies the emotional barrenness of Francis’s childhood years while it also becomes the visual symbol of his profound sense of loneliness: “The picture gave an outward, visible form to a longing that lived deep inside him, and surged to the surface whenever he was sad, or lonely . . .” (122-123). The figure of the naked boy who stands weeping at the firmly closed door becomes an image, which Francis imitates and eventually internalizes as a real part of his life. Even as a
child, Francis identifies his emotions with his visual perceptions. He copes with his loneliness by projecting himself into the painting Love Locked Out; he accepts his afflicted brother, the Looner, by sketching him in every possible aspect; he discovers compassion while sketching the corpse of the dwarf-tailor; and he experiences his first intimations of artistic wonder when he sees Allegory of Love as a young art student. The Marriage at Cana, thus, represents the complex culmination of various emotional, visual and spiritual influences that Francis claims as the forces, which shaped his life. The painting is described by Saraceni as the outward manifestation of the artist’s inner being – in essence, the painting is of Francis’s soul.

In order to explore fully the complexity of the painting, Davies takes great pains with his interpretation of The Marriage at Cana as a reflection of the artist’s psyche. In the painting, the secondary figures are arranged around the central figures, a bridal pair who strangely resemble one another: “Their faces seemed to be male and female versions of the same features” (470). The two figures clearly represent the “Mystical Marriage” between the male and female aspects of the human psyche; and with their union, they signify the final attainment of a harmonious spiritual existence. The most striking aspect of The Marriage at Cana is that so many of the characters resemble one another. As Saraceni notes,
the wedding couple “looks more like brother and sister than a wedded pair”, Christ looks “kin to the Bride and Groom”, the Knight and his Lady are “plainly the parents of both the married ones”, and the old artist is “a fat, elderly version of the same face” (475). In each case, the artist has depicted in visual form various aspects and stages of his spiritual life. He has internalized those characters who have greatly influenced his life, and in an attempt to illustrate the many facets of his inner being, he has projected himself into this internalised understanding of others.

Francis’s individuated self is symbolically represented by the Bride and the Groom who seal their union with a gold band, a symbol of eternal spiritual continuity and wholeness. Saraceni identifies the painting as a depiction of “The Chymical Wedding. The alchemical uniting of the elements of the soul” (476). He goes onto describe the essential aim of alchemy in relationship to the individuation of the self:

Look at it: the Bride and Groom look like brother and sister because they are the male and female elements of a single soul, which it was one of the higher aims of alchemy to unite … that unity – that wedding – was not achieved in youth or with ease, and so the Groom, at least, is not as man in his first youth. That such a unity is brought about by the intervention of the highest and purest elements in the soul – which is of course, what Christ has long been, and was to the Middle Ages . . . (476)
The alchemical uniting of the elements of the soul occurs between the woman and the man who is “not in his first youth” which suggests Francis’ spiritual rebirth. Saraceni goes on to comment that Christ is “a beneficient power at the Wedding”, and it is the Holy Mother or Mother Nature “who blesses the marriage of the soul, the achievement of the spiritual union” (475-476). The painting is symbolic of Francis’s spiritual life on a personal basis, while on a universal basis it is symbolic of the ultimate spiritual attainment – the unification of the divergent elements of the human psyche.

With a view to bring about the complexity of Francis’s personality and his spiritual attainment, Davies made use of the biblical story of ‘The Marriage at Cana’. The story is significant because it chronicles the first of Christ’s great miracles – the transformation of water into wine. Davies’s choice of the story, therefore, is symbolically relevant in two important ways: first, it describes the event of marriage, and secondly it describes the miraculous transformation of one element into another through divine means. The miracle of transformation, which Davies presents in The Marriage at Cana, also depicts the spiritual strength required in order to bring about the convergence of various elements of the soul. In the painting, many aspects of the human psyche are combined and thereby transformed into the timeless spiritual unification of the

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individual soul. The “wine” of which the passage speaks can also be interpreted as a symbol of the author’s own work, which has matured with age and increased in both subtle sophistication and complexity.

To conclude, *What’s Bred in the Bone* is all about Francis Cornish who is a complex character. The other characters of the novel, other than Francis, function as plot devices. In keeping with the author’s symbolic imagination and his interest in the psychology theories of C. G. Jung, many of the characters are archetypal figures, psychological types illustrative of various enabling or crippling forces the one complete mind – Francis himself – in the novel might encounter. Each character fulfils a symbolic role that corresponds to functions out of the quest romance from the medieval literature. Francis loves, as well as being Jungian psychological archetypes.

Archetypes in this novel provide many useful interpretative clues. The protagonist Francis Cornish’s career in *What’s Bred in the Bone* seems to be a masterly blending of the Jungian concepts of the mother, the temptress, the alchemy, individuation, shadow, persona, and the Anima. The symbols of Christianity, Hermes and the Grail legend provide much of the mythic patterning of the story. Francis attempts to understand his art and his life in terms of the grail quest and, in particular, how he embodies his inner vision in a painting, *The Marriage at Cana.*
Davies made use of different versions of the myth–mythic themes, mythic systems, mythic motifs, personification of mythic figures, mythic metaphors. Myth is used to illuminate the development of each character and to structure the evolution of the plot.

1.3.3.2 The Theme of Fakery in the World of Art:

The mere fact that Davies chooses to deal with the faking of art works suggests his preoccupation with the definition of what actually constitutes an authentic work of art. Through his protagonist, Francis Cornish, Davies is able to examine the moral responsibility of the artist as a recorder of truth. Although both *Drolling Hansel* and *The Marriage at Cana* are original in terms of theme and subject, the actual execution of the paintings and their paint qualities imitate an earlier style and time. By utilising such authentic Renaissance paintings as Brozino’s *Allegory of Love* and Velasquez’s *Portrait of Sebastian de Morra*, Davies juxtaposes the authentic with the fictional in such a way that the reader is forced to redefine the very nature of artistic truth. Truth, it seems, is inexorably bound to a specific time and place, and if one attempts to recapture these ever-changing aspects of existence, one is in danger of promoting both fraudulent beliefs and self-deception. Davies’ concern with artistic truth is also examined in terms of the human psyche. Just as *The Marriage at Cana* is the depiction of a specific time and place in the artist’s spiritual
development, the concept of artistic truth is also bound by time and place. As the artist grows and matures, his or her perceptions of the world continue to change. The process of defining one’s self and one’s world becomes a life-long quest, and truth becomes relative to every individual’s inner perceptions.

1.3.3.3 *What’s Bred in the Bone: A Fictional Biography of Francis Cornish:*

*What’s Bred in the Bone* is written as a biography of Francis Cornish. It proceeds chronologically, starting with the familial and cultural background of Francis Cornish and concluding with his death. However, it is a biography with a twist. What the reader finds is “the record, or the film, or the tape or whatever it must be called” of Francis’s life on file with the Angel of Biography. The text of the novel might be looked at as source material for a biography of Cornish, perhaps to be written by Siman Darcourt. Short dialogues between two spirits are interspersed throughout the narrative, always relating what has just been presented to the final product, i.e., Francis Cornish’s character. These spirits, whether they are recording angels or Greek daimons, represent things that are part of the human experience. According to Darcourt, the Recording Angel “exists as a metaphor for all that illimitable history of humanity and inhumanity and inanimate life and myth that has ever been” (*WBB* 330). The daimons were “spirits of the Golden Age who act as
guardians to mortals” (332). They were not morality policemen but rather “manifestations of the artistic conscience, who supply you with extra energy when it is needed to tip you off when things are not going as they should be” (332). In most of the dialogues, Maimas clearly has a more complicated task. The angel of biography looks simply at the facts, whereas the daimon is interested in seeing how these particular facts were used to shape a man’s character.

1.3.3.4 The theme of meaning of life, or more precisely, the meaning of a life:

One of the important issues in the novel is the meaning of life. The outward manifestations of the life of Francis Cornish are very quiet indeed. His main accomplishments scarcely register on the public record, and certainly not as attributable to him. The nature of his clandestine activities, whether espionage or art faking, do not lend themselves to public recognition. At the same time, his accomplishments are great, in their way. ‘The Marriage at Cana’ finds acclaim as a masterpiece. Similarly, his spying, in its small way, assists a winning war effort. Finally, his art collection and philanthropy provide the corner stones for a national gallery. Yet this greatness lacks the usual measures of success or happiness: friendships, family, progeny, recognition. Davies suggests that Francis is no less great for all that.
1.3.3.5 The theme of exploration of early factors that shaped the life of Francis Cornish:

Davies devotes disproportionate space to Francis Cornish’s youthful experiences, scarcely any to his final years. The record of Francis Cornish’s life is divided into two sections: “What Was Bred in the Bone?” and “What Would Not Out of the Flesh?” The first section is about Francis’s early life in Canada up to his graduation from the University of Toronto at the age of twenty-three. The second section is about Francis’s later life in Europe and Canada from the time he attended Oxford to his death in Toronto at the age of seventy-two in 1981.

Francis is a complex character. Davies spends a lot of time developing this character. Francis is born in Canada in 1909, in a small town, to a wealthy and influential family. His grandfather is the origin of the family’s wealth and a staunch Catholic. Francis rarely sees his parents and so their direct influence on him is slim. Although his father was promised that Francis would be raised a protestant, Francis grows up with an odd mix of both Catholicism and Protestantism and is actually baptized into both faiths. This religious upbringing has a strong influence on Francis. It makes him a deeply religious man, however, it actually affects his artistic preferences and helps to create ‘The Marriage at Cana’, which is the myth of Francis Cornish.
Francis develops a love of drawing and art early and secretly practices every chance he gets. The major theme of *What’s Bred in the Bone* is very evident in the life of Francis. His choice of career, his ability to keep secrets and his distrust of other people are all the result of his upbringing.

The theme that ‘things are not as they appear’ is also developed through Francis. He grows up keeping secrets and knowing that those around him have secrets of their own. His profession as an adult is secretive, and although others think he is a patron of the arts, he actually is working for M15. The two paintings he creates also become important to this theme. There is much speculation about the origin and painter of these two works of art, and Francis is never able to publicly claim ownership of them. When he died, he left behind him a large eclectic collection of art to be disposed of.

1.3.3.6 The Theme of Identity:

*What’s Bred in the Bone* explores what it means to be a Canadian in the twentieth century. It is seen in *The Rebel Angels* that Maria Theotoky stresses her Canadianness. In *What’s Bred in the Bone*, Davies explores what it means to be a Canadian. Both the novels reflect upon the cultural developments of the age. As a record of its cultural context, Davies’s fiction reflects the transition from a colonial, monocultural
Canada to a modern, pluralist Canada. In his first trilogy, *The Salterton Trilogy*, he described Canada as idealizing British society and customs. Canadians continue to feel a moral obligation to Great Britain and like the idea of Canada as the “Daughter who stayed at Home” (260). With the splitting up of the British Empire and the founding of the Commonwealth of Nations, Canadians started to realize that it is time to let go of the past and to look into the future. Political developments also brought Canada closer to the U.S.A. As a result of that new alliance, Canadians became afraid of foreign, cultural assimilation and took care to develop a national consciousness on their own, as Davies showed in *The Deptford Trilogy*. All of Davies’s trilogies contribute substantially to this discussion. He found the answer to Canadian identity to lie in the nation’s history and the individual’s history. He linked the national psyche with the individual one following the theory of the psychoanalyst C. G. Jung who maintained that the collective unconscious is an essential part of an individual’s psyche. This realization is the central image of Davies’s Cornish Trilogy – the root must feed the crown regardless of ethnicity and gender.

**1.3.3.7 The Theme of Fraudulence:**

One of the major themes of *What’s Bred in the Bone* is the theme of fraudulence. This theme is illustrated by two of Francis’s three love relationships.
The first love affair is with Ruth Nibsmith. Ruth is the governess at the castle in Dusterstein. Francis meets her on his apprenticeship. As it turns out, she is also in the profession. Francis and Ruth develop a relationship at the castle, and years later, they meet each other again in London and rekindle their relationship for a few weeks before Ruth is killed in a bombing. While at the castle, Ruth casts a horoscope for Francis. The horoscope turns out to be very accurate, and at the end of Francis’s life, his Daimon comments on the fact that the two strongest forces of his horoscope have been purposely bred into his bones.

While at Oxford, he is attracted to his cousin Ismay Glasson; they become lovers at Cornwall, the site of the Arthur legends, but Ismay’s only aim is to make Francis think that he has made her pregnant so that he will marry her. After marriage and the birth of Charlotte, she reveals to him that Charles Fremantle is the baby’s real father; then she runs off to join her lover, who is fighting in Spain. Both lovers are not ethical. Both use and abuse him.

Francis Cornish’s relationship with Aylwin Ross is quite strange because Ross is a beautiful man who has never married and whom a female cabinet minister is trying to prove “a fairy”.

Francis’s relationship with Ross is more complicated; Ross is a beautiful young man whom Francis has helped to develop his career.
There is nothing overtly sexual about their relationship, but Francis is warned about Ross several times by Saraceni: “he is not an artist, nor a creator; he is a politician of art. He turns with the wind, and you stand like a rock against the wind – except when it is Ross’s wind. You are a little too fond of Ross, and you don’t understand how” (WBB 681). Francis protests that he is not in love with Ross. Saraceni agrees, but he suggests that Francis might want to live the youth he never knew through the younger Ross. To do this would be a mistake because Ross is essentially a different kind of person from Francis.

To sum up, What’s Bred in the Bone is a rich novel. There are many other themes. These themes are essentially intended for one purpose, i.e. to realize the character of Francis Cornish. Many details from the past are needed to understand the significance of any single action in Francis’s life.

1.4.1 Introduction:

The Lyre of Orpheus is not merely a novel about music; it is a novel about the nature of art in general and its relation to reality and time and the human spirit. But the main plot carrying this theme deals with a musical event, and in doing so it takes us back with striking deliberation to the first group of Davies novels, the Salterton series. For, like the last of that series, A Mixture of Frailties, The Lyre of Orpheus is built around
a family trust which offers a phenomenally generous grant to a young woman musician from a Philistine background, and finds itself sponsoring a controversial opera, so that a contribution is made to the art of music in a general way at the same time as the young musician, aided by wise teachers, undergoes an inner transformation that opens to her what in Davies terminology one might call “a world of wonders”; in Jungian terms she is taken out of the anonymity and personal incompleteness of common life and achieves individuation.

There are indeed important ways in which *The Lyre of Orpheus*, written thirty years later, goes beyond *A Mixture of Frailties*. While Monica Gall in the earlier novel is a singer whose talents are trained by inspired teachers, and the opera in which she becomes involved is the original work of another – a wayward modern genius – in *The Lyre of Orpheus* we edge nearer to the creative role, for the musician, Hulda Scknackenburg (generally called Schnak), is a composer engaged not in an original composition but in a task of inspired reconstruction. She is making an opera, *Arthur of Britain*, out of scattered fragments left by E.T.A. Hoffman of an opera he was unable to complete before his early death from the nineteenth-century endemic, syphilis. At the same time the priestly scholar Simon Darcourt constructs the libretto around which the score that Schnak develops from Hoffman’s fragment is built up. Schnak
and Darcourt, with their various collaborators, manage to recreate an authentic sounding early nineteenth-century opera, which pleases the spirit of E.T.A. Hoffmann who makes as ghostly appearance in the comments from the underworld that, appear as interludes between the narrative chapters.

Schnak completes *Arthur of Britain* and successfully launches as a new work in the operatic repertoire. Schnak had found herself and her career complete. The ghost of E.T.A. Hoffmann was laid to rest. It meant that *The Lyre of Orpheus* as a whole, with its deliberate recording and retelling of the plot of *A Mixture of Frailties*, completes the circle of Davies.

*The Lyre of Orpheus* circles back to the early Davies novels, as if to signify that a cycle is being closed, and how, thematically, it brings to a conclusion questions regarding the nature of literary art that are implicit in Davies’ fiction from the beginning.

### 1.4.2

In his several interviews, Davies has admitted that he was profoundly influenced by Jung’s theories of the collective unconscious and the archetypes. The religion, Christianity, and the myths and legends of Orpheus and King Arthur have also been profusely used in his novels. In reply to the question of Raymond H. Thompson about the Arthurian references, Davies says:
I write novels that I hope will be interesting just as stories, but they also have implications and byways which I think would interest people who have more information. That may conceivably lead them to form conclusions about the persistence of myth in what we are pleased to call real life. I get awfully tired of people who talk about real life as though it had no relation to the life of the imagination and the life of legends and myth. They would do better to look again, though the trouble is they don’t know enough in order to know where to look. (Thompson 7)

There are no signs of Arthurian influence in the first novel, but references start to appear in *What’s Bred in the Bone*, and the characters in *The Lyre of Orpheus* find themselves engaged, not only in mounting a performance of a long-lost Arthurian opera, but also in personally re-enacting the Arthurian triangle in their own lives. Responding to the question of Thompson in regard to the attraction of Arthurian legend, Davies says:

> The Arthurian legend has been a part of my life since childhood. . . . As a boy I had a book of Arthurian legends, and about the age of sixteen or seventeen I became very interested in the work of that now rather neglected writer, Arthur Machen. . . . The Arthurian legend, thus, was part of the fabric of my life. . . . Everybody has his own vision of an Arthur who exists in the past as a kind of great God. The Welsh are essentially a people whose best time was during
the Middle Ages. Since then they have been very much in decline. (2-3)

Keeping in mind the Arthurian legend, Davies thought over it incorporating in his novel. As he says:

Since I have always been fascinated by Arthurian legend, I thought that in *The Lyre of Orpheus* I would investigate what might happen when one of those simpletons who put together bad operas in the nineteenth century set to work at it. Planche was a popular composer of opera libretti, and I believe that at one time Weber was thinking of doing an opera about Arthur, though I cannot be certain of it. (5)

Davies was further questioned about any research done into Arthurian legend. Davies answered:

I knew that it would just weigh me down since I wouldn’t be able to use it. Nor is that the way you write the libretto of an opera. You write the libretto; you don’t try to write an historical play. You’ve got to remember that it is going to be music, music, music all the time. (6)

Thompson went still further and desired to know from Davies in regard to his consciousness while writing *The Lyre of Orpheus* within Arthurian tradition. Davies responds to him:

The Arthurian story spreads out in various directions throughout my novel. The principal male character is named Arthur Cornish, and his wife gets involved with his very close friend. . . . The opera is another way of looking at the
story that it is unfolding in the novel. Arthur is trying to bring about a sort of splendour with the money that he has been left, which is rather like King Arthur in the legend establishing the Age of Chivalry with the traditions he inherited from the Romans. So there is linkage in that way, but I did not want to hammer it out flat because that gets awfully tedious. (7)

Thompson wanted to know from Davies whether he planned to write series from the outset. Davies said:

The trilogy deals with what happens to the Cornish fortune. The young man’s life in What’s Bred in the Bone, for example, is entirely conditioned by the very large fortune which he has, and which he has to cope with. The Lyre of Orpheus shows what the next generation intends to do with it: they want to be patrons. Then they find how uncommonly difficult that is. I never planned a series, however. It just grew from curiosity about what happens to the large fortune. (9-10)

1.4.3 The Significance of the title The Lyre of Orpheus:

Davies drew his title and epigraph – “The Lyre of Orpheus opens the door of the underworld” (Grant 580) – from E.T.A. Hoffmann’s criticism of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony. Two projects provide the basis for the action – the completion and production of the opera Arthur of Britain, left unfinished by Hoffmann, the composer, novelist, critic and
conductor, at his death in 1822, and the writing of the biography of Francis Cornish.

Davies’ keen interest can be seen in the revival of two legends, the Arthurian legend, which has been stated in the aforesaid pages, and the legend of Orpheus. Orpheus and Eurydice is a well-known mythological story. Orpheus was presented with a lyre by Apollo. With the music of his lyre, Orpheus enchanted not only the wild beasts, but the trees and rocks move upon Olympus, so that they moved from their places to follow the sound of his golden harp.

Davies was fond of opera. For him “Opera gives us the great big basic emotions of life itself. It strikes at once on your feelings because music is the very language of feeling” (ibid). More, as he observed in a speech given in 1989,

Opera in a splendidly direct way takes us into the world of archetypes, and music has its own overmastering way of making archetypes palpable to us. . . . In great opera, as in great painting and great literature, we meet these possibilities of ideas given an immediate and comprehensible form, and we are seized by them because what we see and hear from the stage speaks directly to things that lie very deep in our nature. (Grant 580-581)

Davies studied well the three great composers of opera, Mozart, Verdi and Wagner. Mozart is Davies’ special favourite. Opera, music, the
legends of King Arthur and Orpheus become part of *Lyre*. In one of the novel’s climactic scenes, Davies makes us see and feel the enchantments as the story, the music, the spectacle and the glorious singing grip the opera’s audience. In *Lyre*, Davies is particularly interested in three elements in the creation of a work of art, whether opera or biography. One is the flash of audacious imagination; another is the recondite skill of the practitioner; the third is the human drama. With this perspective at the back of mind, let us see *The Lyre of Orpheus*, and its underlying ideas.

1.4.3.1 If the Deptford series is concerned with the relationship between illusion and reality, *The Cornish Trilogy* tends to be dominated by the relationship between true art and artifice. The central theme of Davies’s ninth novel, *The Lyre of Orpheus*, is the Cornish Foundation’s first venture: extravagantly bank rolling the completion and production – faithful to the early nineteenth century style – of an incomplete opera score, *Arthur of Britain*, or the *Magnanimous Cuckold*, which Hoffmann was composing when he died. Four sub-themes are woven together:

- the completion of the score by a damaged music student, as her doctoral project and her resultant healing;
- the writing of an appropriate libretto, faithful to the period and true to Hoffmann’s intentions, as he hated the preliminary sketches proposed by his librettist Planche; the cuckolding of Arthur in the
novel, which parallels the cuckolding of Arthur in the legend; the deliverance of Hoffmann from Limbo, where he has been since 1822, following the successful staging of the opera more or less as he conceived it, thus vindicating his belief in transcendence through art, and in an authentic Romanticism over and above a superficial Romanticism.

As the story begins, Arthur Cornish dares the directors of the Cornish Foundation to take a major risk – to support a nineteen-year old composer, Hulda Schanakenburg, in her project of completing Hoffmann’s opera, and then, if her work is satisfactory, to underwrite the cost of mounting the opera and giving it a public performance. The completion of the score occurs under the sign of the unconscious and its realm of feeling. The doctoral candidate, Hulda, is a filthy, anorexic, and slightly crazed genius, whose personality has been damaged by her mediocre and ultra-conservative Lutheran parents who see themselves as victims and are psychological manipulators. She has abandoned this damaging environment, which represents the worst features of the Reformation, but is rudderless. She has been exploring very modern paths in composition but has become interested in the Romantic tradition of the early-nineteenth century. The Foundation arranges a special supervisor, or musical midwife, from Stockholm.
Gunilla Dahl-Soot, the Liesl of this novel, is a bisexual archetype who represents something important in the unconscious, and who exerts a positive influence on Hulda. Jung has repeatedly stated that we are all really bisexual in nature. The anima or animus is the archetype through which we communicate with the collective unconscious. Not only does this accomplished woman inspire and discipline Hulda’s genius, but she also brings her a long way toward social refinement, articulateness, and bodily awareness. Their homosexual embrace seems part of an emotional formula – a sorcerer’s magic well-practised by Dahl-Soot. The writing of an appropriate libretto occurs under the sign of the conscious and its realm of reason; music can give life and feeling to an opera but it cannot tell a tale.

The task devolves to Simon Darcourt, as priest and academic and biographer, who represents the best, features of the Reformation, and whose instincts and detective work unlocked the mystery of Francis’s history and myth. Simultaneously the Merlin of the novel, and the Fool of its Greater Arcana, he now needs to unlock the mystery of what kind of libretto will be faithful to Hoffmann’s intention and deliver the composer from Limbo. After discarding unhelpful suggestions from knowing but uninspired fellow academic experts, he keeps his own counsel and turns to Sir Walter Scott for inspiration.
The opera is realized by Geraint Powell, a man with a career to make in the theatre, a Welshman who is handsome, egocentric, Celtic, and Byronic. Arthur likes Geraint and has appointed him to produce and direct the opera, through which he hopes to launch the mission of the Foundation. Maria’s dislike of Geraint coincides with a crisis of identity, as Arthurs loving wife, as one of the Foundation’s trustees, and as a stalled doctoral student unable to progress her thesis on Rabelais. Thus, the Excalibur and Grail themes – and the Romantic relationship of Arthur and Lancelot and Guinevere – are reworked in a contemporary way: Arthur gets mumps and becomes infertile; while he is away on a short business trip. Geraint steals into Maria’s bedroom in the middle of the night, wearing Arthur’s robe, and silently gets her pregnant; both men have a crisis; the woman has an epiphany; they all learn important lessons about the mystery of life and move on.

From an audience perspective, Arthur of Britain, or The Magnanimous Cuckold is a huge success. Hoffmann, who has been observing the struggle to complete and produce his final unfinished opera, is on the whole satisfied with the result. He believes it is a musical drama performed with a unity of style and intent quite impossible in his time. But he is not jealous. He does not feel a true Romantic fervour in Hulda: “as we knew it who first felt its pain and beauty; we, of whom it
was my luck to be among the foremost” \((LO\ 1124)\). He is a creature of his time. He misses elements in this production “that were familiar, rather than good” \((ibid)\). “I have watched \textit{Arthur} brought into being, I have watched the complexities it has introduced into so many lives, and, as an artist, it becomes me to know when enough, even of one’s own art, is enough” \(1125\).

A piece of unfinished work brought Hoffmann to Limbo. Now that Arthur is done, and as far as he is concerned is sufficiently well done, he can finally move on. His aesthetic ideology has been fulfilled.

\textbf{1.4.3.2 \textit{The Lyre of Orpheus} is concerned with Canadian culture and institutions.} Like its companion novels, the novel is concerned with Canada’s multicultural society. The works of Davies are closely connected to the cultural developments of his age. All of Davies’s trilogies – \textit{The Salterton Trilogy}, \textit{The Deptford Trilogy} and \textit{The Cornish Trilogy} and \textit{The Toronto Trilogy} – contribute substantially to the discussion of characteristics of Canadianness. Davies feels that the answer to the Canadian identity lies in the nation’s history and the individual’s history. He linked the national psyche with the individual one following the theory of the psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung, who maintained that the collective unconscious is an essential part of an individual’s psyche. This realization is the central image of Davies’s
Cornish Trilogy – the root must feed the crown regardless of ethnicity and gender.

1.4.3.3 *The Lyre of Orpheus* completes a spectrum of balances and contrasts among characters.

Before Maria was Mrs. Cornish readers discovered her, in *The Rebel Angels*, as the radiant Miss Theotoky, a graduate student. There, her struggle with her Gypsy background began Davies’s exploration of the slim difference between lore and learning. Maria’s investigation of a Rabelais manuscript (in the Cornish collection) launches her career well; the temporary disappearance of the manuscript fuels the plot. In *The Lyre of Orpheus*, Davies has turned the tables: Now the aspirant is the unattractive “Schnak”, and the task is completing the past rather than elucidating it.

Clement Hollier, a minor figure in *The Lyre of Orpheus* is Maria’s lover and mentor in *The Rebel Angels*; he plays something of the role to Maria that Gunilla Dahl-Soot plays to Schnak. Hollier is a man of great sexual attractiveness, but in this dimension he is superseded by Geraint Powell. Another mentor for Maria in *The Rebel Angels* is John Parlabane, a fallen monk and rebellious philosopher. He is one in series of corrupt or potentially corrupting mentors – somewhat demonic Merlins – who populate the Cornish novels. In *What’s Bred in the Bone*, Tancred
Saraceni, Francis Cornish’s mentor in the art of restoring paintings, fills this position. From these figures, it is revealed that art and learning are dangerous, and that they cannot always be achieved in ways that are consistent with the dictates of religious convention.

In each novel, the principal characters delve into the secrets of past masters. Personal fulfilment comes, in part, through the penetration of another creative sensibility. In The Rebel Angels, Maria pursues Rabelais and the folk wisdom of her ancestors. In What’s Bred in the Bone, Francis Cornish pursues the secrets of the master painters of the Renaissance. Hulda Schnakenburg and others in The Lyre of Orpheus pursue the genius of E.T.A. Hoffmann. Simon Darcourt discovers the remarkable achievement of his deceased friend, Francis Cornish.

To conclude, it is to be noted that the third novel, The Lyre of Orpheus focuses on Simon Darcourt, Arthur Cornish, and Maria Cornish who are called upon to decide what projects deserve funding. Their first essay into the world of humanist patronage is to support a precocious composer in completing an unfinished opera by E.T.A. Hoffmann entitled Arthur of Britain, or The Magnanimous Cuckold, and then bringing it to the stage at Stratford, Ontario. The novel follows the course of this project from inception to completion. At the same time, the archetypes in the opera are reflected in the personal lives of those involved: Arthur and
Maria as the central “ruling” couple. Arthur’s best friend Geraint Powell, a Welsh actor-turned-director as Lancelot, Simon Darcourt as the household cleric and writer, and so on. In this final novel, archetypes tie together the three levels of Arthurian, romantic, and modern characters.
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★★★★