Abstract. The article tells about one of the most outstanding Canadian writers Robertson Davies (1913-1995), the author of four famous trilogies (“The Salterton Trilogy”, “The Deptford Trilogy”, “The Cornish Trilogy”, “The Toronto Trilogy”). The paper deals with four essays about his oeuvre written by Gordon Roper, Ellen D. Warwick and W.J. Keith where the main psychological peculiarities of Davies’s trilogies are contemplated. The transformation of Davies as a proser, the change of his characters from novel to novel and the roots of the author’s psychological background are emphasized in the article giving readers and scholars the further basis for the Davies’s oeuvre research.

Keywords: Robertson Davies, Canadian writer, trilogy, Canada, literature, prose, novel.

Introduction

The literature of Canada is closely connected with the nation identification and reflects cultural diversity of the country which is composed of the constant contact of two cultures, British and French, as well as the permanent absorbing of other countries’ cultures, from which emigrants arrive in Canada (Germany, Italy, Ukraine, states of Asia and Latin America). But all elements are interpreted in a new way, in the specific Canadian surrounding that enables us to speak about unique character of this country’s civilization and its literature in particular. Over a long term of years Canadian literature tradition had been contemplated as a colonial “addition” to either British or French literature. The opposition began with a revolutionary essay by Margaret Atwood “Survival: a Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature” (1972), where the authoress bravely raised a question of the originality of Canadian literature. With a firm belief in the dignity and uniqueness of Motherland’s prose Atwood was supported by such writers as Mavis Gallant, Robertson Davies, Margaret Laurence, Alice Munro, Mordecai Richler and Carol Shields. Each of these writers has (or had) his own inimitable style of the eternal human problems description against of the background of multicultural northern country. Today Canadian literature is still intensively developing but under more favorable conditions because now Canada is an independent state which supports and encourages both young writers and representatives of older generation. Unfortunately the Canadian literature is not well-researched in the post-Soviet countries thus it is rather necessary to continue working in this direction and analyzing its uniqueness.

Method

We would like to pay our attention to one of the above-mentioned Canadian novelists. Robertson Davies (1913-1995) is a classic of the 20th century, one of the most outstanding Canadian writers, the initiator of “Canadian literature breakthrough”. His novels influence both authors and readers. Davies’s fame and reputation of a proser, playwright, critic and journalist are based on his three monumental trilogies devoted to towns of Canada, relationships between residents and life in the provinces in general.

The first significant novel of Robertson Davies is entitled “Tempest-Tost” which was written in 1951. This piece of work opens his first trilogy “The Salterton Trilogy”. The second and third parts of the cycle have the titles “Leaven of Malice” (1954) and “A Mixture of Frailties” (1958) respectively. But the real world fame was obtained by the author Davies after he had finished philosophical and magic “The Deptford Trilogy” in which his inclination for magic and psychologism was fully proved out. The cycle consists of such novels as “Fifth Business” (1970), “The Manticore” (1972) and “World of Wonders” (1975). Davies’s last trilogy “The Cornish Trilogy” appeared in the 80th and contained even more striking fantastic elements. This trilogy is compounded of “The Rebel Angels” (1981), “What’s Bred in the Bone” (1985) and “The Lyre of
Orpheus” (1988). Unfortunately Robertson Davies didn’t manage to finish his last fourth cycle “The Toronto Trilogy” but its first two parts “Murther and Walking Spirits” (1991) and “The Cunning Man” (1994) were successful as well.

Given article is devoted to the scanning and analyzing of four papers the theme of which is the oeuvre and its peculiarities of a classic Robertson Davies. Such a kind of the method gives both readers and researchers an opportunity to come to see what peculiarities of the author’s style have already been emphasized and what moments still need to be brought into focus. The analysis also helps an average reader understand the novel and its characters better, do it deeper and from the viewpoint of a scholar (often the author himself). We begin with a scientific article of Gordon Roper, Canadian professor, English teacher and literature researcher who knew Davies in person. The article is entitled “Robertson Davies’ Fifth Business and “That Old Fantastical Duke of Dark Corners, C.G. Jung”. The title itself is a speaking proof of Jung psychology elements used in the first part of “The Deptford Trilogy” though the main character (and the narrator simultaneously) Dunstan Ramsay refers to Jung only once, recalling how much the personal life of his friend and foe Boy Staunton always interested and attracted him. Roper constantly emphasizes that the novel “Fifth Business” can be called absolutely Jungian according to the form and substance (Gordon, 1983). Roper mentions that Davies read many scientific papers by both Freud and Jung. The latter became Davies’s “Wise Old Man” before the writer started writing the first part of “The Deptford Trilogy” (Gordon, 1983). For easier understanding of Jungian “matrix” in Davies’s oeuvre Roper offers a brief description of Jungian psychology with quotations from the scientist’s lectures and papers, always bringing to focus that according to Jung a personality consists of body and soul interacting (Gordon, 1983). Such a hypothesis of the Sweden psychiatrist as the statement that all human conflicts arise due to conflicts between conscious and unconscious is emphasized as well. Unconscious is divided into personal and collective (Gordon, 1983). The part of individuality which is always suppressed Jung calls “the shadow” of collective unconscious but not meaning anything immoral (Gordon, 1983). The psychiatrist also identifies one of the opposite pairs always present in human mind – one’s ego and anima (female archetype in a man’s mind) or animus (male archetype in a woman’s mind). According to Jung this opposite energy explains a permanent human endeavor to obtain the wholeness and the search of it through the attention to opposite sex.

Roper supposes that these very concepts of “shadow” and anima (animus) help Davies shape the characters of “Fifth Business” and their relationships between each other (Gordon, 1983). For instance Dunstan Ramsay subconsciously tries to find his anima during journeys and research work devoted to saints and at the end of the novel identifies (actually with the help of Liesl) his own position as “the fifth business”. Many times Davies refers to Jung’s statement that life develops gradually (in the youth and when one is middle-aged) and in such a way the writer explains the change of his creative techniques and new ideals and values of his characters. In the article Roper emphasizes that “Fifth Business” characterizes human “afternoon” and “evening” so brightly that an average reader is not able to get used to such a psychological technique (Gordon, 1983).

The way of Davies’s thinking is intuitive and mythological. Over many years Jung’s seeing of the reality has been coinciding with the novelist’s position and for Davies the famous psychiatrist becomes the source of wisdom. Roper is sure that the first part of “The Deptford Trilogy” is a bright example of a modern myth, symbolic dramatization which leaves an imprint on readers’ imagination using collective unconscious and its energy exists as long as the readership is influenced by it.

In contrast to Gordon Roper the author of the next article contemplates all three parts of “The Deptford Trilogy”. Having been written by Ellen D. Warwick it is entitled “The Transformation of Robertson Davies”. The author considers that the novels of this trilogy can be perceived and interpreted separately from each other. Characters are the same but the author’s methods of writing change from part to part. Davies gradually becomes a romantic and Warwick brings to focus that only few researchers have paid their attention to this change of Davies as a novelist (Warwick, 1983).

Then Warwick calls “Fifth Business” a real breakthrough (Warwick, 1983). In her opinion the secret of success is hidden in the satisfying characterization of the characters, especially of the narrator Dunstan Ramsay. The personage has more opportunities for the “revealing” because the novel doesn’t embrace a short stretch of time but a period from childhood to elderly age. The author of the article doesn’t overlook Davies’s inclination for “contrasts” enumerating several examples: Boy Staunton’s affection towards tinsel while Ramsay constantly looks for something his soul needs; Boy feels in love with immature Leola, Ramsay
chooses strong-willed and understanding Diana; middle-aged Staunton’s lover is avid and ambitious Denys, simultaneously Ramsay makes acquaintance with a little strange and grotesque Liesl.

The second part of the trilogy “The Manticore” is written from Boy Staunton’s son David’s perspective. Warwick draws some parallels between him and Ramsay (for instance, the longing for being independent of a strict father) but states that David lacks some of Ramsay’s views. In “The Manticore” a romantic quest is transformed into the search for psychological wholeness (Warwick, 1983) which is divided into several stages, and Warwick’s position lies in the fact that David Staunton achieves the success in this search.

In the third novel of “The Deptford Trilogy” Davies confirms his conclusive transfer to a romantic novelist. Clearly-defined structures of “Fifth Business”, psychological and mythological elements of “The Manticore” disappear (Warwick, 1983). Now the narrator is Mrs Dempster’s son Paul who is known all over the world as an illusionist Magnus Eisengrim. Some parallels are also drawn between him and his narrators-predecessors. The novel is divided into three parts (Paul’s childhood, his life as a member of the theatre troupe, the outcome) but the authoress of the novel believes that the last part of the trilogy doesn’t contain any certain solution of the problem but acts as a story that just ends. In contrast to Ramsay and David Staunton the personage of Paul Dempster doesn’t acquire any positive features because the imprint left by childish traumas is too deep.

W.J. Keith, the author of the essay “The Roots of Fantasy: Document and Invention in Robertson Davies’s Fiction”, is Professor Emeritus of English at the University of Toronto, the author of numerous books and articles on Canadian and English literature. First of all Keith is interested in the interaction of realism and fantasy in Davies’s novels and the writer’s methods with the help of which he persuades a reader that illusion is a part of reality. The researcher is convinced that Davies erases distinctions between two extremes deliberately and in an expert manner. “Fifth Business” is used again as a bright example. Keith emphasizes that one of the novel’s peculiarities is the combination of established facts, events and dates with special focus on magic (Keith, 1991). The author contemplates the first trilogy entitled “The Salterton Trilogy”, novels of which (“Tempest-Tost”, “Leaven of Malice”, “A Mixture of Fragilities”) according to Keith are based on traditional standards of romantic tales. “Tempest-Tost” is one more variant of an “unrequited love” fable, “Leaven of Malice” is Davies’s trick where fiction turns into reality and “A Mixture of Fragilities” is a new variant of Cinderella story though the main characters are not similar to traditional personages of fairytales. Keith suggests that constructions used by Davies in his first trilogy are original standards of Jane Austen and Charles Dickens (Keith, 1991).

Coming back to the first novel of “The Deptford Trilogy”, Keith mentions that in “Fifth Business” there is also a large number of recalls about certain books. For example “The Secrets of Stage Conjuring” by Jean Eugene Robert-Houdin is a real written artifact which Davies refers to both in the first and third parts of the trilogy. But such pieces of work as “A Hundred Saints of Travelers”, “Forgotten Saints of Tyrol” and “Celtic Saints of Britain and Europe” actually do not exist but Davies renders their use in his characters’ life so brightly that the reader has no doubts – it is a real novel inside the novel in front of him.

The next article by W.J. Keith published in the same collected book “An Independent Stance: Essays on English-Canadian Criticism and Fiction” as the above-mentioned one is entitled “The Not-So-Divine Comedy of Robertson Davies”. This time the researcher analyses the first part of “The Cornish Trilogy” entitled “The Rebel Angels” and doesn’t overlook Davies’s (as a literary critic) collection of essays which saw the world in 1981 under the title “The Well-Tempered Critic”. Keith emphasizes that “The Rebel Angels” and the collection of his early essays (both devoted to Canadian literature and theatre, by the way the latter was written under the pseudonym Samuel Marchbanks) were published almost simultaneously not in vain. It stimulated the birth of an absolutely new approach to Davies’s oeuvre analysis which ignored differences between fiction and nonfiction (Keith, 1991).

The collected book “The Well-Tempered Critic” represents a selection of Davies’s critical notes on the development of drama and literature in Canada from 1940 to 1979. The anthology acts as literal and critical experience of an intelligent admirer of books and theatre, the person who cherishes an independent cultural tradition of Canada (Keith, 1991). Davies’s articles provided in the book reflect his own position that critical reviews based on established information are not wide-spread practice in Canada. As a reviewer Davies demonstrates a remarkable skill to be responsible and honest both to a reader and an author, and always emphasizes something which is really worth it. But the second part of the collection book – “the theatrical” one – shows the figure of Davies from the other side, it is a figure of “a cultural politician” that used to sound
rather offensive. Indeed Davies advocates the development of Canadian drama and supports the originality of the national theatre, even tries to have an influence on the audience tastes.

But what is the connection between “The Well-Tempered Critic” and the novel “The Rebel Angels” in Keith’s opinion? It is mentioned by him that both of them are full of witty but intelligent discussions (Keith, 1991). In the last part of the previous “The Deptford Trilogy” Davies contemplates the world of theatre (circus) both from outside and inside, but in the first novel of “The Cornish Trilogy” the author uses the university world as the setting and the plot. It is an interesting fact that the introduction in the collected book “The Well-Tempered Critic” (concerning “Light-Hearted Scholarship”) can be used as a preamble to the novel “The Rebel Angels” – it is a reference to the “Rabelais” scholars and “extremely slow dissertation writing” (Keith, 1991) which acts rather expedient because one of the main characters researches Francois Rabelais’s oeuvre. Gypsies are also brought into focus (“The Man in the Borrow Field”) hinting at the interest in traditions and the language of this people while the same character of “The Rebel Angels” is half Gypsy. At the end of the article Keith mentions that by using the myth about rebel angels Davies represents himself as a rebel as well who is rather dangerous but never boring to follow.

**Results**

There are no anthologies on Canadian literature which overlook Davies’s figure but all above-mentioned articles and essays contemplate the novelist from different new sides: as a writer, as a critic, as a playwright, as an academic, helping a reader understand the writer’s psychological background and giving us various ideas for further research of the style and oeuvre of Robertson Davies. One of the advantages of chosen papers is perspectives which Davies has not been discussed from before.

**Discussion**

Papers by G. Roper, Ellen D. Warwick, W.J. Keith reveal childish traumas, magic, phantasmagoria, eternal remorse, moral decay, devil, murder, evil nature, university, Rabelais, lechery as plot lines in Davies’s trilogies, depicting them as books of transformation, metamorphosis and inconstancy which show the world as a microcosm where something neglected is in fact really valuable. One of the most mysterious writers of the 20th century Robertson Davies invites his readers to a come-hither place where changes and combinations never end. The figure of Davies attracts our attention to the Canadian literature in general showing its unique “cold northern style” which can be interpreted in many ways.

**References**