Fifth Business: Theme Of Religion And Faith

In the beginning of part two of Robertson Davies's novel Fifth Business, Dunstan Ramsay, the narrator of the novel, fought in The Great War from the year 1915 until 1917, however, he barely socialized with his comrades and instead, he repeatedly read the New Testament; therefore he received the nickname, Deacon. During a fight in November 1917, Dunstan saw Mrs. Dempster's face on a statue of the Virgin and Child before he fell unconscious after getting injured; however, he woke up in an English hospital in May and met a nurse named Diana Merfleet, who rechristened him, giving him the name; Dunstan. He returned to Deptford and learned about what happened to Mary Dempster during the time he was away, and then left the town once more to study as a history student at the University of Toronto in 1919. After he received his master's degree, he got a job teaching at Colborne College and returned to Europe to find the statue he had seen in battle; thus it led him to travel around, studying many examples of Renaissance art, and rediscovering his love and enthusiasm for religious studies.

Connect:

A significant theme of religion and faith can be frequently seen throughout part two and the beginning of part three of the novel. Dunstan travelled to Europe after Percy Boyd Stauton and Leola Cruikshank's wedding to search for the statue of Madonna that he had seen in battle. While in Europe, he travelled around and studied many examples of Renaissance art which led him to think to himself that "I was feeding a splendid new enthusiasm for religious art and architecture I knew that I was rediscovering religion as well" (Davies, 122). His search for saints has led him to find religion again and rediscover the faith that he had as a child. When he was younger, he was raised in a religious household. After Mary Dempster prematurely gave birth to Paul Dempster, he felt guilty and says that

I was a Presbyterian child and I knew a good deal about damnation. We had a Dante's Inferno among my father's books, with the illustrations by Dore. (Davies, 16)

He had a lot of faith as a child; however, as he grew older, he wandered in and out of religion. Thus, in part three he says he rediscovered love and enthusiasm for religious studies because he used to study religion much more in his childhood and slightly lost interest in it until he visited Europe.

Reflect:

Within the novel pages 63 to 123, slight character development can be seen in Dunstan Ramsay. Dunstan left his hometown alone and joined the army training camp. During his time at the training camp, he says, "None of it had any great reality for me, but I learned to do it all, and even to do it well" (Davies, 64). He acquired new skills and learned to perform useful tasks instead of continuously feeling guilty like he did in part one of the novel. When he held his feelings of guilt, all he had done was help Mary Dempster and did not do much for himself. However, once he went out into the world, he was awarded the Victorian Cross, earned his master's degree in university, and became a teacher. Therefore, this depicts that he somewhat improved on himself.

Does the name “Dunstan” have significance in this section?

I believe that his name has significance in this section for Diana says, “St. Dunstan was...very much like you—mad about learning, terribly stiff and stern and scowly, and an absolute wizard at withstanding temptation” (Davies, 90). This shows the similarity between Dunstan Ramsay and St. Dunstan, and adds to the theme of religion and faith.