

the town's Baptist minister, causing her to give birth prematurely to an infant who will be christened Paul and who will grow up to be Magnus Eisengrim, the greatest magician in the world.

It ends two books and sixty years later with Eisengrim, Ramsay and their mutual friend and confident, Liesl Vitzlipützli, in bed together in the Savoy Hotel, discussing God and the Devil. Liesl, who is both the ugliest woman in the world and a person of irresistible charm, is probably the Devil herself.

The three volumes are triumphant as mind-challenging perceptions of good and evil; as essays on ambition, success, failure and futility; as mystery stories; as splendidly accurate evocations of small-town Canada and other places; as richly textured, old-fashioned novels; and as painless sources of information on show business, magic, hagiography, Ontario tycoonship and caste symbols.

Robertson Davies is, above all, a man who should be allowed to speak for himself:

ON THE CONSEQUENCES OF A DEVIANT SNOWBALL:

"On a particular winter afternoon, a boy threw a snowball at another boy with a stone concealed in it and the consequences go on for sixty years. Was the boy guilty? Did he know what he was doing? Yes, he did know what he was doing up to the point that he wished to harm somebody; he was being as evil as he knew how; he was setting in motion an evil action and the amount of evil that came from it and also a great deal of good. But that doesn't alter the fact that, so far as he could control the thing, his impulses were toward evil. He wished to do harm, and he did harm but not the kind he meant.

Ramsay never intended to do good, but in the course of his life he does a great deal of good."

ON RELIGION, SUPERSTITION AND THE PRESENT AGE:

"It seems as if we are perpetually looking for new threats to our peace of mind and that is in a measure superstitious. We're very much in the position the Roman Empire was in before it really

began to go downhill, which took a long time. At about this equivalent of where we are now, they were immensely superstitious, and they were full of new religions, and they had swamis and maharishis, all kinds of eastern teachers who invaded the capital and taught meditation and so forth. Christianity was only another of the sort of voodooos from the East which invaded Rome, and I think that we're probably going to see the rise from the midst of all this queer, superstitious searching for something, a new religion, perhaps not entirely new, but at least a new form. Christianity was a gigantic forward step. If you look around you in any large, civilized country, you see for one thing that it's full of hospitals. Before the world fell, or a great part of it, under the influence of the Christian religion, there was no such thing as a hospital. All attempts to look after the unfortunates and the miserables, these are from Christian influence; it is a religion of compassion and it attempts to behave with decency toward other people, a notion which would have been absolutely incredible to the Romans."

ON SAINTS:

"The fascination of the saint is the fascination of the extraordinary person, the remarkable person, the outstanding person. People are very quickly interested in criminals. Look at the extraordinary sales for all kinds of books, not only mystery stories, but real-life criminals, books about crime. Criminals are extraordinary people. You have got to be very unusual to be a distinguished criminal. But it takes just as many extraordinary qualities to be unusually good. And these very good people are fascinating because they are so unusual and they have such energy. And their goodness isn't the sort of sickly goodness that nearly makes you throw up. It is a sort of driving, practical determination to change something which they felt was wrong. And sometimes it was themselves that they thought was wrong and they changed themselves."

## The Televisionary Man

Marshall McLuhan is a conservative man who believes in home discipline, school discipline, Thomas Aquinas, marriage and the church. This may be surprising (or perhaps it is not), because persons steeped in linear thought tend to believe in logical connections and it seems illogical (at least to them) that:

A) a man who believed in all the above would be the patron saint of the fragmented

world

of

TV

OR

B) the patron saint of TV would

believe

in all

of the above. (This sentence is, like McLuhan's own, circular; but it is not, LIKE HIS, PARADOXICAL.)