

Foreshadows of Postmodernism in Graham Green's Catholic Novels

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Abstract -

Postmodern elements foreshadow in Greene's Catholic novels that serve his deliberate objective of showing the chaos, uncertainty, gross materialism, loss of identity, non-conformity of postmodern era to bring back the lost faith in the society. He believed that loss of religion could be restored through unfaith, and salvation is gained only through sin or damnation. Greene intended to restore the humanity lost in the labyrinths of social and religious constructs. He consecrates the profane to bring back the glory of the church and other social institutions. He even uses magic realism and uncertainty of postmodernism to invigorate Catholicism.

Key Words: 1.Gross-Materialism 2. Non-conformity 3. Chaos, 4. Mortal sin 5. Identity crisis, 6. Magic realism

1.INTRODUCTION

Scientific inventions, industrialization and world wars have their impression on Greene's fiction. We observe foreshadows of postmodern elements like gross materialism, non-conformity, identity crisis, uncertainty, chaos, play, pastiche, time-shifts, simulation, magic realism intruding in his fiction. Postmodern producers, including artists, were forced to produce to the satisfaction of the consumer and the market flooded with what was saleable and demanded by the consumer. In the beginning Greene created his fiction as 'entertainments' in the same compelling milieu where writers tempted to incorporate elements from various disciplines and areas of life into their composite portraits of reality resulting in heteroglossia, a carnival-like confrontation of elements, voices and ideologies including news, autobiography, anachronism, rumor, art, politics, and real-world figures interacting with fictional ones, literature, and any number of other incongruous voices from any

given time. Writers began to experiment with mixed plots of different genre like science fiction, thrillers, picaresque and religious themes. Green's Catholic novels are such experiments with mixed plots. *Brighton Rock* is a murder-mystery thriller, an 'entertainment' with Catholic undercurrent; *The Human Factor* is a serious novel about the secret service compromising with established morals. *The Power and the Glory* is a picaresque novel with religious overtones and *The End of the Affair* is a saga of promiscuous love ending in ethereal love.

2. Gross-Materialism

Greene's fiction foreshadows postmodern trend of late capitalism that fired desire and lust, not for essential or primary needs but for exorbitant luxury leading to gross materialism. 'Mindless buying', 'irrational eating', and 'devouring' made man 'slave to his appetite'. Conversation among Pinkie's accomplice in *Brighton Rock* reflects gross materialism:

'I'm not hungry' ... 'I can't eat it.'

Pinkie insists, 'Go on. Eat'.

'He's got no appetite; he said and stuffed his mouth with fish.'

Later Spicer is asked to 'spew' if he likes so. Yet again the Boy says,

'We'll have ice-cream.'¹

Gross materialism caused irrationality in every part of human life and loss of faith in religion. Greene

highlights gross materialism in his novels to awaken rationalism, to restore faith and humanism.

3. Chaos

The postmodern concept is –‘no ordering system exists, so search for order is fruitless and absurd’. If ‘centre’ and ‘essence’ are mere fiction what are you left with but utter chaos and confusion. A chaos does not have the potential to produce a cosmos for cosmos is order while disorder and panic characterize the postmodern age. Since the author is helpless to put things in order he plays with this disorder. This element of ‘play’ with disorder became a part of post modern thinking. In Greene’s catholic novels like *Brighton Rock* and *The Power and the Glory* there are glimpses of an overall scenario of chaos and disorder.

4. No moral Scruples

Foreshadowing the postmodern thinking Greene’s characters attain salvation through sin and sacrilege. They do not measure their actions in terms of good or bad, moral or immoral, true or false. Pinkie and Rose in *Brighton Rock* do not hesitate to commit mortal sin, Castle in *The Human Factor* betrays his loyalty for personal obligation, Scobie of *The Heart of the Matter* transgress the Ten Commandments and, the whisky priest of *The Power and the Glory* is a drunkard and Bendrix of *The End of the Affair* has no moral scruples against promiscuity.

5. Fictionality of the fiction

The distinction between real and fiction or fantasy is narrowed down by simulation in postmodern era. Reality is constructed or manufactured by social conventions and institutions, which we unquestionably take for facts. Similarly, the realist text applies literary conventions which are shared between author and reader, in such a way that the reader does not question the artifice of fiction. Literary conventions are tacitly agreed upon between author and reader, and enable

the reader to momentarily suspend his disbelief to accept the constructed world of fiction as real. The notion that reality and truth are a construct, rather than an entity or an essence, is one of the major concerns of postmodernist fiction. Bendrix in Greene’s *The End of the Affair* writes his own story of hatred. **“His novels span the long period,”** says M. Allot, **“from fag-end of modernism in the thirties, through the revival of documentary realism of the fifties, to the indulgence in narrative games about the fictionality of the real and the reality of fiction which has become familiar to us since the sixties.”**² Postmodernist fiction, thus, explores and reinvents the novel form to discover other possible realities, creating ‘world as real as but other than the world that is’.

6. Identity Crisis

Identity crisis of postmodernism foreshadows in Greene’s novels. Greene’s characters search for their identity and recollect the past which is often bitter. Pinkie, ‘The boy’ fights to establish his identity and hegemony as leader of the gang by murder, threats and crime. The protagonist of *The Power and the Glory*, the whisky priest and the lieutenant remain without any name identity till the end.

7. Profanity Justified

Most of the protagonists of his Catholic novels tend to commit mortal or venial sin knowingly and are ready for damnation or hell. They have their own postmodern justification for their profane acts which hardly distinguishes between good or bad, moral or immoral, right or wrong. Non-conformity and uncertainty of postmodern age are enunciated by the priests - **“The Church knows all the rules. But it doesn’t know what goes on in a single human heart.”**³ Greene sympathizes with the priest who expresses his angst, **“They send for me when they are dying”. ‘I’ve never been any good to the living.’**⁴

In spite of mortal sin committed by the protagonist in *Brighton Rock* Greene pleads mercy for The Boy. **You cannot conceive, my child, nor can I or anyone the...appalling ...strangeness of the mercy of God.**⁵ Marcel More, a French critic observes, **“The interest of *The Heart of the Matter* is to show us how a man, to all appearances a criminal, can still by offering himself as a holocaust for his brothers, see spread out before him the broad highways of the communion of saints.”**⁶

8. Magic realism

Greene has also introduced the postmodern element of ‘magic realism’ in the form of ‘pre-cognitive dreams’, and nightmares reflecting fear and revenge of unconscious or subconscious of Pinkie in *Brighton Rock*. Sarah and Castle in *The Human Factor* also have such nightmare of racial discrimination. Mr. Wilhem Hortman, the German scholar considers the author’s method of attributing grace to Sarah as **‘white magic’**.⁷ Sarah Miles in *The End of the Affair*, an atheist, a lady of free will towards sin and sacrilege transforms into a believer in God after a single vow. Magically-realistic incidents after her death lead the staunch, non-believer, Bendrix to yield unwillingly to the inroads of faith: and paradoxically acknowledge the existence of God. **“I hate you, God. I hate you as though you existed.”**⁸

Conclusion

Greene appears as one of the forerunners of postmodern elements in fiction. It served his purpose to reflect the emerging trends of the age and counterbalance it with the revival of Catholicism.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT (Optional)

I extend my sincere thanks to Dr. S.S. Thakur, Prof. ABV Arts and Commerce College Indore for preview of the Paper.