

Magical Realism in Graham Greene's Catholic Novels

Submitted by * Dr. Chandrabhushan Varde

F-9, Govt. Polytechnic College, Jhabua

Abstract:

Postmodernist use 'magical realism' as outlandish and inexplicable elements of surprise or shock. Greene includes pleasant or scaring dreams or surprising events in his fiction for the similar purpose reflecting troubled past, uncertain future, hidden fears, desires and inner conflict of his characters. In *Brighton Rock* Pinkie's dreams prompt his revenge; and reminds his parent's acts embittering his sex-life. Dreams in Greene's narratives provide him freedom from rigidity of time. He got the concept of 'precognitive dreams' from John William Dunne that they truly foretell the future. In *The Heart of the Matter* a snake in dream symbolizes sexual or other temptation. Probably it forecasts the future events related to sexual temptation that Scobie could come across. In his dreams fear of Louise's suicide haunts him. In *The Human Factor* dreams haunt Castle after his colleague's death; he and his black wife have nightmare of racial discrimination. In *The End of the Affair* Greene has tactfully used time-shifts technique; moving the narrative backward and forward. The events created with 'magical realism' after Sarah's death enable Greene to anoint her to 'sainthood' with all her sin and sacrilege. It suits his objective to bring faith through unfaith and salvation through sin.

Keywords: Precognitive dreams, inexplicable events. déjà-vu, 'meta-narrative', simulacra

I INTRODUCTION

Postmodernists use 'magical realism' as outlandish and inexplicable elements of surprise or shock. Greene includes pleasant or scaring dreams or surprising events in his fiction for the similar purpose reflecting troubled past, uncertain future, hidden fears, desires and inner conflict of his characters. Luis Borges, Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Cuban Alejo Carpentier are regarded notable exponent of 'magic realism'. 'Magical realism' encompasses 'miscellaneous use of dreams – 'elements of surprise or abrupt shock, the horrific and the inexplicable' in literary works.

II HIS CHEQUERED CHILDHOOD AND HIS CHARACTERS

After his early tormented school years Greene left school without any wish to return. He was sent to a therapist and analyst Kenneth Richmond whose conviction influenced his belief in 'precognitive dreams'. Dreams, that played a significant role in Greene's life, created special effect in his novels. Cedric Watts comments on Greene's favourite technique of using dreams as part of his narrative:

Graham Greene was already an assiduous recorder of his dreams. Of course, he was well versed in Freudian and Jungian ideas, and, during his psychoanalytic treatment by Kenneth Richmond, he had been trained to report his dreams for analysis.' He says, 'I am convinced that Dunne was right' he refers to Dunne's concept of prophetic dreams. In A Sort of Life, Greene claims, for instance, that at the age of five he had dream of a shipwreck on the night that the Titanic sank in 1912. He also claimed that in 1944 he dreamed of a VI pilotless aircraft before the first England raids began.¹

Greene has included dreams pleasant or scaring reflecting his troubled past, as well as uncertain future, hidden fears, desires and inner conflict of his characters.

Pinkie in *Brighton Rock* comes back to Frank's after roaming around in vain with Rose to spend his wedding night in an extravagant mood. He dreams that night—his lost childhood without play, his father-like figure Kite prompting him for revenge, fear of death by drowning with collapsing pier, his father panting his mother making 'horrible sounds of pleasurable pain' in Saturday nights.

"He was in an asphalt playground: one plane tree withered... he was sick with fear—he saw the reflection of himself and Kite behind... Kite said and put a razor in his hand. He knew then what to do: they only needed to be taught once that he would stop at nothing, that there were no rules."²

The other nightmare of his childhood haunts him and embitters his concept of sex:

"...and then heard the stealthy movements of his parents in the other bed. It was Saturday night. His father panted like a man at the end of a race and his mother made a horrible sound of pleasurable pains. He was filled with hatred, disgust, loneliness: he was completely abandoned: he had no share in their thoughts—for the space of a few minutes he was dead, he was like a soul in purgatory watching the shameless act of a beloved person."³

III PRECOGNITIVE DREAMS-DÉJÀ-VU

The dream extends further to show his future action and fear:

*He flung out his arm in a motion of attack... He was upon the pier and he could see the piles breaking—a black cloud came racing up across the Channel and the see rose: the whole pier lurched and settled lower. He tried to scream: no death was so bad as drowning.*³

Greene fore-shadowed a number of features that later formed the concepts of postmodern era. The time shifts and dreams introduced in *The End of the Affair* and other novels seem to have their origin to Dunne's concept of *déjà-vu* (I have already seen it). Time-shifts and dreams in his narratives provided him freedom from rigidity of time. In a dream, our attention is no longer directed by normal waking-state concerns; so our mind is free to roam, and may wander from one time-dimension into another: hence the pre-visionary glimpses. J. W. Dunne explained the intermingling of times in his book *An Experiment with time*, "Every Time-travelling field of presentation is contained within a field one dimension larger, travelling in another dimension of time, the larger field covering events which are 'past' and 'future', as well as 'present', to the smaller field."⁵

"John William Dunne 'offered anecdotal evidence that certain dreams are precognitive: they truly foretell the future.'⁶ In 1902 he dreamt of a volcanic eruption: later in the year, he read in a newspaper that Mont Pelée had catastrophically erupted.

Watts comments, "Dunne's book may now seem cranky and pseudo-scientific, but in the late 1920's and the 1930's its show of evidence, its elaborate theorising and its basis in the familiar (the *déjà-vu* feeling and apparently anticipatory dreams) made various readers regard it as, if not convincing, certainly thought provoking. It influenced the ideas and sometimes the structure of various literary works."⁷

In *The Heart of the Matter* during the night of Pemberton's suicide case Scobie slept and "he went smoothly back into a dream of perfect happiness and freedom. He was walking through a wide cool meadow with Ali at his heels: there was nobody else anywhere in his dream, and Ali never spoke. Birds went by far overhead, and once when he sat down the grass was parted by a small green snake which passed on to his hand and up his arm without fear, and before it slid down into the grass again touched his cheek with a cold, friendly, remote tongue."⁸ Snake suggest a balance between good and evil (though also indicate the fears and worries). Snake is also spiritual symbol, like one in Eden, symbolizes sexual or other temptation. Probably it forecasts the future events related to sexual temptation that Scobie could come across (fear and worry of secrets known to Ali).

Scobie desperately in need of two hundred pounds to send Louise to South Africa sleeps:

*But in this sleep there were no pleasant dreams. Pemberton and Louise were obscurely linked. Over and over again he was reading a letter which consisted only of variations on the figure 200 and the signature at the bottom was sometimes 'Dicky' and sometimes 'Ticki'; he had the sense of time passing and his and his own immobility between the blankets— there was something he had to do, someone he had to save, Louise or Dicky or Ticki, but he was tied to the bed and they laid weights on his forehead as you lay weights on loose paper.*⁹

He has explained some events by his theory of the *déjà-vu* feeling and apparently anticipatory dreams. After the death of Sarah, Bendrix dreams of 'cheap jewellery'

I could smell her scent. I wanted things I should never have again...' 'And at last I slept. I was walking up Oxford Street---to buy a present and all the shops were full of cheap jewellery, glittering under concealed lighting. Now and then I thought saw something beautiful and I would approach the glass, but when I saw the jewel close it would be as factitious as all the other...' 'Then out of one of the shops came Sarah...'

Don't worry, she said. Something always turns up...' Oxford Street extended its boundaries into a great grey misty field, my feet were bare, and I was walking in the dew, alone and stumbling in a shallow rut I woke, still hearing, 'Don't worry,'¹⁷

IV FANTASY TO REALISM

The dream reflects the quagmire of Scobie's mind yearning to give 'happiness' to Louise but lacking the source to get the money from, and when opens his eyes finds Yusef coming at his door. Third dream is just after Yusef's offer for the loan. Cedric Watts observes that Greene used dream for providing fantasy to realistic narrative," As in *The Heart of the Matter* Scobie has a vision of peace which is fused with an ominous hint of a sinking like that of the *Titanic*: 'He dreamed of peace by day and night. Once in sleep it had appeared to him as the great glowing shoulder of the moon having across his window like an iceberg, Arctic and destructive in the moment before the world was struck.'

At another place prior to a dream Scobie acknowledges his sin of adultery with Helen but shows “**lack of spiritual strength for amendment. Father Rank cannot grant him absolution and instead ask him to come back when his mind is clearer. That night Scobie dreams that he is in a boat with a corpse, only to realize that the ‘smell of decay’ comes from his own body.**”¹⁰The dream shows the spiritual death of his body and the body without spirit is corpse that stinks.

*When he slept unhappy dreams returned. Upstairs Louise was crying...he turned to look for a weapon or a rope, it suddenly occurred to him that this was an act he could never do. Suicide was for ever was out of his power... he tried the door and the door was locked, he called out, ‘Louise, everything’s all right. I’ve booked your passage.’*¹¹

Dreams, recounted in most of his novels, are sometimes crucial to the plot. The dream sequences make *The Human Factor* a beautiful and disturbing novel filled with tenderness, humour, doubt, thrill, and excitement. The dreams for Castle after the death of his colleague Davis were broken fragments of a past which pursued him till the daylight hours. Davis played no part in them. ‘The ghost of Davis hovered over the bag from Zaire, and the telegrams which Cynthia encoded were now more mutilated than ever.’¹²

V DREAM AS NIGHTMARE; DEEPER CONSCIOUSNESS

In one dream Castle finds a South Africa reconstructed with hatred, though sometimes the bits and pieces were jumbled up with an Africa which he had forgotten how much he loved. He came on Sarah suddenly in a litter-strewn Johannesburg park sitting on a bench ‘for blacks only’: he turned away to find a different bench.’

Sarah also has nightmare of racialism:

*‘I was in a railway train. It was moving off. You were left on the platform. I was alone. You had the tickets. Sam was with you. He didn’t seem to care. I didn’t even know where we were supposed to be going. And I could hear the ticket collector in the next compartment. I knew I was in the wrong coach, reserved for whites...’*¹³

Sarah feels that she and Sam cannot forget that they are Black and People show their likings for them as pity or sympathy:

*‘Sam and I are colour conscious, aren’t we? It haunts us both in sleep. Sometimes I wonder whether you love me only because of my colour.’*¹⁴

Greene wished to focus on apartheid with a different humanistic perspective that love, humanity and goodness have nothing to do with colour. **“It’s a great pity he always identified Africans with colour. It’s a kind of mistake second generation men make. They refuse to admit a white man be as good an African as a black.”**¹⁵

Dreams enable Greene to touch deep inner layers of our consciousness. The first outer layer is the real world the reader dwells in, the second is the virtual world that Greene creates in his novel and the third is the inner layer of dream world of his character’s unconscious or subconscious mind. Albeit the dreams of his novels more often than not are nightmare that correlate with the sin, evil, betrayal, disloyalty etc.

Brennan writes, ‘imaginary and real staircase appear’ in *The End of the Affair* a number of times. In a dream Sarah is ‘walking up a long staircase’ and descends sadly ‘down the stairs again’ that reflects a confused mind having no peace.

*Two days ago I had such a sense of peace and quiet and love. Life was going to be happy again, but last night I dreamed I was walking up a long staircase to meet Maurice at the top. I was still happy because when I reached the top of the staircase we were going to make love. I called to him that I was coming, but it wasn’t Maurice’s voice that answered; it was stranger’s that boomed like a fog-horn warning lost ships, and scared me. I thought, he’s let his flat and gone away and I don’t know where he is, and going down the stairs again the water rose beyond my waist and the hall was thick with mist. Then I woke up. I’m not at peace any more.*¹⁶

Greene includes another dream of Bendrix after the funeral of Sarah:

*I dreamed I was at a fair with a gun in my hand. I was shooting at bottles that looked as though they were made of glass but my bullets bounded off them as though they were coated with steel. I fired and fired, and not a bottle could I crack, and at five in the morning I woke with the same thought in my head: for those years you were mine, not His.*¹⁸

The dream signifies the futile efforts of Bendrix to offend God and to protest that he owned Sarah, and God had no right to take her away from him. Henry after Sarah’s death tells Bendrix, *‘I dreamed last night...about all of us.’* ‘... When I woke up I thought she wasn’t dead.’ *‘One can’t disprove it, Bendrix.’*

VI DENIAL OF META-NARRATIVE

Greene has used 'magical realism' in *The End of the Affair* with the purpose to make his protagonist believe in the 'sainthood' of Sarah who is shown as 'slut' mad in passionate adultery with him and other men. But in spite of her profanity she has great humanistic virtues that led her to sainthood. In Postmodern era magical realism is used because it denies 'meta-narrative' any ultimate source of meaning of truth. Greene depicts events which can have no logical explanation.

'I write a story. How can you prove that the events in it never happen that the characters are not real?'

'... You can't disprove my story anymore than I can disprove God. But I just know he's a lie, just as you know my story's a lie.'

She had a lot of friends. Sir William Mallock. Dunstan...

... I looked around at my room-there wouldn't be any more of Sarah where Henry came from: less perhaps, for she would be diluted there.'

If I were writing a novel I would end it here: a novel, I used to think, has to end somewhere, but I'm beginning to believe my realism has been at fault all these years, for nothing in life now ever seems to end, Chemists tell you matter is never completely destroyed, and mathematician tell you that if you halve each pace in crossing a room, you will never reach the opposite wall, so what an optimist I would be if I thought that this story ended here.¹⁹

Sarah writes in her diary:

If I were to invent a doctrine it would be that the body was never born again, that it rotted with last year's vermin. It is strange how the human mind swings back and forth, from one extreme to another. Does truth lie at some point of the pendulum's swing, at a point where it never rests, not in the dull perpendicular mean where it dangles in the end like a windless flag, but at an angle, nearer one extreme than another. If only a miracle could stop the pendulum at an angle of sixty degrees, one would believe the truth was there.²⁰

VII MAGIC REALISM OF SUPERNATURAL POWER

All the events after Sarah's death and her funeral are strange and miraculous. Henry invites Bendrix to share his home with him because, he feels the presence of someone invisible in the house; he says, 'The house feels very queer these days. I try to keep out of it as much as possible.' Thus, we find evidences of supernatural power that work after Sarah's death. This again is 'magical realism' or postmodernism.

'... The trouble is, the house doesn't seem empty. You see, often in the old days I'd come home from the office, and she would be out somewhere-perhaps with you. I'd call and she wouldn't answer. Then the house was empty...' 'You know I did love her in my way, Bendrix.'

...But the house never seems empty like that...' 'Because she's always away, she's never away. You see, she's never anywhere else.' '...There's nowhere for her to be but at home.' '... I'm nery and tired-I don't sleep well. You know the next best thing to do is to talk to her is talking about her, and there's only you.'²¹

Parkis sends Bendrix a parcel containing books with a note telling- *I am writing it you ... being a literary gentleman of imagination and accustomed to strange events.²²*

He writes that his son had terrible pain in his stomach and doctor advised him operation. But being afraid of knife for his motherless child, Parkis prayed hard to God, then to his wife and at last to Mrs. Sarah Miles in heaven, to do what she could do. When he got up in the morning his son's temperature was normal and he hadn't any pain, and he's been all right all day.

Only he told the doctor it was Mrs. Miles who came and took away the pain-touching him on the right side of the stomach if you will forgive the indelicacy-and she wrote in the book for him. But the doctor says he must be kept very quiet and the book excites him, so under the circumstances I would rather not have the book in the house...²³

Another miracle takes place with Smythe when Bendrix meets him at the Common. He keeps a hanky on the bad side of his cheek. But for the utter surprise to Bendrix his skin was quite fresh and young except for one insignificant spot. 'It cleared up suddenly, in a night.'

... 'It was done by touch.'
'...Faith-healing?'²⁴

Bendrix knew that he would say '*It was Sarah who touched and cured him.*'- another 'coincidence'

*'...I thought with a sense of weariness, how many coincidences are there going to be? Her mother at the funeral, the child's dream. Is this going to continue day by day?'*²⁵

Greene admitted in an interview with Frank Kermode that he had intended a much longer last part of the book after the woman had died, where there was to be a succession of coincidences, until the lover became maddened by the coincidences which wouldn't cease. He found it very difficult to continue the book with the loss of the principal figure, and he foreshortened badly, by introducing something which was not easily accountable for in natural terms. This novel witnessed resistance over the mechanical conception of the operation of Grace. 'Magical Realism' is being applied here, like a powerful drug or an electric shock to an unconscious patient, with miraculous effect to purge patient's blood stream of the virus of sin.

VIII CONCLUSION

Greene used magical realism as a postmodern literary tool reflecting indistinguishable elements of real and virtual (simulacra), truth and untruth, and the uncertainty hallmark of the postmodernism. It can also be attributed to his personal nihilistic experiences that mesmerized him in the magical realism.

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