

Plot in Graham Greene's The Heart of the Matter Fictional Dreams

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Abstract

Over the whole world, people are interested in telling and understanding their dreams believing that, in depth, there is nothing meaningless. For them, a dream unifies the body, mind, and spirit. It provides an insight into the human self and a means for self-exploration. It is a kind of a play on the stage of mind. In Graham Greene's The Heart of the Matter (henceforth HOM), major Scobie, akin to any ordinary person, sees dreams that show what goes on the stage of his mind.

This study is an attempt to investigate the plot in the fictional dreams of Greene's HOM according to Freytag's (1894) pyramid model and it is not concerned with the interpretation of dreams in terms of their symbolic reference. It is, rather, an analysis and a study of the dreams' plot development and its significance in relevance to the novel. The study assumes that Freytag's model is applicable to show that Greene's HOM fictional dreams are dramatically plotted. The study arrives at many conclusions concerning the model and the novel.

الخلاصة

يهتم الناس في كل ارجاء المعمورة بسرد احلامهم وفهمها معتقدين أن كل الأشياء ذات مغزى. فبالنسبة اليهم، يقوم الحلم بتوحيد الجسد والعقل والروح فهو يزودنا بنظرة معمقة للنفس البشرية. إنه أشبه بمسرحية على خشبة العقل. في رواية غرهام غرين لباب الأمور ، وأسوة بأي شخصاً عادي ، يرى الضابط سكوبي أحلاماً تظهر ما يجول في مسرح عقله.

هذه الدراسة هي محاولة لبحث الحكمة في الأحلام القصصية في رواية غرين لباب الأمور على وفق أنموذج فريتاغ. لا تعنى الدراسة الحالية بتفسير الأحلام حسب دلالتها الرمزية بل هي تحليل ودراسة لتطور الحكمة واهميتها في الرواية. تفترض الدراسة امكانية تطبيق أنموذج فريتاغ لبيان طبيعة بنية الأحلام المحبوكة درامتيكياً في رواية غرين لباب الأمور. لقد توصلت الدراسة الى العديد من الاستنتاجات التي تخص الأنموذج والرواية.

Introduction

Each of us is drawn into a telling life drama in which the plot divulges itself to be outstandingly tedious. Each of us wharfs abundant dramatic characters who are constantly seeking a stage on which to play out their tragedies and comedies. Dreams, nevertheless, is a source of such life drama. It provides a unique set of plots that operate on the stage of mind where the rules of reality do not apply and where attitudes, motives, perceptions, identities, anxieties, aggressions, and conformity are expressed. It is the terrain within which society, culture, and individual interact in the theatre of mind creating the characters, the moods, and the motivations.

Accessing the world of dreams is rather a curious attempt. It is a world of mystery and debate: whether it relates to the awaking life or not; whether it affects our life or not; and whether it resembles certain patterns such as the pattern of dramatic plot or not. It seems that dreams, similar to poems, portraits, symphonies, and so forth, have a scheme of development crowned by a climax. This research paper approaches this assumption, fictionally, having Graham Greene's **HOM** fictional dreams as samples of application.

Plot

The terms story and plot overlap tremendously though they belong to the same discipline namely narrative. Narrative is the story involving "characters, their dialogue and actions, and the events in which they participate" (McManus, 1998: 2).

Sometimes, the story is considered a tantamount to plot. Yet, there is a key difference between them. Thus, the story involves the temporal succession of events whose center of attention is on what happens subsequently whereas plot focuses on causality, i.e. the story imaginative arrangement of events (Fludernik, 1993: 72). Hence, "The king died, and then the queen died" represents a story, while "The king died, and then the queen died of grief" represents a plot (Prince, 1987, 72).

Plot is the literary (or traditional) term preferable to call narrative structure. The term plot has been avoided sometimes because it has become

too vague in ordinary critical usage (Rimmon/Kenan, 1983: 135). Yet, it is the cornerstone of drama. It indicates "the progression of events toward an ending that hopefully is logical in the depiction of a story". Novel, short story, and some narrative poems show plot too. Plot comes together only when "a sequence of certain selected events are so arranged as to indicate cause and effect, relationship and connection." In history, this connection can be simple or complex, tight or loose. The ancient Greek tragedies are rather simple but firmly structured because of the unity of time. Consequently, a long-winded structure is subdued. So far, comedy is episodic and loosely plotted. Roman comedies are complicated and tightly structured, whereas Elizabethan drama is highly complicated having a set of plots and subplots (Shroyer/Gardemal, 1970: 14).

Plot can be of different types. Crane classifies plot into three types according to where a change happens. Hence, in the plot of action, the situation of the protagonist changes. In the plot of character, the moral character of the protagonist changes. And in the plot of thought, the feelings and thoughts of the protagonist change (Prince, 1987: 72).

According to Aristotle, the main role of plot is connecting the events that make it up. This is possible through three ways: relating the events as if happening because of one another, i.e. causally; repeating and ironically overturning the events, i.e. thematic connection; and by showing the relationship between the protagonist's character traits and what he thinks, says, and does (Rorty (ed.), 1992: 8 – 9).

Above and beyond, plot is significant when the protagonist is involved in a conflict situation that should be resolved (Kwiat, 2008: 107). The conflict is the struggle that the characters are involved in. Thus, they "can fight against fate or destiny, against their social or physical environment, or against one another (external conflict), and they can fight against themselves (internal or inner conflict)" (Prince, 1987: 15).

Besides, "a plot should have an appropriate beginning, middle, and end." Thus, a beginning may not refer to the beginning of life or creation. It is rather an interesting moment, or an important and crucial decision or information. This point could be near the end of one's life if this moment

initiates the plot of the story. The middle, however, builds up tension on the behalf of the audience parallel with the complication of the events. It gets the audience smoothly to the end in which an appropriate resolution is necessary. This resolution may begin as early as the first scene (Appelcline, 2001: 2 – 3).

Strongly grounded on Aristotle's model, Freytag's model (commonly known as Freytag's pyramid) sketches the five phases of plot development in drama as figure (1) below shows. The pyramid serves as the basic structure of tragedy. It involves five parts which correspond to an angle or a vertical side. Thus, "from the lower left introduction there is a rise to the climax apex then a fall to the lower right catastrophe" (Kwiat, 2008: 32).

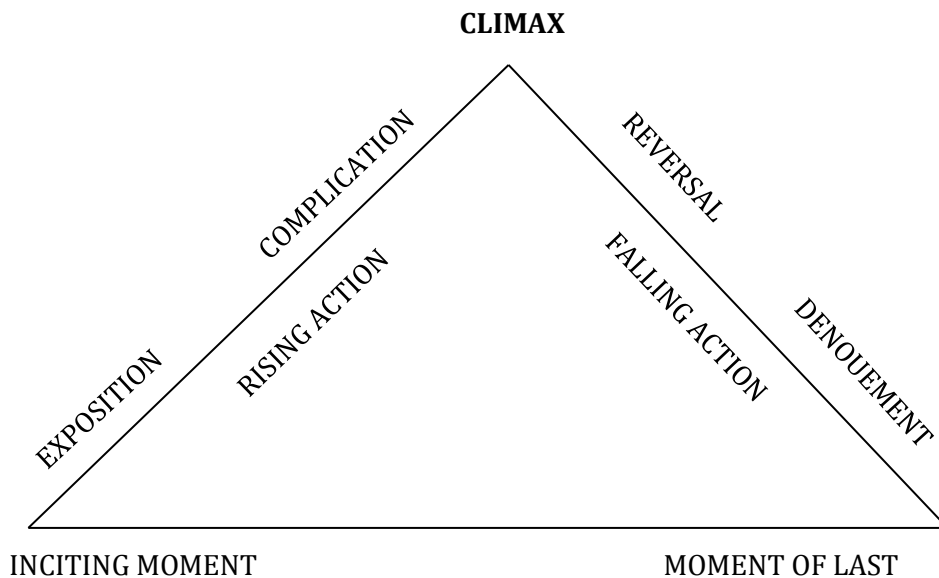


Figure No (1): Freytag's Pyramid
After Prince (1987:36)

Freytag's model suggests the following phases of plot development. The EXPOSITION consists of the early material providing the theme, establishing the setting, and introducing the major characters and

sometimes early hints of the conflict. Tension increases or uncertainty develops out of the conflict the protagonist faces to create the COMPLICATION. Hence, the story builds and gets more exciting rising the story's action and the audience's tension as well to the CLIMAX. It is the moment of the greatest tension, uncertainty, or audience involvement. It is also the turning point. That is, a REVERSAL will soon change the fortunes of the protagonist, i.e. from success to failure or vice versa. This brings the falling action that leads to the CATASTROPHE or DENOUEMENT which unwinds the tension and helps end the conflict. (Wheeler: 2010, 15 – 55). However, the complication is “essential” whereas the reversal and catastrophe are “recommended adornments” (Kwiat, 2008: 32).

Dreams

While “all dreams are affairs of mere seconds”, i.e. “the events of several years can be seen within ten seconds” (Sivananda, 2001: iv), dreams are only "a series of images, ideas, emotions, and sensations occurring involuntarily in the mind during certain stages of sleep. The content and purpose of dreams are not fully understood, though they have been a topic of speculation and interest throughout recorded history"(Wikipedia, 2009:1).

Freud believes that dreams are “designed to be secretive, he also did not believe dream formation is a product of discharging our tabooed sexual impulses”. Jung, on the other hand, sees that dreams “reveal more than they conceal. They are a natural expression of our imagination and use the most straightforward language at our disposal: mythic narratives” (Hurd, 2009: 1– 2).

Prehistorically, dreams were ascribed to the world of supernatural beings such as the gods and demons. Further, it was believed that dreams serve a certain purpose of the dreamer namely predicting the future. However, this is controversial because there is a disparity in the content of dreams and the impressions they produce on the dreamer made it difficult to create a consistent conception of them. This, indeed, requires sundry differentiations according to their significance and trustworthiness. Yet, for

Aristotle dreams are a psychological problem. He was familiar with some of the characteristics of the dream-life; for example, he knew that a dream converts the slight sensations perceived in sleep into intense sensations. For example when a part of the body only gets quite slightly warm, the person imagines himself walking through fire and feels hot (Freud, 1900: 42).

There are several types of dreams. Thus, retrospective dreams reveal events belonging to past incarnations. The waking dreams however, refer to the state of being alert and conscious but never realizing it a dream until after awaking, i.e. they resemble everyday life patterns. Lucid dreams, on the other hand, extend conscious existence into a realm where the dreamer is the creator. Anything imaginable can be expressed in fluid graceful motion in this dreamscape. Further, precognitive dreams embody the ability to know and experience a future event before it ever occurs which is hardly unforgettable, i.e. they are shadowy and flash like. Nightmares, besides, are scaring dreams. They are the territory of the deepest human fears struggling with the moral mind as to why we think what we think (Blavatsky and Judge, 2002:3).

Attributing the relationship of the dream to the awaking life is debatable. Some writers believe that the dream continues the awaking life. Thus, a dream connects itself with ideas present in our consciousness. On the contrary, some think that the majority of dreams belong to everyday life not a release from it. Other writers see that the "the content of dreams is always more or less determined by the personality, the age, sex, station in life, education and habits, and by the events and experiences of the whole past life of the individual." The philosopher, I. G. E. Maas, adopts the most unequivocal attitude in this respect saying that experience "corroborates our assertion that we dream most frequently of those things toward which our warmest passions are directed". Consequently, the generation of dreams is affected by passions. Hence, all the desires, when stimulated by any cause, may combine with other ideas to create a dream (Freud, 1900: 74).

Graham Greene's HOM: Summary

In a British colonial base in Sierra Leone and during World War II, the events of Greene's The Heart of the Matter happen. It tells about war and surveillance, love and adultery, and morality and corruption. Police officer Henry Scobie struggles to make his miserable wife, Louise, who bored the climate and aloofness there, happy whose misery increases when her husband is passed over as a commissioner of police and she feels humiliated. She shows him her deep desolation and he is the kind that cannot endure the idea that he has caused others' unhappiness. Consequently, he commits himself to the obligation of sending her to South Africa. Unable though, major Scobie is involved in this trouble. He begins a series of decisions and bargains to get the money and make his wife happy though he is quite convinced that nobody can arrange others' happiness. Anyhow, he strikes a bargain with Yusef. This leads to Scobie's corruption after being totally honest.

During the absence of Louise, he begins an affair with young widow Helen, a survival of a shipwreck. Soon, he finds himself responsible for her happiness. Accordingly, he has two people to make happy. When Louise returns back, she suggests having communion together that Scobie finds difficult to do out of the many sins he commits so he pretends to be sick. Then, he submits which requires a full confession and the cage door swings shut on Scobie and his dishonesty.

Considering it a sacrifice, Scobie decides to commit suicide in spite of his belief that he will be damned eternally. He thinks that he is going to save two lives if he sacrificed his own. Thus, his sense of virtue is only the opposite of religion. He sees himself right in spite of the fact that he is a sinner and this is the heart of the matter in the novel. That is, a sinner is, profoundly, a saint.

Plot in Graham Greene's HOM

Fundamentally, the plot of the fictional dreams in Greene's HOM will be analysed according to Freytag's model. They are dealt with as they occur in their sequential order in the novel. It has been observed that the

fictional dreams in Greene's **HOM** repeatedly occur and they are significantly connected to each other on the one hand and to the whole text on the other. Besides, they exhibit evolutionary movement towards a climax and then an end.

DREAM NO 1

He [Scobie] 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 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. (**HOM**: 83).

In his first dream, major Scobie found himself in a meadow with Ali, his servant. As such the setting and characters are first introduced in the starting scene. However, the general atmosphere is elusively suspicious which triggers the main conflict. Thus, except for Ali who never spoke, Scobie was alone. Moreover, "the birds in this meadow went by far overhead" (ibid). This discloses a fact that there is something wrong. Thus, the appearance of a small green snake unfolds complication that develops hand by hand with the audience's tension to reach a climax when the snake "passed on to his hand and up his arm without fear" (ibid). Hence, a reversal changes the situation where the snake did no harm to major Scobie except for a peaceful touch. The conflict resolved when the snake "slid down into the grass again" (ibid). Obviously, this dream shows all the phases of plot evolution. The phases of plot development in major Scobie's first dream are delineated in Figure (2).

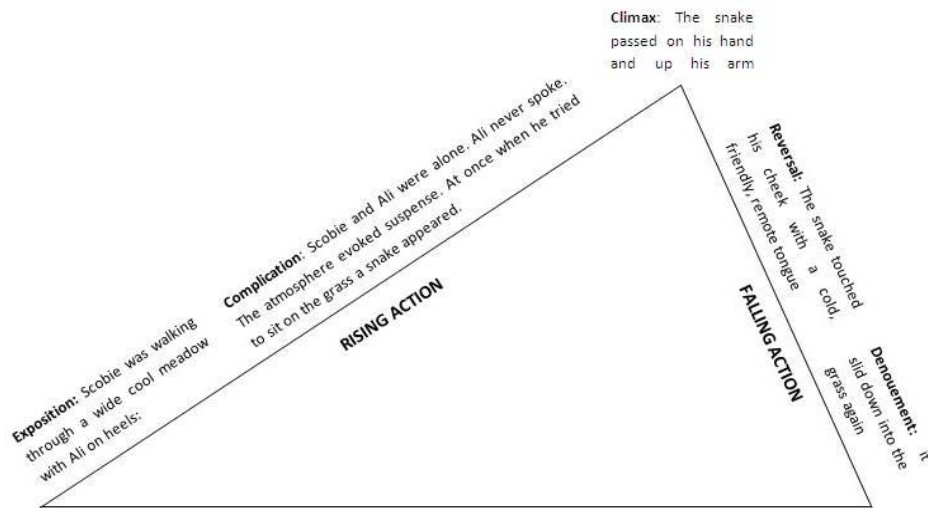


Figure No (2) Plot Development in the First Dream

Outwardly, there is a series of inconsistencies in this lucid dream. That is, under the headline of “perfect happiness and freedom” (ibid), Scobie’s dream involves a struggle with nature, which is, supposedly a source of freedom, namely a snake that, in turn, was peaceful. Thus, the aggressive, i.e. the snake, turns to be peaceful and friendly. In fact there is no inconsistency at all simply because dreams are not subject to the logic of reality. In other words, illogicalness is quite common in the context of dreams. Further, the snake could be the kind of harmless species. That is why it could be a dream of freedom and happiness

It seems that the suffering of major Scobie invades his dreams too. As such, dream and reality interfere on the stage of his mind in his second waking dream. This is awfully pathetic because Scobie’s sense of pride misleads him to the extent he becomes unable to differentiate between what he wants and what he really can do. The second dream, in any case, uncovers the dilemma he was living.

DREAM NO (2)

In his sleep Louise wept silently beside him; he put out his hand and touched the stone wall again – “Everything shall be arranged. Everything. Ticki promises”. (**HOM**: 90)

The set up scene identifies the setting, characters, and the inciting incident. Hence, Louise (character) wept silently (action) beside him (setting and character). As such the conflict begins early right from the exposition. The following phase of plot development mixes dream with reality. That is, while Scobie was trying to comfort Louise by touching her, he, in fact, was touching the stone wall instead.

The burden of making Louise happy puts tension in progress. Thus, when Scobie commits himself to arrange the journey of his wife, he actually complicates matters because of the contradiction between what he wants and what he is really able to do. This journey requires money which he is not able to guarantee. Thinking himself able and, consequently, making a promise only complicates the situation, then, what about confirming the promise of arranging “everything”? Certainly it brings complication to the climax. The falling action is brought forth by the comfort created by Scobie’s submissive use of his nickname “Ticki” accompanied by a future hopefully achieved promise. In fact, Scobie could be confident this time because he is working on it or he only wants to have an end to the situation. Accordingly, the problem is resolved by having a dream within the dream! The denouement is absent because he awoke leaving the end open. Figure (3) below sketches the plot development of Scobie’s second dream.

Short though, this dream is closely related to the awaking life of major Scobie who kept thinking of arranging the amount of money required for the journey of his wife. In this way, it can be explained by the light of his awaking life context. That is, although major Scobie is certain that “no one can arrange another’s happiness” (ibid: 85), he is, unconsciously, preoccupied by the arrangement of Louise’s happiness. He is busy thinking of a way to get out of the dilemma of guaranteeing money either from his life insurance, which is never sufficient, or borrowing it from manipulative

Yusef. In this sense Scobie’s dream upsets rather than comforts him since it continues his suffering even while sleeping.

This dream paves the way to accept the fact that Scobie is going to have the money no matter how. Of course, this will be on the expense of his honour as a police officer. But, this is the only possible way to have the money required for the journey of Louise. Accordingly, the dilemma of the good and the bad, and the right and the wrong has started. Thus, a bargain with Yusif is quite conceivable now.

The unhappy dreams persist and after a short period of time Scobie sees another lucid dream which continues the earlier one if not develops it. May be that is why Greene left the end of the earlier one open. At the same time, this dream innuendos the end of Scobie, i.e. suicide.

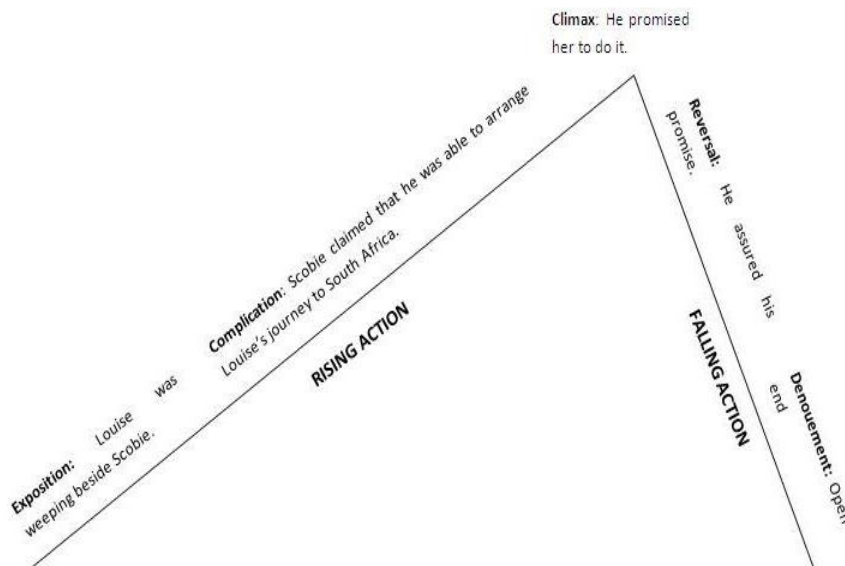


Figure No (3) Plot Development in the Second Dream

DREAM NO (3)

Upstairs Louise was crying, and he sat at a table writing his last letter. "It's a rotten business for you, but it can't be helped. Your loving husband, Dicky," and then 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 out of his power – he couldn't condemn himself for eternity – no cause was important enough. He tore up his letter and ran upstairs to tell Louise that after all everything was all right, but she had stopped crying and the silence welling out from inside the bedroom terrified him. He tried the door and the door was locked. He called out, "Louise, everything's all right. I've booked your passage," but there was no answer. He cried again, "Louise," and then a key turned and the door slowly opened with a sense of irrecoverable disaster, and he saw standing just inside Father Clay, who said to him, "The teaching of the church..." (**HOM**: 93 – 4).

In the third dream, quickly, the writer triggers the conflict through the opening inciting incident. Thus, "Upstairs Louise was crying" (*ibid*) brings setting, character, and conflict together at once. Simultaneously, another action was going on carried out by Scobie who was writing his last letter. Accordingly, the situation is already complicated. Nevertheless, the events are put in progress when he was seeking for a weapon or rope to take his life. At this moment, he realized that "suicide was for ever out of his power" (*ibid*) simply because he is afraid of damnation. This means a further endurance of suffering. The events continue evolution when the atmosphere adds an extra level of uncertainty particularly when silence dominated the place. This, in consequence, rises tension to its peak when Scobie tried to find out the reason that brands "the silence welling out from the inside the bedroom" (*ibid*) which was locked with Louise inside. The terrified screams of major Scobie that "everything's all right" (*ibid*) echo his previous promise that "everything shall be arranged" (*ibid*: 90). In the climax of this dream Scobie got the top of desperation. Fortunately, the reversal changes the procedure of events when "a key turned and the door slowly opened" (*ibid*). Thus, things began to resolve. The last scene uncovers a surprise for Louise was not inside. Rather, Father Clay broke the

silence reciting “the teaching of the church ...” (ibid). The denouement ends the situation with a disappointing disclosure when Louise’s fate was never uncovered. As the figure below displays the third dream exhibits all the phases of plot development.

Again Scobie, in vain, struggles to make Louise happy. In fact, this time the conflict is rather complex because it involves more than one struggle namely external and internal. The former outlines Scobie’s attempts to commit suicide on the one hand and finding out the reason that upsets Louise so as to get rid of it and make her happy on the other. This is, roughly, hard. The internal struggle, nevertheless, is represented by his futile attempt to find balance between what he believes in, i.e. Catholicism, and what his pride dictates, i.e. either keeping his promise or taking his life. Additionally, this dream is significant because it extends the earlier one (the second dream) and suggests a new hint to the future of Scobie namely suicide.

The final dream is simply a lucid dream. Although the external conflict dominates, this dream focuses on the fact that major Scobie is unconsciously involved in a hard internal struggle of uncertainty and fear. It outlines the sense of corruption he lives.

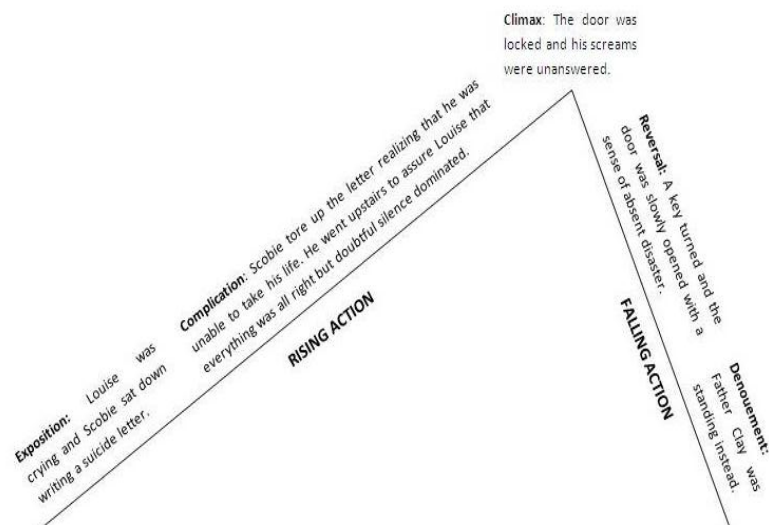


Figure No (4) Plot Development in the Third Dream

DREAM NO (4)

[H]e was in a boat drifting down just such an underground river as his boyhood hero Allan Quatermain had taken towards the lost city of Milosis. But Quatermain had companions while he was alone, for you couldn't count the dead body on the stretcher as a companion. He felt a sense of urgency, for he told himself that bodies in this climate kept for a very short time and the smell of decay was already in his nostrils. Then, sitting there guiding the boat down the mid-stream, he realized that it was not the dead body that smelt but his own living one. He felt as though his blood had ceased to run: when he tried to lift his arm it dangled uselessly from his shoulder. (**HOM**: 222)

The fourth dream has been set in alarming motion right from the first prospect. Scobie was in a boat drifting down an underground river and only to bring the image closer, he assimilates his dream state with the movie character Allan Quatermain's when he was getting to the lost city of Miloses. This assimilation is significant to give a rough image of the dream's background but in short. Accordingly, setting, characters, and action are all told in the exposition.

The complication has more than one source. First, the boat was drifting. Second, he was the only living person on the boat. Third, "a dead body on the stretcher" (ibid) that accompanied him raised urgency because it "in this climate kept for a very short time" (ibid). However, this leads the events to the climax when "the smell of decay was already in his nostrils" (ibid). The irony, next, comes to turn the situation and brings the events towards resolve. Hence, Scobie discovered that the smell of decay was not that of the dead body but of "his own living" (ibid). In consequence, he realized that he is dead for his arm swayed unworkably from the shoulder when he tried to lift it. Thus, he felt "his blood had ceased to run" (ibid). This was his last sight of himself which is catastrophic. Figure no (5) displays the scheme of plot development in the fourth dream.

This dream clarifies the fact that Major Scobie suffers a struggle between his fears, reservations, and doubts on the one hand and his sense of guilt on the other. He internally fights to find justifications to the unfair

instructions of Catholicism and the rigid procedure of survival. He tries, contentiously, to spell out the right answers of his questions in the examining sheet of religion. Yet, he realizes that “there was no hope anywhere he turned his eyes: the dead figure of God upon the cross, the plaster Virgin, the hideous stations representing a series of events that had happened a long time ago” (**HOM**: 222). In relevance to the novel, the plot of this dream suggests the close end of Scobie since his last sight of himself shows him dead.

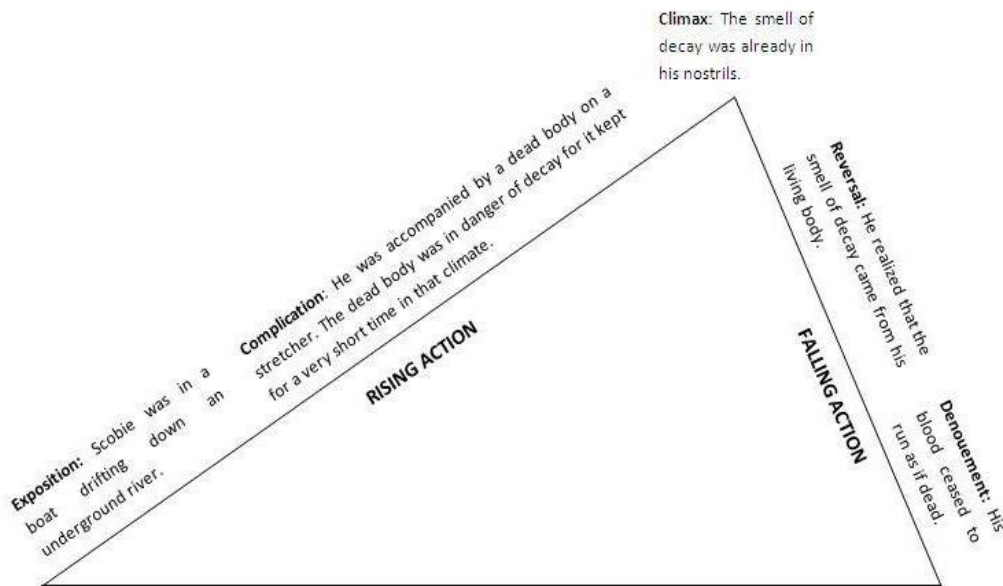


Figure No (5) Plot Development in the Fourth Dream

Conclusions

All the way through the application of Freytag's model to Greene's **HOM** fictional dreams, it has been evident that the results meet the assumption raised so far. That is, the fictional dreams in Greene's **HOM** demonstrate all the phases of plot development scheme, i.e. they have exposition, complication, climax, reversal, and denouement. Thus, the model, old though, is consistently applicable and the fictional dreams, except for one absent denouement in dream no (2) whose end is open, show all the stages of plot development.

Basically, the fictional dreams in the novel have an outstanding function specifically foreshadowing. That is, they indicate early hints to what will occur later in the novel, e.g. the act of Scobie's suicide. Moreover, they are planned in advance. That is, though each one is structurally independent having a complete plot, they are thematically connected to constitute a whole which resonates the general tune of the novel that develops tragically headed for the catastrophic end of the protagonist.

Besides, It has been observed that the fictional dreams in **HOM** achieve two other purposes: uncovering the deepest feelings of major Scobie, and being a kind of a sequence of mini plots that go parallel with the general plot line of the novel. In other words, they are a mirror image of the plot of the novel. This is evidently appropriate because all of the dreams belong to major Scobie. Hence, he is the protagonist of all the dreams and at the same time he is the protagonist of the novel. Further, they trace his psychological state whether he is happy, anxious, or depressed.

On the other hand, and by the light of the previous point, it can be said that the plots of the fictional dreams in the novel, if taken in their sequential order, trace the morality of the protagonist. That is, they outline the changing standards of major Scobie towards, let's say, religious corruption. Accordingly, it is obvious that the plot of the novel is a plot of character since the moral appeal of the protagonist changes. Alternatively, each dream serves reveal the character of major Scobie: the struggling, the dedicative, and the sympathetic. That is, a person who fails in the standards of religion but succeeds in the standards of humanity.

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