



Pratidhwani the Echo

A Peer-Reviewed International Journal of Humanities & Social Science

ISSN: 2278-5264 (Online) 2321-9319 (Print)

Impact Factor: 6.28 (Index Copernicus International)

Volume-VII, Issue-II, October 2018, Page No. 212-220

Published by Dept. of Bengali, Karimganj College, Karimganj, Assam, India

Website: <http://www.thecho.in>

Graham Greene's *Brighton Rock*: A Study in Sin and Salvation
Aratruna Panigrahi

Research Scholar, P.G. Dept. of English, Berhampur University, Berhampur, Odisha

Abstract

Graham Greene has been rightly accused of presenting unusual and unorthodox Catholic problems and because of his presentations he has been falsely accused of violating Catholic beliefs. The secondary purpose of this paper will be to show that Greene's ideas are in keeping with the tenets of Catholic dogma. Brighton Rock's plot seems to spring from the story of A Gun for Sale. Employing a transtextual narrative, a device that Greene borrowed from Conrad, is not a usual or infrequent literary strategy.ⁱ Articles about two horrifying murders that were committed in a Brighton of 1934. In the preface to "Brighton Rock" Graham Greene confesses that the book he always wanted to write was "the high romantic tale, capturing us in youth, with hopes that prove illusions, to which we return in age in order to escape the sad reality" "His characters do everything they can to escape the "sad reality" but cannot change their lives as they are engaged in "the same subterranean struggle... between two eternities of pain – and God knows the opposite of pain, not we.... There is no peace anywhere where there is human life ..."

Graham Greene, one of England's foremost Catholic writers, is primarily concerned with the great conflict between the supernatural forces of Good and Evil - God and Satan. The main characters of his novels are beings involved in the struggle between God and Satan fighting for their souls. The primary purpose of this paper will be to examine Greene's obsessions with the twin ideas of sin and salvation and the existence of Good and Evil as they are presented in the light of a Catholic conscience.

Graham Greene has been rightly accused of presenting unusual and unorthodox Catholic problems and because of his presentations he has been falsely accused of violating Catholic beliefs. The secondary purpose of this paper will be to show that Greene's ideas are in keeping with the tenets of Catholic dogma.

Brighton Rock's plot seems to spring from the story of *A Gun for Sale*. Employing a trans-textual narrative, a device that Greene borrowed from Conrad, is not a usual or infrequent literary strategy.ⁱⁱⁱ Here, though, it is totally reversed, since Greene first built up what Pinkie might have been if he had not died because of police intervention. Greene realized that he had given his character a Peter Pan syndrome; *Brighton Rock* evokes n 1936 racecourse gangs, the reports from the Lewes's Assizes, and perhaps the tone of

several press articles about two horrifying murders that were committed in a Brighton of 1934.

In the preface to "Brighton Rock" Graham Greene confesses that the book he always wanted to write was "the high romantic tale, capturing us in youth, with hopes that prove illusions, to which we return in age in order to escape the sad reality" ^{iv}His characters do everything they can to escape the "sad reality" but cannot change their lives as they are engaged in "the same subterranean struggle... between two eternities of pain – and God knows the opposite of pain, not we.... There is no peace anywhere where there is human life ..."

In several of Greene's novels we find imaginary patterns which can be conceived as typical symbolizations of a primal splitting process resulting in the opposition of an absolutely bad object and an idealized object. A male character personifying absolute evil and an idealized female character, displaying some original unity, are completely contrasted with each other and eventually the male character destroys it. The most obvious and extensive elaboration of this pattern can be found in Brighton Rock. The gang-leader Pinkie and the young waitress Rose have the same catholic background and are linked by Marriage. But while Rose by her generosity and self-sacrifice, symbolizes an idealized object, Pinkie is the personification of absolute evil. His narcissistic destructive hate, oral sadistic impulses and amorality are indicative of identification with a primate absolute bad object. Driven by his hate, he plans to destroy the idealized object; he can never reach, as soon as possible. An impenetrable wall also separates him from his dream paradise of music and peace, concretized in religious songs. His only prospect is death and eventually self-destruction.

Brighton Rock, stating clearly defined Catholic problems in Catholic terms, will be examined to show how Greene reconciles the pervasive evil of man with the Infinite Love of God. Though told in terms of stark realism, each of these novels touches on profound spiritual truths in a way that only a Catholic seems able to understand.

In Greene's works one is brought face to face with the great issues of sin and salvation - Greene writes always in terms of heaven and hell. In *Brighton Rock*, evil in its most vicious form is presented - a Catholic knowingly and willingly damning his soul.

In Brighton Rock, Greene introduces the religious dimension for the first time. This marks a turning point in his writing career. However, the subject of Roman Catholicism is not immediately apparent to the reader. It is incorporated into a thriller plot that functions as the framework of the novel. Greene originally conceived Brighton Rock as an "entertainment", and it indeed starts out as an exciting thriller.

As a means of suspense Brighton Rock is pervaded with pairs of opposites. The sunny Brighton of the Bank Holiday against the gloomy Brighton of the gang fights; Ida Arnold against Hale's murderers; Pinkie against Colleoni.

Yet this is only the first or basic level of *Brighton Rock*. The true meaning lies on a second level beneath the surface of the entertaining action. Ida Arnold, Colleoni and the police are the hounds that are after Pinkie, which can be described as the secular level of the text. This division of characters is taken up but then transformed into a spiritual one by introducing the religious dimension, which establishes a spiritual gap between the believers (Pinkie and Rose) and the non-believers (especially Ida Arnold). Although there are various shifts in point of view, the main perspective is that of Pinkie Brown. He is a religious gang-leader, who fights against secular enemies. His behaviour is shaped by his Roman Catholic concepts of good and evil, of damnation and salvation.

The novel thus depicts the world as it is seen by a Roman Catholic. It describes religious belief can shape human perception and behaviour.

In *Brighton Rock*, Pinkie struggles to gain salvation at the same time as he courts damnation. He tries to circumvent God's grace with the energy of a Machiavellian over-reacher in Jacobean drama that had always fascinated Greene. The tragedy derives from Pinkie's poignant awareness of God's grace that he refuses nonetheless. He thwarts the ample opportunities to repent, and he knows it.

Greene, however, places doctrine into aesthetic contexts, testing the various means by which fiction can represent the ineffable nature of sin and death. Pinkie and Scobie sin when they fail to trust the paschal mystery and reject God's grace out of despair, but Greene's novels reveal that the experience of despair is very real and cannot be alleviated by eschatological hope. Since Christianity brings Redemption into the context of tragedy, the experience of despair becomes more complex than in pagan tragedy. The tragic event does not remain the final word as the present world determines the individual's future in an eternal life of salvation or damnation. Greene is more concerned with offering a shape to Christian mystery by interpreting tragic experience in the light of eschatology as opposed to systematizing theology or professing doctrine. The strength of his novels derives from his use of narrative to bring meaning to irreducible issues of the human's complex relationship to the world without relinquishing reality or exhausting mystery.

The end of *Brighton Rock* strips any certainties concerning Christian salvation to an uncomfortably radical mystery that denies the more comforting words the priest offers Rose, "we must entrust judgment of persons to the justice and mercy of God" (248), a refrain of all the priests at the ending of Greene's Catholic novels. If the novel had ended with certainty concerning Pinkie's redemption or Rose's ability for self-transcendence, it would not reflect the indeterminacy of such theological issues. Interpretation, however, demands that we resist the advice of Greene's priests, who tend to have the last word, to leave all judgment to the mysterious mercy of God. I argue that the novel is successful not because of the radical mystery at the ending that seems to value an irreducible theodicy, but because of the means by which Greene constructs a dark aesthetic out of Catholic dogma in order to address the more complex experiences of despair.

Although Ida Arnold represents the secular world of justice, she is not the ironic sort of antagonist that most critics make her out to be. A. A. Devittis sums up the critical heritage toward Ida:

One of the most beguiling aspects of the novel is the subtle yet relentless way in which Greene managed to shift his reader's interest away from right and wrong — morally easy Ida — to good and evil — the Roman Catholic Church girl Rose and the boy Pinkie. As the focus shifted, the reader's affection for Ida diminished, and her undeniable humanity at first so captivating became tedious and then even unreal.

Although she may become "tedious" and "unreal," Ida plays a vital role in putting Pinkie's extremes of evil and damnation into an earthly context. Her secularity opposes Pinkie's tragic sense of the sacred with her down-to-earth belief in human "badness" as opposed to human "sinfulness." Reducing Pinkie's theological pretensions so that we can see his behaviour in the light of day, Ida succeeds in denying Pinkie his potentially heroic role as a misunderstood rebel, a Miltonic sort of Satan. He is simply a bad person who does very bad things, and he must be stopped before he harms the very good girl Rose.

At the same time, however, Greene forces us to resist adopting Ida's secularity too readily as he continually depicts her "goodness" as smug and recalcitrant juxtaposed to Pinkie's far more alluring nature, and this is borne out by the competing discourse that surrounds both of them. Ida "was of the people, she cried in cinemas at *David Copperfield*, when she was drunk all the old ballads her mother had known came easily to her lips, her homely heart was touched by the word 'tragedy'" (28). Pinkie "had no doubt whatever that this was mortal sin, and he was filled with a kind of gloomy hilarity and pride. He saw himself now as a full grown man for whom the angels wept" (168). Ida "wasn't religious. She didn't believe in heaven or hell, only ghosts, Ouija boards, tables that rapped and little inept voices speaking plaintively of flowers," whereas Pinkie ponders how "God couldn't escape the evil mouth which chose to eat its own damnation" (32). The loaded and dramatic discourse that surrounds Pinkie aesthetically overwhelms Ida's earthly existence. Ida's world of "right and wrong" is not as *entertaining* as the high theatre of Pinkie's "evil." Perhaps we are supposed to gain moral perspicuity through Pinkie's self-deceptions, but Greene does not offer us a viable alternative in Ida's ideology that remains equally self-deceptive, nor does Rose's blind faith function as a determinate moral centre to the novel.

Two different eschatological world views are there without necessarily accepting one or the other. Roger Sharrock claims:

For Ida death and life apply and are distinct categories because there is no eternity in which they may become continuous, on the clear limited sense of a present world in which human beings enjoy that life, pursue happiness, and postpone that death.

Whereas "death shocked [Ida], life was so important" (32), Pinkie is "touched with the annihilating eternity from which he had come and to which he went" (17). Ida believes in only an earthly fulfilment whereas Pinkie visualizes a hell of divine retribution. "Of course

there's Hell," Pinkie tells Rose. "Flames and Damnation . . . torments." When Rose tells Ida that she hopes that Pinkie will go to confession and repent, Ida responds: "That's just religion. Believe me, it's the world we got to deal with." Ida believes that one must live in the world with the same urgency with which Rose and Pinkie anticipate the afterlife: "Let Papists treat death with flippancy: life wasn't as important perhaps to them as what came after; but to her death was the end of everything" (32).

Although she stands on the side of justice, Ida's hunt for Hale's killer disintegrates into a game, and we realize that her lack of an eschatological vision turns her actions into activities she designs to merely satisfy her present desires. As the narrative progresses, she can no longer remember the name of the man Pinkie murdered. She admits that instead of pursuing Pinkie in a drive for justice, she hunts him down because the chase is thrilling as she revels in the theatrics of the chase.

As Ida's pursuit of justice becomes uncomfortable, so does Pinkie's theatrical religiosity. The only character that has the power to awaken people to the spiritual appears to be Pinkie. But by making Pinkie the moral centre of the novel, Greene forces us to sympathize with the tragic fall of a consummately bad person, frustrating tragic convention in which a fall results from the actions of a good person. Greene wants to awaken the reader to God, who exists even in a corrupt and violent world and whose grace visits the damned with equal intensity as the saints. In his manipulations of Catholic doctrine for his artistic purposes, however, we wonder if he depicts a viable eschatological vision or if he merely entertains us with Pinkie's perversion of theology, turning him into a spectacle of the Catholic sinner.

Greene makes sin and damnation more dramatic than the suspense an author usually features in a typical thriller by superimposing Pinkie and Rose's discourse over the narrative structure of a crime novel. Ian Ker argues that Greene invents a new form of detective fiction by using theological discourse to cast fundamental doubt upon Catholic eschatology. By challenging Catholic certainties, Greene creates suspense when Pinkie gambles with the possibility of last-minute grace. The novel reveals Catholicism's "insistence on the one hand on mortal sin and the reality of hell and on the other hand the infinite mercy of God which exceeds human understanding" (122). Catholic doctrine is frequently at odds with itself in its insistence upon both the certainty of damnation and unlimited mercy. For Ker, the indeterminate nature of mercy creates "the uniquely thrilling sense of danger that accompanies the fear of eternal damnation." In Catholicism, God does not predestine anyone to hell — one is free to choose, including the freedom to reject God's grace — a doctrine that heightens the thrill of mystery in the novel. According to Ker, Greene creates a new genre of the crime novel because the plot does not end with certainties concerning right and wrong, but with the indeterminacy of mercy and damnation.

Since the novel incorporates Catholic certainties and, at the same time, casts doubt upon these very certainties, the discourse surrounding the sacred and the secular oscillates between seriousness and parody. Often the discourse that surrounds Pinkie becomes an avalanche of Catholic terminology — "the confession, the penance, the sacrament" — creat-

ing a serial effect that threatens to empty the terms of meaning. Pinkie's memories of Catholic liturgy "spoke of things he didn't understand" (49). He only revels in the drama of a memory. Pinkie is a child playing with murder and theology, an illiterate gang leader who can mouth fragments of Latin. Pinkie and Rose's religious discourse is not too far removed from baby-talk, and they apply the terms "Good and Evil" to their lives instinctually.

The novel becomes more theologically believable when Pinkie and Rose attempt to understand a Catholic sense of God's mysterious grace by interpreting, in their limited intellectual capacity, verses remembered from childhood.

My friends judge not me, Thou seest I judge not thee: Betwixt the stirrup and the ground, Mercy I asked, mercy I found. (88)

The possibility that Pinkie could find last-minute salvation in God's mercy frequently recurs in the text, but Pinkie's more anxious desire to escape the law travesties penance. After fleeing wounded from Colleoni's attack at the racetrack, Pinkie "even tried to pray. You could be saved between the stirrup and the ground, but you couldn't be saved if you didn't repent, and he hadn't time . . . to feel the least remorse . . . there he stood . . . with his razor out, trying to repent" (105). Greene establishes an almost ludicrous tableau of Pinkie: a teenage sociopath attempting to repent while brandishing a razor blade. Since Pinkie is a child mentally juggling a relationship between crime and a theology he does not understand, he is unaware that to bank on God's mysterious grace — deferring repentance to the last moment — is the tragic sin of pride. Pinkie equates God's mercy with the roll of the dice, a bet placed at a racetrack. His personal eschatology, in the end, parodies Pascal's coin toss.

The egocentrism of Pinkie's dramatic memories of a Catholic childhood turn his beliefs into a bogus religiosity because he cannot escape his own egocentric concerns. "The imagination had not awoken... He couldn't see through other people's eyes, or feel with their nerves" (49). To be spiritually awakened and to rise from his despair, Pinkie must gain a sense of human empathy, of otherness. His relationship with Rose becomes his greatest hope to transcend his solipsism. Although he marries Rose so that she cannot testify against him, Pinkie begins to find her goodness integral to his life — she embodies necessary otherness to Pinkie, just as Ida's secular sense of justice stands juxtaposed to eschatological certainties. "What was most evil in him needed her; it couldn't get along without her goodness... he got the sense that she completed him" (125).

Additionally, Pinkie glimpses the possibility of an alternate eschatological world from that of torment, despair, and damnation that parallels his recognition of Rose's necessary otherness. After their marriage, they go to the cinema where music, again reminding him of liturgy, offers Pinkie an eschatological fantasy.

Suddenly, inexplicably, the Boy began to weep. He shut his eyes to hold in his tears, but the music went on — it was like a vision of release to an imprisoned man. He felt constriction and saw — hopelessly out of reach — a limitless freedom: no fear, no hatred,

and no envy. It was as if he was dead and was remembering the effect of a good confession, the words of absolution. (178)

Wishing he could look back retrospectively from death as if he had been redeemed by God, Pinkie desires a better end that contrasts his "torments and agonies." Pinkie yearns for something different in his life, but "he couldn't experience contrition — the ribs of his body were like steel bands which held him down to eternal unrepentance" (178-179). He realizes that Rose has somehow affected his hatred as the novel draws toward its catastrophic ending: "It was quite true — he hadn't hated her; he hadn't even hated the act. There had been a kind of pleasure, a kind of pride, a kind of — something else" (166). Since he is conscious of his unrepentant nature, however, *he should know better*, which makes the tragedy more poignant and his actions more reprehensible.

That "something else," the otherness of love and an alternative life, grows more excruciating for Pinkie as the novel nears its end. Like a giant bird of prey, the power of grace pursues his car, about to consume him as he drives Rose to the location of their bogus suicide pact. But when he leaves Rose alone in the car with the gun, there is no question that Pinkie wants her to commit suicide. Alone, Rose realizes that it is one thing to damn oneself and another thing to shoot oneself, and throws the gun away, rejecting Pinkie's plan, which allows time for Ida and the police to catch them. In his escape, Pinkie suffers an ironic punishment that is almost too fitting. In a parody of extreme unction, he burns his face off with the vitriol that he had intended to use on Rose, and then satanically falls off the cliff "out of any existence" into the ocean.

Despite how we may feel about Ida, she grounds the melodramatic discourse that surrounds Pinkie in a real and finite world. The dramatic climax when Ida arrives with her posse like the cavalry over the hill brings Pinkie's seductively sublime world of damnation into the light of reality. There is good and evil, but in the finite world, Pinkie must be judged as right or wrong, good or bad. Satisfied with her accomplishment, Ida turns to her Ouija board while Rose, in a parallel scene, goes to the confessional. Nothing in Ida's experience has alerted her to anything beyond the world she lives in. Yet, her worldliness, her dedication to the importance of finitude, allows her to become a strange vessel of God's grace.

The three endings of Pinkie, Ida, and Rose indicate the three means by which Greene turns narrative closure into eschatological problems for interpretation in this novel. Although Ida is right when she stops a wrong, she misses a larger spiritual picture of the human drama into which she intervenes. Pride drives both Ida's determination to mete out justice and Pinkie's determination to be damned. But Pinkie experiences moments of doubt. The glimpses we get of him vacillating force us to experience the tragic waste when Pinkie denies, out of despair, alternative possibilities of which he becomes poignantly aware. In the end, what counts in this novel is not that Pinkie is a worse person than Ida, but that he is a more dramatically interesting character. If Greene had shown the story only through

Pinkie's point of view, things too sublime for words would paralyze our ability to interpret the text.

In the final chapter, the perspective shifts from the inexplicable Pinkie to the vulnerable Rose as she walks off the last page of the novel on the edge of everlasting hope and hopelessness. In the light of Christian tragedy and the eschatology that tragedy questions, Rose stands for all of us who struggle to reconcile daily suffering with the hope of an eternal world that may be waiting for us, or that may be a consoling fiction to help us to survive the "horror" of life.

Nearly all of Pinkie's actions have a criminal purpose; therefore, when he envisions the possibility of reform, the tragedy becomes heightened by the opportunity for redemption that he thwarts.

When asked by Marie-Francoise Allan whether he did not consider of his character Pinkie in Brighton Rock to be "the very incarnation of evil," Graham Greene replied:

"I tried as a sort of intellectual exercise to present the reader with character whom he could accept as worthy of hell. But in the end, you remember, I introduced the possibility that he might have been saved "between the stirrup and the ground." I wanted to instil in the reader's mind a fundamental doubt of hell.(148) Pinkie's admission to Rose that he believes in hell but not in heaven establishes a kind of spiritual geography in the novel, and his defiant "Credo in unum Satanum" together with his territorial ambition in Brighton, aligns him with Milton's Satan as a character who would rather rule in hell a good deal. Role speculates that Ida "couldn't burn that to marry would be worse than to be hanged. The corrosive vitriol which Pinkie carries in his pocket and which explodes in his face causes him leap to his death seems to prefigure the tormenting flames of hell itself, yet Pinkie's end was always implicit in his beginning – in the ruined slum whose ironic name "paradise Piece" evokes the condition of man in the fallen world:"Hell lay about him in his infancy", in short the idea of hell is so powerful and vivid in Brighton Rock that one might seriously question whether the novel is successful in instilling that "fundamental doubt" which Greene wanted the reader to experience.

Brighton Rock thus has traces of a detective story undoubtedly and has become successful as a film. But the religious dimension of the story cannot be ignored. The character of Pinkie the centre character is destined to doom for its acts of immortality. The main characters are craftily interwoven to indulge in the religious dilemma of sin and salvation and finally ended with the fate of Pinkie. *Brighton Rock* like other novels of Greene is a Catholic novel and in spite of its commercial success very clearly dealt with the theme of sin and salvation.

Works Cited:

1. Dermot Gilvary, Darren J.N. Middleton (Ed) (2011), *Dangerous Edges of graham Greene*, Continuum, London pp.73-76
2. *Ibid.*
3. Greene, Graham, (1977,), Brighton Rock, Penguin Books in association with William Heinemann Ltd., New York, p. III

4. Richard Hoggart (1953), 'The Force of Caricature', *Essays in Criticism* 3 (October), pp. 447–62.
 5. Brian Diemert, 'Ida Arnold and the detective story', *Twentieth Century ... for Pinkie in Greene's Brighton Rock*, *Studies in the Novel* (Spring 1992) pp. 67–77.
 6. Ibid.
 7. Hodgkins, H.H. (2006), "The Apophatic Heart: Graham Greene's Negative Rhetoric", *Renascence*, 59,(1), pp.53-75.
 8. R.H. Miller, (1990)*Understanding Graham Greene*, University of South Carolina Press, p.48
 9. Robert Hoskins (1999), *Graham Greene An approach to the Novels*, Garland Publishing, New York, London.p.95
 10. Roger Sharrock (1984), *Saints, sinners and comedians: the novels of graham Greene*. Burns & Oates. P. 84
 11. Smith. J.M. (1970), "Graham Greene's Theological thrillers, *Queens quarterly* 77, no.1, p.65.
 12. Brian Diemert, *op.cit.*
 13. Georg Gaston, *The pursuit of salvation: a critical guide to the novels of Graham Greene*, Whitston, Pub. Co. 1984, p.19.
 14. Sherrock, *op.cit.*,p.94
 15. Roger Sharrock (1984) *op.cit.*, p.88
 16. Williams, L. Trevor, (1992), "History over theology: the case for Pinkie in Greene's Brighton Rock" *Studies in the Novel* Spring, pp. 67-77.
 17. Diemert, *op.cit.*, p.10.
 18. Knox R.A (1958), *Literary Distractions*, Sheed & Ward, New York: 180-98.
 19. Auden W.H. (1948), "The Guilty Vicarage" *Harper's Magazine*, 196, (1176), p. 406.
 20. Sayers D.I. (2003), "Les Origines Du Roman Policier: A Wartime Wireless talks to the French: the Original French text with an English translation, (ed) S. Bray, Husrtpierpoint, West Sussex: Dorothy I. Sayers Society. P.11.
 21. Ibid.
 22. Bergonzi B. (2006), *A Study in Greene*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.82-83.
 23. *Obid.* P.83.
 24. Lodge D. (2005), *Personal Correspondence*.
 25. Christian Schafer, (2005), "Message and Meaning of Graham Greene's "Brighton Rock"", *Scholarly Paper (Advanced Seminar)*, GRIN Verlag, Munkch, pp.3-6.
-