

## Class Issues and Spatial Representations in *Brighton Rock*

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### Introduction

Graham Greene (1904-1991) was highly regarded as a Catholic novelist of the twentieth century. He became a Catholic at the age of twenty six, which affected his writing. *Brighton Rock* (1938), for example, has been discussed from a Christian perspective. Rather than taking that view, this essay sheds a new light on class issues in this novel through Greene's spatial representations of clay. At the beginning of the novel, it is clear that Brighton is a place for tourists, such as Ida Arnold, a middle-class woman who comes from London. For the protagonist, Pinkie, however, Brighton is the home, where he was born and lives with a community of gang members. In considering Ida and Pinkie's different association with Brighton, this paper explores the class issues between the middle and working classes.

### I. The Image of Brighton for Tourists and Inhabitants

In the very beginning of the novel, Greene significantly represents Brighton as a tourist destination. For tourists, it is a place to visit for pleasure and to escape from their everyday lives:

They came in by train from Victoria every five minutes, rocked down Queen's Road standing on the tops of the little local trams, stepped off in bewildered multitudes into fresh and glittering air; . . . Fifty thousand people besides himself were down for the day. (Greene 3)

People who come to Brighton think that there is "fresh and glittering air." In fact, it is the place closely connected with the development of tourism, and many people began visiting Brighton after the opening of the railroad from London Victoria to Brighton in 1841. In addition, the construction of the West Pier in 1868 and the Brighton Aquarium in 1871 brought more people to Brighton. In reflecting the historical development of Brighton, therefore, Greene's spatial representation integrates the textual space with the physical space.

In the novel, Brighton is also described as the place where Pinkie lives. As a gang leader, he commits assault and violence in everyday life. For instance, he kills Hale who had a hand in the murder of his boss, Kite. That is, the spatial image of Brighton, which is developed along with Pinkie's everyday life, is in stark contrast to the tourist's image of the city. In discussing these two distinctive images, for instance, Gurpartap Singh argues that:

It is Pinkie's world that is real while that of the tourists is temporary and fake. His world is what will remain once the holiday is over. . . . Pinkie cannot conceive of a world where there is no violence or hatred or disgust. (Singh 12)

This means that the world which tourists see at the beginning of this novel is "fake," whereas the world in which Pinkie commits violence and murder is "real." Focusing on the relationship between these worlds could be a factor in revealing different pictures which tourists and inhabitants see in Brighton.

In order to investigate the relationship between the two distinctive images of Bridgton here, it is worth carefully examining a scene in which Pinkie attempts to stay at a tourist hotel on his wedding night. The reason he marries is connected with the murder of Hale. Spicer, one of Pinkie's gang members, makes a mistake in creating an alibi, which a waitress, Rose, spots at a restaurant. Then Pinkie approaches her to intrigue her into a marriage, as he believes that, as his wife, she will not be able to take the witness stand. He manages to marry her and plans to take a hotel room on the wedding night. Rose refuses to do so because she is ashamed of her appearance, but Pinkie forces her to go to the Cosmopolitan hotel:

'I want a room,' the Boy said. 'A double room.' The clerk stared past him at Rose, then turned a page. 'We haven't a room free,' he said. 'I don't mind what I paid,' the Boy said. 'I'll take a suite.' 'There's nothing vacant,' the clerk said without looking up. The pageboy, returning with a salver, paused and watched. The Boy said in a low furious voice, 'You can't keep me out of here. My money's as good as anybody else's...' 'No doubt,' the clerk said, 'but there happens to be no room free.' He returned his back and picked up a jar of Stickphast. (Greene 190)

The Cosmopolitan hotel is a place for the tourists such as Ida Arnold to stay. At the hotel, Pinkie is no longer described as a gang leader, but treated merely as a "Boy" who comes to the wrong place. Based on Singh's argument, therefore, it could be discussed that the Cosmopolitan hotel embodies the "fake" world relished by the middle-class tourists, and the imaginary world maintains stability by keeping Pinkie's "real" world away from there.

In the novel, on the other hand, these two worlds are inseparable. For instance, the inseparability between them is illustrated along with Greene's description of Ida. While coming from London and enjoying her holiday, or the "fake" world of Brighton in Singh's words, Ida accidentally faces Pinkie's "real" world, when she notices that he is a murderer. Ida comes to Pinkie's house to meet Rose and tries to persuade her not to marry him:

‘You [Pinkie] leave her [Rose] alone,’ the woman [Ida] said. ‘I know all about you.’ It was as if she were in a stranger country: the typical English-woman abroad. She hadn’t even got a phrase book. She was as far from either of them as she was from Hell- or Heaven. Good or evil lived in the same country, spoke the same language, came together like old friends, feeling like the same completion, touching hands besides the iron bedstead. ‘You want to do what’s Right, Rose?’ she implored. (Greene 135)

Ida advises Pinkie to stay away from Rose and guides her to do “what’s Right.” Here, Ida is described as “the typical English-woman abroad,” which implies her arrogant way of thinking. For her, Brighton is not her home, and yet she still tries to impose what she believes is “right and wrong” on the locals (Greene 43). Therefore, Ida comes to Rose in order to abandon her marriage with Pinkie.

Greene’s description of Ida’s arrogance could be read as his criticism against the middle-class people who assume their own values are superior to the working-class values. Her arrogant attitude is distributed by “right and wrong,” but it is questionable what is right, or what is wrong. As Ida thinks that Pinkie kills Hale, she asks police to investigate the case again. However, they refuse to do so because the case is closed. Thus, she takes men she meets in Brighton to her side and tries to prove that the case is a murder by herself:

She [Ida] had only to appeal to any of them [men], for Ida Arnold was on the right side. ... She wouldn’t tell tales to your wife, she wouldn’t remind you next morning of what you wanted to forget, she was honest, she was kindly, she belonged to the great middle law-abiding class, her amusements were their amusements, her superstitions their superstitions. (Greene 84)

Ida belongs to the great middle class that believes the law and “superstitions,” which implies the aspect of her contradiction because she believes not only the law but also superstitions. Her arrogant way of thinking could be considered Greene’s ironic comment on middle-class people; the thought of the middle class could be a bond to connect with the “real” and “fake” worlds in Sherry’s words. It is questionable why Greene mainly writes about the life of Pinkie while he is being expelled from the world Ida enjoys.

Rather than obsessing with middle-class values and lifestyles, Greene intends to shed a new light on those of the working class. For instance, his biographer, Norman Sherry discusses that:

Certainly he [Greene] was planning to deal with areas of human life that he did not 'know', the working and criminal class life of Brighton, the race-course gang feuds, the world of the Ravens and Pinkies. (Sherry 627)

It is dangerous to discuss the working class and the criminal class as equivalent, but this essay focuses on the class issues between the middle class and the working class in this novel. Greene writes from the perspective of the working-class people in which the middle-class people behave as they please, with suspicious values such as "right and wrong." Greene illustrates the middle class critically although he himself belongs to the middle class, same as Ida. However, the constitution of social classes in Brighton cannot simply be divided into the two sides of excluding and being excluded. In order to accelerate the discussion about this constitution, it is debatable that the middle class try to install their sense of values in the working class. In discussing the "real" world of Brighton, it is necessary to explore Pinkie's conflict.

## **II. Pinkie's Struggle**

While excluded from the Cosmopolitan hotel, which symbolises the territory of the middle class, Pinkie is also depicted as a character who struggles to protect his own territory. When he goes to the Brighton racecourse with a member of his gang, Spicer, the place is illustrated as his own territory, from which he intends to exclude Ida:

Somewhere from further down the enclosure he [Pinkie] heard a laugh, a female laugh, mellow and confident, perhaps the polony who'd put a pony on Fred's horse. He turned on Spicer with secret venom, cruelty straightening his body like lust. (Greene 112-13)

According to Shore, the racecourse was the place where a dispute over territory between rival gangs constantly occurred between the 1920's and the 1930's, and the media called the dispute the "racecourse wars" (Shore 352). In the novel, the racecourse serves as the place to illuminate Pinkie's "lust" to protect the territory of the working class. Thus, when he hears Ida's laugh, he cruelly regards her as the third person or the middle class who intrudes his territory.

The economic disparity between the working class and the middle class is one of the reasons for Pinkie's disgust with the middle class. Tourism, for example, portrays the economic power, which is illustrated in the garage he finds after he escapes from the ambush by underlings of Colleoni who is a leader of Pinkie's rival gang:

Whoever the owner was, he [Pinkie] had come a long way to land up here. The pram-wheelbarrow was covered with labels the marks of innumerable train journeys: Doncaster, Lichfield, Clacton (that must have been a summer holiday), Ipswich, Northampton roughly torn off for the next journey they left, in the litter which remained, an unmistakable trail. ... And the Boy hated him. He was nameless, faceless, but the Boy hated him. (Greene 116)

Pinkie cherishes hatred against someone who is faceless and nameless. The fact that Pinkie saw a wheelbarrow with labels provides him with the hatred because the labels show evidence of economic strength enjoying a holiday and taking a trip, which includes one of the historical facts that Clacton is a sightseeing spot to enjoy going to a beach in the 1930's. Thus, those who come to Brighton is the object of critic for Pinkie as well as this person.

Pinkie's repulsion against the middle class is also highlighted when the middle class is regarded as a threatening presence for his gang. For him, the city of Brighton means the territory that he inherits from his boss Kite:

'I liked Kite,' the Boy said. He stared straight out towards France, an unknown land. At his [Pinkie] back beyond the Cosmopolitan, Old Steyne, the Lewes Road, stood the downs, villages and cattle round the dewponds, another unknown land. This was his territory: the populous foreshore, a few thousand acres of houses, a narrow peninsula of electrified track running to London, two or three railway stations with their buffets and buns. It had been Kite's territory, it had been good enough for Kite, and when Kite had died in the waiting room at St. Pancras, it had been as if a father had died, leaving him an inheritance it was his duty never to leave for strange acres. (Greene 142)

It is important to notice that the Cosmopolitan hotel is located in "his territory." As discussed, however, Pinkie was rejected by the hotel. That is, tourists appear invaders for him, and he intends to protect his own territory. At the same time, his desire to leave the territory is also implied, as he "stare[s] straight out towards France, an unknown land." As discussed, in this novel, travel represents the economic power of the middle class. Therefore, his staring towards France paradoxically implies his lack of economic strength. While imprisoned within his own territory, he considers his responsibility in defending his own territory.

Throughout Pinkie's conflict, it cannot be said that the boundary between the middle class and the working class is completely divided. In Singh's word, while belonging to the "fake" world which excludes Pinkie, he is depicted to belong to the "real" world where he struggles to live. When Pinkie talks with Dallow one of his gang members, he says who he is:

‘I was born here,’ the Boy said. ‘I know Goodwood and Hurst Park. I’ve been to Newmarket. But I’d feel a stranger away from here.’ He claimed with dreary pride: ‘I suppose I’m real Brighton’ as if his single heart contained all the cheap amusements, the Pullman cars, the unloving week-ends in gaudy hotels, and the sadness after coition. (Greene 238-39)

Pinkie’s mind sarcastically contains “amusements,” “Pullman cars,” “week-ends,” and “hotel” that indicate factors consisting of his disgust against the middle-class people who relish the “fake” world. These factors are associated with tourists of the middle class, and the boundary between the “real” and “fake” world is illustrated as complex composition. Here, Pinkie implicitly criticises these factors related to the middle class ironically. In other words, Greene, as a narrator, is trying to try to condemn the middle class. In this novel, Greene would like to write about “the working and criminal class life of Brighton” based on Sherry, and the life is illustrated as the complicated world rather than the simple binary opposition between the “real” and “fake” world discussed by Singh. Therefore, the sophisticated relationship between the middle class and the working class is raised by investigating Greene’s spatial representations in this novel.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this paper focuses on class issues between the middle class and the working class. The relationship between the “real” and “fake” world is not simple composition, which reveals that the middle class presses their sense of values onto the working class. The “real” life of Brighton is clarified by investigating Pinkie’s struggle. Pinkie is interpreted as the model to criticise the middle class rather than fit the mould they indicate. Brighton is illustrated as his territory which is inherited from Kite, and his eyes regard the middle class including Ida as an intruder with an arrogant attitude. Pinkie’s ironic criticism of the middle class is associated with Greene’s own criticism. In this novel, class issues and spatial representations are a key to consider the struggle of Pinkie, and this discussion will be accelerated by adding the distinction between the working and the criminal class.

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