

Good vs. evil in brighton rock



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The conflict between good and evil is a prevalent theme in literature.

Graham Greene incorporates the conflict throughout the text of his novel *Brighton Rock*. In order to do this he uses two prominent characters, Ida Arnold and Pinkie Brown. Ida represents “good” and is portrayed as a woman with high morals and sensibility, whereas Pinkie represents “evil” and is portrayed as a merciless sociopath. Throughout the plot of *Brighton Rock*, the two characters continuously clash, which assists in setting up the theme of good versus evil. The characterizations of Ida and Pinkie, as well as the underlying themes of morality and malevolence, create the conflict between good and evil in *Brighton Rock*.

Early on in the novel, Pinkie accosts Hale on the street when he is talking to two girls. During his conversation with Hale and the girls, Pinkie is described as someone with “grey inhuman...eyes” (12) and a “serious dead voice” (13). These characteristics immediately put Pinkie in a negative light, as his eyes convey that he lacks qualities of compassion and mercy, and his voice reflects his lack of emotion and liveliness. Thus, Greene characterizes Pinkie as some sort of bestial creature, as he seems to not have typical human qualities. Pinkie’s characterization also allows Greene to introduce the “evil” in the text, as his personal qualities are in line with someone that would be considered villainous. As soon as Pinkie leaves, Ida is formally introduced when Hale asks if he can sit next to her. In stark contrast to Pinkie’s personality, Ida is portrayed as someone who is caring and compassionate and smells of “comfort and peace...a touch of nursery” (14). She also has a lively attitude, being “only a little drunk and happy” (15). Greene effectively introduces Pinkie’s foil in the novel, a person who represents “good”, by

illustrating an evident contrast between Pinkie and Ida. He also gives the readers an insight into Ida's moral sense. When Hale tells her that he is sick, Ida comments " You oughtn't to be alone. What's the matter with you?" (16), which reflects her solicitude. Thus, Greene's initial characterization of Ida develops her " good image" and her role of being the moral backbone in Brighton Rock. By the end of the first chapter, Greene is able to set up the conventional theme of good versus evil by introducing and characterizing Pinkie and Ida.

After Hale is murdered by Pinkie's gang, Ida contemplates investigating his death. " The more she thought about [Hale's death] the more she wished she had been there: it was like a pain in the heart, the thought that no one at the inquest was interested" (32). Her concerns and curiosity regarding the death of Hale prompt her to get involved, despite her friend Clarence telling her that it's not her business. "' I know,' [Ida] said. ' It's none of mine.' But it's none of anybody's, her heart repeated to her: that was the trouble: no one but her to ask questions" (33). Hale's murder lingers in Ida's heart and determined to uncover what really happened, Ida takes it upon herself to investigate his death. Ida's demeanor reflects responsibility, as she decides to tackle Hale's murder after no one wants to question his death. She also demonstrates a just character, as she is hurt by the fact that Hale's death was not properly investigated and in turn feels that she is doing him justice by trying to deduce what actually occurred. Greene is deceptively able to construct and develop Ida's role of representing " good" in Brighton Rock, as he characterizes Ida as a determined woman with strong morals and values. Greene also continues to build Pinkie's role of representing " evil" in the text.

When Pinkie is discussing the murder of Hale with his gang members, he remarks “ When people do one murder, I’ve read they sometimes have to do another – to tidy up” (47). Pinkie’s utter disregard for life is evident, as he nonchalantly talks about how a murder needs to be balanced with the killing of another person. Furthermore, “ the word murder [conveys] no more to him than the word ‘ box’, ‘ collar’, ‘ giraffe’” (47). Greene’s characterization of Pinkie shows that he is unfazed by the loss of human life and that murder holds no negative connotation in his mind. Therefore, Pinkie is being portrayed as a psychopath, which goes along with his role of depicting evil in the text. Pinkie’s psychopathic nature is further demonstrated when it is said that “ He couldn’t see through other people’s eyes, or feel with their nerves” (47), which shows his lack of empathy. As the novel progresses, Greene is effectively able to demonstrate how Ida plays the role of “ good” and how Pinkie plays the role “ evil”, by delving into their psychological thought processes.

Later on in Brighton Rock, Pinkie forms a romantic relationship with a waitress named Rose, in order to prevent her from giving any incriminating evidence to the police. Ida, realizing that Pinkie is trying to use Rose, confronts her multiple times in order to tell her the truth. Ida is also relentless in her pursuit of Rose, once saying “ I’m going to work on that kid every hour of the day until I get something” (129). Also, her aggressive approach is backed by “ merciless compassion” (129), an intriguing oxymoron. Ida is portrayed as someone that desperately wants to help Rose, as she is willing to spend as much time as possible in order to talk with Rose about Pinkie’s malignant behavior. Therefore, Ida complements her role of

playing “ good” in the text as she is trying to protect Rose from succumbing to Pinkie and his malicious intentions. In essence, Ida is a guardian angel to Rose, except Rose tries to thwart her. When Rose asks Ida “ Why should you care about me?” (130), Ida replies “ I don’t want the Innocent to suffer” (130). Again, this shows how Ida is trying to be a guardian figure for Rose, except Rose believes that she does not need any help, as she is too naïve to understand Pinkie’s true intentions. Ida also continues to pursue Rose, saying “ Don’t be silly now...I’m your friend. I only want to save you from [Pinkie]...he’s wicked” (130). Here, the conflict between good and evil can be seen. Rose wants to be with Pinkie even though he is manipulating her, and Ida is trying to persuade Rose to leave him, as she is trying to protect her from harm. Rose is essentially a see-saw, where “ evil” is on one side and “ good” is on the other side. At this point in the text, she is leaning towards “ evil” as she is attracted to Pinkie and continues to ignore Ida’s advice about him. However, Ida does not back off, continuing to tell Rose why she should leave Pinkie, arguing “ He doesn’t care for you...I’ve loved a boy or two in my time. Why, it’s natural. It’s like breathing. Only you don’t want to get all worked up about it. There’s not one who’s worth it – leave alone him. He’s wicked” (130-131). Lastly, Ida extends her hand, and tells Rose “ it’s in my hand: the girdle of Venus. But I’ve always been on the side of Right...Don’t take away the notion I’m against love...Come away from that wall and act sensible. He doesn’t love you” (131). Ida continues to demonstrate her moral character, as she asserts that she’s always on the side of justness, but she also gives one last piece of advice to Rose – that Pinkie doesn’t love her. In conclusion, Ida’s argument with Rose demonstrates her guardian angel mentality, as well as her interpersonal conflict with Pinkie.

Towards the end of Brighton Rock, Pinkie makes a suicide pact with Rose. However, Pinkie does not want to kill himself, as evident in the text. He asks Rose if he should commit suicide first, and when she says no, Pinkie tells her to go first, saying “ I’ll take a walk an’ you stay here. When it’s over, I’ll come back an’ do it too” in a tone that made it seem like “ he was a boy playing a game, a game in which you could talk in the coldest detail of the scalping knife or the bayonet wound and then go home to tea” (263). Pinkie’s deplorable character is shown, as he is essentially trying to bait Rose into killing herself, without fulfilling his side of the pact. This also shows his callous manipulation, as it is evident that Pinkie only “ loved” Rose in order to prevent her from destroying his alibi. Pinkie is also taking advantage of Rose’s trust, as he says that he’ll commit suicide after her, but Rose is too enthralled with him to realize that Pinkie is just trying to get rid of her. Pinkie continues to egg on Rose, saying “ It won’t hurt” (263), and starts to walk away. Rose also has a moral dilemma regarding Pinkie and choosing to commit suicide, because “[if a] guardian angel was speaking to her now, he spoke like a devil – he tempted her to virtue like a sin. To throw away the gun was a betrayal; it would be an act of cowardice: it would mean she chose never to see him again for ever” (263). Greene’s characterization of Pinkie likens him to a devil, which is symbolic of his malevolent character. Pinkie’s negative influence is apparent as well, as he is tempting Rose to sin by convincing her to end her life. Also, Pinkie’s manipulation of Rose is evident because she believes she will betray Pinkie if she doesn’t kill herself. Ultimately, Rose doesn’t kill herself, as Dallow, Ida, and a policeman confront Pinkie. Left with no other options, Pinkie commits suicide by jumping off of the cliff. His death was rather swift, “ as if he’d been withdrawn suddenly by

a hand out of any existence – past or present, whipped away into zero – nothing” (264). To summarize, Pinkie is represented as a diabolical and manipulative person when he is trying to persuade Rose to commit suicide, as he demonstrates his disregard for her life.

The characterizations of Ida and Pinkie, as well as the underlying themes of morality and malevolence, create the conflict between good and evil in Brighton Rock. Graham Greene accomplishes this by delving into their psychological thought processes as well as their interactions with Rose, an essential character in the plot. Throughout the course of the plot, Ida is portrayed as a righteous woman with high morals, whereas Pinkie is portrayed as a sociopath. Towards the end of Brighton Rock, the conflict between good and evil is evident, with Rosie acting as a medium. Ida acts as a guardian angel towards Rose, and Pinkie reveals himself to be diabolical and manipulative when he attempts to persuade Rosie to commit suicide. In the end, “good” overcomes “evil” as Pinkie’s death parallels the demise of evil in the text. Furthermore, Greene creates a revealing paradox in Brighton Rock by presenting “good” and “evil” in ironic manners. He is able to accomplish this by using Pinkie, an insecure Catholic seventeen-year-old who abstains from drinking, to symbolize “evil” and Ida, a non-religious woman who smokes and drinks, to symbolize “good”. The conventional theme of good versus evil will continue to be a mainstay archetype in literature for hundreds of years to come, and thousands of future conflicts will mirror the one between Ida and Pinkie in Brighton Rock.