

How does graham
greene explore
gender
representation in
brighton rock? essay



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In Brighton Rock, Graham Greene demonstrates aspects of the archetypal masculine and feminine characters. Prominent patriarchal themes which he explores include leadership, criminality and mob mentality, typifying the image of the contextual audience; what was perceived of 'the 1938 man'. However, Green also depicts contrasting images of gender representation. We gain knowledge of this through the portrayal of the novel's anti-hero Pinkie, his name alone contradicts any masculine traits and his physical appearance also contrasts his criminal lifestyle which entails violence.

Similarly, Ida is a vehicle of feminine strength; shown through her endurance and determination in the hostility of a murder. Yet more stereotypical characteristics are presented in Ida's polar opposite: Rose displays more familiar actions associated with a pre-war female, the expectancy to provide and to serve a husband. Themes of masculinity and femininity are equally challenged throughout the novel; Green challenges many typical images of men and women, specifically those of a pre-war society. There is consistent evidence throughout Brighton Rock to suggest that Greene presents the males in the forefront of the plot to conform to the archetypal images of men. Under this umbrella of masculinity, includes the male violence and intimidation.

The first insight of this is Hales shuddering thoughts: "it was in the dark he had met the whole mob" indicative of the cruel nature of the mob. The word 'dark' implies the relationship between Hale and this 'mob' is certainly unpleasant; it immediately highlights the group mentality in Brighton and the male tendency, of that era, to resort to violent methods. Dallow's naïve question to Pinkie also shows the severity in which the mob operates: "Do

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we carve 'em up Pinkie?" the matter of fact expression signifies the lack of effect the violence conveys on the gangsters; inflicting pain on others becomes almost a primal instinct. Perhaps the upbringing of each member suggests that males confine better when they are together in a group, and once in a group naturally they turn to violence and intimidation in an attempt to boast their masculinity and toughness as opposed to serious crime for personal profit. Greene's exploration of the gangster lifestyle and its trimmings certainly can be seen to confine with the typical gender representation; male violence and comfort in a group are characteristics associated with the most primitive of humans.

Furthermore, abiding by history, Greene displays the masculinity necessity and desire for leadership. Most prominently, this is seen in Pinkie's character. Despite his age of just seventeen, Pinkie confronts Colleoni: "I'm running it (the mob)" this highlights his pride and power he possesses, in control of the mob, Pinkie commands respect and authority, perhaps the ultimate objectives of a man. Greene progresses Pinkie's leadership of the mob, in the way he converses with them; boldly, strongly and patronisingly. "You think that was funny eh.

.. come on Dallow" his authority over members of the mob is a significant indicator of Greene's social commentary whereby men in a position of power, often manipulate their authority and begin controlling others. Perhaps Greene is commenting on masculine desire of a patriarchal society where individuals seek leadership over those beneath them in order to gain the status and recognition of their power. Pinkie's relationship with Colleoni is

also significant. It is representative of the era of social mobility and the male need for materialistic belongings.

In distasteful admiration “fingering his gold lighter” Pinkie does acknowledge Colleoni's empire and potentially sees him as inspiration. Reflected in his thoughts: “he looked as a man might look if he owned the world” this shows that within Pinkie, there always lays the necessity for dominance and ownership. The word “owned” is interesting, suggestive that with power and money, all things could be bought; Pinkie believes there is potential for a man to control the world. “Owned” implies that the ultimate achievement is not happiness or love but the control and disposability of objects and people which is why Pinkie admires Colleoni. The examples of Pinkie's leadership are representative of male behaviour; controlling and arrogant through expression whilst there exists the inherent need for materialistic belongings which ultimately comes through power.

Contradictory of his nature, the superficial evidence of Pinkie defies what is expected for the typical “gangster” as his name and appearance similarly suggest.

Firstly, the name Pinkie is paradoxical of his illegitimate, pernicious ways. The colour Pink springs to mind which is associated with delicate, feminine and pure traits in a person; yet Pinkie himself appears to show male characteristics completely opposing his title. Perhaps Greene is commenting on the superficial toughness males conveyed in that era, whereby men feel that it is more important for other to believe you are masculine in order to strike fear in whom they come across. Additionally, his name could be seen as satirical; what appears to be a hardened outer shell of Pinkie, what lies <https://assignbuster.com/how-does-graham-greene-explore-gender-representation-in-brighton-rock-essay/>

within is a more sensitive and ultimately a more morally aligned person. Pinkie's age, coupled with his appearance, is also Greene's comment on masculinity, particularly in gang culture.

Seventeen, at the period of time the novel was written, was considered very much an age of immaturity, and teenagers still remained relatively innocent and child-like. The leader and protagonist, Pinkie's role is associated with age and what comes with it; Greene thrusts the character into a role requiring experience and wisdom and credentials, yet obviously presents him as a character seemingly unprepared for a more experienced male. This suggests that Pinkie clearly is still a young boy, attempting to fill significantly larger shoes; he desires to be more masculine through leadership of the gang but ultimately his twisted fate came down to his lack of rational thought, associated with more practical, aged men. Similar gender representations in the feminine characters are explored by Green.

Through both Ida and Rose he shows the contrasting vehicles of feminine actions likewise with masculinity. Rose in particular represents the stereotypical image of a woman; extremely emotional, comforting and delicate. The name "Rose" connotes beauty and love, reflecting her part within the novel. She naively believes what her and Pinkie share is love, something beautiful, whilst it is actually ironic that what she perceives is perfection, is actually destined for a disastrous ending. We first see these more traditional values in the introduction to her character: "in no time she had cleared the table" what may seem insignificant, the first indicator of her traditional femininity is her occupation.

Greene purposefully placed the delicate, innocent girl in the novel as a waitress, symbolising and enhancing what is perceived of the traditional images of women. Waiting on people highlights some maternal qualities; comforting, serving and looking after, all of which are considered the fundamentals of a typical “mother”. As Rose becomes increasingly intertwined with Pinkie's paranoia, her innocence and naivety become evident: “Pinkie, you wouldn't”. Despite obvious mistreatment from Pinkie under false pretences, she fails to see his volatility; a flaw in her sensitive personality. Her Catholic stance adds to the pure outlook in which she views life, becoming emotionally attached and remaining naïve even to dangerous people around her.

Specifically, this could be a reference to the representation of females, and the role they play in relationships and family whereby often they are the foundations of partnerships and can be labelled with the upmost of dependence. However, through Greene's portrayal of Ida Arnold, he presents a dichotomous relationship between the images of women. On one hand there is the innocent, naïve, dependable Rose and on the other there is Ida, the symbol of endurance, strength and sexuality. “Her lipstick told you that, and her well covered body” the physical reference and the consistent anatomy related language implies her presence as well as her promiscuity. Her lipstick almost acts as a signpost of her character; bold and brash, with the tendency of enjoying life.

This example contradicts the purity of Rose; Greene challenges the traditional images of females through Ida's bold, frontal nature.

Additionally, her promiscuity is a continual act throughout the novel. “
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Fastening his mouth on hers...Pecking at her lips” she is presented as a woman who flaunts her assets as well as boasts about being able to “ please a man”.

Bordering on prostitution, her character challenges what is expected and perceived of, a female, particularly in a 1930 society. Greene is perhaps commenting on the dual nature of women, not only is there the archetypal ideas of women staying at home, caring for the family, but there does exist the maverick female in society who can be happy and content with a life of enjoyment whilst not being tied down to family commitments. Her strength in times of hostility is also highly commendable: “ I want justice”, Ida remains persistent throughout the novel, hunting down members of the mob, apparently fearless of any encounter. Although she embarks on a moral crusade, her quest can also be seen as an adrenaline rush; the boost of finding danger and lurching into it. However, her tenaciousness and toughness is respected, what is considered flamboyant of the time, she carries on trying to solve a murder.

Presenting femininity in a different, perhaps stronger, light, indicates that Green believes that the typical female representations are inaccurate, and that women can certainly be a beacon of strength and not conform to what society expects. Graham Greene delves into gender representation throughout Brighton Rock and severely challenges the typical images of both sexes. Where Pinkie shows the qualities of innocence and immaturity, Greene comments on the masculine desire for power and leadership in society; feeling the necessity to provide and achieve control by whatever means possible. Similar contradictions are made in the feminine characters;

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whilst there exists more traditional stereotypes in the novel, Ida Arnold represents more uncharacteristic representations of what it is to be a woman; standing on her own two feet whilst remaining strong in the face of wild adversity.

In both genders, Greene defies the norm; he analyses alternate representations of the genders to criticise pre-war society and highlight possibilities of masculine weakness and feminine strength.