

A Study of Graham Greene

The Pinkies (III)

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This is a continuation of the examination of Pinkie Brown, the protagonist in *Brighton Rock*.¹⁾ In the preceding chapter "The Pinkies (II)" ²⁾ the examination of the behaviour and motives of Pinkie and Peter Pan and the demonstration of the meaning and similarities between them are especially clarified. In this chapter the point is to examine the figuration of Pinkie attributed with an image of a fallen angel and to clarify what components Pinkie is made up of, which would reveal specific features of this seventeen-year-old boy, Pinkie, who boasts to be an outlaw and be evil and does cruel murders.

In 1973, Greene made a comment that the Pinkies (Raven in *A Gun for Sale*, and Pinkie in *Brighton Rock*) "have something of a fallen angel about them, a morality which once belonged to another place"³⁾ and in 1983 he again commented "I don't think that Pinkie was guilty of mortal sin because his actions were not committed in defiance of God, but arose out of the conditions to which he had been born."⁴⁾ His comments appear a little contradictory themselves, but in 1973 he had already said, "One gets so tired of people saying that my novels are about the opposition of Good and Evil. They are not about Good and Evil, but about human beings. After Hitler and Vietnam, one would have thought good and evil in people was more understandable. Still, I do not wish to judge any of my characters. I would hope it was common to most of us to have sympathy for the unfortunate part of the ordinary human character."⁵⁾ So it should be emphasized that the characters Greene represented in his works are first to be examined as ordinary human beings and the conceptional and religious

interpretation of their own peculiarities are important as a means to make their characteristics clear. And appropriately Richard Johnstone also explained, on belief appeared in the novels by Waugh and Greene, that justifying intellectual commitment to Catholicism of their novels is fruitless and belief is significant not as an independent phenomenon, but as an aspect of the hero's predicament.⁶⁾

In this meaning the quality of Pinkie as a human being would be made evident through the demonstration of characteristics of a fallen angel found in him. The metaphorical expressions and images of a fallen angel drawn into the description of Pinkie expound his idea, his feelings and behaviours. Especially the words: "Hell, annihilation, nothing, pride and hate" are clues to lead to significant components of Pinkie's character.

"Hell" where fallen angels dwell with Lucifer after falling from Heaven, is a place and a state Pinkie dwells in. Pinkie, young leader of racketeers, boasts himself to be evil. "It's in the blood. Perhaps when they christened me, the holy water didn't take. I never howled the devil out." (p. 156) He can recognize himself as evil, because when a child Pinkie was educated as a Roman Catholic. He understands Catholic ideas, and especially believes in Hell. This one-sided view originated in Greene's boyhood and in fact he retrospected on the days, that "I began to believe in heaven because I believed in hell, but for a long while it was only hell I could picture with a certain intimacy."⁷⁾ Certainly Pinkie affirms, "Of course there's Hell. Flames and damnation," and "torments." (p. 62) Pinkie consequently perceives he is guilty of mortal sin as a Roman Catholic when he and Rose married at the registry and as a result he feels there is nothing left more to fear because he is already damned. When he heard his solicitor, Mr Prewitt, quote, "Why, this is Hell, nor are we out of it" from Mephistopheles,⁸⁾ (p. 261) Pinkie, coming back to his lodge, understands his dwelling is Hell: "if this was Hell, he thought, it wasn't so bad" (p. 265) like the fallen angels doomed

to dwell in Hell.

J. B. Russell has mentioned that Hell where the fallen angels dwell is explained by the scholastics in Medieval times as "a state of deprivation of God's presence rather than as a place : 'This is hell, nor am I out of it.'"⁹ The idea that Hell is not a place but a state of privation of peace of God is partaken in Milton's conception. J. B. Russell has also expounded that Hell by Milton is "a place where the fallen angels dwell, yet it is within their hearts and is with them wherever they go : 'which way I fly is Hell ; myself am Hell.'"¹⁰ Hell, therefore, means not only a place but an existential situation.

The perception of Hell to be their own existential situation is one of the distinct similarities between Pinkie and fallen angels. As a Roman Catholic, Pinkie understands he can pray and could try to pray God's mercy "Between the stirrup and the ground" but he "learned the fallacy of that comfort" (p. 155) when he was shamefully defeated in the violent fight between Colleoni's gangs and him.

... he'd learnt the other day that when the time was short there were other things than contrition to think about. It didn't matter anyway... he wasn't made for peace, he couldn't believe in it. Heaven was a word : hell was something he could trust. A brain was only capable of what it could conceive, and it couldn't conceive what it had never experienced ; An awful resentment stirred in him - why shouldn't he have had his chance like all the rest, seen his glimpse of heaven if it was only a crack between the Brighton walls ... He turned as they went down Rottingdean and took a long look at her as if she might be it - but the brain couldn't conceive.... (pp. 284-285)

For Pinkie only hell is real and he believes only its presence while heaven is not even a mere conception. "He tried in a half-hearted way to picture 'peace' - his eyes closed and behind the lids he saw a grey darkness going on and on without end, a country of which he hadn't seen as much as a picture postcard, a place far stranger than the Grand Canyon and the Taj Mahal...."

(p. 186) "A grey darkness going on and on without end" symbolizes his inner blankness which has no traces of something peaceful. So Pinkie has a strong aspiration for a glimpse of heaven. In the expression "as if she might be it" there can be recognized a possibility that good Rose might be the peace of God, but he can't appreciate her because of her shabbiness. However Rose "touched him like cheap music" (p. 138) and with music Pinkie recalls what he has lost.

'Why, I was in a choir once,' the Boy confided and suddenly he began to sing softly in his spoilt boy's voice : 'Agnus dei qui tollis peccata mundi, dona nobis pacem.' In his voice a whole lost world moved – the lighted corner below the organ, the smell of incense and laundered surplices, and the music. Music – it didn't matter what music – 'Agnus dei', 'lovely to look at, beautiful to hold', 'the starling on our walks', 'credo in unum Dominum' – any music moved him, speaking of things he didn't understand. (p. 61)

What music speaks of is a whole lost world : "something he had lost or forgotten or rejected." (p. 147) There is an appropriate comment on phrases from the Ordinary of the Mass. K. C. Joseph Kurismmootil, S. J. points out that such phrases are used effectively at every major turn of Pinkie's life, especially when he decides to betray or to murder.¹¹ Phrases Pinkie once learned in a choir work paradoxically in his mind and urge him on both to do crimes and to recall the past time when he wished to be a priest. And like a fallen angel that shows "a hint of regret for his own rebellion" and is "aware of his fate,"¹² Pinkie bears in his mind where he has come from and what he has lost, and now aspires the peaceful world of heaven yet unknown to him. Though hopelessly out of reach, he aspires freedom and peace of God. The following quotation is about the scene in the movie theatre Pinkie and Rose entered after their wedding and now the actor is singing on the screen.

He sang again under the restless stars in a wash of incredible

moonshine, and 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, no envy. It was as if he were dead and were remembering the effect of a good confession, the words of absolution : but being dead it was a memory only — he couldn't experience contrition — the ribs of his body were like steel bands which held him down to eternal unrepentance. (p. 223)

Pinkie realizes that he is imprisoned in Hell and his agony lies in his fallen existence, where being bound into eternal unrepentance he only hopes to be released and get freedom. And in this awareness of his Hell lurks the sense of separation or alienation from where he should have naturally belonged. Accordingly Pinkie is interpreted as a human being who has to endure his sense of alienation that derives from his separation from natural and peaceful human lives and loneliness of not knowing the love of God. This is the same sense of aspiration and alienation that fallen angels have, that “are intelligences exiled from their true native land above.”¹³⁾

The sense of alienation, J. B. Russell explains, also originates in the moment when the angel, Lucifer, realized that

he was not God, that his being depended upon God, and that he had the choice of accepting this state of dependence or not. This is an astute extrapolation from human experience. The rage that occurs when we first discover that we are not God — that our will need not be done, that we will be disliked and ignored, that we will die — is the primal rebellion. Alone among the creatures of this planet we humans are aware that we are not one with the cosmos, and in that awareness lies our alienation.¹⁴⁾

The primal rebellion leads to the unnatural direction, the deviation from God. "Every natural thing moves naturally toward realizing itself fully by moving toward God, in which everything has its being. Evil is a pulling away from that natural movement, a turning away from the direction of reality toward the direction of nothingness." ¹⁵⁾ Therefore the evil can never be eternal being because "God, who is infinite, annihilates his opposite — totally, so that it never exists at all." ¹⁶⁾

"Annihilation" and "nothing" are other words particularly signifying the inherent features of Pinkie. Greene has effectively used the description of Pinkie's eyes to represent his latent inhuman quality of vacancy. There are many interesting expressions of his eyes: "his grey eyes had an effect of heartlessness like an old man's in which human feeling has died," (p. 5) "the grey inhuman seventeen-year-old eyes," (p. 13) "his grey ancient eyes giving nothing away." (p. 69) Greene also described, "the slaty eyes were touched with the annihilating eternity from which he had come and to which he went," (p. 22) and "A dim desire for annihilation stretched in him: the vast superiority of vacancy." (p. 178) Annihilation opposite to God is the quality he belongs to and desires. For Pinkie, to go into the vast of vacancy, which seems to suggest "a grey darkness" mentioned above, means his superiority over others or his energy that keeps him going on, because Pinkie doesn't know the meanings of love to others and life with others. He cannot live with other people believing and trusting their love. He was an abandoned child like Peter Pan and doesn't understand what love means.¹⁷⁾ So Pinkie knows nothing that keeps and encourages a person to be alive except his nihilistic arrogant indifference and cruel intention to other people. Only death has a meaning and every one lives to death, "... children being born. It's dying slowly." (p. 283) So the false double suicide in which he intends only himself to be alive betrays "the exhilaration, the bitter excitement, the anarchy in the eyes," (p. 283) because it relieves him from Rose, from

human relationships, from life he doesn't want to be involved in. He tends towards the anarchy of confusion, disorder and rebellion against the natural state of an ordinary human being, turning away from life to annihilation, that is to say, deviating from God.

The scene of Pinkie's death is also described introducing an image of a fallen angel that falls down from heaven into the mouth of hell and turns towards the direction of nothingness. Pinkie goes into nothing.

He screamed and screamed, with his hands up to his eyes ; he turned and ran ; she saw a police baton at his feet and broken glass. He looked half his size, doubled up in appalling agony : it was as if the flames had literally got him and he shrank – shrank into a schoolboy flying in panic and pain, scrambling over a fence, running on... they couldn't even hear a splash. It was as if he'd been withdrawn suddenly by a hand out of any existence – past or present, whipped away into zero – nothing. (p. 304)

The simile “as if the flames had literally got him” suggests the image in the early eleventh-century illustrations of Lucifer falling from heaven, “who remains proudly humanoid though with flaming hair and a tail.”¹⁸⁾ Also the shrinkage of his body has a tint of the falling angels that become little, black, wizened imps.¹⁹⁾ But the shrinkage of his body also accompanies an image of a schoolboy that often appears through the novel to show his youth, ignorance and inability in the world. Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan offers his interpretation that Pinkie's offences and crimes echo the fallen angel's descent into Hell, that the vision of the daemonic description of him and the opposite view as a pitiable lost child operate through the novel, and that the tension between the opposed conceptions is a source of the compelling power of the novel.²⁰⁾ This double image attributed to Pinkie, however, can be metaphors to imply triflingness and powerlessness of him in the world and before Almighty God.

“Nothing” into which Pinkie was whipped away is another characteristic of a fallen angel that rebelled against God and

chose the fate to perish into the void of nonbeing.²¹⁾ However, as mentioned above, Greene made comment that Pinkie was not guilty of mortal sin because his actions were not committed in defiance of God, but arose out of the conditions to which he had been born. This comment verifies the priest's words to Rose in the last chapter, "You can't conceive, my child, nor can I or anyone the ... appalling ... strangeness, of the mercy of God" and "because we believe in Him — we are more in touch with the devil than other people." (pp. 308–309)

It is easy and simple to understand that Pinkie is now given the mercy of God, according to Catholic ideas that all human beings are in the hand of omnipotent and omniscient Deity. Critics tend to accept this view. For example, one critic mentions the mysterious operation of God's mercy which can save even as bad a sinner as Pinkie²²⁾ and another critic states that Greene has ended *Brighton Rock* with a statement about man's inability to understand "God's appalling strangeness of the mercy of God."²⁴⁾ Richard Johnstone, although he finds contradictory points such as the possibility of salvation that would imply the negation of Pinkie because of its rendering his whole life insignificant, finally discerns optimism and confidence and faith beyond logical justification.²⁵⁾ All of these are religious interpretations of Pinkie and it seems, as A. W. Friedman mentions, that the man-God relationship is the most important in the novel and actions of men may be ignored.²⁶⁾

In this meaning, suppose Greene put an end to this church scene, *Brighton Rock* would have another importance as one of religious works and have been advertized for Catholicism. About this point, S. K. Sharma states that ambiguity at the end makes *Brighton Rock* not an advertisement of the Catholic faith but a plea for the victims of the terrible life.²⁷⁾ The last scene of the novel, therefore, gains much significance. In fact, the last line: Rose "walked rapidly in the thin June sunlight towards the worst horror of all" (p. 310) implies inscrutable reality human beings get involved in. Greene doesn't continue to write to the very scene

of "the worst horror of all," where Rose listens to the record Pinkie left, listens to not his words of love but of loathing her. With this ending Pinkie and Rose could be real characters picked out of the reality of human beings, because there still remain the questions, the inexplicability and inscrutability about human beings, which the author has to begin to quest from now on. In this meaning Pinkie and Rose are, as characters, not yet completely nor fully pursued in their existence.

"Credo in unum Satanum" (p. 205) testifies to another evil feature of Pinkie. The phrase is evidential of his evil like a fallen angel but his belief in Satan also manifests his vainglory and his unnatural pride, out of which some of the angels, too, rebelled, following their own desires, and planned to seize a portion of God's glory.²⁸⁾ The word "pride" also constitutes Pinkie's personality; for example, "a kind of hideous and unnatural pride," (p. 4) "full of pride," (p. 119) "a kind of infernal pride," (p. 230) and "an insane pride" (p. 254) are peculiar to the motivation of Pinkie's deeds. His pride first appears in his ambition to be a great and high-ranked gang leader in Brighton and not to be involved in an ordinary human life. He wants to be superb in the world.

All his pride coiled like a watch spring round the thought that *he* wasn't deceived, that *he* wasn't going to give himself up to marriage and the birth of children, he was going to be where Colleoni now was and higher. (p. 112)

Even though Pinkie has no power, ability and back-up to be like Colleoni who dominates all Brighton, he is ambitious enough to be higher than Colleoni, like fallen angels that struggled in vain against God.

Secondly, Pinkie is proud of himself who has the power and ability to be corrupted and damned. Pinkie realizes that to get married at the registry is to commit a mortal sin and he gets a sense that murders are boy's trivial games leading only to

corruption. And "he was filled with awe at his own powers" (p. 207) to commit a mortal sin.

He 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. (p. 210)

He is proud of his own powers to be damned, independent of God and to prove his identity. This proud Pinkie has also the similar image of Lucifer, "the proud, the noble, standing alone in hopeless battle against an implacable foe, unyielding to the end."²⁹⁾ Like Lucifer, Pinkie behaves with vainglory and narcissism derived from impudence of his youth, as it is clarified by comparison with Peter Pan in the preceding chapter.

However proud of himself he may be, on the other hand, he is a boy without any experiences as a grown-up man and often quite bewildered because of his ignorance. He speaks arrogantly as the leader of the mob to his men, but in fact he is "like a cruel child who hides the dividers behind him" (p. 122) and "his youth came out in the crudity of his instruction : he was like a boy playing on an ash-heap." (p. 301) Even in tempting Rose to do the false double suicide, he is described as a boy playing a game.

Again he gave the sense that 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. (p. 302)

He is like a child playing a game of make-believe, so cruelty of his intention and his deed has no reality in his mind with "an awful lack of understanding." (p. 58) A lack of understanding, namely, ignorance derived from his lack of experiences brings out his hatred of what he doesn't know. "All the Boy's hatred was in the word 'know'," (p. 185) because hatred usually comes from fear or anxiety for what is not yet known or what one cannot deal with at will. Hatred is also one of the characteristics of Satan by

Dante, that is isolated away from God and shrouded in darkness and sightlessness, angry and hating.³⁰⁾ Pinkie, too, hates what he cannot hold and what he cannot experience. For example, he doesn't know the security and happiness of a family that an ordinary citizen has. And Pinkie hates the owner of ordinary happiness of family life. "He was nameless, faceless, but the Boy hated him, the doll, the pram, the broken rocking horse. The small pricked-out plants irritated him like ignorance." (p. 132)

Pinkie, being enclosed in the Hell of his mind and "bound in a habit of hate," (p. 289) cannot accept tenderness which calls him or love between Rose and him. He believes that love is not an eternal thing like hatred and disgust. (p. 233) Not believing Rose's love he only hopes to be relieved from fear for her betrayal and anxiety about human contacts. He imagines his life without Rose and freedom without her. He imagines his life only after Rose dies in the false double suicide.

Life would go on. No more human contacts, other people's emotions washing at the brain — he would be free again : nothing to think about but himself. Myself : the word echoed hygienically on among the porcelain basins, the taps and plugs and wastes. (p. 289)

The quotation above explains Pinkie's egotism : aspiration for egocentric freedom, which he thinks Rose's death can only bring to him. Pinkie was cruel enough to deceive and hide his crimes by murdering every one who would have a possibility to betray him, and, consequently, Rose is now only a menace to his existence : "it was all now him and her." (p. 271) He has to recover his identity just the same as before he met Rose. To be "myself" is the strongest desire of him in order to live on at his will, that is to say, to get his identity back again. So "Myself" means Pinkie's aspiration for egocentric freedom, that is "the vast superiority of vacancy" isolated from an ordinary human relationship, from peaceful life in the mercy of God.

It is concluded, as mentioned above, that by the examination of the figure of Pinkie through the image of fallen angels, a sense of alienation and aspiration for freedom and peace that would recover his identity is especially expounded as the features of his character. In addition to this, Pinkie's pride or his narcissism and hatred are features found in Pinkie embodied as evil. In the next chapter, Harry Lime in *The Third Man* and Raven the killer in *A Gun for Sale* need to be examined and demonstrated comparing with Pinkie's character. And finally the peculiarities of the evil characters Greene represented in his novels can be specified.

Notes

1. The text used in this paper is *Brighton Rock* (William Heinemann & The Bodley Head, London, 1970)
2. *Studies in English Literature No. 26* (The English Literary Society of Baiko Jo Gakuin College, 1990)
3. *Ways of Escape* (SIMON AND SCHUSTER, New York, 1980), p. 75
4. Marie-Françoise Allain, *The Other Man: Conversations with Graham Greene* (The Bodley Head Ltd, London, 1983), pp. 158–159
5. Samuel Hynes ed., *Graham Greene* (Prentice-Hall Inc., Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1973), p. 175
6. Richard Johnstone, *The Will to Believe: Novelists of the Nineteenth-thirties* (Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 63
7. *The Lawless Roads* (William Heinemann & The Bodley Head, London, 1987), p. 3
8. A. H. Bullen, B. A. ed., *The Works of Christopher Marlowe* (AMS PRESS, INC, 1970) Scene V, L. 78
9. Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Lucifer: The Devil in the Middle Ages* (Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1988), p. 180
10. Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Mephistopheles: The Devil in the Modern World* (Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1990), p. 109
11. K. C. Joseph Kurismmootil, S. J., *Heaven and Hell on Earth: An Appreciation of Five Novels of Graham Greene* (Loyola University Press, Chicago, Illinois, 1982) p. 51
12. *Mephistopheles*, p. 64, p. 65
13. *Lucifer*, p. 223

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14. *ibid.*, pp. 201–202
 15. *ibid.*, p. 194
 16. *ibid.*, p. 196
 17. “The Pinkies (II)”
 18. *Lucifer*, p. 131
 19. *ibid.*
 20. Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan, *Graham Greene’s Childless Fathers* (MACMILLAN PRESS LTD, 1988), pp. 20-21
 21. *Lucifer*, p. 36
 22. David Pryce-Jones, *Graham Greene* (OLIVER AND BOYD, 1973), pp. 34–35
 23. Judith Adamson, *Graham Greene: The Dangerous Edge* (THE MACMILLAN PRESS LTD, 1990), p. 82
 24. A. A. DeVitis, *Graham Greene*, Revised Edition (Twayne, Publishers, Boston, 1986), p. 73
 25. *Will to Believe*, p. 77
 26. Jeffrey Meyers ed., *Graham Greene: A Revaluation* (MACMILLAN PRESS LTD, 1990), p. 144
 27. S. K. Sharma, *GRAHAM GREENE: The Search for Belief* (Harman Publishing House, New Delhi, 1990), p. 90
 28. *Lucifer*, p. 138
 29. *ibid.*, p. 134
 30. *ibid.*, p. 217