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The Worst Horror of All: Greene's Political and Salvific Imagination in *Brighton Rock*

by

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Introduction

Graham Greene's "Catholic novels," a term he detested as it accordingly assigned him the moniker of "Catholic author," emerge out of a growing critique of the industrial, secular, and late/post-imperial United Kingdom. Likely influenced by his unhappy childhood as the son of an English public-school headmaster ostracized by his classmates, Greene's literary perspective concerned itself with those living on the periphery of society and the perspicacity arising from such marginal existence. A member of the British Communist Party for merely four weeks, Greene thereafter converted to Catholicism to marry his wife and integrated the language, logic, and formulae of the Church into his oeuvre. Serious about the crisis in and of modernity experienced in the interim between the First and Second World War, Greene wrote *Brighton Rock*, the first of his "Catholic novels," in 1938. The remnants of Greene's original idea, an ordinary detective story, can be viewed in the first fifty pages of the text (Greene *Ways of Escape* 80). The novel concerns a murder committed by the newly ascendant leader of a Brighton gang named Pinkie, who kills an itinerant newspaper man, Charles Hale who, before he dies, makes an impression—through his flirtatious behavior—on the hedonistic Ida. Ida resolves to discover the truth behind Charles Hale's murder, which motivates Pinkie to marry the only key witness of the event, Rose, a decision that ultimately closes with Pinkie falling off a cliff after being caught attempting to get Rose to commit suicide via a failed suicide pact. After Charles Hale's murder and Ida's subsequent commitment to detective work, the tone of the novel markedly shifts from one that does not readily concern justice for the victim and the discernment of facts from red herrings; to a focus on the internal dissonances within the murderer Pinkie. Vividly illustrating a conflict between the world and the conscience, *Brighton Rock* is composed of and negotiated by an unlikely troika of characters: the Satanic Pinkie, the secular Ida, and the "Good" Rose.

Through the trio's individual engagement with 1930's Brighton, Greene develops a composite of 1930's England as devoid of hope and inundated with the ideology of shallow secular consumerism. Yet the novel's timeliness as an exhibition of a decaying English beach town, crafted a year prior to Hitler's invasion of Poland and the proceeding Blitz—which Greene would live through—gives the novel an idiosyncratic spirit that he does not demonstrate prior in his more conventional "entertainments" or his later Catholic and/or political works written later in the 20th century. Greene relishes the aesthetic image of the despairing Catholic unable to confess or acknowledge his sins, who somehow in the grips of despair appears immeasurably closer to accessing the grace of God than characters of different or no religious affiliation. Pinkie, when reduced to his essentials as a character within an overarching plot structure, does not differ radically from the Whisky Priest in *The Power and the Glory* and Scobie in *The Heart of the Matter*. These characters possess an acute awareness of the omnipotent yet silent God who dictates their relationship with Himself, themselves, sin, and others. The difficulties these dictates produce ultimately coalesce into and terminate with each individual character's extinction at the end of their respective works. *Brighton Rock* distinguishes itself among his explicitly Catholic novels by virtue of its lack of closure: First in Pinkie's extinguishment into "zero" after falling over the cliffs (Greene *Brighton Rock* 264); next in Greene's term "the worst horror of all," which is Pinkie's recording that awaits Rose after her confession that concludes the novel (*Brighton Rock* 269).

Some critics of Graham Greene see such similarity between the works of Greene's oeuvre that they claim that the locations and people populating his works, such as the ones enumerated above, do not constitute mimetic portrayals of lived experience. Rather, Greene substitutes the real world for an imagined one called "Greenland." Greenland is a place in

which a poor teenaged criminal possesses an erudite knowledge of Latin, an alcoholic priest attains martyrdom, and common people incessantly grapple nigh-explicitly with age-old issues of economy, religion, individuality, and society. Though a worthy treatment of Greene's oeuvre—and not of primary concern for this thesis—the use of the term Greenland, insofar that the term refers to a *place*, can be an effective metaphor for elaborating a particular expression that occurs in his novels: most notably in *Brighton Rock*. By providing the dueling final imagery of Pinkie's evaporation into nothing and Rose's walk to the recording—interspersed between a priest's suggestion to Rose that Pinkie might have achieved salvation—Greene grants *Brighton Rock* a lingering ambiguity that Catholic novels of this era, including most of his own, would largely avoid. Evincing the actual *place* of the ending of *Brighton Rock* will demonstrate within this ambiguity an imagined future that remains mired in the teachings of Catholic doctrine as well as a revolutionary potential within a more-concordant world governed by materiality.

To establish the aim and method of such a discussion, it will be essential to distill the formal character of the Catholic novel that will allow one to locate the exceptional character of *Brighton Rock*—that a narrative might account for both a Catholic and secular materiality. For assistance in exhibiting such radical potentialities, other forms of Catholic media which too use, for lack of a better term, cliffhangers for the sake of narrative outcome will be of value. Analysis of Paul Schrader's *First Reformed*, Robert Hugh Benson's *The Lord of the World*, and Graham Greene's *The Power and the Glory*—all works sharing in an approximate air to that of *Brighton Rock* insofar that they all portray struggling Catholics in dreary, grounded settings—develop the history of the Catholic narrative, its distinctive manifestations, unique narrative devices, and present incarnation as Greene writes *Brighton Rock*. This history inaugurates a study through which the conclusion of *Brighton Rock* will be evaluated as a *place*, as a land in which Graham

Greene imagines both new and conservative values uniting into a concordant future made available to both the individual Catholic and the greater proletarian working class.

Further differentiating *Brighton Rock* from other texts in Greene's catalogue is its connection to the more secular and overtly political Greene exhibited in his earlier novels: there exists in the beginning an underdeveloped corpse of a detective story written before his decision to write a different kind of work. By linking *Brighton Rock* on the formal level with the detective story—a genre marked by its flair for resolution and disdain for the cliffhanger—Greene instills the ending of *Brighton Rock* with enduring intrigue. Peter Sinclair's research on the tragic aesthetics of Greene's novels touches upon this irresolution tangentially when he writes, regarding the ending of *Brighton Rock* and *The Heart of the Matter*, "For Greene...death is not the end of the story; consequently, there is no finality to his narrative endings, but the beginning of a further and greater mystery" (145-6). Sinclair is only half-correct. *Brighton Rock*'s ending oozes a sense of the lacuna that Sinclair notes to be an essential aspect of the endings of Greene's Catholic novels (146). The same cannot be said for his other novels. *Brighton Rock* singularly represents a moment in Graham Greene's oeuvre unlike any other and this is immediately evident in his next novel, often considered the masterpiece of his Catholic novels, *The Power and the Glory*.

In the latter novel there exists clear analogues to the former novel in terms of character development, perspective, and tone; *The Power and the Glory* differs from the former in its finale, one where the martyrdom of the Whisky Priest is affirmed by the child's dream and then further by the new priest's arrival, which in turn closes off the universe of the text completely. Greene in this very move totalizes the Catholic narrative. *The Power and the Glory* generates an entirely different ethos of Catholicism and perspective than *Brighton Rock*, so much so that the

narrative falls back into totalizing trappings of earlier, more instructive forms of the English Catholic novel conceived earlier in the century, which are less nuanced and artfully designed works of literature. *Brighton Rock* evades such perilous miscues for the same reason it “fails” as a detective story—the indeterminacy of Pinkie’s and Rose’s fate as the novel closes. Greene’s framework supplies the “lacuna” which not only allows for one to wonder at the future and supernatural fate of the novel’s characters, but a latent potentiality that such a Catholic imagination can provide to the exact modern moment in Western Europe that Greene inhabits. *Brighton Rock* has often been criticized for its overly sympathetic treatment of the “damned” Pinkie, but Greene never once allows his audience to gain a semblance of certainty about Pinkie’s fate. I contend this figurative and spatial absence that the last pages of the novel keep open is an instance of Greene’s concession to his inner materialist—that he may not only be wrong about the mercy of God but God in general—which creates a horizon from which both politics and a Catholic orthodoxy can occupy and witness different futures than the ones that have already been prescribed by the hegemonies of the day.

Though the primary thrust of my analysis stems out of a desire to distill this latent potentiality within Greene’s *Brighton Rock*, a variety of material will be evaluated to properly establish the primary motors that operate the novel. Fredric Jameson’s *The Political Unconscious* helps evaluate how “successful” Greene is at developing such an alternative imagination. Greene cannot withstand the critiques that Jameson levies at literature concerned with the process of Christian salvation, but Greene will not be expected to for the sake of this project. Jameson’s text acts as a vast lexicon through which one can determine harmony within the form of the text being evaluated. The most harmonious of these narratives would be proleptic ones aimed at a future grounded in a class-conscious imagination. The harmony that Jameson imagines congeals

into something he calls the “final horizon” which accounts for the bourgeois present and provokes a proletarian vision. The open-endedness of that “final horizon” will be the room in which Greene’s text will parse out what may best be called an exception to this dissonance.

This analysis will limit itself to discussing two novels of Graham Greene: *Brighton Rock* and *The Power and the Glory*. Though seemingly digressive, it is appropriate to commence with a short study of Paul Schrader’s film *First Reformed*. In the spirit of Jameson’s appreciation for synchronic analysis, I utilize the narrative of *First Reformed* to properly evoke a certain animating force within a specific kind of Catholic narrative. Though released in 2017, Schrader’s film exacts with sheer clarity the nature of despair as it manifests in *Brighton Rock* and *The Power and the Glory*. This is essential for the sake of placing Schrader within a continuity of artists invested in Christian narrative along with Graham Greene. The ending of *First Reformed* will act as a hermeneutic key through which I seek to elucidate the exception in *Brighton Rock*. This focus on *First Reformed* does not indicate that such potentialities cannot be gathered from the two primary Greene texts, but the ease with which much of the film applies to Greene’s texts cannot be understated and assists in the elaborative labor. Once Schrader’s film has been explored, it becomes necessary to evince the Catholic novel as form as it will be imagined by Greene. Once again, discourse will commence with a non-Greene but more-contemporaneous novel: Robert Hugh Benson’s *Lord of the World*. Benson’s polemical early dystopian text outlines the position of the Catholic individual in the early 20th century with precision and serves as a model through which one can witness how a later Greene operates within and exceeds the confines of the Catholic novel as form. Furthermore, *Lord of the World* not only acts as a text through which to determine critiques Jameson’s text might have for the Catholic novel as form, but functions as an

unlikely analogue to Greene's miscues within *The Power and the Glory*. An exhaustive review of Greene's *Brighton Rock* utilizes this above-mentioned material.

Despair as an Animating Force

Paul Schrader's *First Reformed* details the collapse of Rev. Ernst Toller's faith and sanity as he handles the aftermath of the suicide of a would-be-terrorist Michael. The suicide, prompted by Michael's belief in an impending anthropogenic climate catastrophe, exacerbates and influences Rev. Toller's ongoing crises—brought on by his alcoholism and the death of his son in the Iraq War. Though reverend to a facility known as the "First Reformed Church," which would presumably subscribe to Protestant beliefs in the Dutch First Reformed tradition, Rev. Toller's inner turmoil takes on a remarkably Catholic color, as noted by his repeated quotations of and affectation for Catholic convert, Trappist monk, and memoirist Thomas Merton. Reflecting in his journal on his meeting in Michael's apartment prior to Michael's suicide, Rev. Toller, paraphrasing an excerpt from a Merton text¹, narrates "Despair is a development of pride so great that it chooses one's certitude rather than admit God is more creative than we are" (*First Reformed* 22:16-25). Schrader's positioning of despair as the central motivating force of the film places the work within a distinct lineage of Christian narrative aimed at the thorough exploration of this specific manifestation of pride. Solutions to this sin vary dramatically as Christian authors—whose tacit sympathies for their individual strain of Christian theology near always become evident—tend to adhere to an *ad hoc* approach that targets the fundamental causes of the despair while dismissing the particular symptoms of the condition. As early as Boethius' *The Consolation of Philosophy*, he finds the "Passion" expressed by the figurative Muses an

¹ The exact Thomas Merton excerpt being modified above can be found on p. 108 of his text *Seeds of Contemplation*.

insufficient cure for the despair brought on by his impending execution and banishes these “hysterical sluts” so that “rich and fruitful harvest of Reason” can ameliorate his suffering (2). In a mechanistic fashion, Boethius proceeds to outline, with the assistance of the great pagan philosophers of which he studied profusely in his youth, how all fortune, good or poor, remains within the bailiwick of God’s flexible yet eternal Providence. A near millennium later in the 15th century, the morality play *Everyman* would dictate a thoroughly robotic portrait of the human experience ending with the eponymous Everyman entering the afterlife with the awareness that Good-Deeds will speak in his favor before Christ’s judgement. In both enumerated works, the authors display a comfort within the dogma of their Christian faith as they are explicated through their very application to the unique scenarios within each text. Yet, to speak somewhat loosely, as one progresses towards the termination of the second millennium—as faith, philosophy, industry, the state, and so on, shift, expand, and splinter—so does the very form and motivating factors of Christian narrative.

Christian authors of the medieval ages often took on the role of narrativizing theological tracts; often many of these works could be viewed as being written by theologians using the masque of the artist to proselytize and clarify certain aspects of the faith. Graham Greene would belong to an expanding group of authors whose works concerned religion but could not be considered a sort of publicity for religion. These authors would position at the core of their works dissonances brought on *by* narrative as it grapples with Christian ethics, eschatology, and salvation. No longer theologians fabricating art, but artists exploding the implications of Christian theology, a rich tradition of English Catholic authors explored with alacrity and venom the Catholic faith, its Church, its devotees, and its clergymen. Located at the heart of many of these English Catholic works is the exact kind of despair suffered by Rev. Toller in that

aforementioned scene: the individual striving to perceive God's creativity through the barriers of His apparent silence yet revealed (through revelation and only encountered via faith) supernatural power.

The nature of the despair as it relates to the underlying motivational structures of a narrative initially appears to be discordant. Despair as it's used colloquially (and often in media) conjures images of an intense listlessness or a crippling hysteria—both of which seemingly would anchor the narrative into place spatially. One conjures images of physical inaction or melodramatics. Though this template occurs in a variety of narratives about despair, including Catholic ones, the despair most often crafted by Greene and other artists of concern inhabits the realm of self-destructivity rather than a polar/bipolar malaise. Rev. Toller, for example, is so moved by Michael's suicide that he plans to use Michael's suicide vest himself to kill local businessmen and politicians visiting his church whom Rev. Toller has deemed responsible for the looming doom of global warming. Once Rev. Toller sees the widow of Michael, Mary, enter the building, his despair consumes him, so much so that he ostensibly abandons his mission and begins to wrap barbed wire around his exposed body in a clear attempt to mimic Christ's suffering on the cross. The power of this sequence emerges out of Schrader's continuous cuts back and forth between Rev. Toller's self-mutilation and the organized image of the parishioners listening to a hymn in anticipation of his arrival in the austere First Reformed Church. Rev. Toller's anguish cannot even seem visually compatible with the banal communitarianism witnessed in the First Reformed Church though both are composed of and brought on by an adherence to Christianity. Though Rev. Toller ultimately directs the majority of manifested self-destructivity towards a violence he enacts on himself, his ability to translate his despair based in his crisis of faith towards that of ecoterrorism reveals the creative propensity despair itself

possesses. One is reminded of the Kierkegaard quotation that occupies the epigraph of Walker Percy's *The Moviegoer* which reads "the specific character of despair is precisely this: it is unaware of being despair." *First Reformed* does not suggest Rev. Toller's intended actions are to be commended or modeled, but Schrader's film does express something fundamental to the sentiment of the above quotation, which is Rev. Toller's twisting of his internal crises into one of immense external magnitude; he intends to become an agent of a movement that weeks prior he knew almost nothing about. The sincerity of his devotion to the ecoterrorist cause is fraught at best, if not outright disingenuous. His despair finds its outlet in the external politics of environmentalism—however Schrader's film does not condemn this commitment either. In fact, at one point Pastor Jeffers—effectively his superior—and Edward Balq—a representative of a local industrial site and target of much of Michael's disdain—chastise Rev. Toller for spreading Michael's ashes, as requested in his will, at the site of an uninhabitable dump created by Balq's company. The union of politics, capital, and religion in the film, as well as the complacency it imposes implicitly and explicitly on those willing to speak out against it, prompts immediate disgust. These sparring realities within the film illuminate a cruel insight into the nature of Rev. Toller's despair: its proximity to a Christianity infused by a dedication to both faith and service—which in this context could be termed as a form of praxis. Despair as a form of pride, and thus as a creative force within the mind, disallows Rev. Toller from seeing the roots of his suffering and turns him into a half-sincere would-be-environmentalist martyr. Yet he cannot bring himself to kill Mary and turns his violence back on himself for a final time. Charity, service, stewardship, divine providence, and so on find their perverted manifestations in *First Reformed*. Schrader's incisive portrayal of the strikingly Catholic despair of Rev. Toller arrives at the same problem that Greene grapples with in much of his work: the same simple impetus

that makes people do good can also make them do bad. A supernatural Good and Evil, rather than being distinct and distant counterparts, are likely contiguous.

First Reformed offers a stark visual aid to introduce the concepts of Catholic narrative as it portrays despair as the prime animator of the analyzed works. Expressing this sort of creativity in the face of an omnipotent God provides the space for the vast conspiracies of Pinkie and the heterodox musings of the Whisky Priest to be accurately and appropriately introduced. Furthermore, Schrader gives us the glimmer of salvation from despair, even while in despair, when Rev. Toller's suicide via the consumption of drain cleaner is apparently interrupted by Mary who proceeds to passionately kiss him. Intentionally ambiguous, Schrader, in an interview with Alissa Wilkinson, said of the film's ending:

Part of me says it's a miracle. He is saved by a miracle. The other part of me says he's on all fours. Like Jesus, he stood there in Gethsemane and said, 'Please take this cup away.' But he drank the cup of Draino [*sic*], and now he's there dying. And God comes — this is the God that hasn't spoken to him for the whole movie — and as he's on all fours dying, God walks over to him and says, 'Reverend Toller, would you like to see what heaven looks like? I'm going to show it to you right now. I'm going to open the doors and this is what it looks like. It looks like one, long, slow kiss. And he's in heaven.'

In this scene, the camera spins around the image of Rev. Toller and Mary kissing, the only time the camera moves at all in the entire film—a mammoth shift away from the characteristically “slow cinema” technique Schrader himself developed and exercised throughout the film. By allowing for a level of expression visually and dramatically unseen in the film thus far, Schrader evokes the archaic definition of the word “passion” which demands suffering just as much as it

requires excitement. The conflicts of passion, the kiss, the suicide, the resolution, and so on dictate a certain spirit of the ending of *First Reformed*, encapsulated all in that of the Schrodinger's Kiss—simultaneously and neither a real and heavenly kiss. In turn, the film engages in the same generative ethos that *Brighton Rock* will do in 1938 with even more radical implications for the Catholic novel as form and its purpose. Thus, it becomes pertinent to describe the animating power of despair in the Catholic novel and the first text to be evaluated in earnest: Robert Hugh Benson's early dystopian novel *Lord of the World*. Though I was unable to establish any definitive connection between Benson and Greene, the themes at work in *Lord of the World* not only foreshadow the totalizing worldview of *The Power and the Glory* which closes off the inchoate potentialities described in *First Reformed* that are fully realized in *Brighton Rock*, but it also begins as a lucid, clear, and fun starting point to enumerate the spiritual and doctrinal character of the Catholic novel in the early 20th century. Benson's novel establishes much of the necessary framework to explore theology in tandem with secular ideologies through the act of narrative, but Greene will utilize a far defter hand to avoid such naked evangelization rife in Benson's dystopian fiction.

The Bridge to Greene's *Brighton Rock*

Robert Hugh Benson, like Greene, is a convert to Catholicism; this was a minor scandal in his day for he was the youngest son of the deceased Archbishop of Canterbury. Initially an Anglican cleric and later an ordained Roman Catholic priest, Benson would translate his newfound enthusiasm for the faith into material that Greene would likely have considered a kind of "propaganda" for the faith that he tried to actively avoid in his own work. Though lacking in style and finesse, Benson's 1907 novel *Lord of the World* would be hailed as an early predecessor of the dystopian fiction genre. For example, Benson's image of a United Kingdom

adhering to military time and the organization of the world into three collective pseudo-socialist blocs of the Americas, Europe, and Asia immediately conjures images of Orwell's *1984* that precedes the novel by forty years. Littered with extended diatribes attacking the errors of secularism and clarifications on the doctrines of Catholicism, *Lord of the World* establishes a latent foundation which Catholic writers in the United Kingdom would emulate. This structure does not inherently mandate that a certain theme or premise will be maintained throughout, but it does dictate that a certain sort of story must arise out of it. Firstly, *Lord of the World* establishes the individual Catholic in opposition to an existing societal structure. Patrick Sherry in his work on the Catholic novel as form notes that the material being written in this era marked a "decisive cultural challenge" after the Second Vatican Council largely dissipated (166). Benson wastes no time in establishing this fundamental challenge to existing society when he writes that—by 2007—with the rise of socialism and secularism, Protestantism had collapsed entirely, those few who remain religious are either Catholics or collaborationist Humanitarianists (a pantheism polluted with Masonic ritual), and that the great remainder of humanity adhere to a psychology-infused "Materialism" (10-11). The novel leaves little to the imagination as it handles many of the great bogeymen to the Catholic order at the time—Freemasonry, Marxism, Psychoanalysis, Protestantism, and so on—and explodes them into caricatures then displaced into the future having achieved their ultimate ulterior goals that Benson likely believed their contemporaneous counterparts to desire. Part of the fun of this novel is Benson's distinctly pre-Soviet imagination for a socialist future, some of which requires essential lapses in knowledge regarding leftist ideologies. Benson writes that consistent with "Communist-colonial policy" the "Individualists" (Catholics and/or Tories) were allowed to emigrate to the remaining colonies of the former British Empire (29). At one point, Benson hints that one of the goals of the socialists in Europe is

“free trade all over the world” (63). Unsullied by the rhetoric of the Bolsheviks and illustrations of their command economies that would follow their ascent, the critique of the secular world-at-large in *Lord of the World* feels unusually fresh and less reactionary—even if its lack of style frustrates and the odor of a racist, imperialist outlook revolts.

Benson’s continued emphasis on the supernatural in his novel does not only serve the purpose of reiterating Catholic dogma to its readers, but it also serves a base human need to explain the immense void that the rise of materialism has expanded in the sterile future of 2007. In a scene near-reminiscent of that in *Mrs. Dalloway* when the pedestrians turn their heads to the plane sky-writing an advertisement, Father Percy, the novel’s protagonist, reads on a government electronic billboard **“EASTERN CONVENTION DISPERSED. / PEACE, NOT WAR. / UNIVERSAL BROTHERHOOD ESTABLISHED. / FELSENBURGH IN LONDON TONIGHT”** (Benson 77). Wanting for the nuance that Virginia Woolf possesses in her 1925 novel, Benson positions the government, through the metonym of the official billboard, as the replacement for God in this society. In a half-mockery of Moses’s assertion of The Ten Commandments, the government proclaims a “Universal Brotherhood” unilaterally. The Felsenburgh mentioned in the quotation above refers to Julian Felsenburgh, the Antichrist figure described as emerging practically from the ether who then unites the remaining disparate groups into the world. And just as Greene will do with his own antagonists in *Brighton Rock* and *The Power and the Glory*, Felsenburgh offers to the world alternatives to the Catholic faith which will ostensibly achieve a perfect world without any sort of foundation in faith. Whereas Franklin acknowledges that such things are only possible through an established relationship to authority (the Papacy) and the supernatural, Felsenburgh promulgates the idea of a united world that brings about Christ’s promise of Heavenly Kingdom on Earth—best characterized by a

newspaper article which heralds the arrival of Felsenburgh as the inversion of Christ's words "Not peace but a sword" into "Not a sword but peace" (Benson 101). "Man" is positioned as the center of the politico-spiritual universe of the text. Benson, like the Catholic Church of the Counter-Reformation and the present radical orthodoxy found in the likes of theologians such as John Milbank, instead of making concessions to the shifting secular world, return to an even stauncher form of traditional worship. The Papacy has regained its status as a nation-state—even as it only controls the city of Rome—and hosts the surviving members of Europe's royal families, having restored many of the already fleeting traditions of an older Papacy. The death penalty, for instance, returns within the vicinity of Rome and religious orders find themselves reorganized under strict(er) Papal authority.

Lord of the World deftly instills the world with a sense of the obverse: every novelty proposed by the new world government corresponds to an ersatz Catholicism. The text relishes in analogue as a literary device to the extent that almost every description requires an inverse elsewhere in the text. The author's intention of course remains to show that even as the world disposes of religion, it will always try to fill it with something remarkably similar; this cannot be made any less clear than in the moment in which Mr. Francis (formerly Fr. Francis and a colleague of Fr. Franklin) goes on an extended tangent to a government official concerning the importance of ritual in the new mandatory faith being imposed by the government and the ability of former Catholic priests to perform such rituals in the new general Mass (Benson 157-61). Benson inundates the novel with moments such as this which could constitute many more pages of material if necessary. However, the purpose of such elaboration is to demonstrate with ease and immediacy the express aim of a certain kind of Catholic novel, which would presume that the more we stray from something, the more we naturally become like it. This sort of dialectic

functions within both the secular world government of Felsenburgh and the feeble Papacy hidden away in Rome. The Pope hosting the royal families of Europe alludes to the medieval religious-political structure of Europe in which the Pope commanded fealty from the leaders of the European nations and formed a loose confederation of the Christian world, a power which would have seen its apogee at the proclamation of the First Crusade. Felsenburgh accomplishes a similar feat in his union of the conflicting world blocs but uses the façades of democracy and materialism to achieve an authoritarian and totalitarian counterpart. The world crafted by Felsenburgh takes on a verisimilitude to that of the shrinking yet reinvigorated Catholic one forged in Rome. The novel's reinvigorated Roman Catholic Church finds its full expression in its finale. Rome is annihilated after the failure of a likely false-flag coup against Felsenburgh by Catholics and Fr. Franklin, having been elected Pope after the fall of the Papacy and taken the name of Silvester III (after the saint whose feast day is celebrated on December 31st), furtively reorganizes the Church in the deserts of Palestine. Having learned of Pope Silvester's location, Felsenburgh—to whom Franklin had been told he bore a striking resemblance to as they possess an identical complexion, frame, and age (thirty-three years old)—bears down on the new Papacy with a fleet of volors (high-speed blimp-airplanes of the future) to bomb the church into oblivion as they did the city of Rome. Silvester learns of his betrayal, gathers the remaining priests, and performs a mass in his modest abode. As Felsenburgh and his volors reach Palestine, the mass concludes and the last words of the novel read “Then this world passed, and the glory of it” (Benson 318). These words are a slight alteration of the English translation of the Latin phrase *sic transit gloria mundi* which, according to *Oxford Reference*, was repeated during Papal coronations. Though ambiguous—in a novel that often forgoes implicit requests to the reader for inference into matters of faith and direction—the ending likely signals the Biblical apocalypse.

Though mere speculation, the usage of the phrase of Papal coronation could signal the “coronation” of Christ upon his Second Coming and thus supersede the need for a Vicar in Pope Silvester. Benson, however, does not instill a sense of certainty within the reader regarding the outcome of these final events, prompting the doubtful but possible sense that Felsenburgh does eradicate the Church. Though not imminently relevant, the ending of *Lord of the World* demonstrates the potentialities latent within the Catholic novel as form, especially foreshadowing how Greene would utilize a similar program in his Catholic novels decades later.

The analogues laden throughout Benson’s dystopian text develop certain themes that pertain to the previously mentioned void that Felsenburgh’s world government attempts to fill with its completely secular-pantheistic program. Felsenburgh’s presence and programs seem so convincing that at one point even Fr. Franklin is stunned into state of disbelief. Temporarily paralyzed by despair, Franklin flees to the Vatican where an extended internal monologue explains how his faith recovered itself in the face of Felsenburgh’s supposed greatness. Within this sequence, those “huge principles...were again luminously self-evident” while eventually conceding the continued existence of “Difficulties”—matters such as the existence of Hell or the concept of transubstantiation (Benson 144, 145). Ultimately, Franklin resolves that it is through Christ’s Incarnation that faith in a sense takes on a dualism that requires both belief and reason, that “like man himself, a body and a spirit—an historical expression and an inner verity—speaks now by one, now by another” (Benson 145). Herein Benson articulates a foundational aspect of the Othered Catholic individual protagonist in the Catholic novel, constantly negotiating the complex co-reality of the material and supernatural world. *Lord of the World*, despite being a polemic aimed at an increasingly irreligious and unorthodox world, manages as astutely as ever to formulate the condition of the Catholic who has been increasingly othered in the 20th century.

Perfectly encapsulated in the character of Fr. Franklin, his feelings describing the nature of his faith will be followed for decades afterwards as the faithful person full of not only knowledge, but knowledge of their ignorance. The crisis of modernity, as characterized by Benson, can be best encapsulated by the wife of a secularist English politician in the novel who seeks state-assisted suicide after Felsenburgh reneges on his pacifist stance. Mourning the commencement of the new world order, Benson writes that Mabel possesses a full awareness of the perfect coherency of Felsenburgh and his program yet still manages to become “tired out with Facts” (279).

Mabel’s modernity-rooted exhaustion is a reflexive motion by Benson. By noting the seeming absence of purpose and meaning in the modern world, Benson simultaneously refers to the emptiness that occurs within the individual and vice versa. It is from this position that Benson primes the Catholic novel—through its emphasis on the holism of the Catholic individual-communal experience—as *the* primary alternative to the proposals by contemporary socialist and materialist movements. Nevertheless, the novel’s impressive cohesion returns to harm its status as a model for the Catholic novel as form. The third-person narration of the novel, though limited somewhat, consistently supports the work of Fr. Franklin and often prefaces alternative ideals outside of a Catholic worldview to be misguided, if not antithetical to a fulfilling human existence. Though a groundbreaking novel, *Lord of the World* remains too self-assured and complete in its analysis; even though it ends without any explicit mentions of salvation the fact cannot be ignored that Benson implies that *something* miraculous has occurred.

“Tired out with Facts”: A Lasting Irresolution

The vague miracle reached at the end of the text, in a sense, *completes* the narrative, thus totalizing it. To elaborate on *Lord of the World*’s totalizing nature, I will borrow from Fredric

Jameson's *The Political Unconscious* which sees the aesthetic act of narrative to be the creation of "imaginary or formal 'solutions' to unresolvable social contradictions" (79). The heuristic model, as developed by Jameson's text, seeks to apprehend within literature "*the ideology of form*, that is, the determinate contradiction of the specific messages emitted by the varied sign systems which coexist in a given artistic process as well as its general social formation (*The Political Unconscious* 98-9). For Jameson, works of literature develop their own "solutions" that in turn the material, as form, will coalesce and congeal around the solution in the form of narrative. The "solution" within the heuristic model created by Robert Hugh Benson in *Lord of the World* would be the everlasting authority of the supernatural Christian God that guarantees a form of providential success no matter the consequences of human free will. Even if Armageddon does not commence at the novel's conclusion, the text lends substantial credence to the notion that Fr. Franklin has saved the world microcosmically—even if the salvation refers exclusively to shepherding the souls of the small remainder of clergymen and worshipping Catholics to an afterlife with an omnipotent God. To put it frankly as it pertains to Benson's imagination within *Lord of the World*: even when the individual Catholic loses, they win. The abundance of grace evident in Benson's work disallows other realities; it would constitute a closing off of the narrative "solution" into a totalized and explicable universe—a sort of totalized un-explicability. Jameson would understand Benson's narrative as possessing a limited "horizon" or capacity to imagine realities different and better from its own. This of course does not correspond to the creativity of *Lord of the World*, which truly resonates as a work of unique imagination. This horizon refers to Benson's incommensurate answer to the problem of modernity in which irreconcilable issues of the self and society appear imminently graspable if one can only displace the issue of the human condition into that of an unknowable Judeo-

Christian God. This knowledge is in turn negotiated by the long-standing bearer of revelation and tradition: the Roman Catholic Church.

Jameson's method notes the requirement to distinguish a text's diachronous parts from its synchronous whole. To examine a text diachronically requires placing it into a distinct location on a timeline of the past, present, and future that locates a text on the timeline as it corresponds to historical events, literary trends, and the creator's contemporaries. Evaluating a text synchronically requires the dissolution of the timeline, places the text in direct conversation with the history, and distinguishes all that history it participates in simultaneously and without qualification. As Jameson's method would apply to *Lord of the World*, the task is no different. Diachronically, Benson's text participates in Anglo-Catholic gestures of wholeness, hierarchy, and heredity common of the era, while also combatting contemporary secularist movements that sought to limit, replace, and/or eliminate the role of organized religion. The novel finds its implicit ideological charge in the apologetics composed by the Oxford Movement of the earlier 19th century. G.K. Chesterton, Evelyn Waugh, and Graham Greene would succeed Benson as the distinctly 20th century bearers of the Catholic novel in the United Kingdom. Yet, as the text exists synchronically, it participates in older semi-polemical forms of narrative as they occur in material such as the aforementioned morality play *Everyman* or even older forms of Christian literature exemplified in the medieval pseudo-epic *The Song of Roland*.² Benson also does not incorrectly diagnose the condition of the modern world. With the disappearance of magic brought on by the rise of industry and empire, in addition to the failure of new movements to

² *The Song of Roland* relates well as a tradition that Benson synchronically participates in since it concludes with the protagonist Roland dying a martyr's death fighting against "Muhammadans" who explicitly seek to destroy Christian civilization. Benson also deploys anti-Islamic language throughout *Lord of the World*, but only insofar as display the ease at which Muslims are convinced of Felsenburgh's Messiah-like status and thus conform to the universalist secular-pantheist hegemony.

adequately reconcile the inner and outer world, Jameson writes in *The Political Unconscious* that as the 19th century concluded, “the search for secular equivalents seem[ed] exhausted, the characteristic of nascent modernism, from Kafka to Cortázar, circumscribe[d] the place of the fantastic as a determinate, marked *absence* at the heart of the secular world” (134). It would not be that generous of a reading to insert Benson’s name between that of Kafka and Cortázar.

Fredric Jameson recognizes a progression in *The Political Unconscious* from medieval readings of texts—which served to dispense a text’s anagogical, moral, allegorical, and literal character—to more refined but still incomplete notions of perspective. Jameson finds the realist/existentialist impulse to terminate at a dejected complacency and the modernist “will to style” as one insufficient for generating futures unlike our own. What distinguishes Benson’s technique from that of these other writers is his deployment of reified notions of the self, the supernatural, and a hope for the re-establishment of a cosmopolitan Catholic world that would see this “*absence* at the heart of the secular world” dissipate. Naturally, it would be impossible from a historical-materialist perspective to see any sort of more-perfect future as directed by something so ethereal and ungraspable. Jameson, as a Marxist, establishes that harmony, on the formal level, arises out of the “final horizon” which accounts for class-consciousness and dispels the mechanisms that bourgeois society have essentialized. The Catholic narrative, as imagined by Benson and later Greene, could never account for a “transparency” that this “final horizon” inaugurates. Its very attainment requires that “only a collective unity...can achieve this transparency; the individual subject is always positioned within the social totality” (Jameson *The Political Unconscious* 283). The outstanding presence of the individual within the Catholic narrative—at its most valuable—instills formal harmony insofar that the individual subject may direct attention towards the means of production and people’s relationship to the means of

production; the focus on organized religion would at best become a distraction and at worst mollify disruptive elements of bourgeois society that would ultimately generate further formal dissonance.

Conspiracies, Providence, and Free Will

J.R.R. Tolkien's essay "On Fairy Stories" essentializes the role of the Christian storyteller—who in the process of creating fantasy worlds—as one who participates in a form of re-creation of the material world of human beings; in doing so "man becomes a sub-creator" (11). Though most of Tolkien's text pertains to the sociological, narratological, and philological origins of mythology, his devoutly Catholic vision places man, the author, in a position that partakes in a similar creativity to that of God Himself. Tolkien's assertion of man as "sub-creator" often seems to stretch its arms outside of the realm of mythmaking and into the very core of Christian experience and narrative. Boethius's vision of a transcendent God whose Providence remains plastic enough to account for human free will but will never break in its inevitable movement towards a final reconciliation develops the notion of the God of creation also being a God of narrative. Like a writer with a broad outline of a new piece of fiction, God has the larger plot points settled. How will He arrive at these plot points? He will find out as we develop the story.

Marxist literary critics such as Fredric Jameson, who detest the retroactive application of a fatalistic "story" of history, stand in contrast to Christian ideals of a divinely directed Providence since they attempt to parse together meaning from the unceasing and undirected occurrence of history. The greatest of flexibility in God's Providence remains too deterministic; there exists no reason History *must* happen the way it does. To quote one of *The Political Unconscious*'s most famous sections: "History is what hurts, it is what refuses desire and sets

inexorable limits to individual as well as collective praxis...[T]his History can only be apprehended through its effects, and never directly as some reified force” (Jameson 102). The idea of Providence, which terminates in a reconciliation with God and each individual human being, subscribes to a simplicity that alludes to another, more human form of co-ordination: conspiracy. Jameson has commented elsewhere on the nature of conspiracy in the past, suggesting that it is “the poor man’s cognitive mapping in the postmodern age” insofar that it completely “accounts” for the gap present between one’s everyday experience and one’s relation to the global world order (*Cognitive Mapping* 286). Even the most unhinged of conspiracy theories provide a semblance of calming order as they find a way to *explain* the world at large, even if they quickly shatter under even mild pressure. God’s Providence, when scrutinized with Jameson’s method and mirrored with less nuance, thus becomes a kind of supernatural conspiracy. Therefore, when an artist explicitly participates in the superficial reenactment of God’s Providence, man becomes a sub-conspirator.

The purpose of drawing out this distinction between God construed as a director in contrast to a God construed as a pseudo-criminal mastermind lies in how the authors of concern in this analysis compose their complete texts. Catholic narratives too often become narratives of sub-conspiracy rather than of sub-creation, such as *Lord of the World*. Felsenburgh, though not clearly stated in the text, exists merely to instigate the final days of the Church and the likely Apocalypse that follows. The narrative of *Lord of the World* necessitates the existence of Felsenburgh just as Benson’s idea of Providence necessitates the existence of an Antichrist to trigger the Final Judgement. And just as the Antichrist is the inversion of Christ, Felsenburgh’s secularist plans for the world bring about the idea of a “Man who has learned his own Divinity. The Supernatural is dead; rather, we now know that it has never been alive” (Benson 101-2).

Thereafter, Felsenburgh's puppets make continuous assertions that Felsenburgh's ascension signals the earthly realization of Christ's vision of a Kingdom of God—created despite God's nonexistence. Intentionally crafted as an Anti-Providence, *Lord of the World* exceeds this plan in the authentic Providence made evident in the novel's ending: a form of supernatural salvation when confronted by the immense material power of Felsenburgh's forces. Within Providence, there also must exist a cause that propels subjects towards such ends as imagined by Benson. Fr. Franklin, though briefly confronted with despair upon Felsenburgh's emergence, nevertheless before and after always acts in a way that allows him to direct his attention towards something I shall term the "immediate good."³ Benson epitomizes this direction of the ethical Catholic individual when Fr. Franklin attends to the surreptitious religious needs of the mother of Oliver Brand—the secularist politician and ally of Felsenburgh. Noting the absence of Oliver Brand in attending to the needs of his ailing mother so that he may attend a conference that Felsenburgh already has primarily resolved, Fr. Franklin became "conscious of a tiny prick of compunction at his own heart. After all, the reconciling of a soul to God was a greater thing than the reconciling of East to West" (Benson 80). The essence of such a statement—which does not suggest that one should avoid pressing and dangerous matters if they exist outside of a direct context—alludes to the fact that if Oliver Brand, and by extension, the world, attended to the needs of those closest to them rather than the huddled mass of proletariats that Oliver Brand speaks to throughout the text, such grand conflict resolution would become unnecessary. Tolkien expertly demonstrates this premise in *The Fellowship of the Ring* when Aragorn chooses to pursue the captured Pippin and Merry rather than ensuring the continued safety of the now itinerant but still-safe Frodo and Samwise. As Tolkien's saga unfolds, Aragorn and company's initial attraction to the immediate

³ I am indebted to Prof. Paul Gondreau for introducing this term to me when describing prioritization within Catholic ethics during a *Lord of the Rings* course taken in 2018 as an undergraduate.

good places them in a position to distract the Eye of Sauron long enough to allow Frodo and Samwise to safely sneak into Mordor. As it pertains to a certain idea of Providence, the Catholic individual's attraction to the immediate good should always put them in a position to do the *greatest* amount of good.

Graham Greene's *The Power and the Glory* would later engage in totalizing techniques of structure and resolution as employed by *Lord of the World*. Set in Mexico during the Cristero War of the late 1920s, the individual Catholic protagonist of the novel, the Whisky Priest, attempts to furtively serve in his role as a Catholic pastor while sparring with the militantly atheistic governmental agent, the Lieutenant. Completed and published after the commencement of the Second World War, *The Power and the Glory* develops analogues that demonstrate the mirroring of good and evil that occurs in Benson's work. Not only does the protagonist and antagonist offer not too dissimilar visions of the future that stem from similar desires, but Greene develops with far better precision the contiguity of good and evil as archetypically presented in Rev. Toller in *First Reformed*. Felsenburgh accomplishes much in the means of disseminating the plan for an earthly realization of Christian eschatology, but other than the ceasing of imminent conflict, authoritarianism and hypocrisy bubble out of his nebulous plans instead of the overarching internal-external reconciliation that his arrival appeared to offer. Greene does not color the Lieutenant of *The Power and the Glory* with the same essence as Benson does with the Antichrist Felsenburgh, which allows for a sharper and more realistic critique of secularist ideologies to take form in the text. While searching for the fugitive Whiskey Priest, the Lieutenant interrogates the foreign Captain Fellows—a representative of an international fruit corporation—who then sees the Lieutenant spit on the ground when he thought he had been out of sight. The narrative voice of the text suggests the Lieutenant spitting is an act of catharsis in

which “he got rid of his hatred and contempt for a different way of life, for ease, safety, toleration, and complacency” (Greene *The Power and the Glory* 37). The ardent jingoist and nationalist fervor of the Lieutenant prompts an appropriate level of disgust on the part of the reader, but Greene provides throughout the text a generous understanding of the Lieutenant’s ideological positions. Disgusted by an extraction economy perpetuated by capitalists, foreigners, and the Roman Catholic Church (as a prime functionary of capitalist hegemony and recipient of its continued maintenance), the Lieutenant, after seeing a group of playing children, fully elaborates his vision for an anti-clerical, anti-capitalist Mexico:

He would eliminate from their childhood everything which made him miserable, all that was poor, superstitious, and corrupt. They deserved nothing less than the truth—a vacant universe and a cooling world, the right to be happy in any way they chose. He was quite prepared to make a massacre for their sakes—first the Church and then the foreigner and then the politician—even his own chief would have to go. He wanted to begin the world again with them, in a desert. (Greene *The Power and the Glory* 60)

The Lieutenant passes a variety of the litmus tests that would constitute a character that lacks dissonance. Aware of the material barriers to realizing a better Mexico, the Lieutenant takes on conditions of a class consciousness—even if still incomplete as his imagination for an improved Mexico is limited by his ardent xenophobia. The Lieutenant, too, exhibits classic literary examples of Nietzschean *ressentiment*⁴ when the novel later divulges that his disdain for the Church on the systemic level likely stems from a personal disdain developed in early childhood.

⁴ Oxford Reference defines Nietzsche’s conception of *ressentiment* as: “A vengeful, petty-minded state of being that does not so much want what others have (although that is partly it) as want others to not have what they have. The term, which might be translated as ‘resentment’, though in most places it is generally left in the original French, is usually associated with German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, who defined it as a slave morality. Nietzsche sees

But even as Greene lays these foundational critiques to undermine and problematize the Lieutenant's praxis-oriented materialist philosophy, it is undoubtedly a sympathetic portrayal. The Lieutenant's identity is far more composed and admirable than that of the Whisky Priest—a prideful alcoholic philanderer who lives explicitly in a state of mortal sin. The Lieutenant gives money to the Whisky Priest (operating under a pseudonym) so he may pay the fine for his crime of possessing alcohol and thus exit indefinite incarceration. This instance demonstrates a disposition towards the same immediate good that motivates the Whisky Priest. The Whisky Priest even goes as far to concede that the Lieutenant is a “good man” (Greene *The Power and the Glory* 194). However, what ultimately dooms the narrative form of *The Power and the Glory* to the same limited horizon of *Lord of the World* remains each narrative's respective commitment to this deterministic conspiracy-like storytelling. When each text has been totalized, the major characters of each novel appear to stop being characters and start appearing rather as functions or gears in a signification-mechanism. Jameson summarizes character as it appears within texts such as these when he refers to *Wuthering Heights*'s Heathcliff as “a donor who must wear the functional appearance of the protagonist in order to perform his quite different actantial function” (*The Political Unconscious* 127). The Whisky Priest and the Lieutenant function within the novel to tell a story of oppression and faith in revolutionary Mexico, but actantially the Lieutenant grants the Whisky Priest his martyr's death which allows the inner workings of a nondescript Providential success to occur at the narrative's conclusion. Greene strips the Lieutenant of his contiguity with the Whisky Priest and reduces his role to a wandering Chekhov's Gun pacing about until he can terminate the Whisky Priest's life. It is in this sense

ressentiment as the core of Christian and Judaic thought and, consequently, the central facet of western thought more generally. In this context, *ressentiment* is more fully defined as the desire to live a pious existence and thereby position oneself to judge others, apportion blame, and determine responsibility.”

that the Lieutenant takes on the qualities of a Felsenburgh, even if the Lieutenant possesses a functional depth far beyond that of Felsenburgh's shallow secularist evil. Just as the Antichrist exists insofar that the Bible requires his arrival prior to the Apocalypse, the Lieutenant exists to give the Whisky Priest this martyr's death. Even when the Lieutenant displays an inclination towards the immediate good, his plan too takes on the nature of an Anti-Providence when he begins to take hostage and subsequently murder a random individual in each town that the Whisky Priest has visited. He's capable of the immediate good, but ideas of necessity and a grander scheme require further violence, even if his program ostensibly terminates in the permanent overarching discontinuation of any national violence. And though Greene's text does not openly express that the Whisky Priest's death *must* occur, the novel's finale with the formerly disinterested child dreaming of the now martyred Whisky Priest, who winks at him, only for a new nameless priest to arrive at his home so that he may allegedly continue the Whisky Priest's furtive obligations to the secret Catholics prohibits readings that preclude the classification of the Whisky Priest's death as a genuine martyrdom (*The Power and the Glory* 221-5).

It's in this sense that Greene's structure in *The Power and the Glory* does not participate in any sort of open-ended potentialities furnished by the author as sub-creator, but more deterministic and retroactive hand of the author as sub-conspirator. In part, one can attribute this to the neatness of the novel's resolution, as established before. Despite the Whisky Priest's undoubted status as a human being in mortal sin, a salvific feat has somehow and somehow been inarguably achieved. The prideful Whisky Priest still acts on the impulse brought on by a dedication to the immediate good continuously throughout the text whether it is in his early acquiescence to the request of the young boy that a "doctor" see his mother or that he attends to

the last rites of the dying American murderer who suffers in a territory within the Lieutenant's jurisdiction (Greene *The Power and the Glory* 17-21, 179-91). The immediate good, as composed by Greene as sub-conspirator, acts as the immediate motivating factor that triggers action on the part of the Whisky Priest; the greater animating force of the Whisky Priest's movements being a creativity latent within the half-pride he has in his despairing state. The Whisky Priest's continued dedication to his pastoral duties notwithstanding his continually immoral acts and constitution asserts a sort of "chosen-ness" that Greene centers on the othered Catholic individual. Especially fit for displaying such an ethereality surrounding the Catholic is the figure of the ordained priest whose soul has been permanently invested by God through the sacrament of Holy Orders. Such a perceived reality prompts Greene to compose the Whisky Priest's final defiance to the Lieutenant:

"But I'm not a saint," the priest said. "I'm not even a brave man." He looked up apprehensively: light was coming back: the candle was no longer necessary. It would soon be clear enough to start the long journey back. He felt a desire to go on talking, to delay even by a few minutes the decision to start. He said, "That's another difference between us. It's no good your working for your end unless you're a good man yourself. And there won't always be good men in your party. Then you'll have that old starvation, beating, get-rich-anyhow. But it doesn't matter so much my being a coward—and all the rest. I can put God into a man's mouth just the same—and I can give him God's pardon. It wouldn't make any difference to that if every priest in the Church was like me." (*The Power and the Glory* 196).

This moment, in tandem with the novel's ending confirming the Whisky Priest's status as a martyr, leads one back to the same conclusion already made regarding *Lord of the World*: the individual Catholic wins even in failure.

Judith Adamson's examination of the politics within Greene's oeuvre, *Graham Greene: The Dangerous Edge—Where Art and Politics Meet*, astutely singles out *The Power and the Glory* as the only one of Greene's early novels in which:

the individual triumphs through Catholicism. The book is a powerful picture of a world in which man has done his best to destroy the individuality and freedom of his fellow man. On the one hand, it shows the revolution gone wrong, the hope for a better world dashed in violence, and draws the conclusion that after all, the end was under the pavement all along. Man reared in a wasteland cannot be expected to do better. On the other hand, it is individual transcendence through Catholicism. Just before his death the whisky priest says "at the end there was only one thing that counted—to be a saint." This is where the believer has an advantage. For the godless, there is only man's imagination, but for the Catholic there is a tradition separate from man's interpretation of it. However limited and failed his attempt might be to improve things, the model remains intact. (64-5)

Though a thoroughly cohesive work of literature, *The Power and the Glory* remains an unsatisfactory solution to the modern reader. Adamson correctly notes "failure" to be an essential aspect of the "model" provided by the novel, but what does "failure" entail as a system of praxis as imagined by Greene in *The Power and the Glory*? Ostensibly, Greene resigns the role of the Catholic permanently to an othered realm and mires in it. If anything, as the age of postmodernity has expanded the void at the heart of the modernity that Greene responds to

within the text, the position of the Catholic becomes increasingly *more* difficult to maintain. For Greene in this text, the abundant mercy of God seemingly allows for salvation even as the apostate Padre José denies the Whisky Priest extreme unction prior to his execution. How might one gain access to such abundant grace? One cannot know. But through the dual lens of experience and faith, the Catholic somehow gains access to it, there just needs to exist a base level of amenity that without seemingly forbids access to such salvific grace. Furthermore, *The Power and the Glory*, as does *Lord of the World*, posits that every secular project—specifically those formed in opposition to fatalistic designs that offset Utopia into a distant and supernatural future (read: conspiracy)—will eventually contort and disfigure itself into a shadow of the very design which it unequivocally seeks to exceed. Nevertheless, Greene’s vision within *The Power and the Glory* seems to be a sort of despondent optimism that begs the Catholic individual to live *to spite* the world rather than with it. The Lieutenant kills the Whisky Priest and even though the Whisky Priest is saved, the Lieutenants of the world will likely continue winning. In Greene’s final diagnosis of the Catholic position and practice in the world built in opposition to them, he asserts certain doom for the modern world. The Catholic does not necessarily transform this world, but he transcends it. Adamson notes that Greene, around the time of *The Power and the Glory*’s composition, acknowledged a potential permanence to the crisis of modernity and responded with “a certain relief knowing the worst has finally happened. There is even some conceit in his having known what was coming all the time. And there is pleasure in facing it. He told John Mortimer he loved the Blitz. It was wonderful to wake up and know you were still alive” (69). Herein lies the symbolic act as expressed by its form: the submission of the struggling Catholic to a world at large and an unknowable God capable of vast mercy. The world

closes off and the Anti-Providence of the Lieutenant's conspiracy takes place, and the Providential conspiracy of the Whisky Priest terminates into its own salvific horizon.

Before the Bombs

Brighton Rock, composed during the anxious 1930s and published a year prior to the German invasion of Poland, does not wildly differ from the novel that would succeed it, *The Power and the Glory*. Equipped with its own idiosyncratic index to diagnose the crisis of modernity, *Brighton Rock* arrives at a myriad of the same conclusions that Benson had thirty years prior. Contiguity, grace, Providence, secularism, Good and Evil, and so on are all of utmost concern. Nevertheless, slight but essential differences allow Greene in this text to occupy the role of author as sub-creator as compared to sub-conspirator. Obviously, Pinkie, though preoccupied with Catholic eschatology, is not a priest unlike Fr. Franklin and the Whisky Priest. Greene certainly assigns Pinkie a status as the obverse of a priest when Pinkie responds to the question of his Roman Catholic background with his own doctrine of "Credo in unum Satanum," but the extent to which Pinkie actually becomes a priest for Satan will be evaluated later (*Brighton Rock* 183). Greene in this text also better distinguishes the secular world—as emblemized in the detective Ida—from that of a genuine Evil, which corresponds to Pinkie. Though this runs the risk of producing caricatures—a trap Greene infrequently falls into within *Brighton Rock*—it expands the space in which Greene elaborates a vision for the future. By establishing this literary Trinity of Pinkie, Rose, and Ida, a more incisive and expansive analysis of the precarious individual English existence concretizes.

Greene makes the image of contiguity between good and evil apparent in both aesthetic and moral terms in the novel. Pinkie and Rose—respectively representing the forces of Good and Evil—conjure the image of a color spectrum displaying the minute differences that generate the

color pink as compared to the colors found in a rose. With furtive style, Greene introduces Ida into the text without the reader knowing initially; Hale first hears her called “Lily” by other patrons in a bar (*Brighton Rock* 5). Though the lily historically has been linked with the Virgin Mary, the initial correspondence between Ida and the Virgin Mary quickly erodes into one of superficiality even in the method through which Greene inserts her into the text. Ida is first noticed by Hale’s eavesdropping, which imparts a certain moral myopia onto the inhabitants of Brighton who would misperceive the justice constitutive of a Catholic God with Ida’s empty morality. Moreover, the bulbous lily juxtaposed with the perennial rose instantly produces aesthetic distance between the two figures in the novel. By establishing this loose metonymic relationship with Ida and the Virgin Mary and then demonstrating *complete* aesthetic difference, Greene inaugurates an immediate sense of disparity between an inherent Catholic good and a secular sense of justice. Though the lily and the rose may both be flowers, this does not dictate that they should both grow into the same organism; just as both Ida and Rose possess an inherent sense of morality, their morality can entail entirely different ends.

The murdered Hale—though divorced from the language of colors and flowers—takes on a variety of pseudonyms assigned and assumed: Charles Hale, Fred, Kolley Kibber, etc. Hale shifts in and out of these names seamlessly, making his identity not only amorphous but also alluding to—in tandem with his propensity for mendacity and pride in the brief time during which he remains alive—his very character as amoral, displaced, and ahistorical. For Ida to latch onto Hale’s murder only for her to increasingly forget more of his identity throughout the text gains further relevance when one understands just how incorporeal his own existence feels when he is alive within the text. Though his paper (and maybe his reporting?) brings about the immediate cause of Kite’s death, his impact on the action of the text remains insignificant except

for placing Pinkie in a role of authority within the gang. Though it cannot be understated a murder has been committed, the hollow grey innards of Ida's Primus Motor—the death of Hale—resounds throughout the text.

Ida Arnold, the novel's designated detective, summarizes her motivations to herself and others as the fulfillment of the term “eye for an eye”: first coined internally as she moves from attending Hale's funeral to interviewing the first girl that Hale approached at the beach, Molly (Greene *Brighton Rock* 36). Though Greene ensures that Ida echoes an ancient and concrete system of justice as her moral compass, the fairness component of “eye for an eye” dissolves when the text interposes this seemingly non-sequitur reflection as her resolve to solve the case during her conversation with Clarence:

“It sounds sort of lonely [at the inquest],” she said. “Nobody to ask questions.”

“I know what loneliness is, Ida,” the sombre [*sic*] man said. “I've been alone a month now.”

She took no notice of him: she was back at Brighton on Whit Monday, thinking how while she waited there, he must have been dying, walking along the front to Hove, dying, and the cheap drama of pathos of the thought weakened her heart towards him. She was of the people, she cried in the 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.” (*Brighton Rock* 31)

The drive to consume animates Ida. Uninterested in the justice aspect of “an eye for an eye,” Ida enjoys the transactional aspect of getting an eye for losing an eye. Moreover, there exists a clear nostalgia enveloped in her justice as denoted by both its longstanding existence—found in the

Code of Hammurabi—as well as Ida’s love for “old ballads” and appreciation for Dickensian fantasies of self-improvement and hard work. Thereafter, Ida notes at Hale’s funeral that being “At one with the One—it didn’t mean a thing beside a glass of Guinness on a sunny day.” Ida’s moral faculties for evaluating right from wrong distills into that of a transaction; genuine reward is a Guinness; genuine punishment is a prison cell. Greene makes her intentions univocal when Ida states to her housemate Old Crowe regarding her voluntary detective work: “It’s going to be exciting, it’s going to be a bit of fun, it’s going to be a bit of life” (Greene *Brighton Rock* 35, 43). For Ida Arnold, consumption—and the excess enjoyment that comes from the consumption of commodities of fixed value—becomes the icon for restorative justice which in turn must correspond to physical objects and experiences. Relevant too is the use of the real-world Guinness brand rather than referring to its generic form as a kind of stout—consumption pertains both to the act of consumption and the perceived quality of the thing being consumed. Even Ida’s spirituality corresponds to a material superstition from which she distinguishes coherent signs from nonsense derived from Ouija Boards. For Ida, ghosts must be as preoccupied with the material world as she is.

The natural contrast to Ida’s consumerist morality is the Good and Evil of Pinkie and Rose, respectively. Greene refuses each character aliases, unlike Charles Hale and Ida who assume theirs with ease. Instead, the text only ever refers to Pinkie as “the Boy” if his first name is not used—a conceit that highlights Pinkie’s outstanding youth in a story concerning mammoth themes of violence and salvation. Pinkie’s underlying motivations for such insane commitments to perpetuating violence stem from his deeply Catholic upbringing, childhood destitution, and support after such a childhood from violent gang members who provide a stable sense of family. Returning to themes of his dedication to some abstract Evil as solidified by his aforementioned

oath to Satan, Greene quickly labors to establish the sheer absurdity of such a situation. After murdering Charles Hale, Pinkie asks a carnie for the time, then wins his carnival game, asks for a doll for a prize, and walks away “with the smell of gunpowder on his fingers, holding the Mother of God by the hair.” With the vitriol of the description, I am reminded of Martin Luther’s claim that the 15th-century salesman of indulgences, Friar Johann Tetzel, asserted that an indulgence could absolve even “impossible sins” such as the rape of the Virgin Mary.⁵ A criticism often launched at *Brighton Rock* is the impossibility that Pinkie could become such a young and educated apostle of an abstract Evil despite Greene developing his status as a near lifelong pauper. Though Pinkie’s erudite reiteration and amendments of certain Latin phrases does make for an extremely unlikely and unusual portrait, such criticisms often disregard just how childlike and performative Pinkie’s dedication to Evil ultimately is. Pinkie wants to commit “impossible sins” and hurt the Mother of God when he yanks the doll’s hair. His apostleship to Satan, too, appears to be almost entirely conditional since the notion of “the stirrup and the ground” repeats constantly throughout the text, which is the Catholic idea one can accept God’s mercy in the infinitesimally small amount of time it takes to fall from a stirrup to the fatal ground below. Pinkie, as a function of his actions and the proximity of his Evil to that of Good, engages once again in the acts of contiguity seen before in *Lord of the World* and *The Power and the Glory*. However, Pinkie becomes a sub-conspirator *within* the narrative of the text, forging an Anti-Providence in his murder of Hale and his continuous tying up of loose ends by courting Rose and killing members of his own gang. But what distinguishes Pinkie from the Lieutenant or Felsenburgh is that Greene establishes no pretense about Pinkie’s relative incompetence as a criminal. When trying to create an excuse for his plot to coax Rose into suicide, Pinkie ensures

⁵ I am unable to recount the source for the exact quotation, though it was a subject of great discussion and research in Prof. Ian Levy’s Reformation Theology course taken in 2017.

the carnie hears his intentions: “He planted his information pedantically, as carefully as he had had them lay Fred’s cards along the route—for later use” (Greene *Brighton Rock* 246).

Ostensibly an act of criminal genius, when Dallow asks the same carnie where Pinkie and Rose have gone off to, the carnie replies “‘What’s the game?’ the man said. ‘You know I seen him. *An’* he’s gone for a ride in the country—with his girl—for a freshener—Hastings way. *An’* I suppose you want to know the time too. Well’ the man said, ‘I’m swearing nothing. You can pitch someone else your phoney [*sic*] alibis” (Greene *Brighton Rock* 256). Not only does the carnie prove Pinkie’s ineptitude to surreptitiously execute wrongdoing, but his suggestion that Dallow might “want to know the time too” references Pinkie’s establishment of an alibi earlier in the text for Hale’s murder—retroactively dismantling any pretense left that Pinkie is, or ever was, a competent criminal. The completeness of Pinkie’s plans and the continuous need to add more and more steps—kill Spicer, marry Rose, exile his attorney—mimics the flexibility of a Boethian Providence without a single instance of any sort of the “conspiratorial” harmony.

To further this idea of the puerile character of Pinkie’s criminal imagination, Greene locates the source of his distortions in his impoverished childhood. Pinkie ponders on a date with Rose, “‘Saturday’ he thought, ‘today’s Saturday,’ remembering the room at home, the frightening weekly exercise of his parents which he watched from his single bed” (Greene *Brighton Rock* 95). Confusing him as a boy and angering him as a teenager, Pinkie’s forced presence during his parents’ sexual encounters breeds a physical disgust for sex and corrupts ordinary experiences of Catholic ritual. His parents “weekly exercise” bleeds into the Sunday Mass of the next day for which Pinkie was an altar boy, which requires greater familiarity with the Mass than the ordinary parishioner. The former ritual sours Pinkie’s relationship with his own body and its passions; the latter ritual—now associated with the former ritual due to their

shared regular maintenance and temporal proximity—loses its powerful significations and thus spoils Pinkie’s relationship to his own soul and the Eternal. Greene in this moment clarifies the source of Pinkie’s obverse Catholicism, but the bodily reality of one’s relationship to the supernatural as well. This also prioritizes the role maturity plays in the narrative, particularly in how quickly Pinkie can regress into a young, frightened little boy. After deciding that he remains capable of simultaneously using and exceeding Colleoni’s grasp on the Brighton horse races only for Colleoni’s men to assault both him and the intended target, Spicer, Pinkie flees: “He wept as he ran, lame in one leg from the kick, he 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, scrambling down the chalk down, to feel the least remorse” (Greene *Brighton Rock* 115). Unable to think his way out of such a precarious situation, Pinkie collapses into a juvenile panic. Greene explains the major fault in Pinkie’s scheming comes down to a lack of “experience,” a term repeated often throughout the text. In response to Cubitt’s concern over his injuries suffered at the races, Pinkie thinks, “What did people mean by ‘the game’? He knew everything in theory, nothing in practice; he was only old with the knowledge of other people’s lusts, those of strangers who wrote their desires on the walls in public lavatories. He knew the moves, he’d never played the game” (Greene *Brighton Rock* 124). Pinkie, in this sense, translates the dissonant parts of his psyche into the composed, *imagined* world of criminality. When the world of “experience” disturbs the creative planning of Pinkie’s enterprises, it directly emphasizes the naivety of his schemes and reflexively the very Good-ness that he’s attempting to exceed. Like Sauron in *The Return of the King* finally detecting the One Ring’s presence to be in Mount Doom, Pinkie senses in these crises that “the magnitude of his own folly was revealed to him” (Tolkien 924). Unlike Sauron, however, the collapse of Pinkie’s Anti-Providence does not result

in the swift apocalyptic repair of the world to one of composure but manifests in the smaller failings of his plans—which ultimately redouble his conviction to achieve ends opposite of that of the Catholic imagination for the Good.

This exploration prompts an essential question: What is Good and how does it correspond to Rose? Greene ensures, somewhat clumsily, that the reader will easily see an innate incompatibility with a secular Right and Wrong in contrast to that of Good and Evil when he has Ida cheat her way into Snow's so that she can chastise Rose for her relationship with Pinkie. Ida, pretending to be Rose's mother, says in response to Rose's shock and surprise "'I had to tell them something' ... 'Come in, dear, and shut the door behind you as if it were *her* room'" (Greene *Brighton Rock* 214). The self-importance and sanctimony of Ida, with her ability to stomach her ends justifying her means, generates a certain unease about her quest to resolve an egregious murder. In response to Ida's banal maxims about a secular justice, Rose states "'There's things *you* don't know.' She brooded darkly by the bed, while the woman argued on: a God wept in a garden and cried out upon a cross; Molly Carthew [a classmate who committed suicide] went to everlasting fire" (Greene *Brighton Rock* 217). A Catholic reckoning of Good and Evil transcends the logical relativism of Ida's secular vision of fairness; Ida arrogantly demystifies what remains nebulous for Rose. How can you know someone's truly worthy of blame when a God-Man cried in Gethsemane? The movement from rational to the revelatory matters immensely. Whereas Robert Hugh Benson has Fr. Franklin take comfort in the "Difficulties" of Christianity, Graham Greene prefers the ethereal cloud it places over man's certainty about this world and our relationships to each other. It is this same inner fog that lets Rose acknowledge Pinkie's corrupt nature while maintaining her loyalty to him. There's more to it than she understands. Slavoj Žižek's *The Fragile Absolute*, a treatise on the potential roles of Christianity in the 21st century,

condenses this treatment of Christian love as distilled from St. Paul: “On the one hand, only an imperfect, lacking being loves: we love because we do *not* know all. On the other hand, even if we were to know everything, love would inexplicably still be higher than completed knowledge. Perhaps the true achievement of Christianity is to elevate a loving (imperfect) Being to the place of God” (138). The Goodness inherent to Rose’s character corresponds to a mystery at the heart of the Catholic faith; if Christ—as man—desired and doubted just as we do, Greene’s characterization of Rose helps clarify the implications of such a possibility: the existence of an infinite, proximate, imminent, and graspable hope.

Fulfilling the narrative need to demonstrate the contiguity between Good and Evil, Rose fulfills this palpable sense of lack within the novel through her engagement with the creativity that Pinkie’ seeks to surpass. When faced with the prospect that their sexual union has sparked a pregnancy—meaning that they have participated in the *most* creative act—Pinkie recoils whereas Rose dreams of “A child...and that child would have a child...it was like raising an army of friends for Pinkie. If They [*sic*] damned him and her, They’d [*sic*] have to deal with them, too. There was no end to what the two of them had done last night upon the bed: it was an eternal act” (Greene *Brighton Rock* 218). Not only does Rose stay with Pinkie as a means of attending to his immediate emotional and spiritual needs but she also sees the act of raising a proceeding generation to be an act independent of and exceeding that of Pinkie’s Evil. Though within the quoted excerpt Rose mires in the newfound turmoil of living in mortal sin, the potential to spawn Evil also has the same ability to spawn Good if such mortal sin could be surpassed. Pinkie’s decision to pressure Rose into suicide likely struggles to defeat both these triumphs that the act of procreativity permits. First, it would eliminate the potential for a child who, as an individual, could exceed Evil despite the forces of violence and poverty—just as his or her mother had.

Next, it would signal Pinkie's final act as a sub-conspirator—reclaiming the power that he has lost because of his schemes' continued and accumulating failures—which in turn would strip Rose of all agency that their sexual union and her potential pregnancy grants her. Pinkie's Satanic priesthood requires a continual depletion of Good things; any contribution to regular agency and its maintenance (such as producing offspring) operates antithetically to this fantasy office.

These ruminations on Catholic ethics and allusions to a supernatural authority little surpass the criticisms offered by Jameson to the form of the Catholic novel. Though Greene does not offer a formal and figurative “solution” that would satisfy *The Political Unconscious*, he does populate *Brighton Rock* with deft insight into the stark late-capitalist moment of 1930's Brighton. Upon Rose and Pinkie's visit with Rose's parents, Greene writes about Pinkie that “now extreme poverty took him back” and he began to “fear recognition” (*Brighton Rock* 153). Poverty has stained Pinkie: not only has it affected his Catholicism, but it has also affected his very perception of reality. His childhood lack of financial means, education, and his proximity to things too adult for his understanding, from a material framework, explains clearly why Pinkie has become the person he has become. Then why make Pinkie so Catholic? Why put so much of the blame on him individually? Why is Rose Good while Pinkie remains Evil? They come from the same place, do they not? In Trevor L. Williams's fantastic exploration of the politics in *Brighton Rock*, “History Over Theology: The Case for Pinkie in Greene's '*Brighton Rock*,’”⁶ he views this matter as a “theological evasion” that Greene employs to obscure purely economic explanations for such a reality (69). Pinkie is mean and angry because he was poor and remains

⁶ Trevor L. Williams was kind enough to respond to my emails in early 2021 regarding his mentioned article. I am grateful for his advice and his suggestion that led me to discovering Judith Adamson's excellent *Graham Greene: The Dangerous Edge—Where Art and Politics Meet*.

relatively so; he is a victim to the economic superstructure which has instigated a reactive criminality in response to the dissonant world of capital, and he will be extracted from this world via a state security apparatus or the workings of disruptive elements of society. Adamson concurs with Williams's point here tangentially when she discusses how Greene's subjects in these early novels are often parvenu and subaltern figures that distract from any clear expression of false and/or class consciousness (21). These characters, othered from the Other, exist in the state they do to highlight certain aspects of their character—in the case of *Brighton Rock*, Pinkie's distorted Catholicism. Even the prime figure of capitalistic criminality in the novel, Colleoni, retains othered status as an Italian.⁷ Though hard to argue that the *weirdness* of Greene's figures does not feel distracting, it does offer an important elucidation of the lasting irresolution between class and marginalized figures.

Colleoni demonstrates to Pinkie in their first meeting that with *enough* money his otherness becomes somewhat, if not entirely, irrelevant. When Pinkie extends the vague threat that he will be “seeing” him at the races, Colleoni responds, “You’ll hardly do that....I haven’t been to a racecourse, let me see, it must be twenty years,” and then suggests that even if Pinkie could hurt him, he couldn’t *really* hurt him because his business would survive (Greene *Brighton Rock* 67). Capital reconciles Colleoni with that of the bourgeoisie; the only thing differentiating the small-time criminality of Pinkie from that of Colleoni happens to be scale and vision. Pinkie himself recognizes “he looked as a man might look who owned the whole world, the whole *visible world* that is, the cash registers and policemen and prostitutes, Parliament and the laws

⁷ Colleoni was “Semitic” in earlier versions of the novel before Greene revised this feature in the latter half of the 20th century. Clearly expressing a retrospective regret for participating in Anti-Semitic tropes in the same decade the Second World War would begin, Greene’s decision to change Colleoni to an Italian might be an attempt to exercise a retroactive prescience in *Brighton Rock* regarding the doom that Italy (and by extension, Italians) would provoke soon afterwards—a nevertheless xenophobic and pointed revision.

which say ‘this is Right and this is Wrong’” (Greene *Brighton Rock* 67-8; emphasis added). Through the art of juxtaposition, Greene unites the prim proper worlds of politics, the cruel underworld of criminals, and crude base concepts of value and exchange into one repulsive chimaera.

Though not a wildly original assertion, the novelty of Greene’s approach to dismantling this façade becomes evident in his linkage of Colleoni’s criminal enterprise to the detective work of Ida. After Pinkie scares Cubitt off, he asks Crab—a criminal now employed by Colleoni who Pinkie’s gang had previously chased out of Brighton—if he could work for Colleoni instead. Once Crab essentially says no without doing so “He passed—a whiff of pomade and Havana, bowing slightly to a woman at the door, an old man with the monocle on a black ribbon. ‘Who the hell—’ the old man said” (Greene *Brighton Rock* 175). This poor mirroring of the manners of the upper-class signals not only that Crab is an idiot, but also the vacuousness of these kind of performative mannerisms in the first place. Functionally, Crab bewilders an old man by thinking “this is what one does when they are successful.” It also prompts Cubitt—who is also an idiot—to think that Ida and Crab know one another because he bowed to her in that same sequence. This in turn provokes Cubitt to reveal to Ida essential information regarding Charles Hale’s murder, furthering her investigation to the extent that she can corner Pinkie at the end of the novel. From an essential perspective, however, an uneducated working-class criminal, triggered by another uneducated working-class criminal, has information incidentally coaxed out of him by the hedonist Ida Arnold, which placates her middle-class morality. Though the immediate recipient of the reward of solving Charles Hale’s murder happens to be Ida Arnold—who extracts the “fun” from finding Pinkie out—the ultimate beneficiary of Pinkie’s demise is the overarching economic superstructure as located and personified in Colleoni. Ida corresponds to

the Lieutenant in this regard insofar that her intentions nevertheless remain constructive and practical. However, via her status as a consumerist agent, Ida excises the cancerous and disruptive Pinkie who would resort to the less respectable realm of criminality—petty and eminently violent exercises in force—rather than its far more palatable cousin: “business.”

“Zero,” Gaps, and the Future

In addition to noting the veniality of Pinkie’s crimes as compared to the systemic ones of Colleoni, Adamson writes “This does not mean that Green absolves his petty criminals. They remain, along with the corrupt élite [*sic*], elements of evil in a disjointed society” (22). Adamson correctly posits that Greene imagines Pinkie as both a victim of socioeconomic circumstance *and* a genuinely “evil” figure. This evidently dissonant figuration in Pinkie—a victim of the late-capitalist moment and a fully culpable villain—does not necessarily need to generate formal and narrative incompatibility. It undoubtedly fails to meet Jameson’s final horizon in which a text correctly diagnoses a collective proletarian class consciousness, but Greene crafts something in *Brighton Rock* equally Utopian and material in its own right.

Pinkie’s demise and Rose’s later reflections at confession contain the “solution.” Greene writes about Pinkie’s outrage at being caught that “fake years slipped away—he was whisked back towards that unhappy playground” (*Brighton Rock* 264). Reminding the reader once again of Pinkie’s immaturity and performativity, Greene also inserts a physical punishment in the unexplained explosion of his vitriol—a bottle of acid that Pinkie possesses throughout the text and uses as a pseudo-icon for his Satanic priesthood—which blinds and staggers him. Destroyed by his own schemes and symbols, Pinkie falls over the side of a cliff. The observers of this event “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” (Greene *Brighton Rock* 264). A

moment of salvation or extinction? One cannot say with surety. But the “zero” that Pinkie becomes, especially in a novel guided by Catholic fullness as compared to the secular vacuum, creates a latent potentiality within Pinkie’s demise. Slavoj Žižek writes in his dialogue with theologian John Milbank, *The Monstrosity of Christ*:

The only true alternative to this ontological fuzziness is the no less paradoxical idea that, at some point, the endless process of dividing reality into components reaches its end when the division is no longer the division into a two (or more) parts/somethings, but the division into a part (something) and *nothing*. This would be proof that we have reached the most elementary constituent of reality: when something can be further divided only into a something and a nothing....

Insofar as the truly materialist axiom is the assertion of primordial multiplicity, the One which precedes this multiplicity can only be zero itself. No wonder, then, that only in Christianity—as the only truly logical monotheism—does God himself turn momentarily into an atheist (Žižek 96)

The ontology of Pinkie transforming from person to “zero” signals a participation, as Žižek suggests, in the dialectic. Žižek’s assertion that God turns “momentarily into an atheist” refers to Christ’s last words in the *Gospel of Luke*, repeated in Catholic Palm Sunday Mass by parishioners in Aramaic “Eloi, Eloi, Lama Sabachtani,” which translates to “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” I have already stated the absurdity of God doubting himself when referring to the “hope” it provides to the generous vision of Rose, but for Rose to be able to generate such thoughts, there needs to be space for such creativity to take place. Simultaneously full and empty, her certainty in the One and Zero of Christ allows for the “zero” that Pinkie evaporates into to be one of open arms—Christ’s salvific powers. Ida too senses the “zero” that

motivates her secular justice of “Right and Wrong,” but participates in a shallow spirituality that Žižek asserts is amenable to the needs of global capitalism (*The Monstrosity of Christ* 28).

Trevor L. Williams’s article echoes this sentiment when he writes that Ida’s morality turns her into a functionary of the existing “*status quo*” whereas Pinkie and Rose’s ethical systems could correspond to a potential for revolution (74).

Iterating such notions about Greene and *Brighton Rock*, however, is not novel by any means: if critics find his Catholicism unconvincing there remains substantial material within the text to garner alternative meanings. But how I have outlined such a creative aporia within the imagination of Rose, Greene too finds Catholicism somewhat unconvincing. Untying the Gordian Knot of this novel—why are Rose and Pinkie different despite near-identical impoverished circumstances?—does not occur in any explicit sense. Engaged in that same mystery of Pinkie’s annihilation into “zero,” the whistling priest at Rose’s subsequent confession tells her, “You can’t conceive my child, nor can I or anyone the...appalling...strangeness of the mercy of God” (Greene *Brighton Rock* 268). Running counter to this chance that the priest offers Rose, Greene notes that as she left, Rose walked “towards the worst horror of all,” referring to the gramophone record she had asked Pinkie to record for her, on which contains a hate-filled exclamation of obscenities directed towards her (*Brighton Rock* 269). Absent in the novel’s conclusion is any hint of apocalyptic repair—as seen in *Lord of the World*—or the winking martyred priest in a boy’s dream—as seen in *The Power and the Glory*. Herein exists the “lacuna” Sinclair refers to within some of his novels: the ability for Greene to leave a space to construct future alternatives. The lacuna, however, corresponds to both a potential within individuals to transcend material restraints *and/or* the doom that late capitalism has engineered for its victims.

Returning to the language of sub-creation and sub-conspiracy, this is the very means by which Greene in *Brighton Rock* leaves an open horizon—as a sub-creator—via the novel’s conclusion. Having already acknowledged Pinkie’s distorted persona being a likely consequence of his poor upbringing, Greene allows this late-capitalist framework to be a symptom of human choice—not serving any sort of Providence but the chaotic machinations of capitalism that mar Pinkie systemically rather than through any direct or indirect action on the part of a single individual or group. Rose being different from Pinkie can be the potential for an abundant grace to be received and transcend material conditions, but Pinkie remains clearly preconditioned for a constant refusal. Adamson sees this as an impasse in this moment of Greene’s oeuvre.

What these 1930’s protagonists lack is faith, not in man’s goodness as some critics have assumed, but in man’s reason and, hence, in the future... They cannot accept the injustice and chaos of their society; they cannot return to what they consider a safer time like the protagonists of Greene’s earlier romances, a past they have, in any case, sentimentalized; and they cannot welcome a future they believe will be worse than the present. This is not a failure of man’s goodness, but of his courage. These characters are society’s victims, and they are also Greene’s. They are the product of his own sense of impotence as he watches capitalism stagger from crisis to crisis, while he sees no clear direction in which to proceed.

(26)

Fredric Jameson coincidentally presents a similar analogue in his essay, “Historicism in ‘*The Shining*,’” in which he extends that Stanley Kubrick’s film attempts to accurately display the crisis of the present—one in which perceiving both the past and future simultaneously instigates a certain horror in the present: best characterized by Jack’s freeze in the maze at the end of the

film. The film thus becomes a sort of “exorcist” by which Kubrick attempts to dispel the past and imagine different futures. Greene desires this exact kind of catharsis at the conclusion of *Brighton Rock* that offers “solutions” both material and Catholic to the reader—precisely insofar that *Brighton Rock* isn’t a “solution,” it’s a location. The end of the novel is the site at which Greene suggests a Catholic transcendence of material predestinies but never discounts their continued relevance. In fact, their relevance remains so strong that the “worst horror of all” seeks to expose that even the exception to material predestiny—Rose—will be exposed to such terrible realities that belie the “appalling strangeness” that allows her to imagine Pinkie being saved.

A later Greene, as seen in *The Power and the Glory*, would fully elaborate on this aftermath—likely offering some form of Eternal and internal reconciliation on the part of Rose to Pinkie through forgiveness, grace, enduring mystery, and so on. But Greene places these powers outside of such a definite resolution, instead localizing them into the hopeful Rose walking to “the worst horror of all.” Maybe Christ has allowed enough potential within creation to allow for Pinkie’s salvation. Or maybe he has not. Or maybe there is no salvation. Herein lies the inverse of the “heaven” that Schrader portrays in *First Reformed*. A miracle occurs (Pinkie is saved) or it does not. The Catholic *may* win even in failure, but it is not restated with conviction. The extra step Greene takes is leaving out Rose’s response. How one sees Rose reacting to the “horror” of the gramophone record signals a need to alter such a present relationship to the economy and the Eternal. Using the language of the Roman Catholic Church, Greene establishes a *hope* for an individual salvation that never once subtracts from human machinations which dull our potential for such things. If such hope seems to be fraught, such imagination can account for conditions of class and access that have molded figures such as Pinkie. Lending further potential for such hope remains the fact that Rose likely harbors the seed of Pinkie in her womb. Though the idea of

children can sometimes be utilized to offset beliefs in better futures to an inaccessible future, from children also springs the notion of furthering such futures by virtue of a proceeding generation's youth and progress. *Brighton Rock's* ending is a transformation of Pascal's Wager in this sense but exceeds it, too, insofar that it takes the "gambling" out of Pascal's equation. Žižek summarizes a similar and adjacent philosophical model for materialists in *The Monstrosity of Christ*: "Materialism has nothing to do with the assertion of the inert density of matter; it is, on the contrary, a position which accepts the ultimate void of reality—the consequence of its central thesis on the primordial multiplicity is that there is no 'substantial reality,' that the only 'substance' of the multiplicity is void" (97). Reiterating the notion of an Eternal participation in the "void" of materiality and material discourse, Greene prescribes a dual optimism in *Brighton Rock's* ending. Even if salvation might be impossible, Greene's Wager asks that we imagine societies in which no material dissonance can preclude individuals from attaining it if it's there.

Conclusion

Though incompatible with Jameson's vision within *The Political Unconscious* for concordant literature accountable to a proletarian class-consciousness, *Brighton Rock's* creates an adjacent horizon characteristically un-Marxist but highly materialist and historical. Religion, as it relates to Jameson's relatively orthodox Marxism, cannot stop being an obstacle to the development of such collective revolutionary working-class praxis—displacing Utopias to ethereal futures to which we do not and may never have access. But Greene's diagnosis of the late capitalism of 1930's England, exacerbated by the malaise of the interwar period, offers another horizon through which other realities become possible. The novel lacks the certitude found in *Lord of the World* as Greene has already become too accustomed at this point to the

gloom of the 1930s. The hope in a nostalgia for a more consonant and holy past cannot and will not save the crisis of modernity. However, he has not yet closed off this potential into a totalized idea of a transcendent and strange grace which will save one through one's dedication to such enduring mysteries. *Brighton Rock* is a rare moment in which an author's lack of ideological certainty provides an inchoate space through which their clearest and least dissonant themes can be broadcast. Greene demonstrates that Catholicism—and its tenets of Providence, Eternity, creativity, and so on—can act as, at worst, a tepid ally of such Utopian impulses, and, at best, serve material realities so that people may be preconditioned for their attainment of salvation. The composed and concordant Catholic individual in such an imagined society reveals that, when properly directed, their creativity often points in the same direction as that of a working-class revolution founded in collective class-consciousness.

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