

Greenland

- Arthur Calder-Marshall coined the term Greenland to describe the unique world of Graham Greene.
- For a while it became a British parallel for the Americanised 'noir' genre.
- Salient features were a setting showing economic depression, immoral and amoral activities, little remorse for heinous acts, awareness of a moral vacuum, overall seediness, tainted people and places, rampant corruption and failure in desire and action. But it is not without relief or moments of redemption. Some of Greene's later novels are light-hearted.
- Greene used his experience of the war and of being a journalist and having a role to play in the British Secret Service. He knew that the world often did not offer pleasant and rational motivations and perfectly rounded psyches.
- Greene wrote in his autobiography:
"Some critics have referred to a strange violent 'seedy' region of the mind (why did I ever popularize that last adjective?) which they call Greenland, and I have sometimes wondered whether they go round the world blinkered. 'This is Indo-China,' I want to exclaim, 'this is Mexico, this is Sierra Leone carefully and accurately described. I have been a newspaper correspondent as well as a novelist. I assure you that the dead child lay in the ditch in just that attitude. In the canal of Phat Diem the bodies stuck out of the water . . .' But I know that argument is useless. They won't believe the world they haven't noticed is like that." (Cedric Watts, *A Preface to Greene*, 142)
- Greene wanted to present the world as it really was, without artistic apology or shield. His own sense of aesthetics demanded brutal honesty and a complete removal of unnecessary metaphor.
- Greenland is the world that hides beneath the sophisticated and polite world that people generally know or want to know. The fact that there is a seedy underbelly of society in all parts of the world is usually kept under wraps – surfacing at times in literature or in the lives of the unfortunate few who become victims. In that world even the persecutor can be seen as a victim.
- Traditionally, there have been many authors who have looked at this world. Charles Dickens, Arthur Conan Doyle, Joseph Conrad, Raymond Chandler and many such names are relevant in this connection.
- Religion often comes to the rescue, but then again religion is often seen as inadequate.
- There are often paradoxes like Catholic Communists and Capitalist Communists. Greene often made fun of this 'Greenland' himself.
- Although some people say that Greene found the *cure* for boredom in crime and seediness, still the fact remains that there is truly such a world the upper echelons try to avoid.

Crime

- Graham Greene dealt with crime and passion in many of his novels. Obsessed with human nature Greene elaborately explored the ideas of crime and the criminal mind. One may think of *A Gun for Sale* or *The Ministry of Fear*.
- Greene did not use any of the available templates of detective fiction.
- The first part of the novel is the pursuit of Hale; the second one looks at the unravelling of the crime.

- *Brighton Rock* is in a sense a dark detective story set against the shady background Brighton between the two World Wars.
- The Brighton seen in this novel is suffering from the worldwide economic depression.
- Unemployment and lack of education creates pockets of poverty that become hotbeds of crime. The smaller towns have small gangs. But syndicated crime often comes and appropriates the business – as we see in *Brighton Rock*.
- The people of the city are not affluent; the establishments are sleazy or sordid.
- The economy is entirely dependent on tourism.
- There are one or two glamorous places, but they cater to the super rich and the powerful.

- The idea of good and evil, even within a dominant Catholic society, suffer because of the economics of the time. Even though many believe in guilt, retribution, hell and such, they are irrevocably caught in the mesh of the psychosis of crime.
- Greene had often dealt with faith – with both faith that is strong and faith that is in crisis. One may refer to *The Power and the Glory* or *The Heart of the Matter*.
- Crime provides Greene with a good opportunity of looking at the anatomy of crime – how morality is corrupted and how people negotiate with it.

- Law and the legal establishment often provide support, but is often seen lacking.
- But they are necessary to draw the boundary between the illegal and the illegitimate. But they have no moral obligation attached to them.
- The limitations of law are made quite clear.

- The detective figure here is a woman whose interest in solving the case often borders on snooping (and not in the good sense of the term).

- Ida Arnold is not a portrait of virtue or politeness. She is loud, casual, and poor but has incredible courage.
- She goes on investigating without much concrete or acceptable proof. She does this because a chance encounter gives her this gut feeling that Fred Hale did not have a normal death.
- Her narrative is at odds with the official narrative, so she has to find out the truth. And that brings her to the ‘actual’ narrative of the murder.
- She has this rigid, Old Testament inspired idea of “an eye for an eye”. And she is not beyond taking help from spiritual sources!
- Saving the innocent Rose becomes a compulsive duty for Ida.
- The gangsters she pits herself against are, of course, quite old school. They have some sense of honour, except, of course, Pinkie the protagonist.

- Pinkie is a fascinating study in juvenile criminality and helplessness. His insecurities and inexperience make him overtly cruel and ruthless.
- He is conscious of the sin he is living in – but has no hope of salvation. He has accepted his damnation and therefore has nothing to lose.
- Even in his sham marriage he is apprehensive of physical intimacy as it seems to be a kind of transgression as there was no church event. But he has no problem taking lives, even that of his completely trusting wife.
- His response to law is practical and is quite aware of the corruptions that function everywhere.
- The murder seems unnecessary – but retribution for Pinkie is necessary as it would establish his leadership despite his youth. He is already the leader, but he needs to have some action to identify him as the *deserving* candidate. Murder of the journalist seems to him the only natural course of action.

- At the end we see innocence saved, but there is no justice as such. The death of Pinkie may not add anything to the Fred Hale case as everything remains inconclusive.

Religion

- Religion was almost an obsession with Graham Greene. The modern paradoxes regarding faith, morality and piety – often seen through Catholicism – appear again and again in his works.
- He essentially explored the duality that life often imposes on people.
- The characters in his novel feel this turmoil and often shift between belief and disbelief.
- Greene resisted the label of being a ‘Catholic’ writer. Even though many of his characters were from the Catholic background, he merely wanted to present people in their natural social setting.
- One of the interesting facts that one may record here is that Greene’s early editions (*Gun for Sale*, *The Name of Action*, *Brighton Rock*) apparently had a number of anti-Semitic references which were edited out, often changed, in later editions. This anti-Semitism could have been a result of an authoritarian Catholic training. They may have been changed later either because the author had a change of heart, he did support Israel later in his life, or because they were simply politically problematic.
- *Brighton Rock* is often considered to be the first ‘Catholic Novel’ written by Greene. Critics usually divide Greene’s work in three categories – pre-Catholic, Catholic and post-Catholic.
- *Brighton Rock* has a continuous presence of religious ideas, almost always referring to the Catholic faith and how that is transgressed. Even Pinkie is quite aware of the transgressions.
- Greene does not offer any judgement, but presents a matter of fact narrative.
- The people in *Brighton Rock* live in a fallen state of sin. There is practically no possibility of redemption or goodness. The little bit of innocence we see is in constant danger.
- The remorseless murders that happen as a domino effect are committed by a man who is 17 years of age. This youth has Catholic training, but morality is not his concern.
- Fully aware of how he will never find forgiveness from God, Pinkie continues his crime spree.
- Particularly the suicide pact – which he does not intend to honour – shows how he is willing to destroy anyone who is even minutely a threat to him. And the suicide pact shows that he – even though he carries on about sin – does not care that he will give Rose eternal damnation. Ironically, he has to throw himself to his own death!
- The paradox comes from Pinkie – he speaks in Catholic terms sincerely, but his actions are completely and consciously wicked. Grippled by the equation of power Pinkie does everything to assert his superiority and violence is the only means available to him. Therefore, he gradually traps himself in this web of death.
- Pinkie is the classic anti-hero. It is hard to sympathise with him but one can understand his pain.
- Greene’s view of faith – at least as it was during *Brighton Rock* – is presented in the lines from the novel: “You can’t conceive, my child, nor can I or anyone the... appalling... strangeness of the mercy of God.”

Pinkie

- Pinkie is the central character who hunts and is hunted. He is 17 years old with a face while inexpressive shows a strange disillusionment.
- He is an anti-hero, but borders on the villainous. He is the result of the total collapse of the system.
- He does not give us much about his childhood, but the little that we get tell us much, and Rose's household gives us an example of the situation many young people had to face.
- He is completely out of place in the posh areas of Brighton, but he feels he is the 'ruler' of the seedier areas.
- Pinkie rarely betrays his inner feelings. It is difficult to know how he feels about others, unless he expresses it to one of his compatriots.
- Like most of Greene's heroes he has a complicated relationship with power. He is pursued not only by the detecting figure, but also by several other establishments such as the police and the mafia. In a sense he is also hounded by his Catholic upbringing.
- The last boss of the gang in question, Kite, was almost a father figure for Pinkie. His death had rattled him so much that he needed to 'avenge' it any way he could. And he also needed to establish himself as a leader capable of doing what is felt needed.
- Although Hale is indirectly involved in Kite's murder, he still becomes the representative figure who can be duly punished.
- His connection with Rose is unique. She probably sees in him an escape from the sordidness, not realising that he will lead to more squalor and to downfall both in religious and legal sense.
- He does not want to kill her, and he is not really willing to marry her. For him it is the only way to ensure his own safety. He cannot trust Rose and completely fails to recognise her honest loyalty.
- Pinkie needs to be in full control as he is afraid of not only losing his life but also his power.
- Ida does not become the key antagonist as far as Pinkie is concerned. She is hardly a threat; it is only through Rose that Ida can finally defeat him. For Pinkie it is the new 'mafia boss' Colleoni who is the threat. Most of his actions in the later part of the novel revolve around this adversary.
- Pinkie's death is ironic as he takes his own life. From the narrative point of view it parallels Hale's death. But Pinkie does not allow anyone to control his destiny.