

## Rose and the Modern "Religious Sense" in Graham Greene's *Brighton Rock*

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Graham Greene opens his novel *The Heart of the Matter* with a quote from the French Catholic poet Charles Péguy: "The sinner is at the very heart of Christianity. ... No one is as competent as he is in the matter of Christianity. No one, if it is not the saint."<sup>2</sup> If this seems a strange place to begin a study on the earlier *Brighton Rock*, the first of Greene's four "Catholic novels," then we might consider Mark Bosco's recent comment that "it could be the epigraph and the theological lens for all of [Greene's] novels from this period: the spiritual life of the sinner has the privileged status of experiencing 'the appalling strangeness of the mercy of God.'"<sup>3</sup> Greene's young sinner Pinkie appears time and again in scholarly attention to *Brighton Rock*, so much so

that he has been framed as the novel's "only character who has the power to awaken people to the spiritual."<sup>4</sup> In our preoccupation with the Luciferian youth however, we seem to have forgotten about Pinkie's other half: Rose, through whom Greene develops an apparatus for understanding both of these characters' Catholicisms as well as the novel's conflicted preoccupations with a love for God.<sup>5</sup> As Gerald H. Cox observed, "nearly all criticism of Graham Greene's *Brighton Rock* has focused on the characters of Ida and Pinkie," yet "the context of *Brighton Rock* clearly points to Rose as the sole exemplar."<sup>6</sup>

Since Cox's generous appraisal, Rose's character has remained on the margins of scholarship on Greene's novels. She has been frequently sidelined as, at best, a figure for "fundamental decency" who remains "naïve" due to her innocence; as a symbol of "blind faith" who fails to provide "a determinate moral center to the novel"; or worse yet, dismissed as a "limited and disingenuous ... immature sixteen-year-old girl" whose love finds its way into the narrative as mere

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<sup>2</sup> "Le pécheur est au coeur même de chrétienté... Nul n'est aussi compétent que lui en matière de chrétienté. Nul, si ce n'est le saint," qtd. in Gordon Leah, "Between the Stirrup and the Ground: Is There Any Redemption for Pinkie in Graham Greene's *Brighton Rock*?" *The Heythrop Journal* 57, no. 5, (2016): 805. My translation differs from Leah's insofar as it maintains Péguy's syntax; see Gordon Leah, "Between the Stirrup and the Ground: Is There Any Redemption for Pinkie in Graham Greene's *Brighton Rock*?" *The Heythrop Journal*, vol. 57, no. 5, (2016), 801.

<sup>3</sup> Mark Bosco, "Shades of Greene in Catholic Literary Modernism," *Graham Greene Studies* 1

(2017): 16. Bosco draws his quote from Greene, *Brighton Rock* (London: Penguin, 2004), 268. Greene's "Catholic novels" are recognized as *Brighton Rock* (1938), *The Power and the Glory* (1940), *The Heart of the Matter* (1948), and *The End of the Affair* (1951).

<sup>4</sup> Peter M. Sinclair, "Graham Greene and Christian Despair: Tragic Aesthetics in *Brighton Rock* and *The Heart of the Matter*," *Renascence* 63, no. 2 (2011): 135.

<sup>5</sup> Michael G. Brennan refers to Pinkie as a "fallen angel" in *Graham Greene: Fictions, Faith and Authorship*, (London: Continuum, 2010), 50. See also J. M. Coetzee, Introduction, *Brighton Rock*, (New York: Vintage, 2004), ix.

<sup>6</sup> Gerald H. Cox III, "Graham Greene's Mystical Rose in Brighton," *Renascence* 23, no.1 (1970): 21, 28-29. Cox argues that Rose's character is modeled after the Virgin Mary.

“infatuation.”<sup>7</sup> While Rokšana Zgierska’s analysis of Rose as a saint-type offers a welcome counterbalance for more cynical views of her character, this reading also becomes problematic when it claims that she “rejects her religion” through her “love for other people.”<sup>8</sup> To draw on Péguy’s words, Rose’s character cannot be easily categorized as either a sinner or a saint, nor is her love for others so callow, her faith so untried, as to warrant anything less than serious consideration.

It is the purpose of this paper then, to provide a fuller account of that character. The nuanced treatment that Greene affords Rose supplies *Brighton Rock* with a particular metaphysical ground, one which neither Pinkie, in his inability to feel contrition, nor Ida, in her esoteric humanism, is able to access. Indeed, against the wider contexts of Greene’s literary Catholicism, Rose’s innocence and subsequent fall into mortal sin bear a grim resemblance to a Christ-like self-sacrifice where, in the state of sin, God’s presence is revealed through individual and freely chosen human acts of love and faith. Rose’s love functions as the narrative’s central redemptive force, her charitable feeling the novel’s example of a spiritual ideal amidst humanity’s moral failings. This is not to say however, that Rose is a Christ-type. Rather, Rose occupies a medial position between the novel’s moral and

spiritual extremes: the ideal that she represents is profoundly human and thereby profoundly flawed.

Nevertheless, her sustained faith as she willingly commits herself to sin for Pinkie’s sake not only captures the complexity of human experience in an elegantly Greenean fashion, but suggests that her practice of love—one that finds connection with the specific practice of Christian love—best constitutes a positive affirmation of the immanence of a divine force. By the novel’s conclusion it falls to Rose alone to explore the role of the self-aware individual against a fallen modern world at once governed by and broken from its faith-based principles through which, I argue, she comes to represent one of Greene’s earliest candid attempts to view that world through a female perspective.

### Graham Greene’s Female Characters

Greene’s female characters have more recently come under scrutiny. Rose’s treatment in the scholarship is perhaps one symptom of a larger issue concerning Greene’s fictional women who frequently present as docile, emptied of the troubled interiorities that we find in their male counterparts, or alternately as threatening to a governing male perspective. Greene’s women have been polarized as “either virgins or whores,” that former type more

<sup>7</sup> Michael G. Brennan, *Graham Greene: Fictions, Faith and Authorship*, 3, 50; Peter M. Sinclair, “Graham Greene and Christian Despair: Tragic Aesthetics in *Brighton Rock* and *The Heart of the Matter*,” *Renascence*, 2011, vol. 63, no. 2, (2011), 134; James F. Dorrill, “Allusions at Work in Graham Greene’s *A Gun for Sale* and *Brighton Rock*,” *Renascence* 66, no.3 (2014): 186–87. Brennan’s approximation of Rose’s character as a possible source of salvation modifies his view of her naivety, but he does not explore that richer aspect of her character any

further than its implied failure, see Brennan, *Graham Greene; Fictions, Faith and Authorship*, 3, 50. Gordon Leah also uses a language of naivety for Rose, but his treatment is more sensitive; see Leah, “Between the Stirrup and the Ground,” 798.

<sup>8</sup> Rokšana Zgierska, “Can a Sinner be a Saint? Graham Greene’s Unorthodox Saints in *The Power and the Glory* and *Brighton Rock*,” *Religious and Sacred Poetry: An International Quarterly of Religion, Culture and Education* 6, no. 2 (2014): 175, 164.

commonly framed as “the plucky waiif” or the passive victim.<sup>9</sup> Helen in *The Heart of the Matter* seems at once to occupy the positions of victim and threat, where Scobie’s trouble with women—his tendency to infantilize and assume paternalistic guardianship over them—leads him into an extramarital relationship with her that serves in part to catalyze the fuller breakdown of both his marital and spiritual lives. Helen’s perspective however, is lost in the narrative’s intense focus on Scobie’s internal plight, his labor with his faith, and his suffering when religious doctrine fails to contain his lived experience. Contrastingly, *The End of the Affair* provides insight into Sarah’s conflicted interiority in her letter to Bendrix—into her struggle between her felt need to accommodate male desire against her own spiritual compulsion—but it takes the sacrifice of her happiness, health, and finally her life to complete her conversion to Catholicism and to escape from her estranged marriage to Henry as well as from Bendrix’s ultimately unwanted attention. *Brighton Rock*’s depiction of Ida simplifies such conflict in favor of action: by removing the moral ambiguities bound up in Catholicism through Ida’s commitment to an immediate, physical experience and

appreciation of life, free from an eternity after death, she instead provides constant interference from a world outside of religious dogma, working tirelessly to expose Pinkie’s crimes and foil his plans for Rose. In so doing, she has been praised “as the novel’s most potent force for good.”<sup>10</sup> Her appearance in the narrative, which often emphasizes her carnal presence, leverages the misogynistic stereotype of the woman who takes up space; Ida deserves a fuller study that recognizes her efforts to upset conventional gender expectations and to productively exert her agency in a mutually antagonistic relationship with Pinkie’s narrative presence. Set against Ida’s active form of heroism, Rose’s yielding, self-sacrificial obedience and acquiescence to Pinkie’s inimical spiritual pathologies seem to place her in deference to both Ida’s and Pinkie’s dominant personalities, particularly when her perspective is filtered through and diminished by Pinkie’s twisted vision of the world.

Work has been done to rehabilitate our view of Greene’s women; the power of a whole personality, Judith Adamson argues, emerges in Greene’s later female characters,<sup>11</sup> while Michael G. Brennan suggests that Greene’s fascination with female religious figures affords his religiously charged women with singular

<sup>9</sup> Andrea Freud Loewenstein, *Loathsome Jews and Engulfing Women: Metaphors of Projection in the Words of Wyndham Lewis, Charles Williams, and Graham Greene* (New York: New York University Press, 1993), 243; Bernard Bergonzi, *A Study in Greene: Graham Greene and the Art of the Novel*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 99. See also Gloria Emerson, *Loving Graham Greene: A Novel*, (New York: Random House, 2000), 7-8, qtd. in Judith Adamson, “The Long Wait for Aunt Augusta: Reflections on Graham Greene’s Fictional Women,” *Dangerous Edges of Graham Greene: Journeys with Saints and Sinners*, ed.

Dermot Gilvary and Darren J. N. Middleton, (London: Continuum, 2011), 210. Bergonzi and Brennan relegate Greene’s women to passivity, see Bergonzi, 99; Brennan, *Graham Greene: Fictions, Faith and Authorship*, 50.

<sup>10</sup> Brennan, *Graham Greene: Fictions, Faith and Authorship*, 3.

<sup>11</sup> Judith Adamson, “The Long Wait for Aunt Augusta: Reflections on Graham Greene’s Fictional Women,” *Dangerous Edges of Graham Greene: Journeys with Saints and Sinners*, ed. Dermot Gilvary and Darren J. N. Middleton (New York: Continuum, 2011), 214-15, 221.

positions in his narratives.<sup>12</sup> In *Brighton Rock*, and like so many of Greene's early women, Rose does not enter into the diegesis fully formed, but she nonetheless resists the bounds of caricature. Her part in the narrative triad establishes for her, by the novel's concluding paragraphs, a fraught perspective like those of her male counterparts, who are far from one-dimensional portraits. Scobie's tortured self-reflection, the priest's spiritual torment in *The Power and the Glory*, and the juvenile Pinkie's own turbulent internal monologues showcase a maturity in Greene's approach toward his male cast that recognizes the multitudes of human emotion. Indeed, as much as we might wish to condemn Pinkie for his villainy, he experiences shades of an impoverished form of love in his occasional sensations of "tenderness"<sup>13</sup> in that "something else" that he feels with Rose, which threatens like "the pressure of gigantic wings against the glass. Dona nobis pacem"<sup>14</sup> in moments where he might not be "all bad."<sup>15</sup> In a Catholic paradigm, if Pinkie finds himself as a part of the *mali non valde*, then Rose occupies the position of the *non valde boni*, and Greene's novel positions itself to explore how, like evil, goodness operates by degree. The complexity of Rose's character is unwound in just such a conversation between good and evil as extremes and in the impossibility of a Greenean world to contain absolutes.

The bedrock of Rose's character is her innocence. Rose becomes "mixed up"<sup>16</sup> with Pinkie and his racetrack mob following their murder of Fred Hale, a reporter for a popular newspaper who betrayed Pinkie's mentor and former gang boss Kite to their rival Colleoni, resulting in Kite's assassination by Raven, Greene's protagonist in the earlier *A Gun for Sale*. In *Brighton Rock*'s diegesis, Pinkie fixates on Rose, rightly suspicious that she knows of his attempt to cover up Hale's murder. In order to prevent Rose from testifying against him should the murder be uncovered, by the novel's half-way point Pinkie reluctantly arranges an illegal state marriage.<sup>17</sup> The subsequent consummation of the secular ceremony in all of its "cold poverty"<sup>18</sup> results in the violation of their shared Roman Catholic beliefs, as the marriage itself is unsanctioned by the Church and performed without their having been shriven.<sup>19</sup> Pinkie's desperation to avoid the legal consequences of his actions heightens as the narrative moves toward its conclusion; as Ida's investigation closes in on him, and having already carved a path through his gang, Pinkie plans to remove Rose as a final measure to secure the silence of his witnesses. Against the backdrop of Pinkie's panic, Greene locates the additional tension of his two young protagonists' concerns over their souls, the dark irony in Pinkie's attempted escape from Rose found in what Rose represents—his last

<sup>12</sup> Michael G. Brennan, "Graham Greene's *Monsignor Quixote*: A Pilgrimage of Doubt and Reason toward Faith and Belief," *Between Human and Divine: The Catholic Vision in Contemporary Literature*, ed. Mary R. Reichardt (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 163, 167.

<sup>13</sup> Graham Greene, *Brighton Rock* (London: Vintage, 2004), 198, 251.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 261.

<sup>15</sup> For a sensitive treatment of Pinkie's desire for peace, see Leah, "Between the Stirrup," 800.

<sup>16</sup> Greene, *Brighton Rock*, 50, 151.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 125-26.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

chance for salvation. While Ida's narrative arc might best be categorized as a modern detective fiction, the intensely anxious drama surrounding both Pinkie's and Rose's fuller engagements with a criminal world traces theological questions onto their actions. In the novel's competing moral perspectives—Ida's life of "right and wrong"<sup>20</sup> and the "stronger foods" that Rose and Pinkie understand as "Good and Evil"<sup>21</sup>—Rose's location on these axes is defined by her innocence. For Ida, Rose is an unchanging figure for the "Innocent,"<sup>22</sup> a victim who requires saving from the suffering that Pinkie will inevitably cause her.<sup>23</sup> Pinkie on the other hand, views Rose's innocence with animosity; he rails at the thought of her "greenness and innocence"<sup>24</sup> and loathes that her purity—both in terms of sex and sin—threatens the illusory power that he has gained by avoiding the consequences of his crimes. He detests her "stupid innocent face,"<sup>25</sup> which reminds him of his own childhood in the Brighton slums,<sup>26</sup> a face which reveals to him the "danger" of his precarious position in this life and the next,<sup>27</sup> and which repels him for its being at once everything that he is and is not.

Rose sees herself however, in terms more fraught than those afforded to her by either Ida or Pinkie. For both of these latter characters, Rose's innocence is akin to goodness; Ida's notion of "Right and Wrong" leads her to implore Rose to act rightly and to leave Pinkie upon the

basis of being "a Good girl," while Pinkie realizes that Rose, against his sense of his own damned soul, "was good."<sup>28</sup> But when Pinkie equates Rose's innocence with ignorance—"You don't know anything"—Rose objects: "I know a lot."<sup>29</sup> For Rose, knowledge complicates innocence. Her self-positioning on the novel's moral axis of "Good and Evil" and its alignment with a Roman Catholic system of values implicates her in the moral failings of a fallen world; as writes C. Kenneth Pellow, "one cannot glibly separate 'good' and 'evil' in Greene's work, as his best characters are a *mélange* of both."<sup>30</sup> As if to prove herself to Pinkie, Rose admits that she "did something once too. A mortal sin."<sup>31</sup> This Rose uses to distinguish herself from Ida: "'Right and wrong. That's what she talks about. I've heard her at the table. Right and wrong. As if she knew.' She whispered with contempt. 'Oh, she won't burn. She couldn't burn if she tried.'"<sup>32</sup> Rose's knowledge of sin, however innocent she may be when set into relation with Pinkie, leads her to love him regardless of his evil acts and to participate with him in those acts. We might read Pinkie's brief moment of insight about Rose in a similar context: "He was speechless; and some knowledge of the astuteness of her simplicity, the long experience of her sixteen years, the possible depths of her fidelity touched him like cheap music, as the light shifted from cheek-bone to

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 130, 217.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 243.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 135. See Leah, "Between the Stirrup," who positions both Rose and Ida as forces of "Good" against Pinkie's "total Evil" 798.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>30</sup> C. Kenneth Pellow, "The 'Presence' of Dostoevsky in Graham Greene's *The Power and the Glory*," *Renascence* 67, no.1 (2015): 71.

<sup>31</sup> Greene, *Brighton Rock*, 121.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

cheek-bone and across the wall, as the gears ground outside.”<sup>33</sup>

Rose occupies a middle ground in the novel’s conceptual tensions and makes available a more nuanced perspective than either Ida or Pinkie. The sin to which she refers may very well be posturing on her part in order to impress her lover—we never do learn what sin she previously committed—but behind her words, and behind Pinkie’s observation, is the suggestion that like Pinkie, and like all fellow “Romans,”<sup>34</sup> she is sinful because she is human; she suffers from original sin, from a fall from Eden into a realm of knowledge and experience. As much as Rose may initially be innocent of the kinds of actions that may be properly thought to damn the soul, she is still human, and the incremental development of that “dark theology between them,”<sup>35</sup> in Rose’s view, affords her and Pinkie with a privileged understanding of the world. Their shared perspective—one from which Ida exempts herself—allows the youths to distinguish themselves with pride at being a part of a community of the elect—even if those elect are damned:

It seemed to her that everyone was very kind: there seemed to be a companionship in mortal sin.

Pride swelled in her breast as she came up from the basement. She was accepted. She had experienced as much as any woman.<sup>36</sup>

Nevertheless, the inborn goodness that Rose’s counterparts detect in her leads

her to love Pinkie. In Pinkie’s words, “they were made for each other,”<sup>37</sup> and that duality of “Good and Evil,” of salvation and damnation, appears decidedly more one-sided without Rose’s narrative part.

### **The Female Religious in *Brighton Rock***

Rose may be too human to be a saint, and she does fall into mortal sin so as to be with Pinkie, but she nevertheless embodies a promise: her presence in the narrative is salvific in nature. We read of it in her second scene with Pinkie as his “one hand caressed the vitriol bottle in his pocket” while “the other touched Rose’s wrist.”<sup>38</sup> Rose provides a sense of balance, in this scene and in the larger narrative, between the concepts of damnation and salvation. Pinkie holds fast to Rose, to her goodness and its promise of salvation, just as he does to the bottle of vitriol, itself a compound symbol of his sins and his related confidence in the reality of “Hell. Flames and damnation.”<sup>39</sup> In the end, the vitriol seems to claim him. Gerald Cox describes the shattering of the glass against Pinkie’s face as “a parody of Extreme Unction” where, from Rose’s vantage in the passenger’s seat of Pinkie’s old 1925 Morris, “it was as if the flames had literally got him.”<sup>40</sup> Even as the acid melts Pinkie’s flesh, through Rose’s eyes the danger that he faces is spiritual in nature. It is Pinkie’s irony that his actions ultimately call the flames of hell into the immediacy of his lived word. In her continued survival

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 211. For “the exclusiveness of English Catholicism,” see Bergonzi, 96; on Rose’s sense of kinship with Pinkie, see Gerald H. Cox III,

“Graham Greene’s Mystical Rose in Brighton,” *Renascence* 23, no. 1 (1970), 29.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 52-53.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 55. See also Leah, “Between the Stirrup,” 798.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 264. Cox, 27.

however, Greene reorients the novel's narrative perspective toward the anxious hope that Rose's character embodies, that a spiritual life might see not only the prospects of Hell, but of "Heaven too."<sup>41</sup>

Despite overt parallels formed in *Brighton Rock* between the literal and the spiritual, as Peter M. Sinclair maintains, "theological inflections can become problematic in Greene's novels if we do not make a crucial distinction between fiction and doctrine in his works."<sup>42</sup> Greene himself was opposed to the epithet of "Catholic novelist," with which he became associated during and after his *oeuvre's* "Catholic cycle." For Greene, while these novels explored questions of a religious nature, "he did not want readers to be seeking catechetical exactitude in his stories."<sup>43</sup> We might take Mark Bosco's words as our guide when he writes that it was the "religious sense" that was important for Greene.<sup>44</sup> In this way we must read Greene's Catholic novels with an approach that is sensitive to how Greene's religious and literary impulses interact. More specifically, the Catholicism that we read as it is expressed in Greene's works "gave him a specific point of view throughout his literary career. ... From the beginning, Catholicism for Greene was never a system of laws and dogmas or a body of belief demanding assent or dissent but rather a system of concepts, a reservoir of attitudes and values, and a source of situations with which he could order and dramatize his intuitions about human experience."<sup>45</sup> Catholicism thus

transposed into Greene's literary worlds functions as a model, as a frame through which his fictional characters' struggles can be understood. While these characters and their situations are steeped with religious significance, they do not model a strict adherence to religious orthodoxy. Instead, that "religious sense" opens up religious signification and spiritual feeling to the vicissitudes of human experience.

When we read Rose's fall into sin, we ought to attune ourselves to the "religious sense" that imbues her character with spiritual meaning, the language and imagery which interfuses Ida's world, free of religious dogma, with the sacrality of a Catholic paradigm, twisted as it is by the self-conscious sensibilities of two "Romans" whose understanding of a lived world under Catholicism is informed by their acute awareness of their own fallenness, whose understanding is that that very world is flawed and painfully separate from that vague, now shapeless and indistinct world of spiritual perfection. What Pinkie and Rose share in their understanding of their world is sin; though Rose suffers already from original sin—that state of being which fundamentally and forever divides both she and Pinkie from Ida—her marriage to Pinkie precipitates a freely chosen fall into a state of sin liable to damn her soul. Indeed, the state ceremony closes with Pinkie's thought that "you signed covenants like this in your blood."<sup>46</sup> Neither he nor Rose have, up to this point, believed that such proceedings could constitute "a real marriage,"<sup>47</sup>

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>42</sup> Sinclair, 131.

<sup>43</sup> Ralph McInerney, *Some Catholic Writers* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2007), 66. See also Brennan, *Graham Greene: Fictions, Faith and Authorship*, x.

<sup>44</sup> Bosco, *Graham Greene's Catholic Imagination*, 5.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>46</sup> Greene, *Brighton Rock*, 185.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 125, 126, 150.

though its consequences here are felt as real: “He stood back and watched Rose awkwardly sign—his temporal safety in return for two immortalities of pain.”<sup>48</sup> Convinced of their souls’ mutual damnation and feeling “as if they were shut out of an Eden of ignorance,”<sup>49</sup> sin succeeds sin as Rose’s fuller participation reads as a process of embodiment, a kind of incarnation through which the loss of her innocence is traced onto her body; after leaving the courthouse, Rose’s face is marked by the “enormous weight of responsibility.”<sup>50</sup> Pinkie notes that “she was good, but he’d got her like you got God in the Eucharist—in the guts. God couldn’t escape the evil mouth which chose to eat its own damnation,”<sup>51</sup> and this same language of perverse ritual reappears shortly in the description of their marriage consummation: “‘It’s mortal sin,’ he said, getting what savour there was out of innocence, trying to taste God in the mouth.”<sup>52</sup> Rose’s body, thus far bound up with innocence and goodness, here assumes Christ-like significance; the consumption of Christ’s body through the Eucharist re-enacts his sacrifice, his gift of redemption to the human soul through his bodily suffering and death.<sup>53</sup> The ritual itself establishes individual connection with God through the symbolic communion of bodies and bodily participation in the process of salvation. The distortion of that communion in Pinkie and Rose’s

“painful ritual upon the bed,”<sup>54</sup> however, marks Rose with a morbid incarnational substance that resonates as at once a force for salvation and damnation. Should we return briefly to Greene’s epigraph in *The Heart of the Matter*, Gordon Leah suggests that “a second look at Péguy’s words shows that a great sinner may be able to understand and feel God’s mercy more than a so-called righteous person.”<sup>55</sup> Péguy’s words not only touch on the notion that those who have sinned are in the most need of God’s mercy, but that “a believer who knows no sin or is so bound by conformity to ecclesiastical doctrine that (s)he has lost all awareness of personal failure or need of grace, is far from the Kingdom of God.”<sup>56</sup> In *Brighton Rock*, Rose’s incarnation as a sinner paradoxically leads her to God—toward the need to better understand her faith in a world that asks the greatest sinners to equip themselves with a profound trust in the mercy of the divine.

At the end of the novel, and following Pinkie’s gruesome death, Rose visits a confessor at a local church. There she expresses her desire to repent not for her sins, but that she did not die with Pinkie, that she did not commit suicide as Pinkie had wanted her to do. The one doubt keeping her from carrying out this final act is her fear that “in that obscure country of death they might miss each other—mercy operating somehow for one and not for the other.”<sup>57</sup> Though the

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 188.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 186.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 194.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 198.

<sup>53</sup> Bosco describes the doctrine of the *felix culpa* as “the primary religious insight sustained throughout Greene’s religious landscape,” *Graham Greene’s Catholic Imagination*, 26. For a discerning analysis of the relationships between the human body, Christ’s sacramental

body, and the presence of God, see Bosco, “Shades of Greene,” 18.

<sup>54</sup> Greene, *Brighton Rock*, 214.

<sup>55</sup> Leah, “Notes and Comments,” 778.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. For Scobie, the idea of self-sacrifice is bound up in his conflation of suicide with Christ’s voluntary acceptance of the Crucifixion. See Graham Greene, *The Heart of the Matter* (London: Vintage, 2004), 174.

<sup>57</sup> Greene, *Brighton Rock*, 267.

priest cannot absolve Rose, as her confession fails to demonstrate the proper form of contrition, he responds with an unorthodox musing:

“There was a man, a Frenchman, you wouldn’t know about him, my child, who had the same idea as you. He was a good man, a holy man, and he lived in sin all through his life, because he couldn’t bear the idea that any soul could suffer damnation.” She listened with astonishment. He said, “This man decided that if any soul was going to be damned, he would be damned too. He never took the sacraments, he never married his wife in church. I don’t know, my child, but some people think he was—well, a saint.”<sup>58</sup>

The priest’s description here puts into words Rose’s own rebellion against the strictures of Catholic doctrine. Her love for Pinkie, misguided and self-destructive as it is, is so great that a part of her would allow herself to lose her soul so that he might be saved from the desolation of damnation, if only by her company. Some scholars go so far as to suggest that the man about whom the priest speaks is Charles Péguy himself, which throws Greene’s epigraph into further relief; the sinner herself—when committing sins on behalf of others for the perceived spiritual good of others—reproduces a kind of saintly self-sacrifice.<sup>59</sup> Through the priest’s words, Greene provides an image of one who perjures his soul and who rejects the

possibility of its reunion with God for those who are in the most need of love and mercy, for those who are damned and thus in the most need of salvation. Péguy’s is a gambit for a universal code of salvation, and like Rose, his resistance is as much a protest against the cold authority of an institutionalized bureaucracy of religion as it is against the conception of a God who could turn away from those most in need. What separates Rose from Pinkie is not God or death, salvation or damnation, but rather her capacity for love, that same faculty of feeling that transforms one complicit in sin through a love for others into a type of saint. Whereas Pinkie consistently fails to love and instead chooses to deny responsibility for the suffering that he causes both to himself and to others, Rose accepts the burden of sin in the hope of saving another, even if her imagined form of salvation is not of a doctrinal kind. To recall a more generous approximation of her character, this imagination is naïve, but it is also deeply felt, and it asks profound theological questions.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, this drive for salvation for all—even if it is imperfect—keeps Rose from committing an act of despair and instead leads her to seek the guidance of both priest and Church.

If there is a narrative space where *Brighton Rock* does some extended theological work, then it is through Rose and Rose’s perspective, where that engagement finds fuller expression. Rose’s character operates under the

<sup>58</sup> Greene, *Brighton Rock*, 268.

<sup>59</sup> See Bergonzi, 101. Greene’s version of Péguy—or Péguy’s signification in the frame of the fictional narrative at hand—is of focus here rather than how accurately Greene represents the historical man. See Grahame C. Jones, “Graham Greene and the Legend of Péguy,” *Comparative Literature* 21, no.2 (1969): 139,

144-45. Péguy however, was eventually reconciled with his Catholic faith if not with the Catholic Church; see Roger Kimball, “Charles Péguy,” *The New Criterion* (2001): 19; McNerny, 119-20.

<sup>60</sup> Brennan, *Graham Greene: Fictions, Faith and Authorship*, 50.

logic of Christian love, the same love that could qualify a sinner like Péguy, at least within the narrative's "religious sense," for a kind of sainthood. Two simultaneous forms of love operate at the heart of Christian love: a love for God and a love for others. We might consider these, respectively, in terms provided by J. C. Whitehouse, as elements of "vertical" and "horizontal" relationships which define Catholic experience, where together, in mutual co-existence, they form the body of the cross and bring a symbol of faith into a lived praxis.<sup>61</sup> Informed by the Pauline virtue of charity, Christian love is *caritas*, "an outpouring of love for God" and a wellspring of selfless love for others, modeled after Christ's love for humankind in accordance with the love that led to the Incarnation and Christ's redemption of the human soul through self-sacrifice.<sup>62</sup> Though Greene frames neither Rose nor Péguy as martyrs for God, their sacrificial impetus is bound up in a Christian love for others. In Whitehouse's terms, their love can be understood as a "horizontal" relationship defined by a shared humanity—and in *Brighton Rock*, a shared damnation—a process which, for Greene, leads to "a growth towards God."<sup>63</sup>

Rose consistently asserts herself in the terms of just such a love. Against Ida's warnings that Pinkie "doesn't love you," Rose actively chooses to love; she

responds, "I don't care ... I love *him*."<sup>64</sup> Ida later insists that Rose's "life's in danger" and that she has "got to be saved"<sup>65</sup>—an ironic statement from Ida, whose concern is with Rose's immediate bodily life, but whose words reflect the increasing precarity of Rose's soul—yet over and over again Rose maintains that she has bound herself to Pinkie:

The woman could tell her nothing she didn't know about [Good and Evil]—she knew by tests as clear as mathematics that Pinkie was evil—what did it matter in that case whether he was right or wrong?

'You're crazy,' the woman said. 'I don't believe you'd lift a finger if he was killing you.'

Rose slowly came back to the outer world. She said, 'Maybe I wouldn't.'<sup>66</sup>

Rose here chooses to "suffer"<sup>67</sup> out of love: at her own peril, "she had chosen her side: if they damned him they'd got to damn her, too."<sup>68</sup> Though Ida is unable to register its tenor, Rose models a charitable form of love. Pinkie embodies Péguy's idea of the needful sinner, the soul that needs saving. Pinkie himself increasingly recognizes that "What was most evil in him needed her,"<sup>69</sup> a need that becomes more immediate in his narration as he slides further toward that state of irredeemable sin with which he is preoccupied. In loving Pinkie, Rose desires to act charitably with her life and

<sup>61</sup> J. C. Whitehouse, *Vertical Man: The Human Being in the Catholic Novels of Graham Greene, Sigrid Undset, and Georges Bernanos* (Shrewsbury, MA: Garland, 1990), 23. See also Joseph Pearce, "Cross Purposes: Greene, Undset and Bernanos," *Catholic Literary Giants: A Field Guide to the Catholic Literary Landscape* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2014), 223-24.

<sup>62</sup> Frances McCormack, "The Later Greene: From Modernist to Moralist," *Dangerous Edges of Graham Greene: Journeys with Saints and*

*Sinners*, ed. Dermot Gilvary and Darren J. N. Middleton (New York: Continuum, 2007), 275. See also Jones, 142 and 1 Corinthians 13.

<sup>63</sup> Whitehouse, 87.

<sup>64</sup> Greene, *Brighton Rock*, 131; original emphasis.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

<sup>66</sup> Greene, *Brighton Rock*, 217.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

her soul. She is prepared to sacrifice both for the sake of Pinkie's soul which, if she cannot save, she can at least continue to love in damnation. Rose understands this as an "eternal act" which,<sup>70</sup> through solidarity with Pinkie, may somehow provide him with a form of mercy even in damnation. In a "religious sense," Rose's love begins to look like a form of *imitatio Christi*. It is surely imperfect, but once again, Greene here treads a line between a clear, religious model and the murky complexity of a world where humans resist containment by absolutes. As much as Rose's love emerges from an impetus like *caritas* and a desire to guide the soul toward consolation, her willingness to serve both Pinkie and the novel in a sacrificial capacity equally serves her as the means by which she distinguishes herself from within just such a world. Through Rose, the novel explores the meaning and consequences of faith, and through faith, Rose finds the agency to affect a wider range of experience than is initially available to the self-destructive role given to her by her love for Pinkie. Rather, her love leads her toward faith, and in nurturing that faith Rose becomes better able to determine the quality of her participation in the world, which asks her to embrace the imperfection of her humanity. Her project is, in its ultimate expression, one of self-determination enacted through the models made available to her by her faith.

Nowhere are such tensions at their most potent than during the novel's climax, where Greene informs the redemptive power of Rose's love with an

epiphanic moment of faith. Rose has by this point agreed to a "suicide pact" with Pinkie.<sup>71</sup> Unbeknownst to Rose, Pinkie has no intention of dying; rather, he has planned her suicide as a means of escaping both hers and Ida's influences.<sup>72</sup> As they drive away from Brighton in Pinkie's Morris, Rose becomes conscious of the eternal implications tied to the anticipated act: "She felt as if she were signing away more than her life—heaven, whatever that was."<sup>73</sup> With the point of a gun in her ear and Pinkie outside of the car, aware that each of her proceeding actions could lead to a double form of death, Rose senses a presence other than her own: "If it was a guardian angel speaking to her now, he spoke like a devil—he tempted her to virtue like a sin. To throw away the gun was a betrayal; it would be an act of cowardice: it would mean that she chose never to see him again for ever. ...The evil act was the honest act, the bold and the faithful—it was only lack of courage, it seemed to her, that spoke so virtuously."<sup>74</sup> "The evil act," for Rose, is not so evil. Just as Pinkie is unable to imagine heaven—"A brain was only capable of what it could conceive"<sup>75</sup>—Rose cannot conceive of "eternal punishment" or commit an "act of despair" since what she feels is not despair at all.<sup>76</sup> Rather, she acts through a love that "wouldn't let him go into that darkness alone."<sup>77</sup> But this love is imperfect because Rose is human; it "was a poor love that was afraid to die";<sup>78</sup> she has within her "all the hideous forces of self-preservation."<sup>79</sup> She cannot help that her love for Pinkie

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 218.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 235.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 232-33, 235.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 247.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 263.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 248.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 249.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 263.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 264.

is balanced by her love for life, even though she rails against that life, against what is “meek, good, repentant,”<sup>80</sup> much like those dissatisfactory “moral maxims dressed in pedantic priestly tones remembered from old sermons, instructions, confessions.”<sup>81</sup> The tempting voice of grace arrests the forward momentum driving Rose toward death. And although she is struck by an inability to act which, in her narrative voice, tastes of humiliation, of powerlessness, whether by divine intervention or the primacy of her own instincts, the epiphanic moment positions Rose at the crux that informs all of Greene’s “Catholic novels”: that the complex nature of faith resists the boundaries imposed not only by an orthodox religious model incapable of fully representing the lived realities of modern life, but by the individual herself. The receipt of grace reveals to Rose the contradictions bound up in her humanness and asks her to break from the sacrificial models which thus far have governed her activity, whether drawn from Ida, Pinkie, or her own understanding of Catholic doctrine. In a pattern that holds across Greene’s literary explorations of faith, the epiphany offers not peace, but an intense emotional turbulence which, for Rose, provides her with the perspective of a whole personality, one not bound by the pre-determined roles of saint or sinner, but released into the interstices of a human life that asks her to choose not for others, but for herself.<sup>82</sup> Epiphany, here, demarcates the

boundaries of the self-sacrificial impetus and forces radical internal change, ultimately resulting in Rose’s survival and in a concomitant return to the Church—more than is provided to many of Greene’s doomed protagonists.

### ***Brighton Rock’s* Fallen Modern World**

Greene’s fictional worlds are frequently defined by critics using the term “Greeneland.” Andrea Loewenstein describes this landscape as one that is pervaded by a “sense of falseness and of alienation from a world which is morally as well as physically shabby and corrupt.”<sup>83</sup> In *Brighton Rock*, this world is inhabited by “hatred, disgust, loneliness.”<sup>84</sup> In this vision, humankind’s options are limited and an animal existence, fuelled by “murder, copulation, extreme poverty, fidelity and the love and fear of God” is counterposed only by the “experience” found in “the glare and open world outside.”<sup>85</sup> Neither offers much in the way of hope; both are marked by a loss of innocence where humans become sensate of their isolation—from others and from God—or, like Pinkie, recoil in horror from the prospect of a connection which might break them from their “habit of hate.”<sup>86</sup> Mark Bosco explains that Greene’s modernism picks up on a realist aesthetic which sought “to expose both human nature and society as they really were ... forcing readers to understand the brutal reality behind the

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 262.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 263.

<sup>82</sup> On the Joycean “epiphany” in response to failure, see Bosco, *Graham Greene’s Catholic Imagination*, 26.

<sup>83</sup> Loewenstein, 242, see also 308.

<sup>84</sup> Greene, *Brighton Rock*, 203.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 131; see also Peter Liebrechts, “‘The World is a Fine Adventurous Place’: Graham Greene in the 1930s,” *Modernism Today*, ed. Sjeff Houppermans, Peter Liebrechts, Jan Baetens, and Otto Boele (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013), 37-38.

<sup>86</sup> Greene, *Brighton Rock*, 251.

comforting facades of modern life."<sup>87</sup> God is far-removed from the world in this conception, a *Deus absconditus* whose presence is hidden from a fallen humanity.<sup>88</sup> The ethos of a character like Ida, whose concerns are emphatically of a world outside of the religious, functions much like a panacea for the novel's troubles with God. Exempt from the strictures of the Catholic faith, Ida navigates the world "like the chariot in a triumph," where she champions "right's right, an eye for an eye, when you want to do a thing well, do it yourself," and above all, "justice."<sup>89</sup> Of all of the novel's competing paradigms, Ida's perspective may very well be the best suited to the Greenian world since in her essentially phenomenological approach to life, she is most equipped to interact with those who populate it. That is, Ida understands immediacy in the nature of human experience, and without hesitation is able to determine a course of action with clearly foreseen results. Hence her reflection on "the people she had saved: a man she had once pulled out of the sea when she was a young woman, the money to a blind beggar, and the kind word in season to the despairing schoolgirl in the Strand."<sup>90</sup> Salvation, for Ida, is a granular, quotidian concept with instantaneous and repeatable effects. From one situation into the next, the "right" action—indeed, the "just" action—is a life-sustaining exercise that functions to balance the sense of isolation in an existence that recognizes its own individuality. A faith like Ida's is a faith

in the capacity of the human to survive as the greatest good of all.

As this paper has sought to argue however, Greene's investigation into matters of faith is not so cleanly cut as any boundaries might at first suggest. In the "religious sense" of *Brighton Rock's* diegesis, the secular cannot be cleanly divided from the spiritual and instead throws the novel's theological questions into relief. Hence, while Greene's characters seem to themselves typify different worlds and different sensibilities, the whole of the novel's take is as murky as a world without "catechetical exactitude."<sup>91</sup> Ida's separate worldview, when understood in the whole of *Brighton Rock* as a complete work of fiction, cannot be and ought not to be separated from Pinkie's exploration of the realities of hell, or Rose's form of *imitatio Christi*, of that spiritual paradox where salvation is made real through a fall. Indeed, without the remove from a created world that Ida's perspective provides, we would not become party to the dramatic irony that hell is brought to life by Pinkie's own actions, counter to his belief in hell's *a priori* existence, nor would we recognize that the hope for spiritual salvation which Rose carries with her depends upon human action in a painfully human world which itself manifests the divine, and which seeks out connection with the divine through a desire for unity with those who are most fallen, with the sinners who stand at the heart of Greene's depictions of Catholicism. It is in just this way that

<sup>87</sup> Bosco, "Shades of Greene," 11. See Pellow, 72, who refers to Greene as "a tough-minded realist."

<sup>88</sup> Anne Loddegaard, "The Silence of God in the Modern Catholic Novel: Graham Greene and French Catholic Novelists Adopting a Pascalian *Deus Absconditus* Perspective on Faith, Truth

and Reason," *Forum on Public Policy: A Journal of the Oxford Round Table* (2008): 2, 4. See also Bosco, "Shades of Greene," 15.

<sup>89</sup> Greene, *Brighton Rock*, 241, 242.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 243.

<sup>91</sup> McInerney, 66.

Greene's modernism deliberately resists the notion of a world not created by God.<sup>92</sup> Rather, as argues Anne Loddegaard, "God's existence becomes a matter of individual faith" whereby "virtue and sin are not experienced as easily definable, distinct entities in concrete situations, but are struck by complexity, opacity and ambiguity."<sup>93</sup> Though God's presence is fraught with human nature's inherent tensions and its inability to understand the divine—in Pinkie's silent recitation of the Mass, "He was in the world and the world was made by Him and the world knew Him not"<sup>94</sup>—by placing a fallible, unstable humanity at the heart of the world, Greene's "religious sense" works from the ground-up, filling his religious landscape with meaning found in that same human nature.<sup>95</sup>

And what we do see of salvation in *Brighton Rock* is human. In the world depicted by the modern Catholic novel, Bosco observes, "Catholicism was inscribed in the midst of fallen, poor humanity, a place of constant struggle where the mysterious irruptions of grace might shine forth or manifest in profound ways."<sup>96</sup> Catholicism thus "became a cultural container and conceptual signifier for the paradoxes within the 'modern' individual."<sup>97</sup> As with Rose's dissatisfaction with doctrinal "moral maxims,"<sup>98</sup> evidence of salvation cannot be found in a world received through simplified forms of religious orthodoxy. Rather, it figures forth in the instability and confusion of human experience, in Rose's very face:

"They said that saints had got—what was the phrase?—'heroic virtues,' heroic patience, heroic endurance, but there was nothing he could see that was heroic in the bony face, protuberant eyes, pallid anxiety."<sup>99</sup> Shown on Rose's face is "the ravaged and disputed territory between the two eternities,"<sup>100</sup> a world that vacillates between Good and Evil—or between Right and Wrong where, in Ida's view, "all the fight there was in the world lay there—warships cleared for action and bombing fleets took flight between the set eyes and the stubborn mouth."<sup>101</sup> In Rose's face, the novel's two overarching paradigms of human existence meet; her face, and faces like it—faces twisted with suffering and experience—attune the divine to the very grit of modern life: "In an alley between two shops, an old woman sat upon the ground; he could just see the rotting and discoloured face: it was like the sight of damnation. Then he heard the whisper, 'Blessed art thou among women,' saw the grey fingers fumbling at the beads. This was not one of the damned: he watched with horrified fascination: this was one of the saved."<sup>102</sup> A constant across depictions of God's manifest presence, the divine here appears to Pinkie amidst poverty and disease, eternity writ onto Ida's vision of war. The connection between Rose and the old woman is plain: Pinkie responds to the woman in the same manner as with Rose time and again, "with distaste,"<sup>103</sup> with the urge to dismiss all that is immanent and imperfect as instead a sign of the impossibility of divine

<sup>92</sup> Liebrechts, 38.

<sup>93</sup> Loddegaard, 4.

<sup>94</sup> Greene, *Brighton Rock*, 262.

<sup>95</sup> See also McCormack, 266; Sinclair, 131.

<sup>96</sup> Bosco, "Shades of Greene, 12.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> Greene, *Brighton Rock*, 263.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 217. For a discussion on Rose's statuesque resemblance to the Virgin Mary, see Cox, 28-29.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

presence. In this case, Pinkie's (mis)understanding of orthodox knowledge fails him; Pinkie thinks only in the terms of a binary ontology—that Good and Evil—which opposes saintly perfection with sin and damnation. When he looks toward just such a perfection for proof of God's presence, its absence ratifies his belief that already this world is a form of hell, that already humankind suffers the pains of damnation in a total separation from the divine, that hell "wasn't anything to worry about: it was just his own familiar room."<sup>104</sup> The revelation that salvation exists with those who are most fallen, and that those who are fallen bear salvation into the world, threatens to shatter Pinkie's worldview in the correlative demand that he accept culpability in the tarnishing of his spiritual life—that all along it has been his prerogative to damn his soul and, worse yet, that he might still choose to save it. In opposition to Rose's encounter with the priest, Pinkie's fiery end results in his continued flight from the mercy of a God with whom he refuses to feel a connection. Nevertheless, in Rose's face, a face that reflects the face of the old woman in the alley, that reflects Pinkie back to himself, the novel offers an image of salvation, a human manifestation of what the priest at the end of the novel can only name as the "appalling strangeness of the mercy of God" which may yet touch Pinkie as it already has Rose in the "honest act."<sup>105</sup>

Rose's character then, is very much the metaphysical lynchpin in *Brighton Rock*: without Rose, and without the

faith-based perspective that she provides, there would be no central presence of God in the narrative's reality. Rose's faith makes her the novel's only character to provide an apparatus by which to understand a divine force as it is experienced by humans within the world. Unlike Ida, both Pinkie and Rose believe in Good and Evil and their respective "two eternities,"<sup>106</sup> but only Rose exhibits faith in the redemptive power of God. Despite her belief that orthodox religious practices such as prayer and confession cannot help her, Rose instinctively reaches out toward a God who may be distant but not inaccessible; though she refuses to repent for her sins,<sup>107</sup> her faith moves her toward contrition, toward her time with the priest in the confessional at the end of the novel and, perhaps most importantly, toward the power of spiritual self-determination, that will to decide for herself what meaning she might derive from her "Roman" life.<sup>108</sup> J. C. Whitehouse suggests that "belief and uncertainty are shown as bringing blessings," what Bosco terms as "the virtue of doubt,"<sup>109</sup> without which, for Whitehouse, "there would be no need for faith."<sup>110</sup> At the novel's end, just as she accepts the priest's words in what Gerald H. Cox considers as "clearly an act of faith" in a similar act of community, so too does Rose agree to pray not merely for Pinkie's soul, but for the priest, as well.<sup>111</sup> In this moment, it is as if Rose suddenly becomes aware that her sin does not sever her from, but rather binds her ever more tightly to her God, and that through this connection,

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 198.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 268, 263.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 267.

<sup>108</sup> See also Loddegaard, (2008), 9.

<sup>109</sup> Bosco, *Graham Greene's Catholic Imagination*.

<sup>110</sup> Whitehouse, (1990), 85; Bosco, (2005), 26, see also 27.

<sup>111</sup> Greene, *Brighton Rock*, 267; Cox, 27.

she is most in unity with those like her. When previously she believed that “her prayers stayed here below with the siphons and statuettes: they had no wings,”<sup>112</sup> following her conversation with the priest, she begins to understand that the divine can be made present through human action. She cannot bestow salvation, but she can seek community with God through the action of love. In this way, Rose never “rejects her religion.”<sup>113</sup> Rather, she enacts a process of coming to terms with the imperfections found in both herself and in the faith-based system that organizes her experience.

For her part in disentangling Greene’s “religious sense,” Rose ought not to be overlooked, particularly in the context of Greene’s “Catholic novels” where his fictional women all too frequently find their agency stripped or suffer death in order to reclaim their power. In the “dark theology” of Greene’s fallen worlds,<sup>114</sup> Rose supplies *Brighton Rock* with a promise of redemption, one that extends beyond the novel’s engagement with the theological and positions her in Greene’s *oeuvre* as one of his earliest attempts to see his worlds through an unironic female gaze, one which, here, is best able to recognize the many and conflicting valences that give shape to that reality. In the novel’s final words, Rose walks “towards the worst horror of all,”<sup>115</sup> the gramophone recording which will reveal to her Pinkie’s spiteful message, whose bitter words reflect his resentment of a life misshapen by the Brighton slums, a life he sees embodied by Rose. In confronting Pinkie’s reality, the

recording will ask Rose to escape the one-dimensionality of her relationship with him and to inhabit a fuller being without the existential safety of her opposite in that “open world outside.”<sup>116</sup> Unlike her narrative counterparts, Rose is equipped with a faith that has led her back to the Church, to the confessional, to community, and has led the novel to a ground of hope, which, despite Greene’s characteristically grim denouement, suggests that Rose, and the reality that Greene explores through her perspective, may yet survive Pinkie’s vitriol.

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<sup>112</sup> Greene, *Brighton Rock*, 250.

<sup>113</sup> Roscana Zgierska, “Can a Sinner be a Saint? Graham Greene’s Unorthodox Saints in *The Power and the Glory* and *Brighton Rock*,” *Religious and Sacred Poetry: An International*

*Quarterly of Religion, Culture and Education*, vol. 6, no.2, (2014), 175.

<sup>114</sup> Greene, *Brighton Rock*, 122.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 269.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.