



## BRIGHTON ROCK (Cert 15)

**Reel Issues author:** Stephen Brown

**Overview:** 1964. Pinkie, a young member of a criminal gang, draws Rose - a fellow Roman Catholic - into his evil ways as he battles with rival gangsters and damnation.

**Director:** Rowan Joffe (2010)

**Produced by:** StudioCanal Features, BBC Films & UK Film Council

**Length:** 111 mins

**Cautions:** Strong language, twice very strong, and strong violence.

### THE FILM

**Warning: includes plot spoilers** Pinkie Brown (Sam Riley) is an ambitious and ruthless criminal. When Kite (Geoff Bell), the leader of his gang is murdered by a rival hoodlum, Fred Hale (Sean Harris), Pinkie goes after him. Hale had previously tried chatting up Rose (Andrea Riseborough), an under-age young woman working at a cafe belonging to Ida Arnold (Helen Mirren). Hale had been a ne'er do well friend of Ida. Unlike Pinkie and Rose (both Roman Catholics) Ida isn't religious but is worldly wise and at ease with her sexuality.

Because of incriminating circumstances in which Rose has been involved she poses a threat to the gang. Pinkie pretends to be attracted to the girl. Ida, seeing all this, begs Brighton's arch-villain Colleoni (Andy Serkis) to bump Pinkie off. In the meantime, Pinkie's violence turns on his new boss Spicer (Phil Davis) betraying him to the rival mob before subsequently killing him. He also marries Rose so as to remove the

possibility (mistrusting her desperate love for him) of being testified against in court.

Despite becoming implicated in her husband's evil behaviour she manages to cling onto some of her Catholic observances, continuing to pray and going to church. When Pinkie declares: 'You're good and I'm bad. We're made for each other' she believes him, though realising that getting married in a register office puts her out of the Church's reach. On Brighton pier Rose urges her new husband to make a record of his voice. Reluctantly agreeing, he declares - unbeknown to Rose - his disgust for her.

As the underworld and police close in on him Pinkie drives Rose on a scooter to a remote cliff top. Once there, Pinkie (who has a more fervent belief in Hell than in Heaven) proposes a suicide pact despite believing that damnation will ensue. Ida combines forces with Pinkie's erstwhile crony, Dallow (Nonso Anozie) to rescue Rose. A struggle results in Pinkie falling to his death. Later, a clearly pregnant Rose listens to her husband's recording which gets stuck on the sentence 'You want me to say I love you', failing to complete the rest of his tirade against her.

### FIRST REACTIONS

- Which characters did group members find themselves identifying with, and why? Which ones were they unsympathetic towards?
- The film begins with gangs fighting one another. Pinkie avenges the death of his leader. What at first appears to be loyalty to a mate's memory gives way to a realisation that Pinkie is just a vicious character. What explanation can we offer for this ex-choir boy's attitude to others?
- There are several references to prayer: Pinkie on the beach, Rose asking for forgiveness in church, etc.

What do you think the characters are hoping to receive by way of a response?

- Which scene or themes do you most want to talk about?

### INTERACTIONS

- The decision to transpose the story to 1964 (just as the previous film version moved Graham Greene's 1938-set novel to 1947) suggests the issues it raises are timeless.
  - Which of the many events occurring in society in 1964 (e.g. President Kennedy's assassination, a sexual revolution; the Civil Rights Movement; Mods and Rockers; the Honest to God debate etc.) may have led people to thinking again about good, evil, justice, morals? Try and think of other significant things around that time that may have influenced the way people then saw things. What key events and factors are influencing us today?
- Even if he wanted to, Rowan Joffe felt it impossible to remove from the film Catholic understandings at that time of sin, guilt, forgiveness, damnation, etc. without making the story meaningless. Also, the Roman Catholic Church was in 1964 in the midst of holding its Second Vatican Council. Many would say this led to rediscovering a more loving, forgiving dimension to faith than the fire and brimstone outlook of Pinkie and Rose.
  - What in the film gives us an indication (in the words of a Bob Dylan song of that year) that 'the times they are a'changing'?
- Ida, in order to protect Rose from ruining her life, tries to enlist the local gangland chief Colleoni to have Pinkie "removed".
  - Is this a case of the end (murder) justifying the means (the saving of Rose)? Can you think of any circumstances when something like this is morally permissible?
  - **Read 2 Samuel 18.1–17** What relevance to this question is the assassination of the rebellious Absalom who had capitalised on the unrest among his father King David's subjects? Are we to take it that the Bible sees Absalom's death by David's men (who countermanded his instructions to deal gently with him) to be the best and right action under difficult circumstances?
- Ida's bookie friend, Phil Corkery (John Hurt), at the end of the picture marvels that Nature, so he believes, has planted love in every man jack of us. If so, where was (or what happened to) the love implanted in Pinkie? How would you explain or justify a similar claim in **Genesis 1.26–28**? What do these verses tell us about being made in the image of a loving God?
- In one scene Colleoni states that we are between two eternities, presumably meaning Heaven and Hell. The question is whether we can affect our ultimate destiny by behaving or misbehaving. Rose thinks people change but Ida doesn't. Human nature, she claims, is like those sticks of rock. Bite one all the way down, you'll still read Brighton'. Who do you agree with and why? Which side of the argument do you think Pinkie sides with?

### SCENE TO DISCUSS

Pinkie is afraid Rose will tell the police about his gang's involvement with Hale immediately prior to his murder, especially if she collects an incriminating picture from the seaside photographer's shop. Pinkie seeks Rose out and pretends to be attracted to her.

She quickly falls in love with him. They go out on a date where they dance together. The song we hear on the soundtrack is almost all of Doris Day's version of 'I'll Never Stop Loving You'.

- The song doesn't appear in Graham Greene's novel of 1938 because these lyrics of Sammy Cahn were first heard on the 1955 Doris Day recording. Of all the music Pinkie and Rose could have danced to why is this particular song inserted into the film version? To what is the director drawing our attention? Can you think of other songs that would have fitted in with this scene?
- What is the scene telling us about Rose's feelings and those of Pinkie? How quickly do you consider it possible to love somebody else in the way Rose does? What other emotions may be involved and how do you distinguish them from love? More profoundly, given the religious nature of the film, is the song letting us hear not just about human feelings but God's eternal love, even for characters like Pinkie? Which of these biblical quotes best throws light on the subject for you: **Matthew 7.13–14** (about destruction and loss); or **Luke 23.32–34** (forgiveness even for those doing terrible things to the Son of God).

### OTHER ANGLES TO TALK ABOUT

Unlike the book, the film opts for a supposedly less bitter ending. In the novel it is made clear that Rose hears Pinkie's hateful recording in its entirety. This film version mimics the 1947 one (mainly written by and sanctioned by Greene). The needle sticks, leaving the impression that Pinkie is about to say he loves Rose. Greene believed that even in the film adaptation Rose would eventually manage to play the rest of the record and discover 'the worst horror of all'.

- Do you think this makes the film(s) crueller than the book? Or is the angelic chorus and camera pointing upward towards a crucifix intended to apply the Mother Superior's words – 'You and I cannot fathom the appalling strangeness of the mercy of God' – to the fact that Rose will never know the ugly truth about Pinkie's hatred?
- Which of these two endings would you have chosen, and why?

*Stephen Brown is an Anglican priest, group trainer and internationally known authority on feature films. He regularly broadcasts, teaches and writes for the Church Times and others about films.*

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