

Brighton Rock Study Notes



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Directed by: Rowan Joffe
Certificate: 15
Running time: 111 mins
Release date: 4 February 2011

Synopsis:

It is 1964 and seventeen-year-old Pinkie Brown is fully immersed in the violence and corruption of Brighton's gangs. He brutally murders a rival, Fred Hale, as an act of vengeance but quickly realises that he may have left a trail that leaves him extremely vulnerable. A nervous waitress, Rose, could ruin everything for Pinkie and he must decide how best to keep her quiet.

These Study Notes are suitable for students of Media, Film and English and related subjects at GCSE, A Level and equivalent.

Before Viewing

Brighton Rock is a new adaptation of a 1938 novel by Graham Greene. The novel has previously been adapted for the screen in the classic 1947 version directed by John Boulting. The director, Rowan Joffe may have been drawn to the novel because of what is widely recognised as Greene's cinematic writing style.

- What would your attitude be towards watching a 1947 black and white film? To what extent do you agree that films need to be re-made (or novels re-adapted) if their stories are going to live on for young audiences?
- What do you think is meant by a 'cinematic writing style'? Look at the novel and see if you can identify some examples of this style.

After Viewing

A New Time Period

The film sets the action in 1964 rather than the late 1930s, when the novel was written. 1964 saw many instances of violence between gangs of mods and rockers. This violence forms a backdrop to the main narrative in the film.

- Why do you think Joffe decided to change the setting of the film in this way?
- Do the 'mods and rockers' scenes simply adorn the film or could you argue that they contribute substantially to the impact of the film and its ideas?
- Joffe has said that he tried to write a treatment that set the story in contemporary Britain. Why do you think he discovered that this simply did not work?
- Look carefully at promotional posters for the film on the internet. To what extent is it possible to identify the film's time period from the posters? What do you think this tells us about the marketing strategy, particularly as far as young people are concerned?

Setting and Production Design

Peter Bradshaw in *The Guardian* describes the setting as '*A tatty, cosmically temporary day-trippers' and dirty-weekenders' sort of place, whose promised pleasures always turn out to be fleeting and disappointing like a pier, giving way to desperate ennui in the face of death, lapping eternally like Brighton's deeply uninviting sea.*'¹

- How important do you think the setting and production design are in terms of the film's overall impact? Could the film work equally well in a large city like London?
- Pinkie's violent murder of Fred Hale is intercut with shots of deckchairs and children bouncing on trampolines. How does this juxtaposition fit with the overall representation of Brighton and the film's ideas of innocence and corruption?
- Compare the design of the hotel and the dark and dingy rooms occupied by Pinkie's gang. How are these scenes shot differently? What does this contrast say about the competing claims of the two gangs and the contrast between the old world and the new?

Rose

Joffe has argued that 1964 was a particularly important year in what is sometimes referred to as '*the invention of the teenager*'. This was a time when young people swept the old world aside as they embraced new-found sexual freedoms. As Colleoni says in the film 'Brighton's on the move...She's not what she used to be'.

- In what ways does the character of Rose embody this move from the old world to the modern world?
- How is she transformed as the film develops?
- What role does costume and make-up have in emphasising her blossoming sexuality?

Joffe suggests that in the 1947 film version Rose was a very passive character; Joffe aimed to create a more rounded and developed Rose in his version of the film. Write a character sketch for Rose which Joffe might have prepared for his actress, Andrea Riseborough, in which you outline some of the motivations and feelings at work in her relationship with Pinkie.

The Ending

The film has been criticised in some quarters for imitating the closing shots of the 1947 film rather than remaining true to the novel.² At the end of the novel, Rose is on her way to listen to Pinkie's recording and to face 'the worst horror of all'. There is no reprieve. The record getting stuck on the words 'I love you' is not in the novel and was introduced by Greene (who wrote the screenplay) after some pressure from the censor.

- What did you feel the ending signified? In particular, what do you understand by the camera moving from the record player to the cross on the wall?
- Why do you think Joffe preferred to end like this, rather than, as in the novel, with Rose bleakly facing 'the worst horror of all'?

1. Peter Bradshaw's review of *Brighton Rock*, available at
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2011/feb/03/brighton-rock-review>

2. Andrew M Brown 'The mystery of what happened to *Brighton Rock*'s harrowing ending', available at
<http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/news/andrewmcfbrown/100073571/the-mystery-of-what-happened-to-brighton-rocks-harrowing-ending/>

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