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Organised Crime in Inter-war Britain and its Impact on Society

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# ZADÁNÍ BAKALÁŘSKÉ PRÁCE

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## Zásady pro vypracování

Student se ve své bakalářské práci zaměří na Britskou historii mezi válkami, společenské dění a jeho dopady na život ve společnosti, zejména vyústění ve vzestup organizovaného zločinu. Při analýze bude využívat román Brighton Rock od Grahama Greena.

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Prohlašuji:

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**TITLE**

Organised Crime in Inter-war Britain and its Impact on Society

**ANNOTATION**

This bachelor thesis focuses on the inter-war period in Britain. The theoretical part's main aim is to show the reader what the life in inter-war Britain's society was like. It deals with the worldwide economic crisis and how it affected the people, consequences of war and most importantly the rise of organised crime gangs which is the main concern of the second chapter. The analytical part tries to point out the similarities and differences between the popular novel *Brighton Rock* and the real events. It comments on the historical associations, gang culture and on the stereotypes based on the character descriptions and actions in the novel.

**KEYWORDS**

Organised crime, Gangs, Brighton, Sabini, Racecourse, Inter-war Britain, Graham Greene

**NÁZEV PRÁCE**

Organizovaný zločin v meziválečné Británii a dopad na společnost

**ANOTACE**

Tato bakalářská práce se soustředí na meziválečné období v Británii. Hlavní cíl teoretické práce je nastínit čtenářům jaký byl život ve společnosti meziválečné Británie. Práce se zabývá celosvětovou ekonomickou krizí a jakým způsobem ovlivnila obyvatele, důsledky první světové války a v neposlední řadě vzestupem organizovaného zločinu, jenž je hlavním tématem druhé kapitoly. Analytická část se snaží poukázat na společné, či rozdílné rysy mezi románem *Brighton Rock* a skutečnými událostmi v Británii. Poukazuje na historické asociace, život gangsterů a na stereotypy, které jsou vyobrazeny pomocí charakteristik postav nebo jejich jednáním v románu.

**KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA**

Organizovaný zločin, gangy, Brighton, Sabini, závodiště, meziválečná Británie, Graham Greene

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## **Introduction**

This Bachelor's thesis should serve as an insight into the life in the interwar Britain and how the society was influenced by the rising organised crime groups. To illustrate this topic, the novel *Brighton Rock* by Graham Greene is used as a primary source which will link the story with the real events happening in the interwar Britain. The thesis is divided into two parts, the theoretical part and the analysis of the book, and each of the parts is divided into two chapters which cover the topic in greater details.

First chapter focuses on the historical events which shaped the British society throughout the years. Starting with the first world war, which brought the overall social degeneration and tension, the economic crisis and unemployment that invoked a social distrust in the government or the consequences of the crash of the New York's stock market which launched the devastating years of Great Depression. Furthermore it discusses the political situation in Britain and its attempts to settle the angry public down.

Additionally, this chapter deals with women rights activism as the first rebellion against the government in the vision of change. Last but not least, the thesis comments on the background of the interwar literature, Graham Greene himself and slightly on the rise of detective stories in literature and its connection to the novel.

The second chapter focuses on the rising organised crime and the gang activity in Britain. Firstly it familiarises the reader with the first notorious gangs in British cities and comments on their ways of functioning. This chapter comments on the impact on the society caused by the ongoing gang activity and the ways of earning money such as: illegal betting, protection rackets and running illegal businesses, on their violent ways of earning respect and fierce turf wars to extend their territories. Sabini and his gang activity will be described in greater details and will serve as a main source of comparison with the gang mentioned in the novel.

The third chapter focuses on the analysis of the book and compares it with the events from the real world in the interwar Britain. It also comments on Graham Greene's personal ideas put into the novel, such as his devotion to Roman Catholic church, criticism towards the interwar period and stereotypes of the characters. The main aim of this chapter is to connect the events happening in the book with accurate historical course of events, concerning: poverty, the criminal underground, social life and stereotypes coming from the period.

Last chapter will delve deeper into the individual characters of *Brighton Rock* and explore how they relate to the real-life stereotypes of interwar period. This part is going to comment on the gender roles, public's view on the criminal underground and the insight into it. Furthermore, the characters will serve as representatives of the real world people. And lastly, the chapter is going to comment on the characters and their representation of the main themes of the novel.



# 1. The Historical Background

As the Great War reached its end in 1918, the whole Europe, including Great Britain, was left in a desolate state. The war had a significant impact on the economic situation of the country and the overall social disrupt. As Marwick states, British society experienced a “moral evil” and “social degeneracy” due to the involvement in war.<sup>1</sup> Especially since the Great war is considered to be one of the largest conflicts in modern history. The social disrupt, however, went hand in hand with the economic problems, since one of the greatest problems the war brought, was the significant rise of unemployment.

## 1.1. Economic Situation

The unemployment was caused mainly by the British dependence of exporting their goods into the world, such as: cotton textiles, coal, iron and steel, with the other industries that Britain could offer to the rest of the world, including: shipbuilding or engineering.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately the export was severely damaged by the conflict, which lead to stagnation of the trades, therefore the commodities could not be exported. Richardson points out the significance of the trade stagnation mainly in the shipbuilding area, as Britain was the world’s greatest shipping nation and the second largest exporter of ships.<sup>3</sup> And since the largest industry in Britain stagnated, many people suddenly lost their income.

Nevertheless, war was not the only thing that caused the massive drop in economy. The other crucial element which affected the world’s economic state was the Great Depression. As if the war was not devastating enough for the economy, USA’s overproduction of their goods led to imbalance between production and demand, which consequently resulted in a crash of a stock market in 1929. Despite the fact, that this event happened in the United States, it has severely affected the rest of the world too, including the Great Britain.

Richardson presents 3 major arguments why Britain was affected by the Great Depression. The first reason was the attempt of balancing the payments. He states that the economic stress rose, however, in comparison to other states, the Britain’s depression was not that significant, so it quickly led to a subsequent recovery.<sup>4</sup> The second reason presented is already slightly

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Marwick, “The Impact of the First World War on British Society,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 3, no. 1 (1968): 53.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen V. Ward, “Interwar Britain: A Study of Government Spending, Planning, and Uneven Economic Development,” *Built Environment* 7, no. 2 (1978): 96.

<sup>3</sup> H. W. Richardson, „The Economic Significance of the Depression in Britain.“ *Journal of Contemporary History* 4, no. 4 (1969): 6.

<sup>4</sup> H. W. Richardson, „The Economic Significance of the Depression in Britain.“ *Journal of Contemporary History* 4, no. 4 (1969): 3.

described in the previous lines, here Richardson comments on the the problem with the rising unemployment with the fall in the investments.<sup>5</sup> These factors resulted in slowing down or even completely stopping the British economy, similarly with the collapse of exporting goods abroad, which was for Britain so significant, that they could not find any long-term solution that would lead to full recovery.<sup>6</sup> The last reason was the inability to adjust the economic views of the Britain's orthodox policies which followed the same habits from the previous decades. This lead to nothing but a short-term solutions which resulted in an inevitable failure in handling the exceptionally rare situation the world was currently in.<sup>7</sup> In contrast to Richardson, Barber summarised the reasons into 3 major arguments as well, and the reasons are relatively similar, however he points out in front, as the most significant one, the disruption of the pre-war pattern, which he claims to be caused by the war debts and the overall restoration of the country, very similarly to the depression in the United States.<sup>8</sup> The failed attempts and the inability to adapt to the current, not very pleasing, situation left the Great Britain in such state for over 10 years, however the people living there, were affected for more than just 10 years.

As mentioned before, the Great depression affected the people as well besides the economic state of the country, leaving many people jobless, thus unable to provide for their families. Those people were left to live in poverty, which naturally resulted into disease spreading such as tuberculosis etc.

Overall, the living standard of those affected by the unemployment has rapidly changed to almost "impossible" to survive. The government proposed some changes in order to support the unemployed families, however, the financial aid was insufficient and left the families in struggle. According to Gardiner, the unemployed families received a little below 30 shillings per week, however, the expenses per week topped over 35 shillings (excluding the rent), meaning the families suffered a shortage of money over 5 shillings.<sup>9</sup> These shortages of money meant that the families were forced to live a rather depressing life, since with the available expenses, families could not afford many foods such as: fresh vegetables and fruit,

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<sup>5</sup> H. W. Richardson, „The Economic Significance of the Depression in Britain.“ *Journal of Contemporary History* 4, no. 4 (1969): 3.

<sup>6</sup> H. W. Richardson, „The Economic Significance of the Depression in Britain.“ *Journal of Contemporary History* 4, no. 4 (1969): 4.

<sup>7</sup> H. W. Richardson, „The Economic Significance of the Depression in Britain.“ *Journal of Contemporary History* 4, no. 4 (1969): 4.

<sup>8</sup> L. C. Barber, "On the Origins of the Great Depression." *Southern Economic Journal* 44, no. 3 (1978): 434.

<sup>9</sup> Juliet Gardiner, *The Thirties: An Intimate History* (London: Harper Press, 2010),68.

meat or fish and had to survive on bread, potatoes and tea. The lack of nutrients and imbalanced diet led to weakening of immunity and subsequent death of starvation. Life in the British streets was miserable and with the lack of much needed help the people were hopeless which obviously led to distrust in the government.

One of the attempts to fix the economic problems was the restoration of the British currency to the gold standard as it used to be before the war. However, this attempt was not as successful as the economists expected, since the gold price was over estimated, meaning the planned recovery was immediately slowed down again. The idea of lowering wages to the employees working in the exporting industries was not a great move either, since it only increased the poverty rates and the overall social tension.

There were several attempts to soothe the burning issue of the unemployment in major British industries caused by the war and the Great Depression, where each industry was treated in a slightly different way. For instance in the coal industry, government brought the idea of trade agreement with certain countries which increased the coal exports to a certain level, however, the industry was greatly challenged by other coal exporting countries. The final solution to the coal industry was the nationalisation for a five year period.

Regarding the steel and iron, this industry was given a tariff protection which should have helped the industry to restore itself, but this also was not very successful, since the industry failed to adapt. The crucial factor relieving the tension in this particular industry was the agreement with the Continental Steel Cartel which helped the industry to restore again.

Other industries were aided by the loans provided by the government which resulted in a partial restoration and decrease of the unemployment. However, as the major and the most significant action against the unemployment was the Building Boom.<sup>10</sup> The Building boom plan started in 1932 and is considered to be the the main factor which brought Great Britain out of the depression.

Thanks to the actions made by the government helping out the industries, by the end of 1937 the level of unemployment has decreased to almost the same level as it used to be before the depression started.

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<sup>10</sup> "Economic Recovery in Great Britain," CQ Researcher, last modified 2022, <https://library.cqpress.com/cqresearcher/document.php?id=cqresrre1938042800#:~:text=A%20building%20boom%2C%20which%20began,Britain%20out%20of%20the%20depression.>

## 1.2. Politics and the Suffrage Movement

Regarding the politics in the interwar Britain, the Conservatives remained in the charge, however there was a significant rise of the Labour party which, according to BBC, gained the citizens trust by the supporting the old people and more importantly the unemployed ones.<sup>11</sup> Thanks to their support, they surpassed the Liberals after the war, as the main opposition to the Conservative party. Later, in 1924 Labour party even formed the their first government with Ramsay McDonald as the first Labour party Prime Minister. However, the labour party did not stay in charge for long, because several years later, to be more exact in 1935, the Conservatives regained the trust, and dominated the government again.

Another significant change in the interwar Britain worth mentioning is the right to vote, given to women who are at least at the age of 30. The right to vote was achieved by the constant pressure of the Suffragettes, who were a huge part of the “Vote for Women” campaign. However, suffrage was not always associated to women activists. According to Jessie Kratz, suffrage originated from the so called “Universal suffrage” which was used as a support for the African-American to receive a right to vote.<sup>12</sup> The word suffrage came from a Latin word *suffragium*, which means a privilege to vote, which simply describes the whole suffrage movement.

The importance of the suffrage movement will be shown in the the following chapters, since the suffragettes and a group is basically another organised crime group. In this case, not as a criminal “gang” which would participate in theft or other criminal activities, however, there is no doubt that it indeed was an organised group specialised in rebellion against the state authorities.

Most of the sources agree, that the suffrage movement, and the first suffragette in Britain, started with Emmeline Pankhurst. According to UK Parliament website, Emmeline was an active suffragette since 1880’s, but the most significant movement was the Women’s Social and Political Union, also known as WSPU, group that she found in 1903.<sup>13</sup> WSPU was a

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<sup>11</sup> „Why the Liberals Introduced Social Welfare Reforms,” BBC, last modified 2022, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/z83ggk7/revision/9>.

<sup>12</sup> “Pieces of History,” What is Suffrage, National Archives, last modified May 14, 2019, <https://prologue.blogs.archives.gov/2019/05/14/what-is-suffrage/#:~:text=The%20term%20%E2%80%9Csuffragettes%E2%80%9D%20originated%20in,it%20from%20its%20pejorative%20use.>

<sup>13</sup> “Start of the Suffragette Movement,” UK Parliament, last modified 2022, <https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/electionsvoting/womenvote/overview/startsofsuffragette-/>.

group limited to only women as members, organising several strikes and protests fighting for their rights. Emmeline herself attended most of the protests and even was imprisoned for organising such protests. Just protesting, however, was not enough to claim the women's rights, so Emmeline organised a rather "radical protest": a "rush" on Parliament in 1908. According to a website dealing with the suffrage movement, over 60.000 people gathered and tried to invade the House of Commons but the police prevented the "invaders".<sup>14</sup> Despite the unsuccessful attempt to invade the House of Commons and many of the members arrested and imprisoned, this action attracted attention, which was crucial for this movement to work out the way they intended and a couple of years later the women finally receive their rights to vote.

Very close to this topic are the social expectations which women faced during the mid-war period. Despite proving what women were capable of, since they substituted men in wide variety of jobs during the first world war, they were still considered to be not fit for most of the jobs and had to work somewhere more suitable for them. These "women's work" were mainly assembly lines, laundry, drink and food industries and paperwork. Despite the very little range of professions they could choose from they faced underpayment and according to "marriage bar" after getting married they had to give up their posts and become a house keeper who would look after her children. According to a website only about 10% married women were actually working, while the rest were home and taking care of the house.<sup>15</sup> Taking care of the house was however no walk in a park, since washing machines and other appliances were a luxury the house work was time consuming and hard.

### **1.3. Literary Background**

Since the topic of this thesis is an analysis of a book, it is important to characterise the mid-war period from the literary perspective as well. Literature is being influenced over time by various movements or events happening throughout the history so it is not surprising that the Great War had a great impact on the literature and the authors. Britain, as one of the main participant of the bloodbath happening between 1914 and 1918, was no exception when it comes to the influence of literature.

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<sup>14</sup> "Start of the Suffragette Movement," UK Parliament, last modified 2022, <https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/electionsvoting/womenvote/overview/startsofthesuffragette/>.

<sup>15</sup> "The Inter-war Years: 1918 - 1939," Striking Women, last modified 2022, <https://www.striking-women.org/module/women-and-work/inter-war-years-1918-1939#:~:text=By%20the%201930s%20about%20one,was%20exclusively%20'women's%20work.>

The first works that can be considered as “influenced by war” were written during the conflict by the soldiers themselves. One of the most famous writers was Rupert Brooke who is known for his sonnets he wrote during the first years of the war that included “The Soldier”.<sup>16</sup> However, Rupert did not experience any praise for his work since he did not survive the conflict and died on the battleground. As gruesome as the war was, there is no doubt that it affected the literature even after the war. Probably the most known novel describing the terrors of the war was Remarque’s *All Quiet on the Western Front*.

To stay within the Great Britain, it is necessary to mention Virginia Woolf who focused on the impact on the society. For instance, her novel *Mrs. Dalloway* describes the life of the survivors affected by the shell shock (nowadays known as post-traumatic stress disorder).

As previously mentioned, the impact on the society caused by the war was enormous and apart from the poems and novels about the trench warfare, a new literary movement emerged, the modernism. Amanda Onion describes modernism as “a genre which broke with traditional ways of writing” that refuses to write about the romantic views, instead it focuses on the inner self of the characters.<sup>17</sup> Modernism describes the post war vision of the affected society, as in the most known works connected to this genre, such as Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, *Ulysses* by James Joyce, or Eliot’s *The Waste Land*. While European’s literature was devastated by the war and focused mainly on the negativity, American literature was quite the opposite. The 20’s in the USA are connected to the prosperity and the high morale which is perfectly described in Fitzgerald’s *Great Gatsby*.

Regarding Graham Greene’s *Brighton Rock*, it is considered to be a part of the modernist work, however, it also has thriller, crime story and detective fiction/detective novel features included. Since the analysis of this piece of work will be focused mainly on the “bad side” of the criminal activity, the detective fiction will be described just briefly.

Detective stories have been there since a long time ago, George Grella claims that the first appearance of the features connected to the detective fiction date back to Edgar Allan Poe.<sup>18</sup> Thanks to his works, such as *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* or *The Mystery of Marie Rogêt* he is considered to be the “Father of detective fiction”.

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<sup>16</sup> „How World War I Changed Literature,” The History Channel, last modified April 7, 2021, How World War I Changed Literature – HISTORY.

<sup>17</sup> „How World War I Changed Literature,” The History Channel, last modified April 7, 2021, How World War I Changed Literature – HISTORY.

<sup>18</sup> George Grella, „Murder and Manners: The Formal Detective Novel.” *A Forum on Fiction* 4, no. 1 (1970): 30.

In Britain, detective stories reached popularity between 1920's and 1930's when they achieved the greatest consumption by readers of all time. This period was called the Golden age of the detective story, bringing Hercule Poirot or Sherlock Holmes in the spotlight.

Regarding the main characters, the detectives, there was a pretty simple description that connected most of them. For example fighting against the crime by themselves (or with a partner) while the police is unable to solve the crime or being capable of solving the mystery by using their common sense or noticing tiny details which police was unable to notice.

As mentioned before, detective fiction as a genre does not play a major role in the following analysis of the literary work, however, Graham Greene's way of writing surely does. In his books, including *Brighton Rock*, are many themes which are being consulted and questioned. One of those is an influence of religion, to be more exact Catholicism. Catholicism is a key theme to many of his works including the *Brighton Rock* and even Graham Greene's personal life, since he got baptised after marrying his wife Vivien. Similar importance of Catholicism goes for the characters in *Brighton Rock*.

Other important themes in his art works are: pride and ambition, innocence versus experience and sex and shame. All these themes are included in his book and revolve around the main characters. Since this topic is more of a comparison of the book and Graham Greene's ideas, rather than a part of the historical and literal background it will be discussed in greater detail in the next parts where the book is being analysed.

## **2. The Criminal Underworld and Organised Crime**

As discussed in the previous chapter, in the mid-war period Great Britain was not the in the greatest state. Considering the post-war trauma the society was experiencing, the economic problems with poverty and unemployment, it is no wonder that the crime rate rose significantly over the years. However, the crime as we might perceive as robberies and violence was not only connected with those, there was something more complex. The mid-war period is characterised as an organised crime or a gang period.

Speaking of organised crime, mafia or gangs, many people would probably imagine formally clothed men with guns, doing illegal businesses such as selling drugs or alcohol, as seen in the movies. The organised crime, however, did not start as a way of doing an illegal business, nor does it originate in the twenties, to look for the origins of the organised crime and so called gangs, it is needed to go much deeper into the history.

### **2.1. History of Organised Crime**

The following pages will be discussing the first organised crime groups which had a great impact on the society and the state of the Britain. The individual gangs will be described in order to create an idea for the reader how the gangs functioned and how they developed in time, until the gangs became what we perceive as a “gang” nowadays. The other reason of discussing this topic is to create a contrast to the gang which plays a major role in Greene’s book. The similarities and differences will be once again discussed more thoroughly in the actual analysis of Greene’s *Brighton Rock*.

The first mentions of organised crime in Britain date back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. According to Alex Cox the rise of the crime happened due to the massive urbanisation.<sup>19</sup> The reason why people abandoned the rural life was the great advance in technology, this so called industrial revolution changed the life of the society. Millions of people who used to live an agricultural life were now flooding the streets of the cities which meant that there will not be enough working positions to everyone. This meant that slums in the cities were rapidly expanding and despite that were still very often overcrowded. These so called slums were usually “melting pots” of people from different ethnicities, races and religions. Since life in slums was not exactly easy and it was pretty much impossible to find a job and escape this miserable life,

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<sup>19</sup> „The Criminal Gangs of 19th Century Britain,“ Find My Past, last modified July 8, 2015, The Criminal Gangs of 19th Century Britain | Blog | findmypast.com.



many people realised that crime could be the answer, since it was way easier than finding a job and more profitable than just sitting down and accepting the fate.

It was the first time when newspaper commented on something such as “organised crime”, street gangs were emerging from the slums and the first gang wars started in order to claim their territories. One of the first and the most known organised crime groups were The Forty Elephants, also known as The Forty Thieves. This group was an all-female gang roaming the streets of London during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. According to Alex Cox, the members of this group were mainly shoplifters and occasional “smash and grab raiders”, or at least that is what the press called them.<sup>20</sup> However they specialised in all kinds of criminal activities.

The first mention about the Forty Elephants in the press was in the 1873, however it is believed that they were active since the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. They worked together with the Elephant and the Castle gangs who were the main gangs ruling the London’s underworlds in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Just like “modern” gangs or mafia families had their leader, boss or godfather, Forty Elephants had their own hierarchy as well. Their leader was so called Diamond Annie who according to Cox was considered a “queen of gangs” by the age of 20.<sup>21</sup> According to police and press, she was considered to be the cleverest criminal and a very effective leader, since she was capable of consecutively raiding multiple shops. The nickname Diamond Annie did not come from any successful heist of stealing diamond jewellery, it came from the lethal punches she delivered with her diamond ring. This proves how the London streets were violent when it came to war between gangs, mainly because of territorial reasons. When a member from a different gang entered their claimed land, they were forced to pay a fee for “trespassing” or kidnapped and severely beaten for disobeying the rules.

As an all-female gang, along some disadvantages, it also brought many advantages, one of which was the unpredictability and avoiding detection. Since they were very often clothed in nice dress, they looked and acted as rich and respectable women so no one would think they came to steal. This method was so clever that it usually took many minutes after their fleeing when the shopkeeper realised he was robbed. Shoplifting was, however, not the only area

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<sup>20</sup> „The Criminal Gangs of 19th Century Britain,“ Find My Past, last modified July 8, 2015, The Criminal Gangs of 19th Century Britain | Blog | findmypast.com.

<sup>21</sup> „The Criminal Gangs of 19th Century Britain,“ Find My Past, last modified July 8, 2015, The Criminal Gangs of 19th Century Britain | Blog | findmypast.com.

where they used their unsuspecting look, they also very often disguised as housemaids and stole from wealthy families without being the suspect.

The cleverest of thieves, as the police called them, was not earned by no accident, since their raids and shoplifting were well-planned to the deepest detail. The cunningness they worked with was unbelievable, for example in police records it is said that the robber used a fake hand to steal with the one hidden in her coat without being detected.<sup>22</sup> Fake hands is, however, one of the many smart methods they used while stealing, the ones worth mentioning are for instance visiting a jewellery shop, trying on an expensive piece, then the other member would come in with an identical replica and replace it with the original jewel. The other and probably even the most used method was wearing a specially modified clothes (mostly skirts) with hidden pockets where they would put the stolen goods and leave without being suspected.

Annie was known for the strict rules her followers had to follow, such as no drinking before raids, going to sleep very early and providing alibi for other members who were captured by the police, however, the set of strict rules led to her downfall. It all began when a member of her gang fell in love with a man, which enraged Annie, since it could mean that she would run away with her new man. When she got pregnant, Annie decided to convince her mates to break into the house of the girl and beat the man to death. This process did not end well for Annie, since the police intervened and arrested the participants including Annie.

London was indeed not the only city in Britain which was challenged by the criminal underground. Gangs were formed in most of the industrial cities throughout the whole country and apart from the infamous Elephants in London there were many others whose names were written down in history.

One of the many notoriously known gangs are the Scuttlers from Manchester who were mainly young men formed mostly in working-class areas. Since the Britain abolished the child's labour in 1933 the children were not able to help their families with earning money. This obviously lead to many youngsters roaming the streets and without the supervision of parents, who were all day at work, they adapted to the streets and started with petty crimes such as theft, however, theft consequently developed into something greater. In comparison to

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<sup>22</sup> „Diamond Annie And The Forty Elephants Tormented London With Their All-Female Gang,“ Ranker, last modified September 23, 2021, Diamond Annie And The Forty Elephants: London's Ruthless All-Female Gang (ranker.com).

the Elephants who disguised themselves as little suspicious as possible, the Scuttlers were quite the opposite. They had their own dress code which consisted of brass-tipped pointed clogs, bell bottomed trousers and colourful scarfs. Apart from a certain dress code, they were also recognised for carrying all sorts of weapons from knives (which were their most common weapon) to heavy belts which were sharpened in order to cause severe injuries. According to BBC, their main concern was not raiding or shoplifting, their way of functioning was almost purely territorial, meaning they fought mainly for social status in the particular part of the city.<sup>23</sup> These so called turf wars between Scuttler gangs were so intense and widespread that in 1879 about 500 Scuttlers participated in a conflict. Scuttlers reached their peak in 1890's, the press considered this period the "peak" because young people were imprisoned for scuttling more than for any other reason. Andrew Davies says that there is a very close connection between Scuttlers and nowadays football gangs, or at least their way of functioning in society<sup>24</sup> The connection is apparent because of the similar territorial and status pride and the importance of fashion.

The Scuttlers were a great problem for society and it was necessary to step in. In 1890's people developed a "Lads' club" which encouraged young people to study, learn some crafts or practically anything to prevent them from straying from the path of a well-ordered citizen on a path of criminality and gangs . This movement was very successful and managed to wipe out a great part of young Scuttlers especially thanks to engagement in sports, mainly football.

Meanwhile in Liverpool a different gang was rising with different kind of ways of functioning in comparison to the other two mentioned. While Scuttlers were fighting in the streets mainly for status and turf, these so called High Rippers from Liverpool were a danger to the whole Liverpool society. The first mentions of the High Rip Gang which started the stream of constant public fear come from the 1884 where the members of this very gang stabbed to death a Spanish Sailor who they attempted to mug.

The way the members of the gang lived and "earned" money was very similar to the other gangs mentioned before, from robberies and mugging to violent wars between gangs, however, they stood out in the way how violently they performed during these actions. It is no wonder that they were the most feared gang in Liverpool at that time, since extreme violence

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<sup>23</sup> „The Scuttlers of Manchester,“ BBC, last modified November 11, 2008, BBC - Manchester - History - The Scuttlers of Manchester.

<sup>24</sup> „The Scuttlers of Manchester,“ BBC, last modified November 11, 2008, BBC - Manchester - History - The Scuttlers of Manchester.

was their main characteristics. They were operating mostly in the dock area, where they were mugging the workers on their way home. Their extreme violence and vicious robberies were feared by the everyone but mostly the ones living near their territories, since they never knew if they are the next one to be attacked by a member of this gang.

Very similarly as the Scuttlers, High Rippers were usually armed with knives or sharpened belts to blow heavy hits that would cause severe wounds to the target. These attacks were, however, very often lethal and caused many deaths among the citizens which of course brought the attention of the press and the police. After the investigations of these murders a large number of the members were arrested and most of them even executed.

Probably the most known gang in Britain (mainly because of the recent serial story) were the Peaky Blinders from Birmingham. According to the Find my Past website, Peaky Blinders used to be rather small groups of criminals, not very organised, stealing and mugging just within the slums they were from.<sup>25</sup> However, as time went on, these small groups of thieves evolved into a huge criminal organisation which later became a criminal empire terrorising the streets of Birmingham.

In contrast to the mugging, beatings and robberies which were done by most of the group mentioned, the Peaky Blinders were more of a “modern” criminal organisation, or at least that is what people might link a criminal organisation with. The turf wars and robberies were still present but something new occurred, such as protection rackets, illegal betting and even running black markets.

The Peaky Blinders had a very similar way of clothing as the Scuttlers, in terms of recognising them, even the arming was very similar, they usually carried knives and sharpened belts but there was a “secret” weapon: a razor blade sewn to the cap which delivered an unexpected but surely a lethal blow to the enemies. In addition to melee weapons some of the members carried a firearm as well.

Gangs began to arise due to the massive urbanisation, so the streets of the industrial cities were dangerous for the citizens, however, gangs did not roam only in the streets these cities. The Cock Road gang is one of the exceptions who refused to cause chaos in the industrial parts of the country and instead focused on the rural part.

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<sup>25</sup> „The Criminal Gangs of 19th Century Britain,“ Find My Past, last modified July 8, 2015, The Criminal Gangs of 19th Century Britain | Blog | [findmypast.com](http://findmypast.com).

The Cock Road gang's specialisations were highway robberies and horse theft which were done on the road from Gloucester to Bristol where they targeted sole travellers. One of the main differences between the other gangs mentioned was their origin. Most of the gangs consisted of young men from slums but this particular gang was a fellowship of inter-married families. Find my Past website comments on the fear this group invoked in the neighbourhood that they could rob a person passing by in a daylight without any consequence, the gang knew this so they even established a protection racket for the farmers in the neighbourhood which provided them with large amounts of money.<sup>26</sup> The fear and more importantly the murders on the road caused by the gang brought the attention of the police which sent their men on a night "raid" on the criminals. This raid was successful, police managed to arrest the whole gang and after a trial most of them were imprisoned or hung.

These first gangs may have not been the exact picture of how we perceive organised crime today, however, it surely formed some sort of a pattern or a cornerstone for future gangs and mafia. Since the first gangs began to rise, a lot has changed but the main principles stayed the same: violating law in order to earn money, but one of the major things which has changed were the ways they were earning money. As previously stated most of the criminals used to rob or mug people in order to earn the money, however, in the more "modern" organised crime, the gangsters focused mainly on illegal business. Something similar could have been noticed in Britain several years ago in Birmingham, where the business was run by the Peaky Blinders, speaking of protection rackets, illegal betting etc. The past methods of earning money were still present but the business became the main source of income for the criminals, the business included prostitution, gambling and the most prominent business in the USA, providing illegal substances during the alcohol prohibition.

## **2.2. Charles Sabini**

It was during the mid-war period, around 1920 – 1930 when the British criminal underground started taking shape similar to the US or the Italian gangs. The gang activity began to rise again right after the war when Europe was in desolate state, Heather Shore claims that at that time the conflicts were mainly territorial and among the rival gangs, however, the violence in the street endangered the citizens as well.<sup>27</sup> At first, these violent gang wars were described by the press and the police as a form of terrorist act. So called racecourse (or racing) men

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<sup>26</sup> „The Criminal Gangs of 19th Century Britain,“ Find My Past, last modified July 8, 2015, The Criminal Gangs of 19th Century Britain | Blog | findmypast.com.

<sup>27</sup> Heather Shore, *London's Criminal Underworlds, c. 1720 – c. 1930* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 167.

started appearing in the newspapers as the ones being a part of these “terrorist activists”, given this name thanks to the place where they usually performed the illegal activities.

As stated before, the organised crime developed into something much more powerful, especially if compared to the thieves from city slums. The gangs started focusing on the business and very often had a great impact on the politics, despite being the “bad” side in terms of law and the racecourse men were considered to be the initial wave of the rising organised crime in Britain.

Racecourse and Charles Sabini will be an important component to the analysis of the book, since both of those play a great role in the book. To create picture for the reader, the following paragraphs are going to describe the Sabini’s imperium and his path to success, since they are crucial in the background of the book.

Organised crime worked as a “family business network” and one of the most known families closely linked to the racecourse gangs was the Sabini gang. Charles Sabini, also called Charles “Darby” Sabini was the godfather of the Little Italy in London and a “king of the racecourse gangs”. The major income to the Sabini family was thanks to the rackets for protection from the racecourse, however, Sabini was also involved in a wide range of criminal activities such as robberies, blackmailing and most importantly operating several nightclubs.

In terms of the profits, the most lucrative ways of earning money were the protection rackets for the bookmakers. Bookmakers, especially the ones on the more profitable places, were being threatened by gangs and the protection rackets or sharing a certain percentage from their sales with the protecting gang were the only way to keep their business going. According to Heather Shore, these protection rackets were seen as a “necessary evil” since the bookmakers would not have any chance to sustain.<sup>28</sup> This particular kind of business was dominated by two main gangs, the Sabinis and the Birmingham boys. Unfortunately such a competition in business between two gangs is never a good thing and this particular conflict lead to several battles for territory, since none of the gangs wanted to give up such a profitable way of earning money. The competition between these gangs escalated into a conflict that moved from the racecourse into the streets of metropolis.

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<sup>28</sup> Heather Shore, *London’s Criminal Underworlds, c. 1720 – c. 1930* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 171.

Bookmakers were the key of the racecourse “era” not only they were the major income for the gangs since they were paying for the protection but also provided the gangs with money from the betting. Betting was a great way of entertainment for ages and the post war period was not a exceptions, and thanks to the bookmakers, the public could bet from any part of town within a couple of minutes so it is no wonder that it was extremely popular among the working class. Despite the betting being illegal, the money spend on betting was not high so the police passing by was not often interested in interrupting the bets and if so, they were opened for a payoff and walk away as if nothing has ever happened. The most popular bets were bets on horse racing, nevertheless, the bets were nearly without limits. However, betting and gambling were being regulated since the beginning of gamble and racecourse betting was no exception, in 1928 the horse betting was regulated due to the “racecourse betting act” and a couple of years later in 1934 the greyhound races were regulated as well.

The rivalry between the Sabini’s gang and the Birmingham boys became more serious in 1921 when the Birmingham boys attacked and beaten a Jewish bookmaker who was a member of the Jewish gang. This attack obviously angered the Jewish community and the godfather of their gang, Edward Emanuel offered Charles Sabini an alliance in order to get rid of the Birmingham gang. Charles Sabini agreed and supported the idea.

The first incident happened in 1921 when the Birmingham gang attacked the rival gang at a racecourse. According to a website Daily mail, about 20 members of the Birmingham gang were present in the ongoing attack and in the end only members of this gang were arrested, apparently due to the bribing of the police which was done by the Jewish godfather (the Sabini’s partner).<sup>29</sup> This was, however, only the beginning of what was about to become the first major war of gangs.

Due to the further conflicts between the gang leaders such as Kimber being shot in the back or verbal insults from each sides, the streets of London turned into a violent battlefield where members of both sides were brutally beaten or stabbed. The greatest gang conflict happened months later when Birmingham gang attacked the rival gang at the Epsom Races. According to police and the press, around 100 men with primitive weaponry such as hammers or concrete bricks attacked a group of Solomon’s (the Jewish godfather) bookmakers, surprisingly no one got killed, however, 17 members of the Birmingham gang were arrested.

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<sup>29</sup> “The REAL Peaky Blinders,” Daily Mail, last modified March 14, 2022, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-10611369/How-Billy-Kimbers-Birmingham-Boys-forged-Englands-major-gangland-war.html>.

The conflict has ended when Solomon legitimised the London's gang activity which meant that their organisation was supported by the Jockey club and also the police. For Kimber this was a great loss and he had to retreat from London and leave the racecourse to Sabini. Despite Sabini's great imperium and reputation in London, even he reached his downfall. As the second world war began and the Italian fascism rose, Sabini faced (as an Italian) antisemitism and hate towards him, as he was the enemy of the Britain. He was arrested and found guilty for receiving stolen goods. After the war reached its end, Sabini's imperium was taken over by the White family, while Sabini retired and lived the rest of his life in Brighton where he worked as a bookmaker.

The previous lines should outline the history of one of the greatest godfathers and his gang of Britain, however, being a part of a gang was not only about fighting against the rival gangs and making money from the racecourse. In the following part, the other gang practices will be introduced.

As previously mentioned, protection rackets for racecourse bookmakers were the major income for the Sabini's family, yet it was not the only way of earning profits. For instance nightclubs were another great way of making money, even Charles Sabini owned some but those were not as profitable as for example in the USA. The nightclubs in USA were highly profitable because of the prohibition and since the gangs already took part in smuggling the alcohol, they realised they could also distribute it in their own local establishments. Alcohol business was the main income during the prohibition and thanks to this, gangsters managed to create a formidable imperium with the notoriously known mob boss Al Capone.

Despite the fact that the alcohol in Britain was never prohibited, local gangsters participated in smuggling alcohol as well, mainly to avoid the taxation, since the goods were not cheap. Alcohol was then sold to local bars or consumed in the nightclubs owned by the mobsters. Drugs were no difference, even Sabini has been involved in drugs, to be more specific cocaine trafficking. According to Fergus Linnane, Sabini had connections to the Italian drug gang in South America<sup>30</sup> Since cocaine was relatively new to the public and quite expensive to obtain, Sabini and other gangs involved in the drug business made fair profits.

The turf wars which were already described in the previous parts were present even in the "modern" era of gangs so violent fights with razors or guns were nothing out of the ordinary

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<sup>30</sup> Fergus Linnane, *London's Underworld: Three Centuries of Vice and Crime* (London: Robson Press, 2005), 194-195.



behaviour of the mobsters. These battles usually took place at the racecourses but the streets were not a safe space either, the ongoing attacks were happening even during bright days in front of the eyes of the public, most probably to show the strength and dominance to the rival gang and to the public. The reason behind the turf wars was simple, whoever owned the particular part of the city could claim a percentage of the profit via the protection rackets or through threats.

The fact that Sabini was more of a business man rather than a thief could be undermined by the rather violent ways of earning money. Sabini was not afraid to earn money through power aside from business, for example organising armed robberies and assaults where his gangster were not prohibited to murder which was not unusual either.

To conclude, interwar Britain has been marked by a high level of street violence and crime which unleashed the rise of gangs such as the Sabini's who was the most significant during this period. His practices have been feared by the public, yet many utilized his power in order to stay safe or to earn money, especially the ones somehow connected to the racecourse, either the bookmakers, or the gamblers.

### **3. Historical Links to Graham Greene's Novel**

This part of the thesis should comment on the Graham Greene's novel and its connections to the things happening in real life during the interwar period. It should point out the obvious links to the events which happened, or which Graham Greene could have taken inspiration from. On the other hand, things which do not have any links to the real events will be pointed out as well just for clarification.

Graham Greene's *Brighton Rock* is one of his most known novels ever written, heavily inspired by the events happening in the interwar Britain and its underworld. *Brighton Rock*, as the name hints, takes place in Brighton in the 30s. To begin with, organised crime was spread basically throughout the whole Britain, including Brighton. While the gangs in Brighton might have been not so prominent and well known, it did not mean that the organised crime was not present. Despite never being classified as a mainly industrial city, Brighton, as any other highly populated placed faced a very similar problem during the interwar period. As already mentioned in the previous part with the ongoing crisis, many people strayed from the path of a fair citizen onto a path of crime and vice. One of the gangs which were a bit more known in Brighton were the Razors, which could be an inspiring gang for this very novel. The Razors, as any other gang during this period, specialised in extortion, prostitution, illegal gambling and the fierce razor attacks which is most probably the reason behind their name. The Razor gang, under Colleoni's management, is one of the key components in the novel, they serve as a rival gang to the Pinkie's gang and as a source of an important event happening: since their attack with razors on the main character set off a series of events that drive the plot of the novel. It is not explicitly said in the novel, that the Razors are present, however it is highly possible that Greene could have used them as an inspiration for the rival gang.

Graham Greene sort of personalised himself in this novel, as many of his other novels, to be more exact has embedded his ideology when it comes to Christian beliefs. His Catholic manners and ideas were already mentioned in the first part of this thesis, however, it is important to mention it here as well, since this part is connected to the book. His Catholic beliefs are implemented in the characters and play a crucial role throughout the whole book, since it is one of the most important themes. He admits so in the introduction part before the

story begins.<sup>31</sup> The importance of the Catholic manners will be described in more detail in the next part where the connection is made with the individual characters.

In terms of the social and historical standards, the book does not stray from the reality that much, even despite the fact that Graham Greene himself says in the introduction, that depicting the real world is not his intention. When it comes to female characters, there is pretty much no difference with the social standards in the interwar Britain. Regarding the jobs, the women presented in the book stand for the classic “women’s work” as said in the previous parts. For example: the ladies in the restaurant where Pinkie went to find the card. Food services were one of the most common working positions occupied by women during the interwar period and even before. The other working position mentioned is most probably a clergy work according to the description of the workplace, once again another work mostly for women, however, in comparison to the food service, paperwork was one of the positions which was more opened for women after the first world war.

Despite the fact that women were mostly submissive and obedient, Greene points out the exceptions and criticises them. For instance he criticises the women at the beach for their manipulative behaviour and seduction of strangers coming through. This can be noticed in the beginning of the novel where Fred Hale is trying to convince the ladies to come with him, so he would be safe from Pinkie. Ida Arnold is depicted in a similar way, since she can use her sexuality and charm in order to get what she wants or needs. One of those situations could be persuading Phil to help her to gather information against Pinkie and his gang and overall help her with the investigation.

Green can be also criticising women for being somehow responsible for men’s sins. The greatest representative of this criticism is Rose who battles with her surroundings, mainly with Ida who is trying to help. Rose is being punished for her association with Pinkie Brown, despite not knowing that he is actually the bad person and completely unaware of his criminal background.

Despite the fact, that interwar Britain was a really bad period of time, since millions of people were unemployed and many more on the verge of poverty, there is rarely any sign of poverty throughout the whole novel. The possible explanation is that Brighton was not an industrial city where people went to work but quite the opposite, as Brighton is a seaside city with

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<sup>31</sup> Graham Greene, *Brighton Rock* (London: Heinemann Press, 1970), vii – viii.

beaches and a magnificent pier it was a place for entertainment and vacation, therefore the people in the book are mostly wealthy since going on a vacation could not be afforded by everyone. This theory is supported by the behaviour and appearance of all the people present in the first part of the book as everyone is enjoying their time on the beach sunbathing or enjoying a drink at a pub.

Crime, as the main component of this novel, is introduced straight in the beginning of the novel, however, this crime is not connected to any gang activity (or at least nothing implies that it could be) but just a simple theft. Despite the fact, that criminal activity has been feared by most of the public, Ida's reaction to the theft is rather comical. "She laughed, someone pinched my bag, she said,"<sup>32</sup> this reaction could be either another proof, that Ida is no ordinary woman in the public's eye, or the social conciliation with the high crime rate. Either way Ida's reaction is very interesting especially in comparison to Fred who is scared to death just to walk on his own in the streets which is actually understandable, since in this case Fred is facing a murder as a threat.

As mentioned in the previous parts, the criminal underworld was not afraid to use brute force against the ones they intend to hurt and Fred's murder was no exception. Despite the fact that the murder is not explicitly mentioned, the reader can assume what has happened, since the plot was hinting at what was going to happen. The maliciousness and evil in the criminal's mind can be seen right where Fred disappears, in the book it is around two o'clock which means that it was bright day. There is also said that the streets around the pier were crowded, and despite all the possible obstacles, the gangsters managed to kill him without anyone noticing.

The criminal underworld has been definitely influenced by the events happening in the real world, speaking of the ways of functioning in the gangs and the characters as well. Regarding the ways of functioning and earning money it is very similar to the gangs mentioned before. Basically every gang, including Pinkie's gang, specialised in extortion (forcing Brewer to pay them for the protection racket), racketing (protection racket provided for Brewer and possibly many more), murder (murdering either Hale, Spicer or an attempt to murder Rose in the end) and rivalry with the other gangs (Colleoni taking over their "customers" or Pinkie being attacked with a razor by another gang).

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<sup>32</sup> Graham Greene, *Brighton Rock* (London: Heinemann Press, 1970), 15.

When it comes to achieving the criminal goals, there is usually a need of a weapon and Pinkie and his gang was no exception. Pinkie is carrying a razor in his pocket as his weapon instead of a gun which might be a reference to the Sabini's infamous razor attacks and leaving scars on the enemies, however, it could also be a reference to the Razor gang which functioned in Brighton. Leaving scars on the enemies of the gang is present in the book as well, there is a scene where Pinkie cuts Brewer for not paying his subscription and paying Colleoni's gang instead, or later in the book, Pinkie being scarred as well by a rival gang. There is also a mention of a gun, however, it is never mentioned to be used in the book by the Pinkie's gang until the end where Pinkie attempts to kill Rose. On the other hand there is a mention of makeshift weapons such as the vitriol which Pinkie used to intimidate Rose.<sup>33</sup> The makeshift weapons were used in many occasions when it came to committing crime, probably the most known event of using such weapons was during the London gang warfare lead by Birmingham boys against the Sabini's men and the Jewish bookmakers at the Epsom Races which was mentioned in the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter.

Pinkie as the main character could be a reference to many gangsters mentioned in the previous parts. As a 17 years old boy being a gang leader, he must have started his "career" years ago, meaning he became a part of the criminal underworld as a child or a teenager. This could refer to the Manchester's gang, the Scuttlers who were most of the time very young boys without parent's supervision and since there is no mention of Pinkie's parents it is highly possible that he got to the criminal side the same way. It is not particularly said what made him join the criminals and become the leader, the first possibility is similar to the one said before, that his parents could have been from the working class, thus not having time to supervise him, or Pinkie could have grown in poverty which could have contributed to his ambition of becoming the leader and living a "decent life".

In terms of living a decent live, it is hard to say how good or bad the situation was for criminals when it comes to finances, since the gangsters share one small room in a lodging house. Despite the room being small, owning a property was a sign of financial stability, especially since in the interwar period a large portion of people could not afford food. Pinkie's gang on the other hand could afford housing and even going into restaurants or spending money on unnecessary commodities, such as buying alcohol beverages or Pinkie inviting Rose for a dance and a drink at Sherry's.<sup>34</sup> It is hard to say if Pinkie's gang's profits

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<sup>33</sup> Graham Greene, *Brighton Rock* (London: Heinemann Press, 1970), 56.

<sup>34</sup> Graham Greene, *Brighton Rock* (London: Heinemann Press, 1970), 56.

were significant, however, in comparison to the working class it has been better, since for example Rose “had never known a boy with enough money to offer her a drink”<sup>35</sup> and suddenly Pinkie is offering her one. This could be a sign of how good their financial state was.

In terms of financial state, there were people who collaborated with gangs in order to stabilise or increase their finances, one of those is most probably Brewer. Brewer’s household is described as very posh and elegant as Pinkie walks through the door. “The light glowed on a silver-plated biscuit-box, a framed wedding group” or “He turned on the stand lamp in a red silk shade,”<sup>36</sup> this hints that Brewer is actually a rich person who earns his money through illegal betting at the racecourse, which is mentioned later in the book. This situation is very similar to the ones happening in London with Sabini, where the bookmakers had to pay for protection to stay safe from the rival gangs and in order for their business to be profitable. However, in this case it is a bit complicated, since Brewer pays two protection rackets to both Pinkie and Colleoni. This double payment and subsequent Pinkie’s attack on Brewer lead to the escalation of the situation with Pinkie’s rival gang, once again very similar to the Sabini and the Birmingham boys.

As Heather Shore said, gang activity such as protection racketeering was seen as a “necessary evil” in the public’s and the police’s view, very similar thing happens in the book, where the detective is asking Pinkie questions. “I don’t mind you carving each other up in a quiet way”<sup>37</sup> is an indication that police was aware of the gang activities happening in the city and that their only concern was to protect the decent innocent people. This could be a hint that the police was bribed by the mobsters, which could once again be a link to the Sabini’s political and police connections, or that they knew, that the crime would never vanish for good so they found it pointless to fight against it, as long as they do not harm someone who is not connected to the gang activities.

Very close to the political connections is the scene where Prewitt, the lawyer, helps Pinkie to cover up Spicer’s murder. In this case it was most definitely thanks to Pinkie’s manipulation and threats towards to the lawyer,<sup>38</sup> however, cheating the system could be done with the finances as well. While there is no sign of bribing the police in the book, in real world it was

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<sup>35</sup> Graham Greene, *Brighton Rock* (London: Heinemann Press, 1970), 57.

<sup>36</sup> Graham Greene, *Brighton Rock* (London: Heinemann Press, 1970), 66.

<sup>37</sup> Graham Greene, *Brighton Rock* (London: Heinemann Press, 1970), 80.

<sup>38</sup> Graham Greene, *Brighton Rock* (London: Heinemann Press, 1970), 152.

nothing uncommon. One of the direct evidence could be the supposed bribing of the police by Sabini, when the Birmingham boys waged a war against the bookmakers at the racecourse and none of Sabini's men was arrested after the battle.

Gangs and their members were usually very unpredictable when it came to trust between each other, especially when there was an outside threat. In the book, the distrust between the gangsters can be seen in the part where Pinkie is at the Brewer's and thinks about his mobsters who is the most trustworthy<sup>39</sup> and on the other hand who is not. Later in the book Spicer met the fate which Pinkie was afraid of, where he got killed for being a threat to the gang. Pinkie was afraid that he could not keep Hale's murder as a secret so he had to get rid of him by pushing him off the stairs, since the previous attempt at the racecourse failed.<sup>40</sup> The fear of betrayal was very common in the gangs, and this particular one was very similar to the one which happened to the Diamond Annie, several years before the book's timeline, where she attacked her member in the fear of her betraying the gang.

Same as in London under Sabini's management, racecourses were the main place for criminal activities, since the races were a great public event and bets were very popular among the people. Bookmakers making bets to hundreds of people and the provision going into the gangster's pocket, since it was very profitable and rewarding for both sides. However, bets were not the only thing happening at the racecourse, it was also a place where the mobsters were settling their business. Since the racecourses were usually very crowded thanks to the incredible popularity of the races, it was easy for the gangsters to get away with their crimes, such as turf wars or any other crime. The fact that racecourses were basically owned by gangs is seen in the book where both Pinkie and Spicer are being attacked by the Colleoni's mob which once again hints at the similarity with Sabini.

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<sup>39</sup> Graham Greene, *Brighton Rock* (London: Heinemann Press, 1970), 69.

<sup>40</sup> Graham Greene, *Brighton Rock* (London: Heinemann Press, 1970), 151- 152.

## 4. Character Analysis

*Brighton Rock* is iconic for a great and detailed depiction of the characters which are based on real characteristics and personalities which people in the interwar period had. This part is going to comment on the connections of the character's ideologies and ideas with the ones which characterised the period. The reader will be provided with the similarities and differences based on the social expectations and the overall societal view on each member of the society depicted in the book.

One of the main characters is Ida Arnold, a female character who plays the role of an investigator who fights for the reveal of the truth. Ida is introduced in the very beginning of the novel, where she meets Charles "Fred" Hale who is there to distribute the cards and who is introduced as a Kolley Kibber's man. She is described as "not old, somewhere between late thirties and early forties, confident and someone who was taking care of herself".<sup>41</sup> She was met at a bar where she was currently drinking with other customers. This exact part breaks the stereotypical social expectations of what a woman should be like. As already mentioned, the social norm for a female was a housekeeper taking care of her husband and children, Ida however is never mentioned to have children, nor to have a husband. This is never said directly but it can be assumed by her freedom of pursuing the investigation. Despite the drinking not being prohibited for women, it still was not something usual as it is for example nowadays. This once again proves that Ida was no ordinary woman, who would follow the prescribed "rules" of being stereotypical female in the interwar period.

Ida takes the role of the main protagonist as soon as she finds out about Fred's death. This part shows the very similar characteristics to the detectives such as Hercule Poirot, Miss Marple or Sherlock Holmes. The ability to connect things together which are not obvious to anyone else and noticing the details which were missed by others investigating the crime scene. It starts when she finds out in the newspaper that Fred possibly died due to exhaustion in the sun, or as the others say due to a suicide, but when she remembered his behaviour before he disappeared, she realises that there has been something much deeper going on.

Her "detective" story starts with going around and asking about Fred, whether they had seen him before and asking questions regarding his behaviour. She visits the witnesses who have seen or talked to Fred before his sudden disappearance and makes connections between the information she receives from the ones asked. As a typical detective story protagonist, she is

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<sup>41</sup> Graham Greene, *Brighton Rock* (London: Heinemann Press, 1970), 3.



determined to unveil the truth on her own, since the police department could not. The inability of the police to solve a murder case or basically any other mystery is another typical component of a detective story such as the ones mentioned before, where the main protagonist, Ida in this case, is the only one capable of solving it. The only difference is that there is a high possibility, that the police knew, who killed Hale, however, decided to keep it a secret to keep the public calm, as Fred Hale was connected to the criminal underworld. This idea is supported by the police officer's statement: "I don't mind you carving each other up in a quiet way" mentioned in the previous chapter, which indicates, that the police just did not want to escalate the situation, therefore they "solved" the mystery as a death by natural causes.

The theme of pride and ambition can be seen in Ida's story same as in Pinkie's story. Her ambitions, pride and determination drives her will to solve the case of Hale's murder and to bring justice for the ones responsible. In comparison to Pinkie, who's ambition is driven by the lust for power and obsession with control, Ida is driven by a sense of justice and the desire to do the right thing in order to help the others, one of which is convincing Rose that she joined the "wrong side".

Ida represent the theme of experience vs inexperience as well as the other two main characters. In comparison to Pinkie, Ida's experience is evident thanks to her wisdom and her previous experience with seeing the darker side of life, yet still she retain a sense of idealism and compassion towards either Rose or Fred Hale.

Pinkie Brown is the main character of *Brighton Rock*, representing the evil of the criminal underworld. Same as Ida, Pinkie is introduced in the early beginning of the novel, both are introduced as somehow connected to Fred Hale. While Ida is introduced as a kind hearted stranger to Hale, Pinkie is introduced as a 17 years old boy with malicious intents, only later we realise he is a leader of an organised crime gang and the one responsible for Fred Hale's death.

Pinkie is a very complex character with twisted morality, on one hand he is a devoted Roman Catholic on the other hand he is a cold blooded killer and a part of a criminal gang. His devotion to the church is apparent in many cases, for instance refusing any kind of alcohol when offered throughout many occasions in the book: "Have a spot of Scotch? Brewer invited

them. You know I don't drink the boy said".<sup>42</sup> While Bible does not entirely say that drinking is a sin, Roman Catholics consider alcohol consumption as a potential occasion of a sin, since it can lead to excessive drinking, which is considered as a sin in the Bible, or moral lapses while under the influence of alcohol. Pinkie himself avoids alcohol in order to avoid temptation and to maintain his spiritual purity. Pinkie views alcohol as a way of losing control which could lead to revealing important information or put him in danger.

His obsession with control and certainty can be seen in multiple occasions throughout the book, for example when going to the Snow's restaurant where Rose works on his own to find the card Spicer left there, "what if they've found him before time, it'd be crazy to go into Snow's, if nobody else'll go, I'll go".<sup>43</sup> or when lying to Rose in order to gain her trust, so she would not speak when eventually asked about Fred's death. The obsession with control and power depicts the gang leaders mentioned in previous parts, since everyone's desire was to be respected (no matter if it was thanks to his acts or just for being feared) in order to "rule" the city. Despite being a criminal, Pinkie has a soft spot for Catholicism in his heart, possibly thanks to his childhood: "Why, I was in choir once, the boy confined and suddenly he began to sing softly in his spoilt boy's voice".<sup>44</sup> This particular scene could be a great proof that Pinkie is still a good person whose path has crossed with bad people, however, it also could be just a cunning lie to gain Rose's trust a bit easier.

Despite being a coldblooded murderer and criminal, there is a sense of innocence in Pinkie which helps him to fool the others and get away with murder without being a suspect. One of the innocent features could be his age. As a seventeen years old boy with an innocent-looking face he is hardly seen as someone who would be a part of the criminal underworld and definitely not someone who would be capable of a murder. The other feature which has been already mentioned in the previous lines is his devotion to the church. It is hard to believe that a Christian could do such things, therefore it is very easy for him to gain Rose's trust and avoid any suspicion.

Gaining Rose's trust plays a great role in the story, Pinkie's main concern is to marry Rose in order to provide alibi for him and his criminal activities to avoid suspicion, such as Hale's murder. Her not saying anything to the authorities was his main reason why he started to talk with her, it all started with him lying about the card at the Snow's or later at the pier near the

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<sup>42</sup> Graham Greene, *Brighton Rock* (London: Heinemann Press, 1970), 66.

<sup>43</sup> Graham Greene, *Brighton Rock* (London: Heinemann Press, 1970), 27.

<sup>44</sup> Graham Greene, *Brighton Rock* (London: Heinemann Press, 1970), 61.

Sherry's where he warned her not to talk to anybody since the mob might be asking questions. The relationship between those two was based mainly on the Rose's innocence and Pinkie's manipulation and benefit of not being a suspect. As previously said, Pinkie's obsession with control was evident even when it comes to Rose, taking control over her and using her for his further interests and later even threatening her with violence or murder if she tried to leave him. The usage of women as a "shield" who provides alibi for the men who commit crimes reflect in the real world, as females were not very often a part of the gang, thus being more trustworthy.

Pinkie as a representative of the evil underground can be seen in almost every part of the book, one of the most cruel things could be "what would be the fun if people didn't squeal".<sup>45</sup> while talking to Rose. His behaviour and his actions could be interpreted as references to the Sabini's or any other's gang members and their methods, however, since the previous parts discuss mainly Sabini, the links will try to point towards him. In contrast to Sabini, Pinkie was no wealthy business man who would own nightclubs, or work with prostitution, nor his gangs would reach the number of members as Sabini had, on the other hand, similarities with Sabini could be seen in comparison to Colleoni who is presented as the wealthy and powerful business man who "owns" the city. It is not explicitly said, how many members Pinkie's gang have but it can be assumed that it was not many, since the only ones described here are Spicer, Dallow and Cubitt. The similar ways of money making with Sabini could be theft, extortion or protection rackets provided for example for Brewer.<sup>46</sup> Despite the fact that Pinkie's gang was in comparison to Sabini's very small, the gang was still feared, same as any other gang during the interwar Britain.

Same as any other gang leader, even Pinkie reached his downfall, and it was due to his ambitions and pride. His pride, as one of the main themes of the novel, prevents him from accepting help and advice from others. One of the many examples where Pinkie's pride was higher than his common sense was when he was invited to the rival gang's leader Colleoni.<sup>47</sup> Despite Dallow's advice not to go there, since it is extremely risky, Pinkie ignores his advice and goes there anyways, since avoiding the confrontation could be a sign of his fear and cowardice which was obviously unacceptable for Pinkie. His arrogance led to a number of

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<sup>45</sup> Graham Greene, *Brighton Rock* (London: Heinemann Press, 1970), 60.

<sup>46</sup> Graham Greene, *Brighton Rock* (London: Heinemann Press, 1970), 66.

<sup>47</sup> Graham Greene, *Brighton Rock* (London: Heinemann Press, 1970), 72.

irresponsible decisions and unnecessary risks which meant harm either for him, or to the people around.

The third main character who will be analysed is going to be Rose. Rose is the representative of inexperience and innocence in the corrupt world of evil and crime. Rose is introduced at Snow's restaurant where Pinkie went to find the card, their paths cross when Pinkie finds out that she found the card and that she could potentially be a threat to him, since she could reveal the truth about Hale's death. As an inexperienced person she is easily manipulated by Pinkie's lies and unknowingly helps him with covering Hale's murder.

Rose comes from a working class family which was according to her words very poor "Everest hadn't in all slum years offered her a choice".<sup>48</sup> or when she claimed that they could not afford newspapers as those were above their available expenses. Despite the fact that millions of people lived in poverty, Rose's background is the only mention of someone being poor.

In terms of historical associations, Rose could be representing the limited options for women during the interwar period, since she obeys the strict gender roles that defined the interwar Britain. One of the things could be the typical "women's work" as she worked as a waitress at Snow's restaurant. Additionally, she is portraying the lack of autonomy that women had during the thirties as women were expected to obey the man's decisions and were often controlled by their husbands or men in general which is exactly what is happening here with Pinkie's manipulative behaviour. The relationship with Pinkie represents one of the main themes of the novel which is the experience versus the innocence and inexperience as Rose is unaware of what is really going on due to Pinkie's lies and manipulation.

Her character as based on the interwar woman she is rather submissive and passive, yet still she craves for love and adventure to escape her ordinary life. The urge to escape the mundane life is a very common theme among female characters in literature so there is a possibility that Graham Greene was influenced by other authors. Her love life and escape from ordinary life is, as she believes, brought to her with Pinkie's appearance, however, it is all a false belief since Pinkie is not longing for love or any adventure with his partner since his only concern is her keeping him safe from the police. Her desire for love and acceptance in society is a reflection of the struggles women had to face during the interwar period in Britain.

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<sup>48</sup> Graham Greene, *Brighton Rock* (London: Heinemann Press, 1970), 58.

On one hand Rose is an innocent, naive and vulnerable character who succumbs to Pinkie's lies and manipulation on the other hand she can be viewed as a symbol of hope and good. Since she is one of the few characters who is genuinely capable of love and compassion she can be seen as a representative of the better future and redemption. While Ida represents compassion and love as well, Rose, as a young woman is representing the new generation of good. She can be viewed as an embodiment of hope for a better future and the rejection of violence and evil in the world of corruption and decay which symbolises the older generations.

As these three characters are not the only ones who somehow represent the interwar Britain's century, the following lines are going to briefly include and comment on some of the characters who played an important role as members of the British society.

Brewer is described as a wealthy businessman who used the organised crime activities in his favour. As a bookmaker, who were very commonly associated with the gangsters, he paid Pinkie and his gang a subscription for protection, so his business could thrive. As already mentioned betting was very popular among the working class men, thus very profitable and since the crime rates were very high, this cooperation was a great deal for both sides, judging by the description of Brewer's wealthy property. The problem came in when Colleoni decided to interfere into Pinkie's business with protection rackets.

Colleoni, as mentioned before, is a very wealthy mob boss who is in comparison to Pinkie pretty much untouchable. As Kite (Pinkie's gang's previous boss) died, Colleoni took this as a great opportunity to extend his territory. Territorial wars were very common in the gang environment, since territory meant more potential "customers" and customers meant greater profits. The gang activity always revolved around money and Colleoni is a great example for that. He represents the wealthy side of the criminal underworld which thrives, the exact picture of the "wealthy business man" who is presented in the movies. The Italian background could be a direct connection to the great and very influential mob bosses from the real world such as Sabini, or when it comes to the USA Al Capone, who were both Italian as well.

As an Italian, life was very hard in an alien environment, especially with an ongoing crisis. Many immigrants, including Italian immigrants faced discrimination and prejudice, and due to the strict immigration policies in Britain they had very hard time gaining citizenships and earning the aids for the poor and unemployed. Therefore the criminality was one of the few options they had in order to survive. This might be the reason where did the stereotype of

Italian mob boss came from, as a vast majority of criminal underworld stories choose Italian as the leader. Despite the fact, it is not explicitly said how old Colleoni is, it can be assumed that he went a long way until he became a very powerful person who basically “owns” Brighton.

Pinkie’s men also represent the criminal underworld but in comparison to Colleoni they are on the opposite side of the social hierarchy. As said before Colleoni is pretty much untouchable as a very powerful businessman which is not Cubitt’s Dalow’s or Spicer’s case. From the story it is evident, that all these men are experienced with the crime activities, as they take part in Hale’s murder. While Cubitt and Dalow are determined to follow Pinkie’s rules, Spicer is described as someone who is too old for any more crime, he admits this to Pinkie as they enter the racecourse.<sup>49</sup> Pinkie however needs everything under control and Spicer’s lack of will to continue forces Pinkie to murder him. This points out the uncertainty of people associated with organised crime, since even Spicer, who worked with Pinkie for a long time, could not stay safe from the gangster’s unpredictable mind.

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<sup>49</sup> Graham Greene, *Brighton Rock* (London: Heinemann Press, 1970), 123-124.

## Conclusion

The interwar period brought lots of major changes into the European societies, including the Britain. The world experienced the greatest economic crisis of the modern times that had a formidable effect on the life in Britain. The decline of traditional industries, in which was Britain superior in comparison to other countries, meant a great loss in economy and even a greater loss in employment. The unemployed people were forced to live in poverty with low chances of return to a normal life. Some people tried to endure, even in the bad living conditions, however, some took their life into their own hands and decided to leave the miserable life and change it for a supposedly “better” and wealthy life.

Thanks to movies, series and other means of modern entertainment, organised crime is perceived as an adventurous life young men, easy way to earn money, respect and most importantly power. Movies very often show only the good part about this kind of life where the gangsters “drown” in wealth. However, as many readers can probably imagine, this “better” life was nothing but an illusion which was far away from good and easy-going life. Indeed, on one hand, the escape from poverty was relatively easy, as said in *Brighton Rock*, Pinkie became quite powerful and rich for his age, but on the other hand the wealth took its toll.

Poverty was exchanged for a constant fear of being murdered or attacked by the rival gangsters or in not so exceptional situations by your own men, especially “small fish” such as Pinkie, meaning this supposedly great way of living brought more danger than living in slums where people fought for food to survive, hoping the government would help them with this miserable situation.

Constant fear was obviously experienced by ordinary people as well, especially near the gang territories which they basically ruled. People were often robbed, or beaten for either trespassing their part of the city or just for being at a bad place at a wrong time. The risk of being involved with a gang activity was always there and a chance of being attacked was pretty high, especially since the police and government was corrupted thanks to the great economic crisis and the gangsters could easily use this situation into their favour.

Obviously not all people were oppressed by the rising gang activities and some of those actually used their services in order to stay safe or to earn money. The repeatedly mentioned bookmakers were one of those, who used the service of protection for a percentage of their earnings. Bookmakers were obviously not the only ones who “worked” with gangs for their

personal gain, since organised crime was very influential in the society, some people even used their service to climb the “societal hierarchy ladder” either in politics or in business. However it is important to note that such associations very often came with a cost, as gangsters were unpredictable and working with them was very risky, meaning that gangsters who helped the person to reach a certain level of power, could very easily “help” the same person reach the very bottom as well.



## Resumé

Válka je pro zasažené oblasti vždy devastující, zanechává za sebou zpustošená města, zhroucené domy nebo ztrátu blízkých. Ovšem válka, která se odehrála během roku 1914 a 1918 předčila svou násilností všechny, které svět do té doby zažil. Evropa byla po válce zanechána v bídě a zmatku. Válka měla obrovský vliv na celosvětové dějiny a změnila politické a ekonomické struktury nejen Evropských zemí. Mezi země, na které měla válka dopad patří i Velká Británie, na které se podepsaly hlavně ekonomické problémy. Jakožto hlavním vývozcem například lodí, nebo jedničkou v uhelném, či ocelářském průmyslu se Británie dostala do velmi nepříjemné situace, neboť mezinárodní obchod bych velmi omezen nebo i v některých případech kompletně pozastaven. Díky odmítání exportu zboží do ostatních zemí se Británie dostala do velké ekonomické krize, která se projevovala zejména na rapidním vzrůstu nezaměstnanosti. Ke zhoršení ekonomické situace napomohl i krach na New Yorské burze, jenž způsobil ještě horší podmínky pro už takhle trpící obyvatele. V tu dobu byly v Británii miliony nezaměstnaných, z nichž vysoké procento se sotva uživilo ze státních příspěvků s téměř nulovou šancí se dostat z finanční tísně. Díky této situaci se někteří jedinci rozhodli vydat se na cestu zločinu, s vidinou šance se dostat z finančních problémů. Británie tedy zažila mezi válkami obrovský rozmach organizovaného zločinu, jenž byl hlavním tématem této bakalářské práce. Práce byla rozdělena do čtyř částí, kde dvě se zabývají historickým kontextem pro lepší orientaci čtenáře a druhé dvě samotnou analýzou knihy *Brighton Rock* pro porovnání s reálnými událostmi a stereotypy.

První teoretická část nastiňuje historické souvislosti, které byly kritickými faktory pro následný vzestup zločinu. Kapitola se věnuje zejména ekonomickým dopadům na společnost, které nepochybně rozpoutaly nepokoj mezi lidmi a následně samotný vstup do kriminálního života. Kapitola komentuje dopady války na společnost, začátek rozkladu společnosti a již zmíněnou ekonomickou krizi vyvolanou odmítnutím zahraničního obchodu. Dále se zde nastiňuje politické dění, které se nepochybně podílelo na krizi nebo následná velká hospodářská krize jenž odstartovala po krachu na New Yorské burze v USA. Jakožto první náznaky nepokojů vůči státu je zde zmíněno hnutí sufražetek, které se taktéž velmi podílelo na vnímání žen společností, vzniku nebo naopak boření stereotypů a celkově formování společenské situace v Británii. V neposlední řadě je zde také zmíněn vliv války na literaturu a zařazení analyzovaného románu do literárního kontextu. Co se literatury týče, je zde také krátce zmíněn detektivní román a jeho rysy, neboť určité charakteristiky se v románu *Brighton Rock* vyskytují.

Druhá kapitola se zaměřuje už na samotnou kriminalitu a vznik organizovaného zločinu v Británii. První stránky popisují zejména prvotní zmínky o organizovaném zločinu, a jeho vývoji v čase až po organizovaný zločin, který známe dnes. První zmínky zanesou čtenáře do druhé poloviny 19. století, kde se uskupil první gang, takzvaný „The Forty Elephants“. V této kapitole je popsáno obdobných gangů několik, každý s lehce jinými způsoby a lokalitou. Zmíněné způsoby a určitá hierarchie v gangzích následně slouží v analytické části jako „odrazový můstek“ pro porovnání s románem, aby byly způsoby zde zmíněné podpořeny historickou souvislostí, nebo naopak vyvráceny, případně zda-li je funkce gangů a jejich způsoby nějakým způsobem využita, jakožto inspirace pro samotný román. Z počátečních gangů se kapitola přesouvá na (vzhledem ke knize) současné gangy a jejich funkci ve společnosti, kde jedním z hlavních a nejvíce zmiňovaných gangů je Sabiniho gang, který v práci slouží jako stěžejní bod pro analýzu a porovnávání s románem *Brighton Rock*. Tato část popisuje vzestup a pád jednoho z největších mafiánských bossů Británie a komentuje jeho praktiky. Na rozdíl od předchozích gangsterů se Sabini prezentoval jako business man podobající se Americkému gangsteru Al Caponovi, ovšem to neznamenal, že by se věnoval pouze obchodu. Mimo nelegálnímu obchodu se Sabini, podobně jako jeho předchůdci, věnoval krádežím, vydírání, vraždám, provozu nočních klubů nebo zprostředkování prostituce. Sabiniho největším příjmem byly ale příjmy z protekčních poplatků, které poskytoval sázkařům na závodištích, díky čemuž si vysloužil přezdívku „král závodišť“. Dále se kapitola věnuje vlivu gangů na společnost, ať už spolupráci s gangy nebo naopak teroru, který organizovaný zločin působil obyčejným lidem.

V první kapitole analytické části se práce věnuje spojitostem mezi analyzovanou knihou a skutečností. Kapitola poukazuje na historické události a snaží je propojit s knihou, nahlíží na faktory jako jsou například ekonomická situace v Británii, jak je kriminalita vnímaná společností, nebo na určité stereotypy, jakým jsou například vystaveny ženy. Samotná kriminalita je v této části také vyobrazena a porovnána se skutečností, jak již bylo zmíněno kriminální podsvětí je porovnáno s činy a způsoby vydělávání peněz či získání respektu, které byly praktikovány Sabinim a jeho gangem. V románu se vyskytuje spousta praktik, které byly využívány právě Sabinim, což prohlubuje důvěryhodnost a zároveň představu čtenáře o tom, jak gangy opravdu fungovaly. V neposlední řadě komentuje kapitola spojitost gangů a již zmíněných závodišť, které v meziválečné Británii byly hlavním pilířem pro funkci a výdělek gangů. Tato kapitola se také věnuje rivalitě gangů a boji mezi nimi, v knize je to vyobrazeno

jako boj o byznys mezi Pinkie Brownem a jeho mnohem silnějším rivalem Colleonim, která se dá spojit s boji na závodističích mezi Sabinim a Birminghamskému gangu.

Poslední kapitola se věnuje samotným postavám, zmíněným v knize. Kapitola se snaží vytvořit spojitost mezi postavami a jejich reprezentací v reálném světě, snaží se popisovat jak jsou postavy vnímány okolím, jaké jsou k nim vázané společenské očekávání a jak se k nim samotné postavy staví. Mezi hlavní komponenty této části patří tři hlavní postavy: Pinkie Brown jakožto reprezentant Brightonského kriminálního podsvětí představuje například spor mezi jeho oddaností církvi a zároveň schopností zabít člověka. Rose naopak reprezentuje čistotu duše a je spojována se stereotypními požadavky na ženu. A v neposlední řadě Ida Arnold, která je opět porovnávána se stereotypy a očekáváním společnosti a zároveň je vyobrazena jako ztělesnění spravedlnosti a dobré vůle. V neposlední řadě kapitola popisuje hlavní témata románu a propojuje je s hlavními postavami a jak jsou vnímány společností.

Analyzované příklady v této práci by měly čtenáři nastínit, jaký byl opravdu život v meziválečné Británii a jakým způsobem byl ovlivněn organizovaným zločinem, ať už byl člověk na straně spravedlnosti a spořádaného života, nebo byl naopak součástí této skupiny lidí, která se jakýmkoliv způsobem zapletla se zločinci.

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