

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### **Background of the Study**

In his Writing about Literature, Edgar V. Roberts writes that a character in fiction, particularly a character who takes a major proportion in the story, is a portrayal of how a man would conduct himself into an affecting plot in his own life. It is without doubt that a work of fiction acquires the ability to introduce its readers to a character who could enhance their understanding of being a human. His features, personalities, actions, interactions with life, and his thoughts are expected to become a clear reflection for readers to relate not only to the character and the narratives, but also to themselves and life surrounding them (Roberts 66).

The goal of literary characterization is to present not just externally perceived person, but also – and primarily – the inner person, the secret self: those expressed and unexpressed inner thoughts, aims, motives, aspirations, joys, fears, obsessions, and frustrations that collectively make up human personalities (Roberts 66).

When studying a major character in a fictional work, it is important to clearly see what the author wants from the portrayal of his character. What

outward appearances does the character have? How does he behave? How does his mind work? But mainly, the reason that becomes the most necessary element to study is what sort of knowledge and idea the author tries to distribute to his readers through the portrayal of his character. M. J. Murphy in his Understanding Unseens clarifies that a thorough characterization technique is an important effort to uncover the concluding message of a narrative from a complete portrait of one character. (Murphy 161)

Two major characters I have taken from two ground-breaking cult novels by two controversial writers, Mark Renton in Irvine Welsh's Trainspotting and Tyler Durden in Chuck Palahniuk's Fight Club, can be methodically analysed to fabricate such venerable acknowledgments through their gripping and bitter characteristics towards life. I believe with a detailed characterization technique, there will be more information about evocative viewpoints of one's values and life concepts based on the characteristics of Renton's and Durden's. I also have come to a thorough understanding that they are presenting radical yet enthralling characteristics as a new transcending reference in how to revalue one's life, because in my reading, I truly consider the influences of both major characters are as powerful in the novels as they are for the readers.

David Foster Wallace, the author of Infinite Jest, declares Trainspotting as a "marvelous mixture of nihilism and heartbreak, pinpoint realism (especially in dialect and tone), and an archetypal universality" (Powell's Book). On the other hand, Fight Club is honored with an astonishing reputation by Seattle Times as "a dark, unsettling, and nerve-chafing satire" (Powell's Book). Having encountered

such profound acknowledgements, I have compelled myself to dissect a broader dimension of the two major characters portrayed in these two famous cult novels.

The major character of the first novel, Trainspotting, is Mark Renton, a 22-year-old junky living in the depraved underside of Leith, Edinburgh. The portrayal of Mark Renton as a junky is well enhanced by his devaluation of one's concepts of life and all the "the spurious convoluted logic" (Welsh) invented by society against him. For Renton, besides the "honest" drugs, other things are only there to delude and divert him from the fact that life is just short and disappointing.

The absurdity and insignificance of the concept of life against one's strong subjectivity are also put forth in Chuck Palahniuk's outstanding cult novel Fight Club. Palahniuk tries to devaluate against the dehumanizing ideas of life structured by society, via one of the major characters, an anarchic and strong-principled visionary, Tyler Durden.

From these tendencies portrayed by both characters, I learn that they acquire strongly typical and obvious attributes of what have been associated with the philosophical doctrine which has the nature to negate life's meaning and values: nihilism. These two distinguishing nihilistic depictions of both major characters have thus challenged me to get involved in a further comprehensive study of the concept of nihilism as well.

In order to obtain a thorough understanding of this subject, I am going to make use of several reliable resources from the Internet and books dealing with philosophical nihilism, particularly from Friedrich Nietzsche's point of view. The reason I draw my interest to Nietzsche's principles of nihilism is that he is a

prominent figure of nihilism, and extensively lays his greatest concern about the effects of nihilism on society and culture (Cline).

### **Statement of the Problem**

The problems I will discuss in my analysis are as follow:

1. How are the two major characters portrayed in both novels?
2. How are the portrayals of the major characters in both novels related to nihilism?

### **Purpose of the Study**

There are two purposes of this study:

1. To show how the two major characters are portrayed in both novels.
2. To show how the portrayals of the major characters in both novels are related to nihilism.

### **Method of Research**

The method I use is library research. First of all, I read Chuck Palahniuk's Fight Club and Irvine Welsh's Trainspotting. Afterwards, all the data related to the portrayal of the protagonists are collected. Then, I analyse the texts by referring to literary theories and using philosophical approach. I gather some resources and references from the Internet and books that are able to support the analysis and help me write the major thesis. Finally, I draw some conclusions of what has been discussed.

## **Organization of the Thesis**

I divide this major thesis into five chapters, which are preceded by the Acknowledgments, the Table of Contents and the Abstract. In the first chapter, I present the Introduction, which contains the Background of the Study, the Statement of the Problem, the Purpose of the Study, the Method of Research and the Organization of the Major Thesis. The second chapter discusses the general theory of nihilism. The third and fourth chapters present the portrayal of the protagonist using nihilism in Irvine Welsh's Trainspotting and Chuck Palahniuk's Fight Club. In the fifth chapter, I draw some conclusion of my analysis. The major thesis ends with the Bibliography and the Appendices, which include the biography of Irvine Welsh and Chuck Palahniuk, and the synopsis of Trainspotting and Fight Club.