

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

After reading both novels and analysing both major characters in Irvine Welsh's Trainspotting and Chuck Palahniuk's Fight Club, I conclude that the portrayals of Mark Renton and Tyler Durden have indeed been enhanced by an extensive aspect of nihilism, which reveals similarities and distinctiveness from the end results of their nihilistic portrayals. First of all, in nihilism, man's question about values and concept of life has been long considered to be a crucial argument, and therefore it argues whether life is really valuable or it is just ultimately trivial and meaningless. Related to the individual's extreme pessimism and a radical skepticism (Pratt), a nihilist would "destroy" because he is deprived of the most inaccessible of hope for a meaningful life, and consequently attaches himself to a life of nothing more than sickness, decay and disintegration (Cline).

Friedrich Nietzsche has been renowned as one of the prominent figures of nihilism. The reason he writes a great deal about nihilism, however, shall be a steady reminder of the fact that his concern about nihilism only revolves around its effects of improvement situated on society and culture. He argues that just because such objective values do not apply in one's life, it does not mean that

there will be no appropriate values at all for one's subjectivity (Cline) and thus lets himself be victimized. Instead of advocating nihilism, Nietzsche develops it as a significant standpoint to every individual in unveiling their valuable potentials to become something else as "fulfilling and purposeful from the subjective perspectives of themselves" (Cline). By nihilism, one is supposed to be able to implement his own creativity in "establishing a new 'order of rank'" (Crowel).

From Nietzsche's radical standpoint of nihilism, I am thus able to extend more my analysis on the portrayals of characters that are related to such standpoint. The first character I have analyzed is Mark Renton, an antiheroic junky and a cynical, self-withdrawing, pessimistic, rebellious, and self-destructive character living in the deprived underside of Leith, Edinburgh. From his interview in Aaron Kelly's Irvine Welsh, Irvine Welsh states that Trainspotting confronts not only the related spread of HIV infection in his time, but also the dissolving prospects in the working-class areas of Edinburgh where people at the time are sort of dropping-dead because "they've just been crushed by so many other things like poverty and unemployment that HIV on top of that is just another thing to deal with" (Kelly 37).

In other words, the futile circumstances stated in his interview contribute a major deal to the trivial and meaningless situations Renton is put in as the major character. Unfortunately, in Mark Renton's case, this kind of futility is converted to a worse nihilistic state Nietzsche describes as victimizing, and thus it only bears a weak outcome to a junky like Renton. In addition, still on the same ground, Steven Crowell also writes that one might push himself all downhill to "despair in

the face of nihilism” when he finds his true potential as dissatisfying and the realization that life has no objective values (Crowell). So, from the discussion, I can deduce that the portrayal of Mark Renton is a proper demonstration of a nihilist who eventually falls into despair and emptiness due to his own deprived disposition that overcomes his mind.

As deprived by life’s values as Renton is, the second character, Tyler Durden, has similar nihilist characteristics deriving from a monotonous life of dull consumerism behaviour and distressing working hours. Caused by inner devastation towards many suppressing life’s values, Tyler, however, becomes a destructive, idealistic, and skeptical character in order to set new and fulfilling ideals of life. In one of his interviews, Chuck Palahniuk states that he does create “very dysfunctional, dark characters” in most of his works, which is then followed by the reputation of "torchbearer for the nihilistic generation” given by some media critics. One of the characters is Tyler Durden, a well-rounded character who is constituted with a radical nihilistic purpose of “reasserting their culturally repressed generation” (Straus).

This kind of reassertion from Tyler is definitely what Nietzsche considers to be effectively killing the “Christian notion of God” and any other shared cultural believes in order to be independent and thus be able to construct better set values freely (Cline). Consequently, instead of giving in, a nihilist character like Tyler does not only vindicate his nihilistic attitude, but also reverses it into what Nietzsche develops as a significant standpoint to unveil the valuable and truthful potential for oneself.

From what I have analysed, both portrayals of the nihilistic characteristics of Mark Renton and Tyler Durden have indeed proved broader varieties of nihilism demonstrated in both novels. Therefore, I conclude that when one conducts the nihilism conceived in the portrayal of Mark Renton, the outcome is surely more devastating and depressing instead of getting better. In addition, Austin Cline also writes that the end result Renton gains is a typical outcome that will occur mostly in every nihilistic individual, and it undoubtedly tends to be suicidal (Cline). On the contrary, Tyler Durden cultivates a broader kind of nihilism expanded by Friedrich Nietzsche, which is the nihilism that could be converted into a source of encouragement or a trigger to radically construct a better value of life. For that reason, Tyler successfully embodies a portrayal of nihilist who perceives life without meaning and values, yet he also seeks the potential to become something else as “fulfilling and purposeful from the subjective perspectives of themselves”, or as Tyler puts it, “to hit bottom”.

Both Mark Renton and Tyler Durden are in a state of denial and they acquire doubtful attitudes towards all concepts of life due to their insignificances these two characters cannot put up with. Therefore, to relieve these strains of life, Renton relies his sense of honesty on drugs while Tyler conducts his own ideals. For them, there is no access anymore to any forms of hope and as a result they attach themselves to a determining act of dispute against the lives around them.

Nevertheless, I would also like to point out that both portrayals have displayed two contrasting nihilistic characteristics. In both novels, Renton and Tyler represent two distinctive nihilistic characters. On the one hand, Mark Renton struggles to strip away all concepts of life by using drugs, but

unfortunately, he merely tries to escape from life with the self-delusion of his own nihilistic state of mind. I have learned that the nihilistic tendencies in Mark Renton are liable to end up in a bleak self- despair. It is clear that when one is as nihilistic as Renton, he would pose a destructive result out of delusive characteristics that are developed within him.

Tyler Durden, on the other hand, refuses to fall into the abyss. He fights back and “destroys every scraps of history” (Palahniuk) in order to produce a better concept of life. Tyler’s radical dogma is indeed an overpowering nihilistic desire to annihilate all imposed values and meaning through a strong sense of destruction. By destroying and redefining all the former values, Tyler is willing to create a new place where he says, “even *Mona Lisa* is falling apart”; the place where history does not apply to anyone, where society has no any significance, and where one can truly belong to.