

Trainspotting Study Guide

Trainspotting by Irvine Welsh

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

[Trainspotting Study Guide.....1](#)

[Contents.....2](#)

[Plot Summary.....4](#)

[Kicking: The Skag Boys, Junk Dilemma No. 63, The First Day of the Edinburgh Festival.....5](#)

[Kicking: In Overdrive, Growing Up in Public, Victory on New Year's Day.....7](#)

[Kicking: It Goes Without Saying, Junk Dilemmas No. 64, Her Man, Speedy Recruitment.....9](#)

[Relapsing: Scotland Takes Drugs in Psychic Defense, The Glass, A Disappointment, Cock Problems.....11](#)

[Relapsing: Traditional English Breakfast, Junk Dilemmas No. 65, Grieving and Mourning in Port Sunshine.....13](#)

[Kicking Again: Inner Shitty, Na Na and Other Nazis.....15](#)

[Kicking Again: The First Shag in Ages.....17](#)

[Kicking Again: Strolling Through the Meadows.....19](#)

[Blowing It: Courting Disaster, Junk Dilemmas No. 66, Deid Dugs, Searching for the Inner Man 20](#)

[Blowing It: House Arrest.....22](#)

[Blowing It: Bang to Rites, Junk Dilemmas No. 67.....24](#)

[Exile: London Crawling, Bad Blood.....26](#)

[Exile: There Is a Light That Never Goes Out, Feeling Free, The Elusive Mr. Hunt.....28](#)

[Home: Easy Money for the Professionals, A Present, Memories of Matty, Straight Dilemmas No. 1, Eating Out.....30](#)

[Home: Trainspotting at Leith Central Station, A Leg-Over Situation, Winter in West Granton, A Scottish Soldier.....32](#)

[Exit: Station to Station.....33](#)

[Characters.....34](#)

[Objects/Places.....39](#)

[Themes.....41](#)



Style.....43

Quotes.....45

Topics for Discussion.....47



Plot Summary

Trainspotting by Irvine Welsh is an irreverent and uncompromising portrait of the heroin subculture in Edinburgh. The narrative cycles through a number of different users, pushers, scam-artists, and general hooligans, though it focuses on a core group of five addicts. The novel is essentially the vision of a group of young men who have chosen to drop out of polite society in search of brief, luminous chemical joy.

The novel focuses primarily on Mark Renton, a Leith heroin addict who intermittently tries to kick the junk. He and his fellow addict, Spud, defraud the government of unemployment benefits to fund their habit. They have a mate called Simon "Sick Boy" Williamson, a charming sometime pimp. His illegitimate daughter dies a crib death early in the novel. They also have several non-addict friends: Tommy, a sex-obsessed innocent; Davie, a service-worker; and Begbie, an alcoholic sociopath.

Tommy's girlfriend breaks up with him, and he soon is doing heroin as a way to cope. Meanwhile, Begbie is annoyed that his girl has gotten pregnant, but he rarely has to see her as he is often out of town running drugs in London. Renton, temporarily off junk, accidentally sleeps with a 14-year-old girl, thinking she is an adult. Soon, he and Spud relapse and are caught stealing books to fund their habit. Spud goes to jail, and Renton attempts methadone treatment. He relapses again and overdoses, and his parents force him to quit cold-turkey.

Not long after Renton gets clean, his brother Billy is killed by an IRA bomb in Ulster. Sick of Scotland, he travels down to London, but on a visit home he becomes involved with an acquaintance called Kelly. While Renton is in London, Davie contracts HIV and hatches an elaborate plan to take revenge on the man responsible, eventually killing him. Not long after this, another addict and friend of Renton's named Matty dies, reuniting the junkie coterie of the novel. By this time, Renton and Kelly have parted ways, and he soon decides to move back to Leith.

Back home and relatively clean, Renton is forced to deal with his past, dropping in on his old dealer, now an amputee, and Tommy, who has contracted HIV and seems likely to die. The novel ends with Begbie arranging a heroin deal in London, earning 16,000 pounds for Renton, Spud, Sick Boy, and himself. Renton steals the cash and flees to Amsterdam, ready to start a new life.

The novel is, in the end, a series of loosely connected short stories with a recurring cast of characters. More than telling a single story, it illuminates a whole subculture, giving the reader a sense of the way these groups interact and the stories that survive from their short, manic lives.



Kicking: The Skag Boys, Junk Dilemma No. 63, The First Day of the Edinburgh Festival

Kicking: The Skag Boys, Junk Dilemma No. 63, The First Day of the Edinburgh Festival Summary

Trainspotting by Irvine Welsh is an irreverent and uncompromising portrait of the heroin subculture in Edinburgh. The narrative cycles through a number of different users, pushers, scam-artists, and general hooligans, though it focuses on a core group of five addicts. The novel is essentially the vision of a group of young men who have chosen to drop out of polite society in search of brief, luminous chemical joy.

The first book, *Kicking*, begins in *The Skag Boys*. This chapter is narrated by Mark Renton, a young former joiner and current heroin-user who is coaxed away from a Jean-Claude Van Damme video by his domineering friend Simon (Sick Boy) Williamson to go to their preferred dealer, Johnnie (Mother Superior) Swan. After an agonized struggle to get a cab, both boys are agonizingly sick upon arriving at Swan's flat. Alison, a fellow junkie with a baby of unknown parentage, is already there. They almost do not score when Swan momentarily insists everyone share on needle, a serious concern given the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in the Skag community. He soon relents, and they all shoot up together. Later, Alison tells Renton that a friend of hers has a crush on him. Sick Boy and Alison go to a bedroom to have sex and Renton wonders if he should look up her friend.

In *Junk Dilemma No. 63*, Renton is awash in the "sea" that is his high. Even as he is reveling in it, he knows he will need another hit soon. As he cooks up, he reflects on the fact that heroin will kill him sooner or later. This does not stop him from shooting up.

In *The First Day of the Edinburgh Festival*, Renton has resolved to come off heroin. He has tried and failed many times before; so this time he is prepared. He has rented a cheap room where none of his fellow junkies will find him. He has supplies, both medical and culinary, but after a short time he is certain he needs a small hit to get him past the first of the pain. His connect Raymie is out of town and he is forced to head farther afield to the flat of a truly unpleasant mate called Mike Forrester. After an agonizing bus trip, he enters the flat to find Mike, his overweight girl, and some yuppie Renton does not know sharing a joint. After giving Renton the runaround for a while, Forrester provides him with some opium suppositories. Renton is dubious, but he proceeds to insert them in his rectum.

On the way back to his rented room, Renton is wracked with the first diarrhea that will be part of his withdrawal. He talks his way into a disgusting pub with an out-of-order toilet. He is annoyed having to convince a patron that he is not going back to shoot up.



After relieving himself, Renton realizes he has passed his suppositories and is forced to rummage through his own feces in order to find them. As he returns to his room, Renton decides this is probably a good sign he should clean up.

Kicking: The Skag Boys, Junk Dilemma No. 63, The First Day of the Edinburgh Festival Analysis

The opening passages of *Trainspotting* introduce the reader to the world of an addict, one in which, as Sick Boy puts it, there are "nae friends ... jist associates" (6). The only thing that brings these young people together is their need for a score, and in three chapters Welsh enumerates the risks and indignities they must endure. Renton must beg a person he hates, wallow in his own feces, and even risk using a possibly tainted needle in his search for heroin. What is perhaps most compelling about these passages is their gallows humor. Mark Renton is daily courting death in deplorable conditions, but unlike a concentration camp victim or child soldier - whose life is not unlike Renton's - he is doing this for a sensory pleasure. He is addicted, yes, but he understands and analyzes his addiction. He daily, actively chooses to debase himself for heroin. By the end of *The First Day of the Edinburgh Festival*, however, the reader feels he might just come off the stuff.

This section also introduces another major character of the novel, Sick Boy. If Renton is the innocent of the book, yearning for happiness but overcome by his own weakness, Sick Boy is the steely cold professional. He, too, is addicted, but even in his worst drug-sickness he can charm the fellow junkie Alison. Renton describes Sick Boy in predatory terms, and he is a predator. Over the course of the novel he will belittle everyone around him and sell out quite a few fellow junkies.



Kicking: In Overdrive, Growing Up in Public, Victory on New Year's Day

Kicking: In Overdrive, Growing Up in Public, Victory on New Year's Day Summary

The point of view shifts to Sick Boy in In Overdrive. He is walking with Renton on a sunny afternoon, disgusted by his friend's lack of interest in finding women. Two English girls approach them and ask directions to a playhouse for a Festival performance. Sick Boy is startled that Renton successfully engages them on the subject of Brecht. They make plans to meet later, and Sick Boy ditches Renton, carrying on an imaginary conversation with his idol Sean Connery. He decides he cannot stand any of his mates.

Growing Up in Public switches to the third person, as Renton's goth teenage niece Nina sits miserably with her family after her Uncle Boab has died. The family comforts her Aunt Alice as Nina realizes her period has started. Upstairs in her aunt and uncle's bedroom - her Uncle Boab's body still there - Nina changes into a pair of her aunt's panties. Suddenly, she notices her Uncle is sweating and screams that he is alive. The family rushes up, but a doctor assures her that the sweat was caused by the electric blanket's being left on. The family begins to bicker, and Nina cracks up laughing.

Victory on New Year's Day is also in the third person, this time focusing on Stevie, a childhood friend of many of the addicts in the novel. Stevie has moved down to London in recent years, but he is back in Edinburgh for the holidays. At a three-day-long New Year's Day bash, Stevie cannot stop thinking about Stella in London. Before leaving, he has told her he loved her, and she had just walked away, saying she'd call him. Stevie has asked his mother to give her the number for the house if she calls.

As Stevie mopes around the house, Frank Begbie - a loud, violent mate - berates him for being sullen. Stevie also sees Sick Boy complaining about how televised football is ruining the game. Daniel (Spud) Murphy - a dull, constantly-inebriated addict - is nearly passed out to the annoyance of his girlfriend. Renton is coming to stay with Stevie in London soon, and Stevie suspects he is on heroin again. As Stevie half-heartedly sings football cheers with the assembled party in preparation for the Hibs game, Stella calls. She says she loves him and is catching a train to Edinburgh.

Stevie is elated throughout the game, even though his mates are finally succumbing to their hangovers and the Hibs lose. He goes to the station, glowing and is punched by a Hearts fan. He does not care, as Stella arrives and they kiss.



Kicking: In Overdrive, Growing Up in Public, Victory on New Year's Day Analysis

Most of the novel will be told either from Mark Renton's point of view or the point of view of one of his core mates: Spud, Begbie, Sick Boy. Occasionally, though, the storytelling switches to third-person and focuses on someone in the Edinburgh area only tacitly connected with one of the main characters. Such is the case with the Nina and Stevie chapters.

Nina is Mark Renton's cousin, a pretty goth teenager. The narrator - though third-person - shares her detached, vaguely annoyed, attitude toward the goings-on at her uncle's funeral. This will be the first of two funerals that Nina attends in the novel, and it foreshadows the far more consequential events surrounding the second. This funeral - like many of the passages of *Trainspotting* - takes on the quality of a pub story; it is a funny, ridiculous anecdote of the dead man who seemed to wake up.

Stevie's story, on the other hand, serves to introduce us to several key characters, reveal new information about others, and explore a developing theme in the novel. In this chapter, we meet Begbie, a hooligan and borderline sociopath; Spud, a junkie who is barely functioning; and Tommy, a seeming straight-arrow with a weakness for sex. Stevie also posits that Mark Renton might be using again.

Perhaps most significantly, explores the ambiguous attitude the characters have towards nation. This manifests itself in Stevie's thoughts regarding the Hibs (Hibernian Football, Leith's club). He is happy, it seems, simply to be out of Edinburgh, rid of the conflict between Hibs fans and the more Unionist Hearts fans. These fans are characterized by racist taunting and a fierce allegiance to the Queen. This sensation of disgust at them, initially breached by Stevie and expanded by Renton later, reflects a feeling that Scotland and Union are idiotic false constructs that fools defend at their own peril.



Kicking: It Goes Without Saying, Junk Dilemmas No. 64, Her Man, Speedy Recruitment

Kicking: It Goes Without Saying, Junk Dilemmas No. 64, Her Man, Speedy Recruitment Summary

At the beginning of *It Goes Without Saying*, Renton is at an apartment, presumably Lesley's, when he is woken up by her screaming. She is shouting that her baby girl Dawn is dead. Renton is coming off of a solid hit, so he is slow in processing this information. Most everyone else is as well, except Sick Boy who seems particularly shaken. Spud figures that they should all stay with Lesley, but Matty, a depressive, antisocial junkie, thinks they should leave. An argument ensues, and Renton realizes - based on his uncharacteristically hysterical reaction - that Sick Boy must have been Dawn's father. Renton decides he will cook up another hit. Lesley begs him to prepare one for her, and he decides she can go after him.

In *Junk Dilemmas No. 64*, Renton is reeling from a hit on the floor of his childhood room while his mother calls for him from the hallway. He loves her. He is sorry, but he cannot get up.

The point of view shifts to Gav (Temps) Temperly, who is trying to have a quiet drink at a pub with Tommy. This becomes slowly impossible as a lowlife at the table next to them begins punching the woman he is with. Temps begs Tommy not to get involved, but Tommy can only stay quiet for so long. He tells the man to cut it out, and the two begin to scrap. To Tommy and Temps surprise, though, the beaten woman attacks Tommy for accosting her man. A brawl breaks out in the pub, and Tommy and Temps are ejected.

Speedy Recruitment switches back to third person and focuses on Spud and Renton. Both of them are on unemployment and are required to take government-arranged job interviews. They have to walk a fine line, appearing to care about getting the job so they can stay on unemployment while making sure not to get the job. Renton suggests they do speed to loosen their tongues. Both Spud and Renton lie about their alma-maters, not realizing the interviewed when to the university they claim. Spud immediately admits to all of his lies, reflecting a desire to be honest and effectively ensuring he will not be hired. Renton gets perilously close to being hired before he cheerily admits to his heroin addiction.



Kicking: It Goes Without Saying, Junk Dilemmas No. 64, Her Man, Speedy Recruitment Analysis

This section of *Trainspotting* effectively illustrates the agony and the ecstasy of heroin life in Edinburgh. The ecstasy comes not solely from the drug itself but from the camaraderie that surrounds the low-down drug lifestyle. Welsh reflects a genuine sense of playful mayhem in *Speedy Recruitment*. Renton and Spud are portrayed throughout the novel as a refutation of Sick Boys' assertion that there is no such thing as a friend in the world of Skag. They love each other and Renton genuinely wants to help him fail his interview.

The agony - and the limits of friendship - come in *It Goes Without Saying*. Dawn's death is a blight upon the whole group, not only for the way they neglected the child to the point of death but also because their reactions are alternately to flee the scene and to get high. Renton, supposedly the moral center of the novel, spearheads the latter action, refusing even to allow the distraught mother to shoot up before him. This sickening selfishness is repeated a page later when Renton refuses to open the door for his mother because that would involve standing.

This interplay of the comradeship of the drug community and the inherent selfishness of the drug lifestyle, in which all that matters is scoring the next hit, is at the heart of Welsh's novel. His characters may care for each other, but only until the drug-sickness begins.



Relapsing: Scotland Takes Drugs in Psychic Defense, The Glass, A Disappointment, Cock Problems

Relapsing: Scotland Takes Drugs in Psychic Defense, The Glass, A Disappointment, Cock Problems Summary

The second book of the novel begins with *Scotland Takes Drugs in Psychic Defense*, told from Tommy's point of view. He is in bad stead with his girlfriend Lizzy since he purchased a ticket to see Iggy Pop with his friend on the same night as her birthday. He is worried about this, because he likes Lizzy and knows he probably won't be able to do better than her. The night of the show, Tommy borrows some money from his parents for booze and speed. He and his friend go to the concert and get ridiculously drunk and high, bashing each other to a bloody pulp.

The point of view shifts back to Renton in *The Glass*. Here, he discusses an ill-fated evening out with Begbie and his girl, June. Renton takes along a casual acquaintance Hazel, with whom he occasionally has sex while not in smack. The four of them go to a pub where a group of hoods and skinheads enter and begin to mob the bar. Renton is thinking how much racist louts like the one's who just entered disgust him when Begbie chucks a large glass into the group, knocking one of them to the ground. Before they can react, Begbie enters the fray, demanding to know who threw the glass. A brawl breaks out. As they leave the melee, Renton tries to assure Hazel that Begbie is an OK guy. Privately, he reflects that these assurances have created a fictional Begbie among his group of friends, one that is jocular and well-meaning. In reality, Begbie is a bully and a violent sociopath. Renton spent most of his childhood and adult life trying to shake him.

A Disappointment is from Begbie's point of view. He tells the story of a night spent playing pool in a pub with Tommy. Begbie notices a guy he knew from school. Begbie is up for a fight, which he tries to start with the guy. He does not bite, though, disappointing Begbie.

Renton narrates *Cock Problems*, which begins with his having to use a vein in his penis to shoot up. As he lays on the floor of his flat, someone starts shouting "Rents" through the door. Renton thinks for a moment that it is the landlord's son, but he eventually realizes that it is Tommy. Tommy enters with news that Lizzy has dumped him and he does not know what to do. Renton makes a concerted effort to hide the fact that he is high, but Tommy knows. Tommy eventually starts to ask Renton why he uses heroin. He responds that heroin reduces all the other disappointments of life to nothing. It doesn't matter if you don't have a girl, a job, or a better house; you have that perfect high.



Tommy asks to try it. Renton, after some faint attempts to dissuade him, gives him his first hit.

Relapsing: Scotland Takes Drugs in Psychic Defense, The Glass, A Disappointment, Cock Problems Analysis

In this section, Welsh illuminates the two deeply destructive relationships Renton has in his life: heroin and Frank Begbie. The difference between these is not their level of danger; both will likely kill him. Rather, the difference is Renton's level of understanding of them.

Cock Problems contains an eerily cogent treatise on the appeal of heroin from Renton. He explains that his worldview - perhaps the product of heroin, perhaps independent of it - is that most of what others want from life is dull and incomplete. He cannot get excited about the goals others have in life. He can, however, get very excited about heroin. On the other hand, Renton has no clue why he is still friends with Frank Begbie. He reflects that he once tried to get good grades in school to test out of classes with Begbie. The coterie of drug-addicts and losers that form the core of the novel accept Begbie, a violent alcoholic and sociopath, for the simple reason that they grew up together. No other reason.

This section also begins the precipitous decline of Tommy Laurence. Initially he is a humorous figure, undone as he is by sex, over-bloated chivalry, and a love for Iggy Pop. By the end of the section, the reader has a portrait of how addiction begins with everyday disappointment. Tommy loses a lover, and he foolishly fills the hole with heroin.



Relapsing: Traditional English Breakfast, Junk Dilemmas No. 65, Grieving and Mourning in Port Sunshine

Relapsing: Traditional English Breakfast, Junk Dilemmas No. 65, Grieving and Mourning in Port Sunshine Summary

Traditional English Breakfast transitions to Davie's point of view. He wakes up in his girl Gail's room in her parents' house, horribly hung over. He discovers that during the night, he has urinated and defecated in the bed, and Gail has left the room. Panicking, Davie showers and bundles up the sheets, with feces inside. He passes by Gail and her parents eating breakfast, and Gail's mom insists on cleaning the sheets herself. She and Davie get into a tugging match over the sheets, resulting in feces being tossed all over the kitchen.

In Junk Dilemma No. 65, Renton and Spud are at Mother Superior's flat, both having shot up. Renton is freezing cold, but he dares not move, lest shifting make him colder still.

Grieving and Mourning in Port Sunshine is told in the third person and concerns a group of poker players, among them Renton's brother Billy. They play low stakes games with each other and make cash by playing with communal money at gaming clubs. The communal pot has gotten up to 2,000 pounds and will be divided soon, but the group has taken to doing something foolhardy. In order to make their friendly games more interesting, they play with the communal pot, and at the end of the night the winner takes it home. One night, Granty - the man who won the big pot last time - has not shown up for the weekly game, and the group is getting nervous.

The next day, one of the group, Lenny, is at the pub when he hears that Granty died of a sudden heart attack. The rest of the group soon meets up and debates what to do. Another member, Jackie, seems resolved to let Granty's wife Fiona keep the pot. Lenny and several others are not having it; they insist the group talk to Fiona after the funeral. No one has the will to do it on the day of the burial, however, and so they all go over together the next day. They discover the Fiona has left the country for the Canary Islands. Jackie laughs this off but is punched to the ground by Billy. Evidently, Jackie and Fiona have been sleeping together for some time. The chapter ends with the rest of the group laying their fists and feet into Jackie.



Relapsing: Traditional English Breakfast, Junk Dilemmas No. 65, Grieving and Mourning in Port Sunshine Analysis

Trainspotting is the product of a writer who heretofore worked primarily wrote short stories. Nowhere is that more apparent than in this section, which contains two anecdotes unconnected to the central narrative and dealing primarily in characters tacitly connected to major characters. These are Davie, who is mentioned intermittently in the central narrative and granted a haunting chapter in the latter half of the novel, and Billy, Renton's brother.

Davie's chapter, Traditional English Breakfast, plays like a scatological bar joke or urban legend. Grieving and Mourning in Port Sunshine, on the other hand, plays like a novella. It establishes a world of semi-professional poker players. It presents a quandary that leads to rising action in the death of Granty and the loss of the big pot. Indeed, the story even contains a final twist in Jackie's double-dealing. Several times in the novel, Welsh halts the narrative to present effective short stories like this (and like Davie's later in the novel).



Kicking Again: Inner Shitty, Na Na and Other Nazis

Kicking Again: Inner Shitty, Na Na and Other Nazis Summary

The third book of the novel begins with Begbie's point of view with Inner Shitty. It's morning and Begbie is heading to London with Mark Renton. He has just finished some sort of scam and must leave town for a bit, though his pregnant girlfriend June keeps asking him questions about where he's going. Begbie punches her until she quiets down.

Begbie heads down to a bar where he plays pool with his alcoholic mate Second Prize. Renton shows with his bag, ready to go, and the two get ready for the extended rail trip. They pick up some vodka, whiskey and several bottles of beer. Begbie is certain by this point that Renton is on heroin again. They board the train to find most of the seats reserved for short commuters. Begbie finds them some seats that are free most of the trip and across from some Canadian tourists. Renton carries on a conversation with them, while Begbie seethes that he forgot playing cards. In Darlington, the seats' owners get on the train and ask Begbie and Renton to move. Renton spins a tail, and Begbie threatens the two men. Renton drifts off for a bit, and Begbie urinates in his beer. The two arrive in London and head to their friend's flat.

In Na Na and Other Nazis, Spud is off heroin. He drops in on Begbie at a pub and has a beer. Begbie is flush with cash after some scam or score. Being off drugs has rendered Spud incredibly bored, and today is no exception. He eventually decides to drop in on his grandmother in her nice Council flat, which she shares with other retirees. She regularly gets into trouble for making sexual advances on the men. Spud explains how Na Na produces many children with several men, some married and some not. When Spud arrives at the flat, he finds his Uncle Dode there. Dode is mixed race, and he and Spud get along.

Spud and Dode go down for a beer at a local pub, where Spud sees Renton's brother and father. A group of skinheads enter and begin harassing them. They start singing racist songs, and finally Dode has had enough. He bashes an ashtray over one of the skinheads, and the rest pile onto him. Spud and the Rentons manage to get the wounded Dode out of the pub. They go back to Na Na's place, where they call an ambulance. Spud reflects that this type of thing happens to Dode everyday.



Kicking Again: Inner Shitty, Na Na and Other Nazis Analysis

Empathy is the subject of these two chapters: Spud's deep empathy and Begbie's complete lack thereof. As the novel continues, beginning with *The Glass* and progressing to the very end, Begbie becomes more and more despicable. He is not a heroin addict, but his attitude toward the everyday world is just as misanthropic as his skag-head friends. *Inner Shitty* begins with him nonchalantly beating his pregnant girlfriend and ends with him urinating in his friend's beer. This latter incident is a window into Begbie's life. Any reasonable person who urinated in a friend's beer would tell him after he drank it, to make it a joke. Begbie just quietly watches Renton drink his urine. He never even informs the people around them. He just wants to watch his friend suffer.

In *Na Na and Other Nazis*, the reader is given his first chance to see Spud as a deeply sympathetic character. Spud is normally unintelligible with smack and alcohol. Now, relatively clean, Spud decides to drop in on his old grandmother and have a drink with his Uncle Dode. Dode's plight as a mixed-race man is painful, and Spud tries to understand the daily tests the man might face. Indeed, Spud spends much of the chapter trying to understand others' plights, even Bobby Sands, the IRA hunger striker who died in Maze prison. Spud, the reader realizes by the end of the chapter, is a caring, empathetic soul who will join a fight in a bar to help the uncle he hasn't seen in years.



Kicking Again: The First Shag in Ages

Kicking Again: The First Shag in Ages Summary

This chapter is told in the third person but focuses primarily on Renton. He is again off heroin and at a club with Begbie, Sick Boy and Spud. They are all drunk and hooped up on ecstasy, and Sick Boy has spent much of the day having sex with two American women in their Edinburgh hotel room. Renton is sick and tired of hearing about the threesome; since coming off heroin he has regained his sex drive. He is disgusted to see that even Begbie has made off with a woman. As Spud and Renton sit together in the club, Renton expounds on a drug-fuelled screed against his brother's involvement in military actions in Ulster. He also states outright that nights like this make him want a hit.

At closing time approaches, Renton notices Dianne, a slim girl who, when he first sees her, is gently rejecting a slimy guy. Renton and Spud approach Dianne and her friend, and Renton - despite hating Dianne's music tastes - seems to hit it off. A bit later, Dianne has a falling out with her friend and invites Renton to share a cab with her. They begin to neck, and she invites him in, warning him to stay quiet. He wonders what her flat-mates are like that she has to sneak men in. Renton and Dianne have sex, and afterward she makes him put on clothes and sleep on the couch.

The next morning, Renton wakes to find a man and a woman appraising his presence in the house. Not wanting to cause Dianne any trouble, he spins a lie about getting too drunk on his birthday and losing the key to his flat. They invite him to sit down to breakfast. When Dianne emerges, Renton realizes that she is thirteen and these are her parents. Renton continues to spin lies regarding a government job in order to keep her parents from suspecting anything.

Dianne insists on walking with Renton when he leaves her parents' house. She goes with him to a music store, where Renton is mortified to see someone he knows. Before they part ways, Renton begrudgingly gives her his address. That night, Dianne shows up and his door, and he invites her in.

Kicking Again: The First Shag in Ages Analysis

The First Shad in Ages definitely reads like a dirty joke, with the perfect punch-line of Dianne emerging in the morning, to the protagonist's horror, a teenage girl. What it does capture effectively, however, is the sort of desperation and vicious resentment that emerges from the mind of a sex-obsessed man in his early twenties. Renton is coming off of heroin, which robbed him of his libido. At the club, he is livid at the notion that Sick Boy, a perpetual liar and sleaze, is involved in a three-way, and Begbie, the psychopath with a kid on the way, has found a woman. The reader definitely feels a surrogate incredulity in these passages, which serve to rally the reader behind Renton as he approaches Dianne. This sets up the punch-line that will follow the next morning.



Stylistically, the chapter is notable for its use of the third person omniscient point of view, particularly during the sex scene. The reader is effectively introduced to Dianne from Renton's vantage. Only when she gets him home is the reader made aware of her thoughts, which allows Welsh to present both Renton and Dianne's feelings toward the sex, from the size of Renton's penis to the approach of each one's orgasm. The next morning, the reader is once again experiencing events only through Renton's thoughts until Dianne emerges from her bedroom.



Kicking Again: Strolling Through the Meadows

Kicking Again: Strolling Through the Meadows Summary

Strolling Through the Meadows is told from Spuds point of view. He is out for the evening with Begbie, Matty, Renton, and Sick Boy. Most everyone wants to go to a pub, but Begbie wants to rob a tourist in the Meadows. The rest of the group is concerned about this because the last time they did this Begbie nearly killed the man. It was all over the news, and the man is still in hospital. Begbie proceeds to verbally abuse the group, attempting to cajole them to join him. Matty, in a customarily dark mood, agrees. Spud reflects that Matty is an unpleasant character, one that he never drinks with unless there is a group.

Once Begbie and Matty are gone, the rest of the group does some ecstasy and gets drunk. Sick Boy, feeling foolhardy, decides they should go to the Meadows and harass Begbie. On the way, they run into two high women cross paths, and Sick Boy and Renton begin chatting them up. Spud thinks about how much he wants to have sex. As the three continue on, they see a squirrel and Renton jokes about killing it. This aggravates Spud, who thinks all living creatures are sacred. He and Renton get into an argument. When they make up moments later, Renton assures Spud that they will always be best mates.

Kicking Again: Strolling Through the Meadows Analysis

This chapter serves primarily to illustrate the bond between Spud and Renton. Their friendship seems to exist on a plane different from the rest of the novel's core group. Perhaps this is because of the essential gentleness of each. Neither picks a fight unless it is necessary or sells out a mate. They may be jaded by life and essentially selfish in their desires, but this is largely a byproduct of the addiction. Clean, they are sound friends. Renton's guarantee that he loves Spud conversely foreshadows a betrayal that will occur by the end of the novel.



Blowing It: Courting Disaster, Junk Dilemmas No. 66, Deid Dugs, Searching for the Inner Man

Blowing It: Courting Disaster, Junk Dilemmas No. 66, Deid Dugs, Searching for the Inner Man Summary

Courting Disaster, the beginning of the fourth book, is told from Renton's point of view. He and Spud are in court facing charges of theft for stealing books. Renton claims to have a passionate interest in Kierkegaard, but Spud cannot keep the story straight and admits to stealing the books in order to sell them and buy drugs. The judge sentences Spud to ten months in prison, but he allows Renton to be released on the condition that he remains in a rehab program. Begbie, Sick Boy, and Renton's family, including Billy, meet him after court. They go out for drinks and Renton is mortified by his mother's brazen drunkenness. At one point, Spud's mother comes in and accuses the assembled group of causing her son's decline. Begbie shouts back that she's to blame.

The group heads back to Leith, in part because Billy's wife Sharon is expecting his child and he wants to be closer to home. At this bar, Begbie is annoyed to see June having a drink. Sick Boy chats with an apish low-life, offering to hook him up with an attractive junkie called Maria in exchange for cash. Renton is shocked that Sick Boy is pimping now. When he confronts Sick Boy, he fires back that Renton is responsible for Tommy's decline into addiction. By the end of the night, Renton is certain he needs a hit.

In Junk Dilemmas No. 66, Renton is terrified of moving, but he knows he will soon have to.

Sick Boy is the narrator of Deid Dugs, sitting in his flat overlooking the park. He has an air rifle, which he uses to shoot a pit bull that is lying in the grass with his skin-head master. The dog attacks the skin-head, and Sick Boy heads down with a bat, which he uses to strangle the dog. The skin-head thanks Sick Boy, as do the police. Sick Boy thinks what a lovely day it is.

In Searching for the Inner Man, Renton reflects that prison cannot possibly be worse than the psychoanalysis he is required to go through in his program. His analyst, Dr. Forbes, delves primarily into his relationship with his dead brother Davie, who was confined his whole life to a wheelchair. He connects Davie's death to Mark's increased heroin use. He thinks Renton chooses drugs as an alternative to real human connection. Renton's clinical psychologist has him on methadone, which only seems to make his cravings worse. Renton has written psychoanalytical texts, which illuminate nothing.



Renton concludes that his essential belief is that life never gets better. His solution is to check out of it and live in the manageable world of heroin use. He does not understand why others are so bothered by this choice.

Blowing It: Courting Disaster, Junk Dilemmas No. 66, Deid Dugs, Searching for the Inner Man Analysis

Courting Disaster begins the rapid decline and rebirth of Mark Renton. Having twice attempted to get off heroin, he is about to plunge deeper still into it after nearly going to jail. Spud, who often serves as the sacrificial lamb of the novel, does go to prison for stealing books. What follows in the coming pages - both Courting Disaster and Searching for the Inner Man - is a scathing critique of society's interaction with the addicted community. Admittedly, these screeds are filtered through an addict's point of view. Dr. Forbes, for example, is likely onto something with the connection of Renton's brother's death and his increased drug use. Renton responds that he chooses drugs so that he doesn't have to choose life. Renton is not a reliable narrator; so the reader must read his self-analysis with a critical eye. In essence, his screed reflects a junkie's sense of life. Nothing will ever be as exciting as that injected hit. Renton treats heroin as a life choice. It is, it appears, the exact opposite of one.

Also notable in this section is its horrifying portrait of Sick Boy. The festering repulsiveness of Begbie tends to overshadow Sick Boy's moral nullity. Like Fagin as compared to Bill Sykes, Sick Boy seems rakish and ne'er-do-well by comparison. In this section, we see the calculated perversity of his life as he pimps out fellow junkie's and kills dogs for fun. In many respects, Sick Boy is more loathsome than Begbie. Begbie is all rage and impotent bravado; Sick Boy knows what he is doing.



Blowing It: House Arrest

Blowing It: House Arrest Summary

House Arrest begins with Renton waking in his childhood bedroom. He takes a moment to remember that he overdosed in Mother Superior's flat and was tossed in a cab to the hospital. His mother is at the end of the bed, explaining to him that he is going to have to quit cold turkey at their house. Renton tries to convince her to secure methadone for him, but she refuses. His father is in the room also, berating him for wasting his life. Renton thinks how he despises his father and all conservative self-pitying Glasgow-natives like him.

The next morning, Renton's father wants to take him to get tested for HIV, but Renton does not have the energy. At dinner, he can barely eat, and later when he watches television, he imagines his father's voice taking about HIV/AIDS interspersed with the program. Soon, the nausea begins. Renton is bedridden, thinking about Hazel, whom he suspects he might have loved before she refused to see him again.

Renton drifts in and out of sleep, and every time he wakes he is worried he's swallowed his tongue. At one point, he wakes to see baby Dawn crawling towards him and pouncing on him with vampire teeth. He realizes it is just a pillow, and that Sick Boy is sitting with him. Renton's parents love Sick Boy, thinking him a perfectly responsible young man. Sick Boy offers some cold comfort and, rejecting Renton's request for a hit, warns him that the days after the junk is out of his system will be horribly depressing. Sick Boy also informs Renton that he has begun seeing a French girl, whom he is going to accompany on a holiday in Southern France and Corsica.

Sick Boy is right. The days that follow Renton's physical withdrawal are maddeningly depressing. He sits, virtually catatonic, unable even to tell his mother if he wants coffee. His father keeps vigil over him, ensuring he does not try to score on the side. One night, Renton and his parents go to a bar for a bingo night. He cannot stomach the bad beer and the arrival of wary family friends. His mother insists on dancing with him to bad oldies hits. While he is at the bar getting a round, an old schoolmate and conquest of Sick Boy's recognizes him and says hello. He cheerily mentions Sick Boy's new career as a pimp and brings drinks back to his parents.

Blowing It: House Arrest Analysis

House Arrest opens in confusion and stays there for the majority of the chapter. Welsh employs a stream-of-consciousness more here than anywhere else in the novel. Indeed, looking back on chapters in which a narrator is high, the tone is surprisingly focused. Characters in the throes of a good hit want to focus on the pleasure, hold onto it, shut everything else out.



Renton's withdrawal, on the other hand, is a mishmash of terror, pain, minute experience, and half-remembered events. He focuses on the concrete elements of the room: a poster, a song, and a television program. Still, haunting, guilt television program. Still, haunting, guilt memories invade, from the vampiric specter of baby Dawn to his father's research into life with HIV. Surprising fixations arise, as Renton's repetition of Hazel's name. Perhaps, Mark Renton felt more for this wounded creature than he admitted earlier in the novel.

The mad torrent of the first half of the chapter gives way to the malaise of the second half. In many ways, life without heroin is portrayed as more depressing than life on it. Renton is left without an objective in life and without friends who understand him.



Blowing It: Bang to Rites, Junk Dilemmas No. 67

Blowing It: Bang to Rites, Junk Dilemmas No. 67 Summary

Renton is at his brother Billy's funeral in Bang to Rites, lowering the casket into the earth. Billy was killed when an IRA bomb went off at a roadblock in Ulster. All of Renton's paternal relatives are in from Glasgow, and he is angered by all the Unionist rhetoric being tossed about. His disgust is not going unnoticed by the Glasgow crowd, and Renton's father warns him that he is not to start anything. His Uncle Charlie seems about ready to punch him.

Renton ruminates on the people responsible for Billy's death. He decides some upper class twit is to blame more than the Irish nationalists. He thinks back to his childhood with Billy, bickering and fighting over the Hibs-Hearts rivalry. He thinks that Billy, in the end, had to protect two disabled brothers, Davie and the addict Mark.

Renton notices Nina at the cemetery, dressed in goth attire and looking cute. Both his father and Uncle Charlie are keeping an eye on the both of them. Renton heads back to his parents' house, where various aunts are comforting his mother and the very pregnant Sharon. As relations arrive, some of Glasgow cousins ask Renton about Billy. Renton decides the best bet is to play along with a set of clichés. So, he makes a speech saying Billy is in a better place, happy that they're all having a drink for him. Charlie is not amused, and when he sees Renton start to chat up Nina, he jumps into action. A fight nearly breaks out, but Renton's Catholic uncle Kenny breaks it up.

Renton goes upstairs to the bathroom and runs into Sharon. They are both drunk, and they proceed to have sex in the toilet. It is a difficult process given her advanced pregnancy, but they manage. Soon relations are banging on the door, and Renton is lying that Sharon is throwing up. He and Sharon slip away and go to his flat. There, she tells him how Billy used to beat her. Renton just wants the Glasgow Unionists to stop claiming him as a martyr. He also wants a hit.

In Junk Dilemmas No. 67, Renton reflects on the need for a stronger and stronger hit. He references Dennis Ross, whose OD hit was a mix of smack and whiskey.

Bang to Rites contains the most righteous indignation of the novel, surrounding as it does the death of a Scottish serviceman in Ulster. Billy's death becomes a battleground for rival attitudes regarding Irish sovereignty, for one half of Mark Renton's family are Unionists from Glasgow. Mark himself is disgusted by the notion of Unionism. This is not because he believes in the cause of nationhood for Northern Ireland, but because he is at heart a social materialist. At heart, he concludes, the entire issue is about class and money. Billy and others like him are working-class and need to pay the bills. Rich folks



down south seduce with the idea of honor, Union, and Protestantism. To Renton's mind, that makes the MPs in London more culpable than any IRA operative in Ulster.

The political question is one half of the tragedy of this section. The other half is the effect it has on the family. Renton notes that in the space of three years, his mother has lost two of her three sons, and the junkie is the only survivor. Billy beat his wife constantly, but now she is a month away from having his child. The government will likely not help her, and she does not know what to do. Having sex with Mark is just a way to forget all this for a moment.

Blowing It: Bang to Rites, Junk Dilemmas No. 67

Analysis

Bang to Rites contains the most righteous indignation of the novel, surrounding as it does the death of a Scottish serviceman in Ulster. Billy's death becomes a battleground for rival attitudes regarding Irish sovereignty, for one half of Mark Renton's family are Unionists from Glasgow. Mark himself is disgusted by the notion of Unionism. This is not because he believes in the cause of nationhood for Northern Ireland, but because he is at heart a social materialist. At heart, he concludes, the entire issue is about class and money. Billy and others like him are working-class and need to pay the bills. Rich folks down south seduce with the idea of honor, Union, and Protestantism. To Renton's mind, that makes the MP's in London more culpable than any IRA operative in Ulster.

The political question is one half of the tragedy of this section. The other half is the effect it has on the family. Renton notes that in the space of three years, his mother has lost two of her three sons, and the junkie is the only survivor. Billy beat his wife constantly, but now she is a month away from having his child. The government will likely not help her, and she does not know what to do. Having sex with Mark is just away to forget all this for a moment.



Exile: London Crawling, Bad Blood

Exile: London Crawling, Bad Blood Summary

London Crawling begins with Renton's arrival in London, having decided to get out of Edinburgh. He arrives at a friend's flat only to discover that his friend is not there. Annoyed, Renton goes to a nearby pub to ask if the barman has seen the friend. When it becomes clear that the friend may not even live in the area, Renton mentally scrolls through a list of acquaintances, deciding whom he should contact. After making a few contacts, Renton resigns himself to spending the night at an all-night porn theater he knows.

In the wee hours of the morning, while sitting through his third pornographic film, Renton is propositioned by a middle-aged Italian man called Gi. He declines, while privately considering whether he should have sex with a man for the experience. Gi offers to let him sleep in his flat. Renton considers a moment and agrees. Upon arriving at the flat, Renton is uncomfortable, but eventually he consents to sleep in Gi's bed.

He wakes up to find that Gi has masturbated on his face. Enraged, he starts to beat Gi but stops after he regains his cool and helps the cowering naked man up. Gi tells him a story of sleeping with his wife's brother until she found out and told some cousins in the central Italian mafia. The cousins beat both Gi and the brother until Gi fled to London and the brother killed himself. Renton buys Gi breakfast and takes him to a friend's flat, where a party is winding down. Gi seems sad, and as the chapter ends, Renton considers having sex with him.

Bad Blood is told from Davie's point-of-view. Davie has contracted HIV from a woman and is at a support group called "HIV and Positive" when he becomes fixated on a rough and vulgar former addict named Alan Venters. He begins to tell lies about intentionally infecting women in group to form a connection with Alan. Soon they are getting drinks together, and Alan's reckless over consumption is decimating his already weak immune system. Soon, Alan is in hospice, slowly dying. Davie informs Tom, the leader of the group, that he will stop attending meetings so that he can continue to tend to Alan. Privately, Davie acknowledges he is plotting some form of revenge.

Alan is a horrific person, without any form of human companionship in his life. The only person he loves is his son Kevin, whom he hasn't seen in years. Davie finds Ken and his mother Frances. He seduces Frances and starts a relationship, and one day, he offers to babysit Kevin so she can go out. The next day, Davie visits Alan in hospice. He is nearly gone, but awake enough to hear Davie inform him that they are not friends. Alan raped a woman called Donna, who would later unknowingly infect Davie. He gives Alan pictures of Kevin's bloody corpse, and tells him he raped the boy before murdering him. Then, Davie smothers Alan with a pillow. In reality, Davie did not kill Kevin, just drug him to stage the photos. He soon parts ways with Frances and reunites with



Donna. He tells his parents he has HIV, and they support him. Davie has decided he will live a happy life for as long as he can.

Exile: London Crawling, Bad Blood Analysis

Bad Blood is something of a novel unto itself, and one that has an ending much happier than any other in the novel. Davie has appeared only intermittently throughout the novel, most notable in Traditional English Breakfast, in which he accidentally flings feces on a girlfriend's parents. In short, he does not seem like a figure rife for dramatic pathos.

In Bad Blood, however, Welsh creates a harrowing pot-boiler with a saccharine sweet twist that subverts all of the reader's expectations. Being that the story centers in HIV/AIDS, rape, and murder, the reader expects that it could reach the darkest depths of the novel so far, and these expectations are fulfilled. Davie's supposed rape-murder of the young boy, Kevin, would be quite in keeping with the world of Trainspotting. Death breeds death; suffering breeds suffering. The twist that Davie staged the photos expunges him of guilt in the reader's mind, though, even if he does still kill Alan Venters. The final paragraphs of this chapter are probably the most hopeful of the novel.

London Crawling establishes that Renton, now seemingly clean, has left Edinburgh. This is a relief to the reader, who understands that the world of his Leith friends is simply a fast-track to relapse.



Exile: There Is a Light That Never Goes Out, Feeling Free, The Elusive Mr. Hunt

Exile: There Is a Light That Never Goes Out, Feeling Free, The Elusive Mr. Hunt Summary

It is early in the morning in *There Is a Light That Never Goes Out*. The chapter is told in the third person. Renton is back in town and happy to be seeing Spud, Gav, and Begbie. They have been partying all night and are heading to a pub for a morning drink. Renton has been chatting up an old acquaintance, Kelly, and Gav is working on Alison. Spud is feeling a little worse for wear and wondering when he will next have sex. He was doing well with a girl called Nicola, but he did not have the will to make a move. Spud recalls a time when a girl called Laura McEwan brought him home because she wanted to have anal sex with him. She tied him up and attempted to lubricate him with a heating ointment. This ointment began to burn, and while trying to wash it off in toilet he slipped, knocked his head and passed out with a concussion.

The group goes out to breakfast together, where Renton and Begbie get in an argument about vegetarianism. Later he slips off with Kelly, and Alison abruptly ditches Gav and asks Spud to take her home.

Feeling Free is told from Kelly's point of view. She is aggravated at Alison, who insists that Renton is still a junkie and should not be seeing Kelly. Kelly thinks the same in regards to Alison and Sick Boy. As they walk down the street, a group of construction workers cat-call them, and the women start shouting obscenities at them. A crowd forms, and two lesbians from Australia jump to Alison and Kelly's defense. Afterward, all four women go home together and smoke hash. Mark drops by, but seeing that they are having fun together, he leaves. The women decide he isn't so bad.

In *The Elusive Mr. Hunt*, Renton and some mates get together at the pub where Kelly works. Sick Boy makes a prank call to Kelly, asking for a Mark Hunt. The bar laughs at Kelly, and Renton sees that she feels hurt. Renton feels bad for letting the joke happen.

Exile: There Is a Light That Never Goes Out, Feeling Free, The Elusive Mr. Hunt Analysis

The events of this section all concern characters making healthy personal connections with individuals after they come off of junk. In *There Is a Light That Never Goes Out*, Renton connects with Kelly for the first time, but the most effective connection of the chapter is the final one between Alison and Spud. We never find out what happens between them - Alison just does not want to be alone - but Spud reasons:



He thinks he knows what she is saying, because he doesn't want to be alone either. He can never be sure, though, never, ever quite sure (273).

These characters have lived years in which no commitment is ever so certain as the one to heroin. Alison and Spud are both of the junk; at least in this bright morning they need each other to stay strong.

Renton, meanwhile, is discovering some nascent empathy as he connects with Kelly. He is only back in town for a short period, and later he will reveal that Kelly moved down with him to London for a time. Several times in this section, Renton states that he understands Kelly's need and frustration. It is not his own, but he can at least, to some extent now, imagine it.



Home: Easy Money for the Professionals, A Present, Memories of Matty, Straight Dilemmas No. 1, Eating Out

Home: Easy Money for the Professionals, A Present, Memories of Matty, Straight Dilemmas No. 1, Eating Out Summary

Easy Money for the Professionals is told from Spud's point of view. He and Begbie have just finished a lucrative drug deal in Edinburgh with the help of a younger kid. They get back to Begbie's flat with a duffel bag full of cash. As they spread it out on the bed, Begbie sits the boy down and threatens to kill him if he goes flashing his money around. The boy is petrified and agrees.

A present is told from Renton's point of view. He is back home to attend Matty's funeral and is crashing with Gav. Gav gives him the rundown on how Matty died. He was not aware that he had AIDS until he had a stroke. Matty wanted to see his estranged daughter; so he bought a cat for her. While he kept the cat, he started having headaches caught by abscesses he got from parasites in the cat feces. The second stroke killed him. As they talk, they find out that Second Prize is spending some money Gav lent him on booze. Gav and Renton go off to sort out that situation.

Memories of Matty is told in the third person and takes place at Matty's funeral. All the heroin users and former users talk about the importance of getting clean. The chaplain starts the service, and everyone thinks of Matty. Renton thinks about Matty's terrible guitar playing. Stevie wishes he were back in London with Stella. Spud is thinking about Australia for some reason. Alison recalls the one night she had sex with Matty: it was the worst she ever had. Frank Begbie is angry that Matty is gone, that he didn't bash the junkie out of him. Mrs. Connell thinks of how sweet Matty was as a child, how one day he was just gone from her life. Matty's brother wants to kill the other junkies at the funeral for coming. His daughter wonders how he'll fly to heaven if he is in a box. Shirley, his daughter's mother, thinks he could never take responsibility for anything.

After the funeral, the heroin crowd goes to a posh lounge in a hotel. Begbie is angry that Sick Boy has not come back from France for the funeral. They commiserate that they've been to too many funerals for being so young. They cannot learn a thing from Matty's death.

Renton is back in London in Straight Dilemmas No. 1. He sits at a young professional's flat, and a bourgeois young woman offers him a joint with pot and opium in it. He



declines, thinking how bored he is and how he misses Kelly. She didn't like London and didn't stick around.

Kelly is back in Edinburgh in *Eating Out*. She is working at the pub to put her way through school. Tonight she is putting up with some genuinely disgusting businessmen from down south. She decides they deserve some comeuppance. She dips her used tampon on one's soup, puts some of her urine in their wine, some of her feces in the profiteroles, and a little rat poison in the ice cream. She feels better.

Home: Easy Money for the Professionals, A Present, Memories of Matty, Straight Dilemmas No. 1, Eating Out Analysis

Matty's funeral in this section is the least arch moment in *Trainspotting*. Welsh's style of writing involves addressing everything at a right angle to the subject. Death, degradation, sexual abuse, addiction - these topics are all handles with a degree of levity, as if to accentuate the living that occurs even in the most desperate of lives. This is what separates *Trainspotting* from a more conventional narrative on the subject of addiction.

Matty's funeral is definitely not without its amusing sections: Spud's rumination on Australia, the worst sex Alison ever had. What makes it so much more painful than the rest of the novel is the vantage point. The rest of the novel is told from the point of view of men and women who have chosen to drop out of life and live selfish, vacuous existences. This section is from the point of view of those left behind. Matty's mother's rumination, in particular, cannot fathom how much she loved Matty as a small child. She notes that one day he just left, grown up and addicted. Affecting in a different way is the sad resignation of the junkie mourners, who seem resigned to dying the same way Matty does. In this respect, his death has truly meant nothing.

One must also note the strangely egalitarian balance between genders in *Eating Out*. In a novel in which urine, feces, vomit, and semen flow freely and vividly, a woman is afforded the most grotesquely stomach-churning passage of the novel, taking scatological revenge on her male annoyances.



Home: Trainspotting at Leith Central Station, A Leg-Over Situation, Winter in West Granton, A Scottish Soldier

Home: Trainspotting at Leith Central Station, A Leg-Over Situation, Winter in West Granton, A Scottish Soldier Summary

In *Trainspotting at Leith Central Station*, Renton is walking through the old neighborhood when he notices the belligerently drunk Second Prize in an alley. He calls a taxi back to his neighborhood and heads to a pub where he runs into Begbie. Begbie tells him Tommy is bad with AIDS now. They walk to the only - now unused Leith Central Station, where an old drunkard asks if they are trainspotting (obsessively tracking train times). The old man is Begbie's father. Later Begbie beats a man on the street for no reason.

Renton goes to Johnny Swan's flat in *A Leg-Over Situation*. Johnny has had a leg amputated from shooting into a femoral artery. He tells Renton he still intends to go to Thailand. Swan laments that he cannot get any girl to sleep with him anymore. In *Winter in West Granton*, Renton finally stops in to see Tommy. He is wasting away and blames Renton for getting him started on heroin. Renton can do nothing but apologize; he knows Tommy will be dead soon. He gives him some money for a hit. In *A Scottish Soldier*, told in the third person, Johnny Swan pretends to be a homeless Falklands War veteran to get money for his new addiction, methadone mixed with cyclozine.

Home: Trainspotting at Leith Central Station, A Leg-Over Situation, Winter in West Granton, A Scottish Soldier Analysis

The past is catching up with everyone in this section. In *Trainspotting at Leith Central Station*, Begbie must confront his drunk, derelict father, presumably the cause of so much of his rage. In *A Leg-Over Situation*, Renton drops in on Johnny Swan, now an amputee. Still, Renton must confront his most damning past acquaintance in *Winter in West Granton*. Renton is directly responsible for Tommy's illness; as he looks at his wasted friend, this dawns on him and he knows all he can do is apologize and give him some cash for his next fix.



Exit: Station to Station

Exit: Station to Station Summary

Station to Station is told in the third person and begins at a bus depot in Leith. Begbie has set up a heroin deal in London involving Sick Boy, Second Prize, Spud, and Renton, who has moved back from London. The product is much higher quality than any of them are used to; so Spud and Renton have been sneaking hits on the sly. Sick Boy arrives late, and they all board. On the ride down, Sick Boy chats up a backpacker, and Renton shoots up in the bus lavatory. Arriving in London, the boys intend to meet their contact Andrea at his hotel, make the transaction, and go to a Pogues concert that night. Andrea meets them with his dealer Gilbert. Gilbert knows the Edinburgh boys are nonprofessionals and settles low with them at 16,000 pounds.

Everyone goes out to celebrate except for Renton, who says he is not feeling well. When he is sure everyone is long gone, he takes the bag of money and leaves the hotel. He deposits half the cash in his bank account before buying a ticket to Amsterdam. He thinks about the mates he has ripped off. He does not feel particularly bad about Sick Boy, who will land on his feet, and Second Prize, who will die soon anyway. He feels bad about Spud, who is a good guy.

Finally, concerning Begbie, Renton feels good. The sociopath deserves to be ripped off, and his anger ensures that once Renton is out of England he will never return.

Exit: Station to Station Analysis

The novel ends with a drug deal and a betrayal. Renton, the moral center of Welsh's narrative, rips off his closest friends and flees the country with their money. He reasons that Sick Boy and Second Prize won't be affected by it and Begbie deserves to get ripped off, but Spud deserves better from life. Still, Renton is a survivor, and in this case, Welsh seems to imply that self interest is the greatest virtue for a junkie who will die otherwise.

Indeed, many people in the novel deserve better than the awful lives they lead. Some persevere and survive against awful odds. Many more are defeated by drugs, violence, or a general lack of options. Renton breaks away, cuts the twin cords of addiction and friendship. His future is uncertain, but with a lot of money and a clean slate life has to be better than it was.



Characters

Mark Renton

Mark Renton is the closest thing to a protagonist in *Trainspotting*. He is a young heroin addict living in Leith who alternately kicks junk and relapses throughout the novel. Before the narrative begins, Renton goes to Aberdeen University for one term before dropping out. He gets into smack more heavily after his disabled brother dies in hospital.

When the novel begins, Renton is at a low point in his addiction. He attempts to quit but soon relapses, only to witness his friend Sick Boy's baby die a crib death while they are all high. Renton is unemployed and when not high he orchestrates his various schemes to get extra unemployment and drinks at the pub with his friends Spud, Begbie, Matty, Davie, and Tommy. He is largely estranged from his parents and brother Billy, who is in the army.

On another spell of sobriety, Renton meets a nice girl at a club and goes home with her, only to realize the next day that she is only thirteen years old. He occasionally goes to be with Hazel, a sullen acquaintance who hangs out with him when he is off heroin. Renton relapses again and is arrested stealing books with Spud. He goes into a state methadone program but is soon back on smack. He overdoses, and his parents put him under house arrest until he is sober. In the malaise that follows his cold-turkey withdrawal, his brother is killed by the IRA in Ulster. At the wake, Renton has sex with Sharon, his brother's pregnant widow.

Renton moves to London and gets an office job, having effectively escaped his addiction. On a trip back to Leith, he starts a relationship with Kelly, a friend of a fellow addict. The distance eventually forces them to break up, and after a time Renton returns to Scotland. Back in Leith, he is forced to face the specters of his junkie past, including his friend Tommy, whom he introduced to heroin and who is now dying of AIDS.

At the end of the novel, Renton goes to London with Begbie and several other friends to broker a lucrative heroin deal. When the friends are out celebrating, Renton steals the money and flees to Amsterdam to start a new life.

Renton is sometimes called Rents or Rent-Boy. He is bisexual and a vegetarian.

Simon

Sick Boy is a heroin addict and friend of Mark Renton. He is a con man and sometime pimp, known for his slick way with women and his cynical indifference to others. He firmly believes that friendship is a waste of time.

At the beginning of the novel, Sick Boy and Renton spend most of their time at Johnny Swan's flat shooting smack. He regularly sleeps with fellow addict Alison, but he has an



illegitimate child with another junkie called Lesley. One day while Lesley, Sick Boy and several others are passed out high, the baby dies a crib death. Like Renton, Sick Boy spends much of his free time at pubs with Begbie, Spud, Tommy, and the rest of the group. He occasionally pimps out fellow addicts for spare cash.

After going clean, Sick Boy has a prodigious string of sexual conquests, like a threesome with two American tourists and a French girl who takes him on an extended European tour. He sometimes kills dogs for fun, but authority figures are always charmed by his slick persona. Renton's parents, for example, don't consider him a bad influence.

Sick Boy is absent in France and Corsica for much of the latter half of the novel, not even returning for Matty's funeral. He does return to take part in the Skag deal at the end of the novel.

Sick Boy is also known as Si and Simone. He regularly carries on imagined conversations with Sean Connery.

Daniel

Spud is a fellow addict who spends his time with the group that includes Mark Renton and Frank Begbie. Spud is a bit slower than his compatriots and not as charming. When he is using, Spud is almost unintelligible. He is a good soul, however, insistent that people are put on earth to be kind. He insists on kindness to animals and shows deep empathy for Lesley when her baby dies. Renton considers them best mates. When Spud first appears in the novel, he is passed out after several days of drinking around New Years.

Like Renton, Spud is defrauding the government of multiple unemployment checks. After going clean midway through the novel, Spud tries to reconnect with his family, particularly his grandmother and mixed-race uncle Dode. He ends up backing him up in a fight with some skinheads. Spud alter relapses and is arrested stealing books to finance his habit. He is sentenced to ten months in jail.

Spud emerges from jail clean and yearning for a girl. He is notorious for his lack of skill with women, one time getting a concussion attempting to have anal sex with a girl. Spud runs drugs with Begbie for spare cash, and he is involved in the final heroin deal when Renton rips him off. Spud is the only person Renton feels bad about stealing from.

Spud is sometimes called Danny. He refers to everyone as "cat."

Frank Begbie

Frank Begbie is the most prominent non-addict in the novel. An alcoholic and scam artist, Begbie is the dominant center of the coteries of lowlifes in the novel. He is a violent sociopath who bullies and beats everyone around him. The group feels fidelity to



him only out of fear and on account of the fact that they've know him since childhood. Begbie, meanwhile, despises junkies as a rule and loves to start fights at pubs.

Early in the novel, Begbie gets his live-in girlfriend June pregnant. He beats June regularly and acts as though the child is not his after he is born. Begbie's rage is partially explained throughout the novel. Partially it is economic; he hates the conspicuously educated and is embarrassed by his own poor roots. Late in the novel, he runs into his drunk, homeless father and ignores him. He is also angry about his impotence in controlling his life. Many of his friends are leaving town and the rest seem to be dying.

As the novel continues, Begbie starts making his money by running drugs. In the end, he brokers a lucrative heroin deal in London only to have Renton abscond with the cash. Renton implies that Begbie will kill him if he ever sees him again.

Begbie is sometimes called Beggars and Franco.

Davie Mitchell

Davie Mitchell is a non-addict member of the core group in *Trainspotting*. He only appears intermittently but has two full chapters dedicated to him.

When the reader first meets Davie, he is dating a girl named Gail who has been withholding sex recently. He wakes in her bed in her parents' house after a night of heavy drinking. He has urinated and defecated all over himself in his sleep. As he attempts to slip out of the house with the sheets, he is stopped by Gail's mother, who insists on cleaning them herself. Snatching them from him, she flings his feces all over the house.

Later, Davie contracts HIV from a woman named Donna, who was raped and infected by a man called Alan Venters. Davie finds Alan at a support group and befriends him. As Alan's health declines, Davie finds the man's young, estranged son. Davie stages a series of photos that make it appear that he has raped and murdered the boy. At Alan's hospice bed, Davie tells him he murdered his son. Then he proceeds to smother Alan with a pillow.

At the end of the novel, Davie is living a happy, reasonably healthy life with Donna. He is the perfect HIV patient, taking care of himself and enjoying life.

Tommy Laurence

Tommy Laurence is a good friend of Renton and Begbie and a part of the core group of the novel. At the beginning of the narrative, he is not a heroin user. He drinks, does a speed, and dates a girl called Lizzy. One day, he forgets her birthday and goes to an Iggy Pop concert instead. She dumps him, and in anguish, Tommy asks Renton to help him try heroin. Renton obliges, and Tommy begins a steep decline into addiction.



At the end of the novel, Tommy is hopelessly addicted and dying of AIDS. He blames Renton for his decline.

Matty

Matty is a former punk enthusiast and hopelessly depressive heroin user. He is among the least liked members of the core group, though his low self-esteem makes him easy prey for dominant personalities like Sick Boy and Begbie.

Matty has a child by a former girlfriend whom he almost never sees. One day, he buys a kitten for the kid, but her mother will not let her have it. Matty does not know that he has AIDS, and the cat's feces gives him a brain infection. He dies of a stroke, and his funeral becomes something of an impromptu reunion for the group of junkies. Matty's death typifies the meaninglessness of life and death in the world of the novel.

Billy

Billy is Mark Renton's brother, a soldier in the British reserves and a loyal Unionist. He and Mark rarely see each other, and he has a wife Sharon who is pregnant with his child in the novel. Billy is a member of a group of semi-professional gamblers who pool their money to play in the gaming clubs. One day, a member dies suddenly while holding the communal pot. Billy knows another member of the group is sleeping with the dead man's wife and proceeds to beat the truth of the man's death of him.

Billy is killed by an IRA bomb in Ulster, leaving Sharon a widow and his family - split of Catholics and Unionist Protestants - in disarray.

Sharon

Sharon is Billy Renton's wife. She does not appear in person in the novel until his death in Ulster. She is eight months pregnant at this point and will likely receive not government assistance. At the wake, Sharon and Mark Renton have sex in a toilet. Later, Mark takes her to his flat, where she tells him that Billy used to beat her.

Kelly

Kelly is a friend of Alison and meets Mark Renton through her. She is a student at a local college who tends bar to pay her school bills. Though Kelly is distrustful of all men, she and Renton spark a real relationship. She moves down to London with him for a while but leaves when she decides she can no longer afford it. In her last appearance in the novel, she is working at the pub where she gets revenge on a group of disrespectful men by tainting their food with her menses, urine, and feces.



Renton's Parents

Mark Renton's parents are portrayed in the novel as tragic figures who cannot - try as they might - forgive Mark for his addiction. His mother is a Catholic and his father a Unionist Protestant who encourages his other son Billy to join the military. They had a third son, Davie, who was mentally and physically disabled. His death crushes the family. When Mark Renton overdoses, his parents bring him home to get off heroin there. The final connection between Mark Renton and his parents occurs when Billy is killed in Ulster.

Johnny Swan

Johnny Swan is the core group's primary supplier of heroin in the novel. His flat is a favorite haunt of the group, and he himself has been a serious user for a long time. Hence the name Mother Superior. Swan dreams of one day having enough money to move to Thailand, but he eventually loses a leg when he starts shooting heroin into his femoral artery. At the end of the novel, Swan is pretending to be a Falklands War vet, panhandling to fund his addiction.

Second Prize

Second Prize is a member of the core group, a belligerent alcoholic with a habit of starting fights he cannot win. As the novel continues, Second Prize becomes homeless and deteriorates at an alarming rate. He is a part of the heroin deal at the end of the novel.



Objects/Places

Leith

Leith is a working class neighborhood in the north of Edinburgh where all the characters of the novel live. It is presented as a generally downtrodden area populated mostly by addicts, skinheads, and lower middle class families in council houses. It also seems to be an area that characters cannot leave. Try as they might, they are always pulled back into the old neighborhood by a funeral or a simple desire to return.

London

London is where Stevie lives with Stella and Renton moves for a brief clean period in the novel. It is the city that many of the characters from the novel go when they want to escape the Edinburgh scene for a while or - as in the last chapter - need to arrange a lucrative drug deal.

Glasgow

Glasgow and its populace are much despised by Renton in the novel. The populace of this city - the second largest in Scotland after Edinburgh - are portrayed in the novel as Unionist blowhards who harbor barely concealed racist attitudes.

Heroin

Heroin is the preferred drug of most of the characters in the novel, and the heroin scene in Edinburgh is the unifying element of the narrative. Most of the characters gather together at Johnny Swan's flat to shoot heroin. Matty and Tommy contract HIV as a result of shooting heroin. The money that Mark Renton steals at the end of the novel comes from a heroin purchase brokered by Begbie. Alternately called smack, opium, skag, and junk in the novel.

Mother Superior's Flat

Mother Superior's Flat is one of the preferred locations for Renton and his mates to go to score heroin. Johnny Swan, a.k.a. Mother Superior, is an advanced junkie who sells the drug to finance his addiction. His flat serves as a general flop-house and "shooting gallery."



HIV/AIDS

HIV and AIDS are the twin terrors of the heroin community in the novel. Evidently the spread of HIV increased dramatically when a medical supply shop in Leith closed, leaving junkies to share needles. Tommy and Matty contract HIV from sharing needles. Davie contracts it from sleeping with Donna, who had previously been raped by the infected Alan Venters.

Opium Suppositories

Mike Forrester gives Opium Suppositories to Mark Renton when the latter is quitting heroin early in the novel. They are supposed to help let him down easily. Renton loses them when he has a fit of diarrhea on the way home. He has to search his own feces in order to find them.

Hibs and Hearts

The Hibs (Hiberian) are the local football club in Leith, and Heart of Midlothian are their rival Edinburgh club. The big rivals' match is played on New Years Day. The addicts of the novel are of course Hibs fans. Billy, Renton's brother, is a Hearts fan. Hearts fans, in general, are portrayed in the novel as Unionist and Racist.

Methadone

Methadone is a drug given to recovering heroin addicts as part of the government recovery program. Renton believes that the drug, never effective, makes the process of kicking junk much more difficult.

Duffel Bag of Money

The duffel bag full of money - 16,000 pounds to be exact - is given to Renton, Begbie, Sick Boy, Spud, and Second Prize at the end of the novel in a heroin deal. While the other four go off to celebrate, Renton absconds with the money, en route to Amsterdam.



Themes

There Are No Friends in the World of Heroin

Early in the novel, Sick Boy states categorically that in the circle with which he and Renton run, there are no friends, only associates. Everybody is looking out for number one, and though temporary entanglements emerge in the common experiences of these junkies, no one is ever more than an associate.

The primary reason for this sad fact has nothing to do with selfishness or cynicism; it has to do with addiction. There are no friends in this world because no one who is addicted to heroin cared about friendship. Nor do they care about employment, family, personal nutrition, or anything other than the availability of the next score. The perfect example of this is the death of Baby Dawn in *It Goes Without Saying*. The group is woken by Lesley's screaming. Everyone is momentarily shocked to realize her child has died, but Renton quickly ascertains the only reasonable response: shooting up. Lesley agrees, and that is what they do.

The other reason there are no friends in this world of heroin is that no one would be this connected to anyone else were it not for the drug. The final moments of the novel confirm this, as Renton - having gotten at least partly clean - casually makes the decision to rip off his mates by stealing their drug money. He feels bad for hurting his best friend Spud, but he also knows that he needs to leave England if he wants to start a new life. That is more important than associates.

National Identity

National Identity plays a key role in fueling debate in the novel, primarily as it concerns Mark Renton, who is intensely distrustful of appeals to national pride. From his point of view - and presumably the point of view of the author - the notion of the Union is simply a tool used by the wealthy to convince poor folks to fight other poor folks.

This causes conflict in Renton's family, which is partially composed of Unionists from Glasgow, who favor the retaining of Northern Ireland in the United Kingdom at all costs. Renton cannot stand what he considers to be idiotic Scots-Protestant chest-beating. He sees no point in fight in Ulster to preserve an imperial vestige. When his brother Billy is killed by the IRA in Ulster, this tension nearly reaches a breaking point.

Renton repeatedly states that the Scottish people are the lowest scum on earth. This sense of national self-loathing seems almost understandable when one considers the figures that appear throughout the novel: neo-Nazis that attack Spud's mixed race uncle, Hearts fans telling Pakistani immigrants to leave the country. The portrait of Scotland that Irvine Welsh paints in the novel is decidedly backwater. Moreover, the characters that populate the city are largely burnouts and losers. They actively choose not to be a part of the Scottish society. They have no need for the Union.

Life in Squalor

The characters in *Trainspotting* live lives of squalid degradation. Mark Renton, the human center of the narrative, drinks urine, handles his own feces and is masturbated upon by a middle-aged man. By all accounts, every other page of the novel contains a new and disgusting indignity visited upon a hapless addict or low-life. These characters are all reaching for some sublime happiness outside of the norm. In that search - be it from heroin, a threesome with two American tourists, or an eventual trip to Thailand - they will suffer horrid pains.

Still, Welsh presents these indignities with something approaching a drunk legend's dignity. Just about every story in the novel, from Davie's fecal mishap with Gail to Matty's kitten-induced stroke, could be told over a pint, as some event that a friend of a friend experienced. These figures are all gutter archetypes, and the central narrative, such as it is, exists incidental to the larger, messy hodgepodge of Welsh's Leith.

Some stories seem to exist in a larger context; they are novels unto themselves. The gamblers of *Grieving and Mourning in Port Sunshine* seem to exist in a Greek tragedy, an indifferent god mercilessly batting them about. Stevie becomes a great romantic hero in *Victory on New Year's Day*, Davie a righter of wrongs in *Bad Blood*. In short, these people live on the filthy fringes, but in the high-pulp style of Irvine Welsh, they live brilliantly.

Style

Point of View

Trainspotting takes the form of a series of short stories with a recurring cast of characters. As such, the plot is disseminated through a rotating narration, involving first person narration from a series of different characters and a third person omniscient narrator that roves about group scenes.

The first person narration in Trainspotting has many different narrators. Mark Renton is the most common narrator, but there are others: Spud, Sick Boy, Begbie, Kelly, Davie, Tommy, Rav, etc. By and large, these narrators become differentiated by their style of speech. Renton, Spud and Begbie, for example, narrate in a heavily accented Scots dialect that seems almost like another language at first blush. Kelly and Sick boy, on the other hand, speak in something more akin to standard English, though not entirely without dialect.

The third person narration, on the other hand, is distinguished by being entirely in standard English. Generally, the third person narration appears in chapters involving groups, which allows the narrator to exist in several different character's thoughts at once, as with Renton's sex scene with Dianne and Matty's funeral. The overall effect created by this mishmash of points-of-view is of a panorama, a full picture of a culture rather than a single narrative.

Setting

Trainspotting takes place primarily in the Leith area of Edinburgh, presumably in the late eighties. Certain parts of the story take place in London, where characters regularly travel for an escape or to broker a heroin sale. At one point, Renton actually attempts to move down to London, but he eventually returns to Leith. The city has a strong hold on natives.

Leith is a working class area in the north of Edinburgh, and all the characters in the novel come from working class families, many quite conservative. The period of time during which the narrative takes place indicates that it is either in the ministry of Margaret Thatcher or John Major. Certainly, the prospect of a Labour resurgence seems inconceivable to the characters. The Troubles, the IRA's extended campaign of bombings in London, have largely ended, but violence in Ulster continues. Bobby Sands has been dead long enough that skinheads are singing songs mocking him.

The portrait Welsh presents of Leith is not a flattering one. It one is not an addict in Leith, then one is a dull and racist alcoholic who likes nothing so much as watching daytime television and complaining about the influx of the Chinese. Perhaps this is meant to reflect the world as seen through a junkie's eyes, but it is certainly not a pretty one.



Language and Meaning

The most apparent aspect of the language in *Trainspotting* is its use of Scots dialect to establish character. As first glance, indeed, the dialect looks like a language other than English, with "ah" replacing "I" and "whae" replacing "who." Soon the use of dialect becomes more apparent as a way to distinguish one narrating character from another. Spud and Begbie, for example, are the most heavily accented; Davie and Sick Boy markedly less so.

Irvine Welsh also peppers his novel with Scottish slang. This is so frequent that the novel comes with a glossary of terms. Again, the more educated characters tend to use less slang and fewer filler words like "ken" and "likesay." What seems most prevalent among all characters is the use of profanity in every situation. This reflects not so much class or upbringing but rather age and lifestyle. The narrators are exclusively young and generally unemployed, addicted, or both. They have chosen to drop out of society and do not care for its polite niceties.

The only instance of standard English in the novel comes in chapters in which a third person narrator tells the story. There are several of these in the novel, and the narrator always maintains standard English spelling while the dialogue, of course, remain in dialect.

Structure

Trainspotting consists of seven books: *Kicking*, *Relapsing*, *Kicking Again*, *Blowing It*, *Exile*, *Home*, *Exit*. With the exception of *Exit*, which has only one chapter, all the books have between four and ten chapters. These chapters alternate between half-page *Junk Dilemmas* and expansive autonomous stories that last more than 20 pages.

Essentially, the novel is a collection of short stories with a recurring cast of characters. Several stories - *Victory on New Year's Day*, *Grieving and Mourning in Port Sunshine*, *Bad Blood* - contain narratives entirely unconnected with the main narrative of Renton's attempts to get clean. The breaking down of these stories into several books creates a somewhat false sense of structure to the events of the novel. Like that most famous of drug novels, *Naked Lunch*, Welsh's collection of stories is unconcerned with a perfectly crafted narrative arch.

This mishmash of stories creates something much more vital than a single narrative: it creates the aura of a subculture. That subculture is one perpetual dropouts and losers. In this world, the story of a man who unknowingly defecates in his girlfriend's bed is just as important as the story of a baby's crib death. Both establish the world of the novel.



Quotes

"When it came, ah savoured the hit ... Take yer best orgasm, multiply the feeling by twenty, and you're still fuckin miles off the pace."

Kicking: The Skag Boys, p. 11

"Mates are a waste of fucking time. They are always ready to drag you down tae their level of social, sexual, and intellectual mediocrity."

Kicking: In Overdrive, p. 28

"Ah can feel death in the room before ah even see the bairn. It wis lying face doon in its cot. It, naw, she, wis cauld and deid, blue around the eyes."

Kicking: It Goes Without Saying, p. 52

"Handsome, easy-going, intelligent and pretty tidy in a swedge. Tommy should make you jealous, but somehow he doesnae. This is because Tommy doesnae have the self-confidence ..."

Relapsing: Cock Problems, p. 87

"[Tommy's] reaction is shitein us up. Some cunts are just so predisposed to skag ..."

Relapsing: Cock Problems. p. 91

"He spent the obligatory half hour hour boosting Begbie's ego. That is, Renton decides, the sole function of any mate of Begbie's. He reflects on the insanity of being a friend of any person he dislikes. he was a custom and practice. Begbie, like junk, was a habit. He was also a dangerous one."

Kicking Again: The First Shag in Ages, p. 134

"Tommy's started using. He nivir used before. It's probably our fault; probably ma fault."

Blowing It: Courting Disaster, p. 175

"Well, ah choose no tae choose life. If the cunts cannae handle that, it's thair fuckin problem. As Harry Lauder sais, ah jist intend tae keep right on to the end of the road ..."

Blowing It: Searching for the Inner Man, p. 188

"Something hud happened. Junk hud happened. Whether ah lived wi it, died wi it, or lived withoot it, ah knew things could never be the same again. Ah huv tae git oot ay Leith, oot ay Scotland."

Blowing It: House Arrest, p. 201

"[Billy] died a hero they sais ... In fact, he died a spare prick in a uniform, walking along a country road wi a rifle in his hand. He died an ignorant victim ay imperialism, understanding fuck all about the myriad circumstances which led tae his death."

Blowing It: Bang to Rites, p. 210



"Life is beautiful. I'm going to enjoy it, and I'm going to have a long life. I'll be what the medical staff call a long-term survivor. I just know that I will."

Exile: Bad Blood, p. 262

"They'd already spent twelve hours drinking and pontificating about Matty's life and his motivations ... all their insights pooled and processed, did little to illuminate the cruel puzzle of it all."

Home: Memories of Matty, p. 299

"The truth ay the matter is, the drugs thing just seems such a bore now; even though ah'm actually much more boring now than ah was when ah wis oan the skag."

Home: Straight Dilemmas No. 1, p. 301

"Renton's real guilt was centered around Spud. He loved Spud. Spud had never hurt anybody ... Nothing had gone right for Spud. The world had shat on him, and now his mate had joined it."

Exit: Station to Station, p. 343



Topics for Discussion

Discuss national identity. Why do some characters in the novel care so little about Scotland and other care intensely? What does Mark Renton feel about the Union? Are there people in the United States with a similar opinion of our Union?

Trainspotting is a novel of incredible filth and squalor, with prodigious amounts of semen, urine and feces. What is the author saying about the lives of these characters? Why all the scatology? What purpose does it solve?

Sick Boy says that there are no friends in life, only associates. How does this represent his worldview specifically? What does it say about the life of a heroin addict? Is it possible for addicts to develop real human relationships?

Discuss humor and its use in the novel. Where does the humor of these squalid lives originate from? Why does the reader laugh at certain points? Does he or she not empathize with the character whose life is so ridiculous?

Discuss the character of Begbie. Why do people stand beside a man as violent and repulsive as he is? Does the author discuss the root of Begbie's aggression? How does he respond to the death of so many of the boys he grew up with?

The novel is essentially a rumination on the realities of addiction. Discuss as a class what factors drive the characters in the novel to heroin. What stops them from getting clean? Do you think that addiction of this type is a disease?

What is the role of hope in the narrative of Trainspotting? Do you think that any of the characters in the novel have real hope of changing their lives? As a class, discuss whether life can ever really be improved.