

Trainspotting Film Summary

Trainspotting by Danny Boyle

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Contents

| | |
|---|--------------------|
| Trainspotting Film Summary..... | 1 |
| Contents..... | 2 |
| Context..... | 3 |
| Summary and Analysis..... | 5 |
| Characters..... | 9 |
| Themes..... | 12 |
| Style and Cinematography..... | 14 |
| Motifs..... | 15 |
| Symbols..... | 17 |
| Essay Questions..... | 19 |

Context

Trainspotting is the story of a man who is heavily addicted to heroin in Edinburgh, Scotland. Actor Ewan McGregor portrays Mark Renton, a young man so immersed in the drug underworld that he seems to have little chance of escaping from it. Renton's need for drugs becomes evident early in the movie, when he purchases and takes heroin at the grungy establishment of a dealer who has been nicknamed Mother Superior, "on account of the length of his habit." Renton's subsequent hallucinations allow the viewer to experience the world of heroin addiction in a powerful, memorable way.

Throughout the film, we see different aspects of Renton's life and personality. He finally comes clean after a baby dies at Mother Superior's and Renton himself is admitted to the hospital. With his family's help, Renton begins to build a new life for himself in London; however, his drug-addicted friends from Edinburgh eventually show up on his doorstep. Renton decides to go in with them on one final drug deal, but in the end, he decides to break away from them and "choose life."

Director Danny Boyle is best known for making smaller films that are vibrant and vivacious. Although *Trainspotting* has dark undertones, Boyle makes the characters come alive on the screen. Of his own work, Boyle says, "I want my films to be life-affirming, even a film like *Trainspotting*, which is very dark in many ways. I want people to leave the cinema feeling that something's been confirmed for them about life." Certainly this film ends up being life-affirming in the end, as Renton sets off to forge a new existence without his old band of friends and without drugs.

Ewan McGregor starred in several of Boyle's films before assuming the role of Mark Renton. Although the film's other characters have some importance, they mainly serve as foils or negative examples in Renton's own quest to discover himself and the type of life he really wants to live. Before *Trainspotting*, McGregor appeared in many smaller film roles, but after his 1994 work in *Shallow Grave*, followed by the success of *The Pillow Book* and *Trainspotting*, McGregor became an internationally known actor. Of small movies like *Trainspotting*, McGregor says, "Film-making is like a series of problems that need to be solved. And the excitement, the adrenaline that you get from making a small film is that you all have to pull together. You finish and you feel like you're walking away from your family. I love that."

When the film was first released in the United States, the first twenty minutes of *Trainspotting* had to be redubbed so that North American audiences could better comprehend the actors' Scottish accents. Even so, parts of the film can be extremely confusing for viewers in the United States due to the characters' strongly accented and colloquial speech. The film was also heavily criticized in the United States (sometimes by politicians who admitted never having seen it) for ostensibly glamorizing drug use, although there is evidence that the film's true intention was quite the opposite.

Trainspotting won many awards around the world when it was released. At the Empire Awards in the United Kingdom, the film won prizes for Best British Actor (Ewan McGregor), Best British Director (Danny Boyle), Best Debut (Ewen Bremner) and Best British Film. At the London Critics Circle Film Awards, in addition to receiving nominations for British Director of the Year (Danny Boyle) and Best British Film of the Year, *Trainspotting* won in the categories of British Actor of the Year (Ewan McGregor) and Best British Producer of the Year (Andrew McDonald). In the United States, at the Academy Awards, the film's John Hodge received an Oscar nomination for Best Writing.



Summary and Analysis

Trainspotting opens with two men racing down the street; in the background, we hear a male voice making a persuasive speech that exhorts listeners to "choose life" and all the best it has to offer. We are also introduced to some of the main characters, including Renton, Sick Boy, Begbie, Spud and Tommy. However, at the end of the scene, Renton says, "I chose not to choose life. I chose something else and the reasons - there are no reasons. Who needs reasons when you've got health?"

Later, in an apartment, Renton and his friends do drugs and make out with each other. Renton's voice explains that he and his friends are not completely stupid. He describes how the sensation of doing drugs, particularly shooting heroin, easily tops even the best possible orgasm. If you aren't stoned, Renton explains, then you also have to worry about unpleasant downers, like bills and relationships. As the group members take turns shooting up, they talk about movies and wait around for their next turn. The group of drug-using friends includes a young single mother named Allison, whose baby also lives in the apartment.

Suddenly, we see a series of scenes in which everyone seems to be telling Renton that he is ruining his life with drugs. As Renton gradually comes down from his drug-induced high, his realization grows that he needs to get off drugs for good. We hear the baby cry in the background, but Renton says, "Of course I'd have another shot. I had work to do."

Renton locks himself in his own room with a lot of food and water so that he can rest. He also swipes some Valium pills, which he considers a safe, respectable way to get drugged up. He calls someone else for help getting his next hit, but only manages to score some opium suppositories. However, once he inserts the suppositories, they reverse the constipation caused by his last heroin shot (a typical side effect of the drug).

Renton hurries to the closest bathroom, which he describes as among the most disgusting in Scotland, so that he can take care of his business. He then reveals the desperation of his addiction by proceeding to dig through the dirty toilet and his own feces in search of the remnants of the opium suppositories. In a graphic, hallucinogenic scene, Renton falls into the toilet and is sucked down the pipes. Suddenly, he is swimming through water and then he pops back out of the toilet with his suppositories in hand.

Later, Renton meets up with Sick Boy, who is also attempting to give up heroin. Unlike Renton, Sick Boy seems to be dealing well with his withdrawal from drugs and Renton is convinced that he is doing this just to show off. Sick Boy's theory is that they are getting too old to hack it in the drug culture anyway. The pair take binoculars and guns to a park and watch people. Renton shoots at a nearby dog, which then attacks its owner. Renton wryly comments that this is the best attempt he can muster to lead a good and useful life without heroin.



Renton also encounters Spud, who is soon to meet with a company for a job interview. Spud admits that he lied on his employment application so that he would stand a better chance of success. In the interview, he is nervous and stoned, answering questions incorrectly and extremely quickly. Before leaving, he hugs and kisses each of his interviewers in turn. Then the group meets at a local bar to discuss their fate. Begbie tells a gloating story about getting revenge on someone who had done him wrong, but Tommy tells Renton the truth a couple of days later: Begbie actually attacked an innocent man.

As Renton and a friend watch a pornographic movie, Renton realizes that something important is missing from his life: sex. He notes that many of the people in the bar he goes to that night easily manage to hook up with someone. Although Renton had felt impotent and uninterested in sex while on heroin, he believes those days are over for him now. Renton finally spots a girl named Diane and he follows her out of the bar. She is unimpressed with him and calls a taxi to escape. However, she eventually lets him come home with her and the two end up having sex in her bedroom. Diane kicks him out before morning and Renton spends the night sleeping in the hall of her building.

Renton wakes up the next morning and has an uncomfortable breakfast with Diane's parents. It turns out that Diane is still in high school and actually took him to her parents' home that night. As Renton walks Diane to school, he expresses anger that he unknowingly had illegal sex with a minor. However, she warns him that she will tell everyone if he fails to make a repeat performance.

After Tommy breaks up with his girlfriend, Lizzy, he tries to convince Renton to shoot heroin with him. They obtain a variety of drugs and Renton begins to fall back into his old ways. Renton names all of the drugs they took and the places they got them from, a list that includes places ranging from nursing homes to their friends' houses.

One night in the apartment, Renton hears screaming from Allison, the young mother in the group. There is a suggestion that she has probably been screaming most of the day without any of her drugged-up friends hearing her. As it turns out, Allison has been shrieking with sorrow upon discovering that her baby has died from neglect. None of the others ever really knew to whom the baby belonged since Allison never revealed the identity of the father. However, since the baby has been a consistent presence in the apartment, everyone is saddened by the loss. Sick Boy eventually discovers that the baby is his child and he becomes terribly upset.

After the baby's death, the friends begin buying and selling drugs with renewed vigor, or perhaps desperation. They are arrested and reminded that their heroin addiction does not excuse their actions. Renton joins a rehabilitation program for heroin addicts and he is informed that his release from prison is dependent on him cleaning up his act. Renton visits with his family and friends, but is distressed that Spud remains in jail instead of him. Although Renton is undergoing therapy, he continues to shoot up at least once a day. During one of his hallucinations, he feels that he has fallen into the floor. His drug dealer pulls Renton outside, dumping him in the middle of the road to be picked up by a taxi and taken to a hospital.



In the hospital, Renton finally wakes up from the other drugs they have given him. His parents pick him up and bring him home, locking him into his room to make it impossible for him to obtain drugs. Renton describes the severe drug withdrawal sickness he knows will overtake him soon if he does not get another hit. In his hallucinations, he sees Diane watching him and singing to him. He begs her for drugs, but she tells him she is disappointed that he has been lying to his parents. After a while, Renton's parents bring him dinner and again lock up the room.

As Renton continues to hallucinate, he sees Begbie in the bed with him, but quickly realizes that this is just a product of his imagination. He also sees and hears the baby crawling on the ceiling. Next, he envisions a television show in which his parents are discussing AIDS with the host of the show. Renton endures an excruciating time in his bed as he tries to escape the many horrors of his imagination. He screams constantly and even believes the dead baby has fallen on him. When he wakes up, his parents are in the room telling him that there is something he needs to do: he is finally tested for AIDS.

Renton observes those around him as he spends time getting sober and trying to fight the depression stemming from both his drug withdrawal and his change of lifestyle. He finally visits Tommy only to vividly witness his friends continuing on the same hellish path he himself had followed for so long. Renton gives Tommy some money and then leaves, finally glad to be free of his own enslavement to drugs. Later that day, Diane shows up at his apartment to see if he has finally cleaned up. Diane tells Renton that he is getting too old to just think about heroin all day; she says he needs to "find something new." Renton decides to move to London.

In London, away from his heroin addiction, Renton is finally able to get a real job. Although he thinks about his friends sometimes, Renton enjoys finding out that he can easily earn an income and he does not really miss his old life much. He says, "For the first time in my adult life, I was finally almost content." Diane writes to him and lets him know that his friends are still being eaten away by drugs.

After getting in trouble in Edinburgh, Begbie unexpectedly shows up, expecting to crash at Renton's place in London. One evening, Renton comes home to find Begbie drugged up and lying in the dark. Renton wants him to leave, but feels he cannot ask him to do so because they are friends. After Begbie wins some money in a bet, the two go out to celebrate, but Renton no longer enjoys himself the way he used to. Soon afterward, Sick Boy also comes to Renton's place and begins living with him. Sick Boy tries to convince Renton to sell his passport so that he can make some money from it. Renton finally realizes that his friends have become burdens from which he must free himself: they are happy to live off him and even willing to steal from him. He locates other people to rent the place, but Sick Boy and Begbie attack them and drive them away.

Shortly thereafter, the friends must attend a funeral for one of their own: Tommy has died as a result of his out-of-control drug habit. Everyone in the group mourns Tommy's fate and realizes that it could have easily belonged to any one of them.



Begbie, Sick Boy and Spud offer to let Renton in on a big drug deal if he can contribute a couple of thousand pounds to help them out. Renton initially refuses because he does not want to go to jail; however, he eventually capitulates to their demands. After buying the drugs, Renton also ends up being the one to test the drugs to check their quality. After using them once, Renton begins to get hooked again. Renton decides that the drugs he has recently taken should, for his own good, be his last; however, he is not completely convinced that he has the willpower to resist.

The group arrives back in London to sell their drugs. However, when they meet up with the buyer, he tries to rip them off. Knowing that they have to accept whatever deal he offers, he lowers the price to sixteen thousand pounds. Having still make the biggest drug deal of their lives, the group celebrates together.

At the bar where they celebrate, a man accidentally runs into Begbie as he is going to get more drinks. After yelling at the man, Begbie beats him up and almost kills him. Renton hands Begbie a share of the drug deal money and they smoke a cigarette together. Later that night, everyone crashes at Renton's place, but Renton is unable to sleep. He gets a drink of water and watches himself in the mirror, then makes a decision to take all the money from the drug sale. As he is leaving with the money, he sees that Spud is awake and has noticed what he is doing. Spud says nothing and does not alert the others, but shakes his head no at Renton; Renton steals the money anyway. Renton realizes that he has treated his friends poorly, but he only feels bad about hurting Spud, who is a decent person. The next morning, Begbie discovers the missing money and angrily breaks everything in the room.

As Renton leaves town, he says, "So why did I do it? Because I was a bad person, but now, I'm going to be like you. I choose life. Now I've justified this to myself in all sorts of ways. It wasn't a big deal, just a minor betrayal. Or we'd outgrown each other, you know, that sort of thing. But let's face it, I ripped them off - my so-called mates. But Begbie, I couldn't give a shit about him. And Sick Boy, well he'd done the same to me, if he'd only thought of it first. And Spud, well okay, I felt sorry for Spud - he never hurt anybody. So why did I do it? I could offer a million answers - all false. The truth is that I'm a bad person. But, that's gonna change - I'm going to change. This is the last of that sort of thing. Now I'm cleaning up and I'm moving on, going straight and choosing life. I'm looking forward to it already. I'm gonna be just like you. The job, the family, the fucking big television. The washing machine, the car, the compact disc and electric tin opener, good health, low cholesterol, dental insurance, mortgage, starter home, leisure wear, luggage, three-piece suite, D.I.Y., game shows, junk food, children, walks in the park, nine to five, good at golf, washing the car, choice of sweaters, family Christmas, indexed pension, tax exemption, clearing gutters, getting by, looking ahead, the day you die." Spud discovers that Renton has left him a share of the money in a train station locker. He smiles and takes the money and the film ends.



Characters

Renton, played by Ewan McGregor

Description

Mark Renton is a smart young man with a major drug problem. Renton is addicted to heroin and totally immersed in Edinburgh, Scotland's, underground drug culture. Renton crashes in a small, untidy apartment with his friends, all of whom live in anticipation of their next hit. They go out at night to clubs, but for the most part, their everyday lives revolve around their drug use.

Finally, after meeting a young girl, Diane, whom he likes and experiencing the trauma of a neglected baby dying in his apartment, Renton begins to get help with his addiction. His parents care for him during his illness from heroin withdrawal and their strict supervision finally allows him to get sober. However, after Renton moves to London for a fresh start, his friends find him and drag him into a big drug deal they are trying to pull off. Renton agrees to help them make the sale, but he steals the money from them afterward. In so doing, he keeps them from using the money on more drugs. Renton uses the money to start a new life of his own - a life free from drugs.

Analysis

Renton helps the audience get an inside look at a young drug addict's life. Through him, the viewer gains understanding of the appealing parts of drug culture, such as partying and staying out all night. However, the viewer also sees horrible aspects of the drug-using lifestyle: its effects on the bodies and minds of addicts and the consequences of their desperate actions (for example, the death of the baby).

Through Renton, the viewer is given an opportunity to witness the difficult journey to sobriety. Renton's experience also helps the audience realize that, even after becoming clean, the desire to take a hit and rejoin the culture can still be extremely hard to break. Even with Diane's support, the care of his parents and his new life in London, Renton still lacks the willpower to stay out of the big drug deal his friends get involved in. However, at the end of the film, Renton finally chooses a life without drugs. His decision indicates that, despite any benefits and highs of heroin, nothing is more important than really being in control of one's own life.

Spud, played by Ewen Bremner

Description

Spud is a member of Renton's heroin-addicted circle of friends, but unlike the others, Spud is gentle and nonviolent. Spud's actions and demeanor suggest that he is



somewhat of an innocent. Although he knows that he is making bad choices, he stays more childlike in his acceptance of his life than any of the other characters. He displays shock over the death of the child and confusion about the way the others around him behave.

Analysis

Spud introduces us to the type of addict who gets involved with heroin through his friends' use, but does not seem to have his own motivation for either using or not using drugs. Throughout the film, Spud merely follows the crowd. In the end, when Renton steals the drug deal earnings, he still feels responsible to help look out for Spud by leaving him a share of money in the locker. One can only hope that, like Renton, Spud will use the money to get off drugs for good. However, without Renton's positive example to follow, there does not seem to be much hope that Spud will reform. Spud's innocence may eventually contribute to his demise if it means he cannot get himself out of his situation.

Begbie, played by Robert Carlyle

Description

Begbie is the classic violent, ill-tempered, bad addict. He has no sympathy for anyone and is perpetually looking out for himself alone. He attacks everyone who seems to get in his way, even if they are simply strangers in a bar. Begbie seems to be the mastermind behind the final drug deal and he is enraged to discover that Renton has stolen from the rest of the group.

Analysis

Begbie has only one goal in life: to make money. Rather than displaying any concern for his friends, Begbie is a selfish man who worries only about himself. After getting into trouble during a muddled drug deal in Edinburgh, Begbie shows up unannounced at Renton's new place in London and makes himself at home. When the opportunity for another big drug deal comes up, he is quick to jump at the chance to make money. Begbie's temper is also shown when he randomly attacks people (especially in bars) who rub him the wrong way. Few complimentary things can be said of Begbie; his core characteristic seems to be selfishness.

Sick Boy, played by Jonny Lee Miller

Description

Sick Boy is another member of Renton's circle of drug-using friends.

Analysis

Themes

Choose Life

Throughout the film, Mark Renton talks about "choosing life" versus choosing his current lifestyle: the drug culture. Renton spends most of his life searching for his next high. Without the drugs, he has no real existence. The other characters display the same dependency on drugs. Eventually, the baby in their apartment dies because the drugs have consumed their lives so much that everyone forgot to care for the child.

Although Renton does talk about "life" in a rather cynical, sarcastic manner (the dentist bills, the game shows, the bills), he increasingly realizes that even the bad parts of others' lives are better than the best parts of his. After breaking off from his friends, Renton embarks on a life of his own creation, which he plans to pursue on his own terms rather than those offered by his friends, his dealers and his drug habit.

Free Yourself From Drugs

The main characters in *Trainspotting* are totally immersed in Edinburgh's drug culture; however, taken as a whole, the film sends an anti-drug message. According to some critics, portraying drugs in a fantastical, cinematic way might make people want to try them. Even if there is any truth to this, the film's plot and characterization clearly communicate that freeing oneself from drug use should be the utmost priority in an addict's life.

Renton first begins to free himself from drugs when he is taken into protective custody by his parents. He continues his sober lifestyle in London, where he begins to enjoy a full, productive life quite different than the one he lived in Edinburgh. After Begbie moves in with him in London, Renton begins to get involved in drugs again. This time, he decides to free himself once and for all by doing whatever it takes (in this case, stealing money) to leave his friends and old life behind.

Drugs Not Glamorous

Overall, *Trainspotting* shows drug culture at its worst and fails to glamorize the use of drugs. As mentioned, critics of *Trainspotting* have certainly argued that the film's cinematography can make drugs look enticing. However, any promise of drug-induced glamour is cut short once things begin to go terribly wrong in the lives of the film's characters. First, the baby in the apartment dies without anyone noticing for hours, or perhaps even days. Once this tragedy occurs, everyone begins to use drugs more heavily and the viewer is shown additional negative effects of drug use. Later, Renton's drug habit lands him in the hospital, forcing his parents to take care of him so that he will stop using drugs.



Although Renton's life in London may not be glamorous either, at least he is clean there. He lives a normal existence as a upstanding citizen until he once again meets up with his old cronies, particularly Begbie, who is the primary "bad guy" in the film. Begbie's drug addiction drives him to hurt everyone around him and causes problems for Renton and the others. Each time a tragic or violent incident occurs and every time Renton's life is nearly overtaken by the drug culture again, the true effects of drugs are revealed in an unglamorous light.

Style and Cinematography

In *Trainspotting*, Boyle incorporates complex cinematography to represent the different stages of drug use. The audience is shown powerful hallucinations in which it can be hard to tell fact from fiction. Boyle uses the camera to advantage by showing Renton falling through floors and swimming through a toilet. These scenes help the viewer grasp the fantasy world in which a heroin addict lives after a hit. Additionally, the viewer sees a graphic depiction of the strenuous, painful and frightening drug withdrawal process Renton endures in his parents' house. As Renton hallucinates and is wracked by cravings for drugs, the viewer can experience his pain while also knowing that he will be better off without drugs.

Another interesting and more lighthearted stylistic feature of the film's cinematography is that it makes numerous references to the Beatles. A careful viewer can spot many fun instances of this. For example, in one scene, store detectives chase Renton down the street for stealing; this is very similar to a scene in the film *A Hard Day's Night* (1964), in which the Beatles are mercilessly pursued by fans. As the main characters watch a passing train at the beginning of the film, Boyle has them sit in the same formation as the Beatles on the back cover of their album *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. Similarly, when Renton and his friends cross the road and enter the hotel in London, the scene resembles the picture of the Beatles on the cover of the album *Abbey Road*. Finally, Renton and his friends go to an establishment called Mother Superior's to buy and shoot heroin. The name "Mother Superior" references lines in the song "Happiness is a Warm Gun," in which the Beatles sing, "Mother Superior jumped the gun," and "I need a hit 'cause I'm going down."



Motifs

Journey

Trainspotting is at least partially constructed around a journey motif. Renton journeys through his sordid life in the Edinburgh drug underworld, emerges in the "real world" of work in London and descends back underground to the drug community. At the end of the film, he seems to be on his way back to a normal life once again. While immersed in drug culture, Renton seems to be totally focused on his addicted lifestyle, displaying neither ability nor desire to move to another type of life. However, after the death of the baby and his admission to the hospital, Renton forces himself to begin his gradual journey toward what most would consider a normal life.

In his life journey, Renton is aided by both Diane and his parents as well as his relocation to London (which is an actual journey in itself). After moving to London, Renton seems to have completed his journey by becoming a productive, well-rounded, upstanding citizen. However, he almost does a complete turnaround once Begbie and the others convince him to get involved in their drug deal. In the end, Renton's only option to save himself is to steal the drug money from his friends (except Spud) and embark on his own journey to create the drug-free life he really wants to live. Through his ongoing, often unsuccessful journeys in and out of the drug culture, he has finally discovered his true self and a path to true fulfillment.

Drug Addiction

Drug addiction is the primary focus of the film. By having Renton surrounded by friends who are totally engaged in a culture of using hard drugs, the viewer is able to see drug use through an addict's point of view. In the beginning of the film, Renton's unbelievably vivid fantasies and irresponsible existence represent what an addict might consider to be the appealing aspects of the drug life.

However, the film continues to use the lens of drug addiction to reveal the character of each individual and of the overall culture they share. The viewer is eventually provided with evidence that using drugs has somehow destroyed the life of everyone Renton knows. The baby dies; Renton's friends have no future; Renton himself is stuck in a cycle of hopelessness. Renton finally realizes that when he stops using drugs and assumes a normal and sober existence, he can be free of the harms of addiction while enjoying life.

Dealing With Bad Friends

Dealing with friends who are bad influences or who make poor choices is a challenge faced by many people in life, especially young people. By including peer pressure and destructive friendships as powerful elements in his film, the director ensures that the

audience can absorb the effects of Renton's friends on his life. Whenever surrounded by his so-called friends, Renton uses drugs constantly, destroying his body and his life. He continues to follow the crowd until he ends up in the hospital, at which point his family forcefully intervenes to help him get back on track.

Renton's personal growth and character development evolves considerably between the first and last scenes of the film. At the beginning, he has succumbed to his friends' decadent environment of drug use and laziness, but he pulls himself together and undertakes the journey to becoming clean without his friends' help. Although Renton's friends pose constant challenges to his sobriety and often cause him setbacks, it is evident that he still cares for at least some of them. Once he realizes that their presence will always remain a source of profound complications and suffering, Renton deals with his friends by finally leaving them for good.



Symbols

Swimming Through the Toilet

The scene in *Trainspotting* in which Renton crawls into and then swims through the toilet is one of the most interesting shots in the film; in fact, it has become quite legendary for its graphic, yet imaginative, depiction of filth. After taking a hit, Renton climbs into an unimaginably dirty toilet in a rank public bathroom and begins swimming through the pipes out to the sea. The scene conveys the floating, light feelings and hallucinations of heroin addicts. Although the scene may make the use of drugs seem intriguing, it also represents the frighteningly vivid hallucinations addicts have under the influence and the horrific lengths to which they will go to for their next hit.

Swimming through the toilet into the sea is merely one of Renton's fantasies appearing in the film, but as the first time the audience sees him in such a state, the scene carries great symbolic weight. Importantly, the scene also alerts viewers that subsequent odd scenes may be hallucinations as well. Thus, the audience is able better discern what is really happening in Renton's life and what he just imagines to be happening while he is under the influence of drugs.

Falling Through the Floor

Another hallucination Renton commonly experiences while taking heroin is that he is falling through the floor. Just as the toilet scene represents Renton's desire (and ability) to escape from the world through drugs, his sensation that he is plummeting through the floor symbolizes the detachment he gains when using heroin. By taking drugs, Renton can allow himself to tumble into oblivion for hours or even days, waiting only for his next hit.

In one scene, Renton watches Spud and the others through his "hole" in the floor; they look blurry, almost as if they are from a different life. By using drugs, Renton is able to "blur" and escape from the bad things in his life, including his friends and the drugs themselves! After the baby's death, his hospital stay and his parents' imposed recovery regimen, Renton is forced to come clean. He may no longer be able to fall through the floor without his heroin, but he may no longer need to, as he will be able to better control his life and live it as he chooses.

Death of the Baby

The baby's death symbolizes a profound change in Renton's life. After being dead hours or even days, the baby's body is eventually discovered; immediately, Renton's life and character are also altered. Soon afterward, his own collapsed body is discovered in the street and he is admitted to the hospital so that (like a baby) he can be cared for by his parents until he stops using. The combined forces of the baby's death, Renton's hospital



stay and the drug withdrawal enabled by his parents' firm-handed help all motivate Renton to finally try to stop using heroin.

While the baby dies because of neglect, Renton thrives as he is cared for and begins to care for himself. Renton takes control of his own life and chooses to go to London to create a new existence for himself. When Renton makes his fresh start in London, he is essentially like a child with a clean slate and no past. After starting anew, Renton wavers from time to time and does help his friends with one final drug deal. However, in the long run, Renton steadfastly removes himself from a drug culture that would let an innocent child die of neglect or allow him to waste his own life being high.



Essay Questions

What is the symbolism of Renton's swim through the toilet?

Describe Renton's typical life in Edinburgh. Of what does it consist?

Why is Renton so upset with Diane the morning following their rendezvous?

How does Diane affect Renton's decision to leave Edinburgh?

Why does the baby die and what does its death symbolize?

Why is Sick Boy so upset over the baby's death?

What role do Renton's parents play in his life?

Compare and contrast Renton's life in London with his life in Edinburgh.

Why does Renton get sucked back into the drug culture?

What is Renton's excuse or reason for taking the money and leaving his friends in London at the end of the film?

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