

Resignation as the main theme of "Trainspotting at Leith Central Station"

by Andreas Gramm

The protagonists of the short-story "Trainspotting at Leith Central Station" written by Irvine Welsh in 1993 are no heroes. They have surrendered to their appalling social situation. The main theme of the short-story is the resignation of the people living in Leith and their different ways of dealing with the circumstances they live under: Begbie tries to compensate his disappointment with aggression, Second Prize falls into abuse of alcohol and Renton develops a passive attitude towards all he experiences.

Begbie is the most aggressive of the characters. When Second Prize has made his "second bookable offence" it is only because of Christmas that Begbie does not solve the quarrel using violence. He even beats up people he does not know without reason. It seems that his brutality has no need of an actual cause. However, it seems that a general disappointment with situation in which leads to his behaviour. He hardly expresses this disappointment in any other way, but when Renton and Begbie meet Begbie's father at Central Station, Renton realises that Begbie is somehow irritated. Begbie's irritation can be interpreted as a reminding of his wish not to become like his father. However, he has no illusions about his future: He has realised that holding on to the life he leads means ending up like his father. This capitulation to his situation is the cause of his aggression.

While Begbie tries to harm others to compensate for his problems, Second Prize destroys his own personality abusing alcohol to forget about his troubles. His abuse of alcohol is not only a sign of his bad social situation; it is rather a reaction to the circumstances determining his life. Because of his drunkenness he is in a very bad physical condition. Like Renton says, it is "the learned helplessness that chronic drunks have". Being constantly drunk Second Prize gets paralysed, so he no longer cares to alter the circumstances he lives under. Since he only lets things drift he cannot make any decision for himself. This means that he cannot even consider formulating a wish to improve his situation.

Renton's reaction to living in Leith is passivity and being undecided. Instead of going home, he joins Begbie whom he obviously does not like. To satisfy Begbie's ego he tells him how great he is. Although he dislikes Begbie's brutality he will not intervene. So Renton hardly takes any action to improve his situation. He defines himself as being a victim as well. When he says "ah realise what a pathetic arsehole ah'm being", he seems to realise his situation. Since he tells Begbie that he has just returned from London it is obvious that he has a chance of leaving the scenario. However, he has returned. Feeling Leith is his home he assumes that staying there is his fate. He has lost the ability to change his life.

Like Second Prize and Begbie, Renton seems to associate his identity with living in Leith. This identity of being a loser is all that is left for them. By trying to hold on to their identity, they have to give away any chance of altering the circumstances they live under. Their identity forces them to resign, and in resigning they strengthen their identity. This resignation is the fatalistic notion of "Trainspotting at Leith Central Station".

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