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"*Trainspotting*: Reflections of the 'Lost Generation' in the literary production of the 1990s"

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Resumo:

When we talk about the ‘Lost Generation’, we are referring to a demographic group that reached adulthood shortly after the end of World War I. However, in the British sociopolitical context of the 1980s & 1990s, and according to Lee Elliot (online), the term also echoes to a generation that was characterised by the political decisions of the Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, who, at the time, moved forward on the privatization of public services and economical cuttings, creating a sense of instability. This final degree dissertation will analyse literature produced in the United Kingdom during this historical period, examining how it was used as a critique towards Thatcher’s policies that significantly impacted British society of that time. I will primarily focus on the novel by Scottish author Irvine Welsh, Trainspotting (1993). Welsh’s novel is set in late 1980s Edinburgh, a city profoundly affected by the economic crisis and unemployment, which transformed a generation that once seemed to have a promising future into simple citizens of a wasteland. Trainspotting is a novel that explores the frenzy that characterises its protagonists as they confront the cruel reality that surrounds them, in a world that seems to not have a place for their ambitions and where addiction becomes a mousetrap. In this dissertation, I will draw an analogy

between the concept of the ‘Lost Generation’ and the renowned theoretical framework of the ‘Monster Theory’, based on the consideration that in Welsh's novel there are two types of monsters: a metaphorical one, embodied by Margaret Thatcher, and a material monster, manifested in drug addiction.

Key words:

-Thatcherism

-Monster theory

-Social anxiety

-*Trainspotting*

-Drug addiction

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1. INTRODUCTION

Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting* (1993) is a novel set in late 1980s Edinburgh, a period marked by the deep economic collapse and social turmoil in the United Kingdom. The historical reality of the devastation caused by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's neoliberal policies and consequent unemployment and collapse of many middle-class communities provide the context for Welsh to realistically portray a generation at a standstill.

I have always been interested in the way literature and history intertwine so, when I began planning this final degree dissertation, it was very clear to me that I wanted to focus mainly on the way historical events can impact and affect literary works. I believe literary texts can act as clear reflections of the cultural, social and political moments in which they were written, documenting the realities experienced for the future generations to learn. With a father who majored in history, his passion for the subject has always inspired my own curiosity for the past. From a very early age, I was exposed to listening to him talk about historical periods or events that have aided to shape the world we live in today. In relation to this, I have always found myself having a strong fascination with Scotland, captivated by its natural beauty, rich culture and historical background. Discovering the specific context that this dissertation will be exploring and how it relates to the literary productions of the time, has deeply deepened my own interest.

This dissertation focuses on Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting* (1993) as one of the main examples of the way literature reflects the realities of 1980s Scotland. This study is based on the hypothesis that the novel is a reflection of the social and political fears

of the end of the century Edinburgh through the use of Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's 'Monster Theory' and the concept of 'social anxiety'. More specifically, it focuses on the fact that Margaret Thatcher acts as a devastating monster that shattered entire communities. Similarly, drug addiction also represents a monstrous figure that is triggered by the political forces of the time. The concept of social anxiety allows us to understand the way characters react to social expectations and social marginalization. Through this framework, I have been able to expose the way the novel explores the consequences that certain historical circumstances, events or figures can have on entire communities.

Trainspotting (1993) is a work that explores the lives of a group of young working-class heroin addicts in Edinburgh in the late 1980s. Through their personal narratives, the novel presents their stories, decisions, addiction and the cycle of despair they find themselves in under Thatcherism.

The story is mainly told through the perspective of Mark Renton, a young man who struggles to leave the dangerous cycle of addiction he finds himself in. Together with Sick Boy, Begbie and Spud among others, Mark is left to navigate a world filled with crime and misery, as well as hopelessness, while also exploring life itself. The novel depicts their daily routines and the impact that addiction has on their future and their social relationships, while also their attempts to find meaning to their lives. Through their personal qualities, these individuals expose the difficulties of moving forward while being impacted by the wider societal difficulties that were affecting the Scottish country at the time.

This dissertation will be divided into sections in order to provide a complete analysis of Welsh's novel as follows. Firstly, an introduction will present the motivation and hypothesis of the study. The chapter that follows dives into the broader historical context of the novel, focusing mainly on the socio-political environment of the region

under Margaret Thatcher. Attention will be given separately to Scotland and Britain, and to the specific effects of Thatcherism in each area. Next, the social outcomes of this period will be studied, emphasising the public health emergency that was triggered by the increase in drug addiction.

The following section will focus on the theoretical framework, drawing on the 'Monster Theory' and the concept of 'social anxiety'. These frameworks will be applied in order to analyse *Trainspotting*, focusing on how certain characters may embody and respond to the monsters that surround them. To conclude, I will tie everything together in a final reflection over the importance of the novel in relation to its social as well as historical context.

2. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

To provide a solid historical foundation for the dissertation that follows, the next chapter will be structured into four sections: the historical context of Thatcherism in Britain; Margaret Thatcher's destructive impact on Scotland; the influence she had on the city of Edinburgh; and the broader social context, which will be further divided in two sections: the health emergency of drug addiction, and the literary context that frames *Trainspotting* itself.

The novel *Trainspotting*, by Irvine Welsh, is set in 1980s Edinburgh, a city profoundly affected by the economic crisis and unemployment characteristic of that decade in the UK, which transformed a generation that once seemed to have a promising future into simple citizens of a wasteland. Welsh's novel reflects the consequences that Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's policies had nationwide, focusing specifically on Scotland. Therefore, the novel does not only serve to portray addiction, but it also highlights the failures of a system that left many young people feeling abandoned.

Margaret Thatcher was the leader of Britain's Conservative Party as well as Britain's only women Prime Minister for the eleven years she stayed in office (May 1979 to November 1990), having won three consecutive general elections. In 1951, Thatcher became the youngest female conservative candidate fighting for a parliamentary seat and only seven years later she secured a Tory seat. She climbed steadily until eventually earning, in 1970, a position as Secretary of State Education, a position made possible thanks to the election victory of Edward Heath, the Conservative Party leader. In her memoirs, she stated that she was "determined to send out a clear signal of change" (Thatcher, 2013); and she so did. The term 'Thatcherism' began to be taken as a way to imply an ideology or a campaign to enrich

the interests of the people in power, while also being able to consolidate political force over the under-privileged. As a politician, she sought for a way to assert herself and ensure Britain became a significant player internationally.

2.1. THATCHER & BRITAIN

The following section is based on the information obtained in the work published in 2013 by Eric Evans, *Thatcher and Thatcherism.* Edward Heath was a British politician who acted as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1970 to 1974, leading the Conservative Party. During his time in office, he introduced strategic reforms that had never been tried before or since. As discussed in Evan's book, Heath's government faced public criticism, and just four years after taking office, he lost his seat. As his opponent, Thatcher soon became the Conservatives leader. Additionally, it is important to note that the importance of Thatcher's tenure lies in its operation in the late 1970s and 1980s.

As Evans (2013) notes, in the 1970s, Britain's economy faced a massive breakdown due to several factors including the end of the post-war boom and the 1973 oil crisis, which led to high unemployment rates as well as inflation and a decline in the value of the British pound. In the middle of the decade, there were several governmental attempts to stabilize the economy such as the so-called 'Social Contract', an active effort at reducing inflation and controlling wages. At the same time, North Sea oil exploitation skyrocketed, briefly turning into a premise of economic stability. However, by 1976, economic struggles had worsened for the British community. In response, the Labour Party—traditionally a centre-left political party and not conservative, under James Callaghan—introduced strict spending cuts and sought to implement balanced budget approaches.

The late 1970s witnessed the downfall of the Labour Party, which was attributed to three main factors. Firstly, a general election was not called in a moment of economic prosperity in 1978. Secondly, the period known as ‘Winter of Discontent’, characterized by unrest and turmoil among trade unions, weakened the confidence of the community in the government. Lastly, the party failed to pass devolution plans—proposals for a decentralization of powers—for Wales and Scotland national parties. As a result of this, Labour lost by a single vote in 1979, sparking a general election. During the 1979 campaign, Thatcher left her combative personality aside and shifted towards a more familiar and relaxed behaviour, presenting herself as more stable to voters. That same year, Thatcher became Prime Minister, presenting herself as the one who would put an end to the chaos that was devastating the United Kingdom at the time.

Her team had planned in advance the new economic reforms aimed to address the challenges the country was facing, such as the feared unemployment rate. However, there was no confidence within the Conservative Party that these new radical reforms would succeed in revitalizing the economy, and her own advisors were sceptical. Some of these reforms included reducing public spending, cutting inflation at the cost of increased unemployment, and introducing free-market policies.

The results of the election showed a radical shift away from the Labour Party and a boost for Tory policies, which gained support among the working and middle classes in England. However, the Conservative Party’s gains were uneven across the country, resulting in 20 fewer parliamentary seats in the north, and 14 fewer in Scotland—seats meaning constituencies in those regions where Conservatives failed to win a majority. Thatcher’s victory used to be associated with the regions with a stronger economy, according to Evans (2013).

Margaret Thatcher had to face scrutiny from members of her own party, many of whom had supported Heath and held more centrist views. As Evans (2013) gathers, her right-wing policies were openly criticized. A clear example can be found in Ian Gilmore, a British Conservative politician who, like Thatcher, belonged to the conservative ideology, and in spite of this, openly criticized Thatcher and her policies, defending that her strategies went against the party's traditions. In her first year as Britain's Prime Minister, she began the process towards economic liberalization by reducing government restrictions on businesses and allowing the economy to grow less controlled by the state. By her second year, in 1980, her government introduced tougher policies on public spending, which included a restriction on the supply of money, tightening control over inflation, and raising taxes. These measures led to a rise in adult unemployment never seen before. The economic crisis was not felt equally, with some sectors suffering more than others, leading to an increase in inequality. In the 1987 election, for example, the Conservatives dominated the south and Midlands; however, the north, Scotland and Wales remained resistant to Thatcher's policies, which were strongly rejected. Taxes continued to rise uncontrollably and public spending spiralled out of control. Despite this, the country's economy was boosted by the North Sea oil and gas, leading to a drop in inflation which fell below 10% in 1982. However, the harsh monetarist policies that were implemented led to major unrest across the country, with riots breaking out in the major cities.

By 1982, Margaret Thatcher had grown into a powerful leader for the nation. Meanwhile, the Labour Party faced internal divisions. Thatcher's election victories in 1983 and 1987 provided her with an enormous boost of confidence when it came to implementing her reforms.

Economics was a central focus of Thatcher's government, and, according to the economist Patrick Minford (in Evans, 2013), controlling inflation was the top priority

from 1972 to 1982. By 1983, inflation had fallen to its lowest percentage since 1970, which Thatcher claimed as an advantage for her campaign. That said, the government manipulated the official statistics to present inflation and unemployment favourably, but the reality was that the latter peaked at 3.2 million unemployed in 1982, a number that although it may not be considered as alarming in Spain, seems unusual for the UK. Despite this, real earnings grew in the 1980s, boosting consumer spending and allowing the Conservatives to take the 1987 election win. The 1980s, thus, saw improvement in productivity, which had previously been a major factor in Britain's economic decline.

Thatcher's policies increased the inequality that existed in British society at the time. Nonetheless, with inflation reduced to single digits, Thatcher became more relaxed in her economic strategy. During her second term in office, privatization became crucial at aiming to reduce state control. It included selling public assets and subcontracting services managed by the government. By 1987, privatization allowed the government to raise 19 billion pounds but, despite this, public support for privatization dropped when it showed that, instead of improving services, it allowed Conservative executives to give themselves pensions and larger salaries while simultaneously cutting jobs. By the late 1980s and early 1990s, privatization had earned the Conservatives a reputation of corruption.

Shifting focus, and as highlighted by Evans (2013), Thatcher led a fight against the trade unions, which she considered a threat to the free market. Due to this, she worked on several laws to reduce their influence and power. The Employment Act of 1982 made it harder for workers to go on strike, and later laws limited the legal protections for unions. Thatcher's government is also characterized by the conflict she sought with the miners by naming a supporter of free markets as the leader of the National Coal Board, which was a government-owned organization that managed the

coal industry in the UK. The government ended up closing unprofitable coal mines, leading to 180,000 workers losing their jobs.

Margaret Thatcher was determined to reduce the size of the public sector, which she believed was inefficient. By 1979, 30% of the workforce in the United Kingdom was employed in the public sector, preventing benefits to the private sectors of society. Additionally, the public sector did not shrink during recessions, and she realised that it resisted her policies, which Thatcher saw as an obstacle to her reforms. Her broader economic philosophy involved reducing state intervention and encouraging private enterprise, but in practice, this led to significant job cuts and cost savings. Records show that by 1983, public sector jobs had been cut by over 100 thousand, enhancing Thatcher's determination to introduce a private sector mindset into government. This approach served to reflect her wider economic and political policies, which included reducing state interventions and promoting efficiency in the public administration.

For Margaret Thatcher, the National Health Service (NHS) posed a dilemma in her campaign, as she saw it as inefficient and expensive but, this said, she also knew that the public strongly supported it. Unlike with other policies she had implemented, her methodology for approaching NHS changes was more careful. Her political and economic advisors suggested cutting costs by promoting private health insurance and introducing patient charges, but Thatcher rejected a full privatization, fearing it would affect her campaign. In place of that, her administration intended to make the NHS more efficient by reducing hospital stays, limiting budgets and involving the private sector. Despite her active efforts to cut public spending, NHS spending reached a peak between 1980 and 1987, rising over 60%.

After her third election win in 1987, Thatcher pushed for reforms more confidently than ever before, and just two years later her government introduced a system known as 'internal market' that actively tried to separate NHS health authorities

or ‘purchases’ from the hospitals or ‘providers’ in order to create ‘competition’ within their own system. Essentially, Thatcher’s policies toward the NHS only served mainly to reflect her wider economic ideals —bringing market principles into public services— while recognizing that the privatization of healthcare was impossible if she wanted to maintain her position as well as the public support.

Despite being at a peak of popularity, Evans (2013) considers that there were two major issues that the Prime Minister had to face. First, the administrative costs of the NHS increased due to the extra spending that the new NHS managers required. Second, inequality in healthcare access was growing exponentially, and it was evident that the NHS prioritized financial survival over patient care. The reforms highlighted the complexities of Thatcherite policies, which tried to introduce market-based ideas in public services, resulting in higher administrative costs and inefficiency. These changes were intended to increase efficiency but ended up having the opposite effect, and caused reduced services, a lower quality in the services provided to patients as well as higher costs for the government. What this did was reinforce the idea that Thatcher’s policies prioritized economic responses over healthcare services.

Margaret Thatcher was also very critical towards the education system in the country. She blamed it for failing to deliver the expected results and held the education authorities and groups like the Inner London Education Authority accountable for being so costly and inefficient while obtaining poor academic outcomes. Her beliefs and reforms are quite similar to those of the NHS: financial accountability was pursued. Throughout the 1980s, the Local Education Authorities lost funding and power as the government took over, British education changed completely. Schools were given more financial independence and parental choice was promoted, however, as in the healthcare area, these changes led to greater inequalitites within the system.

Margaret Thatcher's time in power came to an end in 1990 due mainly to two key factors. First, the fear of the members of her own Party that the next general election would lead to a dramatic crisis for the Conservatives. Geofrey Howe's—former Conservative ally— resignation was dramatic because it showed that even those who had supported Thatcher from the beginning were turning their backs on her as well as losing confidence in her leadership. On this topic, in her memoirs, Thatcher stated: "But what grieved me was the desertion of those I had always considered friends and allies and the weasel words whereby they had transmuted their betrayal into frank advice and concern for my fate" (*The Downing Street Years*, 1993) in (Evans, 2013, p.127). Second, the economic situation at the time was disastrous. Mortgage costs were higher than ever before and house values plummeted, affecting homeowners severely. Inflation rose above 10%, which brought Thatcher's policies under a lens. In addition, her government showed instability and inefficiency in governing the country during times of crisis and need. Although she had been the British political leader for eleven years, by 1990, the turmoil that her policies were causing ultimately led to her political downfall.

2.2 THATCHER & SCOTLAND

Given that *Trainspotting* is set in Edinburgh, Scotland, and follows the lives of young Scottish men and women during the 1980s, it is crucial to consider the specific context and the conditions, both economic and social, that Scotland was dealing with at the time. Margaret Thatcher's 11 years as Prime Minister had a profound impact on Scotland's economy. Her policies, aimed at cutting public spending and prioritizing privatization, led the Scottish nation to experience an enormous industrial decline and an increase in political discontent toward the Conservatives.

The information provided in the following paragraphs is taken from David Stewart's *The Path to Devolution and Change* (2009). Accordingly, Thatcher's economic policies on Scotland aimed at reducing state control over the economy of the country through various measures. First, in 1984, cuts in regional incentives impacted the Scottish economy and reduced the number of Scots that benefited from governmental aid. Second, the Prime Minister moved forward on privatization by selling state-owned companies in order to increase efficiency. The economic crisis that was hitting Scotland worsened because of high unemployment, which affected especially young Scots. By 1986, certain Scottish regions were facing unemployment rates above 17%, highlighting even more the economic struggles under Thatcher's policies.

Thatcher's impact on Scotland has usually been focused on economic terms, considering that during her time in office she completely transformed the nature of the Scottish economy, largely for the worse. Her ideas and policies aimed at breaking the post-war consensus on economic management. But even before Thatcher rose to power, there were already several gaps that needed to be filled as Scotland had been struggling economically since the end of World War II.

In the early 1970s, Edward Heath had adjusted his own policies due to the rising inflation, unemployment and industrial unrest, while economists were linking Britain's economic crisis to a cycle of low growth and rising unemployment. In 1974, the Labour party returned to office. Just a year later, unemployment in Scotland had risen to the catastrophic figure of one million unemployed. Despite this, the number kept rising, just as inflation did. Escalating inflation forced the government to seek financial assistance from the International Monetary Fund in 1976. Between 1973 and 1979 unemployment in Scotland averaged 6.4%, lower than the 7.1 % on average in Northern England. In spite of this, the arrival of Thatcher to office and her 1979 agenda made no direct

reference to the unemployment crisis in Scotland or measures to reduce it, only claiming to reverse the economic decline that Britain's economy was facing, neglecting the struggles of the Scottish nation. Her plans began by introducing a strict budget the same year she stepped into her new role as Prime Minister, aimed at reducing inflation and imposing tax cuts, as well as lowering public spending by 1.5 billion £ annually.

In 1979, it was found that 30% of the total Scottish workforce was in manufacturing, and 59% of Scottish jobs accounted for services, showing the strong dependency on certain sectors for the Scottish economy. When Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister, her economic strategy led the country to an impactful economic recession, resulting in a heavy economic blow to the Scottish nation In 1979, Scotland was downgraded to the status of 'Assisted Area', which meant that the country was officially recognized as a region needing financial aid and support due to the economic difficulties it was facing.

By 1980, Scotland saw 246000 people became unemployed and, to soften the impact of the figures, the government altered the way unemployment rates were calculated in order to make the situation seem less severe. Additionally, Thatcher, who believed a strong pound would be beneficial for the country even if its impact was negative in areas such as Scotland, seemed unbothered by the consequences her new implemented policies had on Scottish sectors and industries, which were nearing collapse. The coal, steel and shipbuilding industries, historically a crucial player in Scotland's economy, faced closures and job losses. By 1982, despite England beginning to show signs of economic recovery, other regions such as Scotland had not been so fortunate yet. Unemployment rates continued to rise and became a central topic of discussion, especially in the matter of the Scottish Ravenscraig steelworks.

According to Stewart (2009), Ravenscraig was a major employer and a crucial economic contributor to the economy in Scotland. If it were to close more than 13000

jobs would be threatened, leading Scottish politicians to start a campaign in order to keep it open. The Conservatives fought for the industry to stay open arguing that Scotland's economy was dependent on it and, with Thatcher's approval, Ravenscraig kept running. Despite this, there were difficulties and keeping the steel factory running was only possible short-term, due to its costs and aging infrastructure. The main point regarding Ravenscraig's temporary survival was more political than economic, as it became a symbol of the industrial decline of Scotland. Regardless, there was one area that experienced significant growth: electronics. By 1981, around 100 electronic companies were established in Scotland, providing some contrast to the general economic decline. Eventually, Scotland played a key role in European electronics production.

As mentioned in David Stewart's *The Path to Devolution and Change* (2009), Scotland's service industries recorded steady growth during the first years of Thatcher as Prime Minister, with more than 60000 new jobs created in retail. Sectors like health and education generated 30000 new job offers, while the finance sector grew in over 21000 jobs. Additionally, public administration jobs were above the British average, peaking at 76000 between 1979 and 1985. Despite this, these new emerging jobs could not replace those lost in manufacturing, which were disappearing by thousands, leading to a big diminution of Scotland's workforce.

As stated by Stewart (2009), there were severe discussions over the Conservatives' and Thatcher's anti-Scottish and neglectful feelings. Contrary to previous expectations, she publicly dismissed and rejected Scottish concerns, which affected more deeply the working and middle classes, leading to growing resentment towards the government. As a direct response to her policies, Scottish civil society groups established a commission to address the economic future of Scotland if the situation were to remain unchanged.

The Scots, aware of the situation in which the country stood since the implementation of Thatcher's policies, seemed reluctant to support her, diverging from England's political reality. Nevertheless, the country continued to receive a huge amount of regional aid through the Barnett formula, a system which allocated public funds to regions such as Scotland or Wales by changing government funding in England, helping to keep the country afloat. Despite Thatcher's negative position towards Scotland's spending, she maintained the formula.

The disillusionment of a nation, particularly among many young Scots during Thatcher's time in office was evident. An atmosphere of uncertainty and hopelessness flooded the country, as stated in 1987: "Today Scotland votes for its future but for the Scots who have no jobs there is no future. For them there is no future with Mrs. Thatcher" (*Daily Record's,* Election Day 1987), (Stewart, 2009, p.70). In the elections of June 1987, Scots pounded the table and expressed their disagreement with the Conservative government, which lost 11 seats. In spite of this, Thatcher triumphed comfortably due to the British economic recovery, despite it not having anything to do with her policies. The tension between Thatcher's economic policies and Scottish concerns was echoed by various Scottish Nationalist individuals, who strongly criticized the Conservative's approach.

Privatization remained a priority in her third term and Scotland saw its effects first hand. Scotland's electricity was privatized in 1989 and, were it not for the Scottish Office, water privatization would have been next. The privatization of the British Steel Corporation (BSC) was the most controversial of all, as it was making profits of hundreds of millions and was ultimately sold for 2.5 Billion pounds. Thatcher's intent was to cut costs and promote moving away from capital-intensive projects, however, in Scotland, the lack of private enterprises led to concerns within her party.

Despite having seen some improvement, Scotland's economy did not recover until the latter years of Thatcher as Prime Minister, with a decline in unemployment to 10.6% in 1988. Despite this, the unemployment rate of the nation remained much higher compared to the rest of the UK, while also struggling with lower investment. As Thatcher's policies were losing support increasingly, the so-called Scottish Enterprise emerged with the intent of working as a partial response to the Scottish citizens and businesses, aiming to encourage private enterprise. However, the strategy did not shift the dissatisfaction Scots felt towards Thatcher's government.

Her third term in office was marked by her strong opposition to European integration and the European Economic Community's policies. On the contrary, Scots and Scottish Nationalists viewed becoming part of the European membership as a crucial opportunity for the nation's future, widening the separation between Scotland and Thatcher's policies. The Ravenscraig steel plant faced closure after the privatization of British Steel, and, after the failure of the campaigns to save it, the plant closed its doors in 1991, as a symbol of Scotland's industrial and economic decline.

Overall, by the end of Thatcher's government, Scotland had gone through a significant economic transformation at a social cost. The situation in the region worsened, with rising income inequality. The shift towards indirect taxation resulted in benefits to the wealthy but strongly impacted negatively on low-income groups. The decline of the industrial sector, high unemployment rates and the disparity growing between Scotland and the south of England fuelled a feeling of resentment. In the view of David Stewart (2009), her reforms will always be remembered in Scotland for leading to economic decline and worsening the living conditions of many Scots, who were left to survive on their own without government support. Support for the Scottish National Party grew exponentially as the measures applied by the Conservatives failed to improve the Scottish economic struggles, leading to an increase of their

unpopularity. Eventually, this led to the formation of the Scottish Constitutional Convention in 1989 and, 11 years later, a referendum in support of devolution. By 1998, the Scotland Act established an entirely Scottish Parliament, which was formed in 1999.

2.2.1. SOCIAL CONTEXT

The following chapter will be divided into two sections: the health emergency that flooded Scotland in the 1970s and 1980s, an era marked by drug use and blood borne diseases, and the literary context surrounding the era in which Irvine Welsh developed his art.

Just as the rest of the country, Edinburgh experienced significant social and economic changes that affected the city in various aspects. In the 1960s and early 1970s, the city was still undergoing extensive urban development projects in order to modernize the place as well as address housing shortage problems. Therefore, it was a period marked by progress as well as evolution. The arrival of the 1980s brough economic problematics to the UK, and Edinburgh was not any different. A rise in unemployment devastated the working-class communities, leading to the establishment of centres for the support of the unemployed, which began to open its doors in the early years of Thatcher's government. The harsh economic situation led to an increase in social issues such as drug addiction, violence and health crises. However, the following decade brought new hope and various initiatives aimed at revitalizing the economy and the city were born.

Within the city of Edinburgh, Leith represents a historical port district deeply known for its working-class heritage. During the 1970s, Leith suffered the hard consequences of deindustrialization and the closure of many factories in which ships were built or repaired. Once one of the biggest port areas became a shadow of its

former history, the loss of these factories, which represented a significant part of the economy of the district, marked a page into the future of the area, that fell into a decline over the next decade. However, the 1980s came to represent a period of revitalization for both the whole city and Leith. The Shore was transformed into an area of fancy restaurants and hotels, additionally, affordable housing was built in what once were industrial sites and new areas also emerged.

2.2.2. HEALTH EMERGENCY

The impact of drug use in Scotland in the 1980s was perfectly captured in Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting*, published in 1993. As reported by Bird & Hutchinson in "Twenty-five years of Scotland's drug-death epidemic: What you sow, so shall you reap*"* (2018), Thatcher's policies had a profound impact on health, particularly for the working-class Scottish population that lived in deindustrialized areas, who were the most affected. As depicted in the novel by Irvine Welsh, drug use —especially heroin addiction— became an escape valve from the harsh realities that surrounded the Scots in the 1980s in urban areas like Edinburgh. According to Bird & Hutchinson (2018), several studies conducted on addiction have emphasized the role that economic and social conditions have played in shaping substance abuse patterns. By the end of the decade, heroin addiction had become an epidemic in many parts of the country.

In an interview conducted in 2005, Irvine Welsh stated that during times of crisis individuals often seek for intense emotional experiences in order to bring meaning to their lives, and the way to experience those during this period was through alcohol and drug use. According to Santos Neto (2021), for those financially unstable, the consumption of alcohol was accessible due to the affordable options of drinks available in Scotland, which contributed to the spread of substance abuse. Similarly, Parkinson et al. (2018) discuss that the worst affected group of individuals would be those

belonging to the working class as well as young adults first experiencing working life during 1979–1990. In the same vein, Scott-Samuel et al. (2014) argue that drug addiction is a social phenomenon closely related to economic conditions, mental health and social exclusion. They discussed Thatcher's policies and government as a culprit of widening health inequalities between working-class communities, leading to a rise in drug use. The privatization of public services and the rise of unemployment created the perfect conditions in which substance abuse could spread. According to Fraser et al. (2018), it has been estimated that the majority of Hepatitis C virus (HCV), which is a bloodborne disease at a global level, infections in Scotland were acquired through drug injection. The study emphasized the need for public health interventions focusing on the spread of HCV.

In point of fact, during the 1980s and 1990s, Scotland experienced a big epidemic of both HIV and HCV, especially among drug users. This period marked the beginning of a public health emergency, with its impact having shaped Scotland's way of fighting bloodborne infections and leading to increased awareness on finding harm reduction strategies. The NHS struggled to cope with the crisis seeing as treatment options were very limited and there were no national common strategies to fight against drug use. As a response, certain initiatives such as needle exchange programs and methadone therapy began in the 1980s, aiming to reduce the alarming spread of HIV and other bloodborne viruses among injection users. The NHS focused specifically on harm reduction by providing methadone to help users manage withdrawal symptoms and reduce the possibilities of suffering an overdose. However, at the time, there were no other possibilities related to addiction services, and attitudes toward drug users were stigmatizing.

The full extent of the crisis was not understood in its totality until some time had passed and data was collected. Data provided by Bird & Hutchinson (2018) show that,

since the 1950s, Scotland's mortality rate has been higher than that of other Western European countries, but it was during the 1980s that the numbers became alarming. Studies have officially shown that Scotland's 'excess mortality' among citizens of ages between 15 to 54 can be closely linked with substance use, especially during the 1980s. Studies conducted in Scotland from 1979 up until 2013 have found that drug-related deaths among young adults particularly affected those born between the 1960 and 1980. Meanwhile, alcohol-related mortality increased dramatically during the 1980s and 1990s, along with suicide or deaths caused by violence. What all these causes of death have in common is that they are not biological but instead, socially constructed by economic and political factors. The economic policies of the 1980s, along with the social context, highlighted the vulnerability of the Scots.

2.2.3. LITERARY CONTEXT & IRVINE WELSH

As stated by Brown, Ian et al. in *Edinburgh companion to 20th century Scottish literature* (2009), "Literature is an essential way in which people in communities convey to themselves and others their concerns and imaginings" (p. 1). In the case of Scotland, after the end of World War II, literature began to gain more attention. The 1960s saw a revival of Scottish poetry on an international level, with Scottish novels being translated and recognized abroad. In the 1970s and 1980s Scottish literature had gained international visibility and served as a way to promote Scottish authors and works written in Scots, Gaelic or English.

Some of this interest in Scottish literature can be associated with the success of the novel *Trainspotting,* by Irvine Welsh, published in 1993. The success of the novel led to the apparition of the term 'Chemical Generation', coined by several Scottish authors, which explored themes such as drug use, working-class life, alienation and violence. It also reflected the social and political reality and the consequences of

Thatcherism. The exploration of these individual issues, as well as existential identity show a significant shift in literature.

The works of authors such as Tom Leonard or Irvine Welsh show the desire to challenge English literary tradition and the desire to claim a place for Scotland's marginalized culture and identity. Brown (2009) stated that Scottish fiction tends to portray urban darkness and themes of broken lives, drug use, criminality and existential despair among others. Authors such as Ian Rankin have followed this trend and have captured the reality in Scotland. While Irvine Welsh's work might seem to belong to this complex new radical wave of writing, it actually is the culmination of a wider tradition in Scottish literature, which dates back to the early 20th century. His stories, which focus on topics like drug addiction, poverty, and a dark sense of humour, carry on with the post-war attitude of scepticism and highlights the difficulties of urban life's realities.

In *Trainspotting (*1993), Welsh takes urban realism further and goes on exploring disillusionment and despair through the characters of his novel. While the work may seem as a collection of fragmented scenes, the connections begin to form as the novel advances and we get to meet Mark Renton and his group of friends as they navigate life and struggle with addiction.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

After navigating through the background of Edinburgh in the 1970s and 1980s, it is key to examine the theoretical framework that will guide readers throughout this analysis of *Trainspotting* by Irvine Welsh and this way, establish a relationship between the novel and the context.

This final degree dissertation will draw on two main theories in which I expect to frame Welsh's work. First, I will be starting from the assumption that the Monster Theory can be applied to the novel. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen sustains that monsters are social constructs of our communities, representing our fears and social anxieties, but said monsters are not only literal elements, but they can also exist as figurative. By applying this to *Trainspotting* we can interpret Thatcherism and its policies as a figurative monster that consumed communities such as Leith's. On the other hand, drug addiction can be identified as a literal monster, which is fed by the figurative one. The second theory I will use as a foundation is the term 'social anxiety', which can be understood as a response from a community to a reality filled with change and uncertainty. In Welsh's novel, social anxiety is a constant presence, affecting the characters and their future expectations.

3.1. MONSTER THEORY

Now that I have established the general theoretical framework, I will begin by analysing the first one of the two main theories: Monster Theory and its application to *Trainspotting*. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen defined monsters through a chapter published in 1996 called "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)" belonging to the book *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (1996). He argued that monsters are not only physical beings but also social constructs. He did it by presenting in his work seven theses that explored the

cultural, psychological and societal functions and reality of monsters. Following, I will outline the key ideas around the seven theses.

1. The Monster's body is a cultural body

"The monster is born only at this metaphoric crossroads, as an embodiment of a certain cultural moment" (p.38)

Monsters, as understood by Cohen, embody fears, anxieties and disillusionments as well as taboos of the societies that construct them as collective entities. However, this happens at specific moments in time and place, appearing suddenly at a specific historical moment and clinging to life. They are born from the common concerns of a community and, even though they adapt to new fears, they remain tied to their original reason for being. Monsters appear in times of societal change and act as physical representations of the fears the society struggles to confront. In periods of economic crisis or societal instability, they directly become symbols of the rooted fears that persist in the collective conscience of the community.

2. The Monster always escapes

"But the monster itself turns immaterial and vanishes, to reappear someplace else" (p.38)

Monsters are never defeated by the forces of good. They constantly reappear at different moments in history and blur the line between what is invincible and infinite and what is tied to a historical moment in time. They have the capacity to adapt

constantly to new cultural preoccupations. Monsters, even if they disappear, will always reappear in another heroic history. Said beasts vanish in order to be able to appear somewhere else eventually and ensure its existence.

3. The Monster is the harbinger of Category Crisis

"The monster is dangerous, a form suspended between forms that threatens to smash distinctions" (p.40)

Monsters cannot be tied to the traditional classifications that humans and societies establish. Their distinct existence is not denied and, therefore, cannot be classified under the standard categorizations such as human vs. non-human or normal vs. abnormal. Monsters exist in a space that goes beyond these categories, turning into a threat to the social norms that construct the structure of our communities. Their existence questions what is considered as 'human' and what is 'in-between'. As a result, they lead us to question the foundations and what really shapes 'normalcy' and whether it is an objective distinction. Through monsters, we are able to see the instability of how we see ourselves and the place we stand in society, questioning the boundaries we have constructed in order to understand who we are and where we stand in our community.

4. The Monster dwells at the gates of difference

"The monster is difference made flesh, come to dwell among us" (p. 41)

Monsters have always been marginalized from societies, representing the ‘Other’, a term usually used to refer to entities of different ethnic, race, gender or class. In regard to monsters, they are seen from an outsider’s point of view as creatures that do not fit in societies. Their differences are too harsh and they cannot be fully included within the social structures. They are seen as disruptive and to belong outside what is considered as ‘normal’. These beasts usually share extreme differences in physical appearance, values, origin or way of behaving, highlighting their inability to adapt to societal norms. From our communities’ perspective, monsters belong outside the barriers of our societies, not fitting into the categories of race, class or identity.

5. The Monster polices the borders of the possible

> “The monster is transgressive, too sexual, perversely erotic, a lawbreaker; and so the monster and all that it embodies must be exiled or destroyed” (p.48)

Monsters serve as warning for us humans about the possible outcomes of trespassing the boundaries of our most hidden desires and behaviours. They represent the dangers of what is to come if we followed our forbidden instincts. Monsters may even be a representation of our most profound soul passions or erotic fantasies, symbolizing the risks of uncontrolled passion or excess, serving as a warning of the chaos that could break if we were to allow such thoughts and feelings to take over.

Monsters represent what we are most afraid or ashamed to confront, and the downfall we would experience if we embraced our most forbidden and primal instincts. Much like a cautionary signal, they serve as a warning to us about what would happen if we lost control over our behaviour. By turning these instincts into physical beings in a monstrous form, we can confront what would be of us if we gave in to them.

6. Fear of the Monster is really a kind of desire

"The linking of monstrosity with the forbidden makes the monster all the more appealing as a temporary egress from constraint" (p.49)

Monsters, for humans, represent that which is feared and forbidden, the unwanted. They represent the unknown outside what we consider as 'normal' within the barriers of societies, and embody our darkest side and deepest insecurities and anxieties. However, despite this fear, we tend to feel fascinated and attracted towards them. Humans are drawn to these creatures; they seem marvellous and captivate us whether we seek to understand them or not. These beasts represent a world that, whether it is voluntary or not, catches our attention and seduces us.

There is something about the feeling of not knowing that captivates our minds and leads us to want to experience the thrill around monsters, which are bound to a world radically different from ours. By getting closer to these creatures, we are allowing ourselves to come near the parts of the world that we do not fully understand yet and enter a new realm full of mystery and desires.

7. The Monster stands at the threshold of becoming

"They ask us to reevaluate our cultural assumptions about race, gender, sexuality, our perception of difference, our tolerance toward its expression" (p.52)

Monsters aim to reveal the instability of the identities of human beings, who are constantly changing and adapting their own boundaries. Therefore, they exist on a

fluctuating edge that is constantly shifting and challenging the fixed categories they defy. These creatures are not limited to those well-known figures which we are commonly used to encounter in literature and folklore such as dragons, chimeras, vampires, ghosts, werewolves or those man-made monsters such as mutants or androids. Monstrosity cand be seen as a broader term, defying pre-existing classifications.

3.2. SOCIAL ANXIETY

As explained by Stefan G. Hofmann & Patricia M. DiBartolo in *Social anxiety: clinical, development and social perspectives* (2014), social anxieties and fears exist along a continuum across the population, ranging from mild discomfort to it being felt at an extreme that can be debilitating. Social anxiety is a common trait among individuals, shaped by cultural factors that intensify or alleviate its intensity. Therefore, social anxiety can be defined as a common fear experienced by citizens in response to social situations such as the concern of being judged or rejected by the community. People with social anxiety are most likely to turn towards alcohol as a coping mechanism in order to alleviate their discomfort in social gatherings.

In *Trainspotting*, the society portrayed is one marked by self-destruction, despair, and addiction, themes closely related to social anxiety. Social anxiety is reflected in the response of the characters to the expectations imposed upon them, as well as the resentment toward societal norms, which they feel far from able to meet. Said fear could manifest itself differently depending on the individual but, typically, it shows in their behaviours, often involving substance use.

There are several parallels between social anxiety and the lives of individuals in 1980s Scotland. For those individuals suffering from social anxiety, isolation, or avoidance, substance use serves as a mechanism to numb emotions and temporarily

enter a new world free from emotional pain, anxiety and preoccupations, providing a small sense of relief. This can be exemplified through the characters in *Trainspotting* who, suffering from social anxiety, seek an escape for their fears and pressures, and therefore use heroin as a way to avoid reality. Heroin use, as depicted in Welsh's novel, turns the characters into empty individuals who forget temporarily about their worries and pain. The long-awaited mental and emotional silence hits them until all their worries have faded away, at least until the effects of said substances wear off.

Individuals struggle with their identity and the feeling of being trapped by anxiety. This conflict creates an endless loop of doubt, in which the fear of judgment and the feeling of not belonging make it difficult to reach personal freedom. The social anxiety they experience reinforces the idea that they belong to the emotional prison they find themselves in, unable to truly break free. The search for numbness becomes a way to silence the overwhelming emotions that, in other ways, would dominate their lives. This comparison emphasizes how individuals, whether they are struggling with addiction or social anxiety, tend to turn to extreme methods to find a feeling of relief from their pain and stress. According to Hofmann & DiBartolo (2014), social anxiety, despite it being personal, is strongly shaped by cultural backgrounds that dictate the expectations or societal norms individuals face. What some may see as a social 'threat', may have been shaped by their society's values and beliefs.

In the case of the characters created by Welsh in his novel, their struggles and anxiety, far from disappearing, are magnified by the external environment of despair, economic difficulties and the feeling of hopelessness. The 1980s decaying conditions of poverty, unemployment and social inequality create a perfect storm where social anxiety is heightened by the harsh pressures of the outside forces, destroying everything in its path. Because of this, an endless cycle of sadness consumes the characters and does not allow them to break free from the emotional distress they feel

trapped in, acting just like a perfect hurricane that destroys everything it comes close to, in this case, the lives of individual Scots.

The use of heroin can be examined as a way of self-destruction that drives individuals to make harmful decisions as they attempt to find ways to avoid reality and new coping mechanisms. This makes it harder for individuals to form meaningful connections, not only with those around them, but also with their own identity. However, the numbness they desperately seek comes with its own consequences, as it traps them in an endless cycle where the relief obtained is only temporal and will eventually lead to stronger isolation and worsen anxiety, ultimately not allowing personal growth.

It is important to recognize the government as a significant player in the dynamics of society, and attribute part of the blame to Thatcher's way of governing over the country. The government's policies, which aimed at privatization, and the dismantling of traditional Scottish industries, eventually led to major economic failures that profoundly marked the generations coming of age in the 1970s and 1980s, who were subject to a system that only contributed to worsen the conditions, creating the perfect setting for a sense of utter sorrow and desolation. Welsh's depiction of Edinburgh and Leith's youth symbolises the way these policies marked generations to come, enhancing the sense or marginalization that heightened social anxiety.

4. LITERARY ANALYSIS OF *TRAINSPOTTING*

When analysing *Trainspotting*, two theoretical approaches have proven to be particularly important: Monster Theory, offering insight into both the literal and figurative monsters found in the 1990s novel by Welsh and how they are represented and recognized by the characters, whether as a symbolic and abstract or as personified elements. Additionally, the framework of social anxiety will allow us to have a lens for understanding the behaviours of individuals—and therefore the characters of the novel— in 1980s Edinburgh, tracing their origins and observing how addiction is depicted as a mechanism leading to social exclusion. Through this foundation, the following analysis of the novel will be strongly structured.

4.1.THE 'LOST GENERATION' THROUGH THE LENSE OF MONSTER THEORY

Before investigating how Monster Theory relates in a figurative manner to heroin addiction, it is crucial to determine how Margaret Thatcher is framed as a material monster in *Trainspotting.* This double perspective will allow an exploration of monstrosity in the novel, considering both the external influences that shaped a 'lost generation' and the forces that determine the characters' reality. By understanding Thatcher's role as a monstrous figure, we can extend this foundation in order to evaluate addiction itself as a monstrous element as well.

4.1.1. MARGARET THATCHER: A POLITICAL MONSTROUS FIGURE

There is something that must be considered before diving in: the fact that at any point is Margaret Thatcher explicitly named as a culprit in Welsh's novel. Despite this, her presence can be felt at various points throughout the book. Her figure is expressed through the use of references to the social and economic conditions that

tormented Scotland during the 1970s and 1980s, a series of circumstances heavily influenced by her persona, and the following implementation of severe neoliberal policies that transformed the country. This led to a decline of the industries of the area, a rise in unemployment and a widening gap between social classes. Her impact is also expressed through the resentment and hatred the characters in *Trainspotting* (Welsh, 1993) feel towards her and her government, as well as towards the consequences of the new implemented system and how it affected their lives. They frequently blame the government, directly and indirectly, in a way that allows readers to fully understand the extent of the crisis, and how the lack of opportunities they must face every day is a direct consequence of Thatcher's tenure. The following passage highlights the resentment of the characters towards the government and those who stand in power, indirectly targeting Margaret Thatcher: "We are ruled by effete arseholes" (Welsh, 1993, p. 86). Renton shows his disgust regarding the broader system that has left individuals like himself with no choices or possibilities of building a better life for themselves:

> Fucking failures in a country ay failures. It's no good blamin it oan the English for colonizing us. Ah don't hate the English. They're just wankers. We are colonized by wankers. We can't even pick a decent, vibrant, healthy culture to be colonized by. We are ruled by effete arseholes. (Welsh, 1993, p. 86).

Therefore, given the resentment in regard to the Prime Minister and the effects of the policies implemented during her tenure, her portrayal in Welsh's novel could be explored through the viewpoint of the well-known Monster Theory by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, exploring how her image is depicted as monstrous, allowing to understand her role in the devastating environment and the character's perception of her as well as what her presence in power represents. On the one hand, Margaret Thatcher and her

government's policies can be identified as a figurative monster, particularly for the members of the community of the United Kingdom and especially to the Scots, who were deeply aware of the difficulties the country was experiencing since Thatcher's policies had been implemented, turning the population against her. In literature, monsters create a specific atmosphere around them, setting a particular mood for the story: horror, chaos, anarchy, melancholy and tragedy are some examples of atmospheres associated with monsters. However, in reality, the way they are perceived is dependent on the reaction the society has towards them, and the feeling said monsters provoke in individuals. The disillusionment of the nation and especially of the early adult portion of the population during Thatcher's tenure as Prime Minister, and the atmosphere that was created around her—one of hopelessness—highlighted her monsterisation. Thatcher, who had aimed to cut public spending and prioritize privatization, led the Scottish nation towards a time of strong decline, filling the streets with hatred and discontent with the situation. If we apply the seven theses of Cohen's *Monster Theory: Seven Theses* (1996), we can interpret Margaret Thatcher as a physical monster because her figure embodies the societal fears and anxieties of the working class. Therefore, we can analyse her monstruous character in the novel as follows.

Thatcher as a politician represents the total decay and destruction of the middle class in Scotland, symbolising the Conservative policies that eventually ended up leading to massive unemployment, a crisis of housing, and a decay in the healthcare system. This decline can all be seen through the representation of the characters in *Trainspotting* (Welsh, 1993), who embody an entire struggling community. Therefore, the first of Cohen's thesis 'The Monster's body is a cultural body' proves to be true, as Thatcherism became a beast constructed through the feeling of fear it evoked in the Scottish community in the 1980s. This deep hatred is reflected in the words of one

character, who strongly states, “ah’ll hate that Thatcher till ma dyin day” (Welsh, 1993, p. 324), capturing the raw fury and the emotional scars left by her persona.

As is common in politics, even after the end of Thatcher’s tenure, its consequences could be felt for years after. Her policies continued to shape the way a new Scotland was being built, and the aftermath of her decisions and influence proved irreparable even decades later. Just as monsters that cannot be eradicated, and following the second of Cohen’s theses—*“The Monster Always Escapes”*—Thatcherism was never defeated. It did not disappear with her resignation, instead, it worked as a tsunami. Its original wave was devastating, but its aftershocks also remained strong, affecting Scots enormously after her departure.

As evidenced by the characters in *Trainspotting,* a novel set in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the society illustrated is one marked by the harsh decision of Prime Minister Thatcher who, even in her last years in office—the period in which *Trainspotting* is set—caused chaos in Scotland. Her persona ensured that even those who had never lived under her rule still had to tolerate the pressure of her political decisions. Renton. Begbie, Spud and Sick Boy, among others, remain trapped in an endless cycle of addiction and desperation, representing a generation that has inherited the consequences of Thatcherism, proving its persistence. The following quote from *Trainspotting,* said by Renton, exemplifies the resentment the characters feel toward the situation they are in, both economically and socially, reflecting the sense of frustration as a result of Thatcher’s policies: “What does that make us? The lowest fot he fucking low, the scum of the earth. The most wretched, servile, miserable, pathetic trash that was ever shat intae creation….Ah hate the Scots.” (Welsh, 1993, p.86). These consequences are not temporary, contrary to that, they will trigger a cycle of despair and decay that will haunt generations to come.

Thatcher as a ‘Harbinger of category crisis’ (Cohen, 1996) cannot be classified in the traditional evil versus non evil differentiation because her policies were not felt equally by the entire population and therefore it would be a false alignment. Thatcher broke said standards and fought against the conventional classification of good leader versus character of destruction. She is both a figure of power and a villain for many. For Welsh’s characters in *Trainspotting*, Margaret Thatcher represents the destruction of their future possibilities, leaving their lives at a standstill, hoping for a change that will not come as long as Thatcher remains in power. However, her tenure in office was beneficial for the wealthy upper classes as well as for many business owners who prospered because of her policies. Therefore, Thatcher cannot be classified entirely as either a villain or a hero, as her legacy and impact are much more complex. The sharp difference between the lives of the elite and that of Welsh’s characters is captured in the following quote: “In the time it takes to dae this, thousand ay rich bastards will be thousand of ay pound richer, as investments ripen.” (Welsh, 1993, p. 230), reflecting the growing division between individuals belonging to the working classes and the rich, who benefit during times of economic difficulties.

In Welsh’s novel, Thatcher personifies the concept of the ‘other’, however, not in the concept defined by Edward Said. Instead, seen from the perspective of a middle-class worker struggling to navigate life without the support of the government. Therefore, taking this context into account, ‘other’ refers to the societal division between the higher classes and those they fail to comprehend. As Cohen states ‘The monster dwells at the gates of difference’, and Thatcher is the perfect representation of the harsh societal divisions. She comes from a wealthy background and has had access to an education which has eventually led to her pursuing a career in politics, therefore representing the higher class and privilege. It strongly contrasts with the needs of the classes beneath her, whom she seems to be unable to see. In

Trainspotting, those in power are divided from the Scottish middle class—such as Renton or Sick Boy— struggling to navigate life, establishing a clear division: us vs. them. The upcoming quote turns into a rejection of the path conventionally organized for people, that included working, aging and dying in an acceptable form, not setting aside the pre-established. Renton ridicules these expectations, implying that his possibilities are more limited, as he stands on the opposite side of society, the 'other'.

> The fact that ye jist simply choose tae reject whit they huv tae offer. Choose us. Choose life. Choose mortgage payments; choose washing machines; choose cars; choose sitting oan a couch watching mind-numbing and spirit-crushing game shows, stuffing fuckin junk food intae yir mooth. Choose rotting away, pishing and shiteing yersel in a home, a total fuckin embarrassment tae the selfish, fucked-up brats ye've produced. Choose life. (Welsh, 1993, p.194).

Thatcher represented the force that dictated what was possible and what was not, she was the maximum force of authority over the population. Any possibility of building a future or a life for those belonging to the middle class was dependent on her: what she believed in, what she decided on, or what she prioritized. Individuals did not have influence over her ideology, she was the one who determined the future of the nation and left no room for changes. Therefore, she became the embodiment of Cohen's thesis that 'The monster polices the borders of the possible'. Like a monster who implements limitations, her rule restricted the possibilities of change and made it clear that the future of Scotland as a nation was within her control, with no other possibilities for change allowed. The Prime Minister ensured that her vision of the future was the only possibility for the heirs of her legacy. To exemplify this, we should go over Begbie's character who, despite showing his anger and deep frustration towards the situation he finds himself in, is trapped in a system enforced by

Thatcherism. He belongs to the traditional working class, struggling to demonstrate authority in a world in which he does not feel seen. Unlike other characters in the novel, Begbie has been left with no other choice, and therefore his frustration is expressed through a violent personality: “The problem wi Begbie wis . . . well, thirs that many problems wi Begbie. One ay the things thit concerned us maist wis the fact thit ye couldnae really relax in his company, especially if he’d hud a bevvy.” (Welsh, 1993, p.83). He is aware his disillusionment is not something with an easy fix, as the policies established by Thatcher’s government have defined his future’s fate.

While Thatcher was despised by much of the population at the time, middle-class citizens still had to navigate the reality shaped by her policies and accept that their lives were bound to the structures she had established. Even in denial, there was a strong dependence on her decisions—whether by adjusting or giving in—. This contradiction reflects Cohen’s argument that ‘Fear of the monster is really a kind of desire’. As an example of this, Renton’s attitude towards the system is clearly a contradiction. His desire to leave Edinburgh and that way escape the social structures that control his life collides with his acceptance of the fact that his reality is tied to said structures. His drug use is both a way of rebelling against the political, economic, and social systems and also a symbol of his dependence on these policies, as they have shaped the reality that surrounds him.

Thatcher represented a force that changed the course of the preexisting societal order, building upon her arrival in power a new unstable reality**—**one that fought against the previous social constructions, aiming to create a new reality. Her decisions and policies continued to shape the future of those affected, turning her legacy into something inescapable even after her departure from office. In the following citation, Renton rejects the societal expectations imposed by Thatcher and her government, refusing to fit into the conventional life path that has been forced upon

individuals: “Well, ah choose no tae choose life” (Welsh, 1993, p. 194). However, his choice is also dependent on said expectations, as he cannot truly break free from the norms, no matter how much he wishes to. The monster creates fear, which is intertwined with a kind of desire— the desire to leave said fear behind.

Communities that previously relied on the public sector or industry were forced to adapt to a new reality. Individuals, such as the characters in Welsh’s novel, found themselves trapped in this changing societal frame, where the previous traditional realities and roles are blurred. As Cohen suggests, these forces defy the fixed categories, as they do not fit into the traditional roles, mirroring this way the unstable ground they stand on. Thus, the last of Cohen’s thesis— ‘The Monster stands at the threshold of becoming’— proves true. Just as the characters in Welsh’s novel struggle to accept their limitations, “Ah despised masel and the world because ah failed tae face up tae ma ain, and life's, limitations” (Welsh, 1993, p.192), society as a whole was also fighting against transition in a period where adapting to the new reality has become urgent.

By framing Thatcher as the definitive monster in *Trainspotting*, we can see her not only as a political force whose policies led to mass devastation across the country, but also as a force that haunts the characters of the novel, shaping their entire existence and turning them into victims of one single individual, the ultimate monster. However, this analysis does not end there and if we interpret Thatcher as a physical monster by analysing in depth her actions and by applying Cohen’s theory, which emphasized her monstrosity, we can also apply said theory to drug addiction.

4.1.2. FIGURATIVE MONSTER: THE IMPACT OF DRUG ADDICTION ON THE ‘LOST GENERATION’

The connection between Thatcherism and the drug epidemic lies in the socio-economic context of the 1970s and 1980s. The impossibility of prosperity and the lack of economic opportunities deeply affected individuals and their lives. Despair spread across the country, leading many weak individuals —afraid of what was to come— to drug use, especially heroin. For them, drugs offered an escape, a new world beyond reality was being created around them. Users failed to care, or notice, that the world kept moving on without them.

Heroin can be viewed as a symbolic figurative monster that dominates the way the characters in *Trainspotting* (Welsh, 1993) live, shaping their personalities and limiting their future possibilities. Following, an exploration of how Cohen's theses apply to heroin addiction.

Heroin embodies the decay of Edinburgh under Margaret Thatcher, it is a force shaped by the privatization of public services, unemployment, social and economic despair—a symbol of a community that has been abandoned by the government—. It is not only a prejudicial substance, but a symbol of the collapse of an entire part of the population: those belonging to the working class, left behind by the organism that is supposed to protect them. Therefore, the first of Cohen's thesis 'The Monster's body is a cultural body' proves to be true. Drug addiction became an escape for those struggling due to Thatcherism and its policies, individuals who had been left with no expectations of what was to come. Cohen's first thesis defines monsters as constructions made up of the fears and anxieties of the societies that build them. In this context, heroin is a monster born from Scotland's panic of Thatcherism, representing the destruction of the middle classes and its search for refuge. Hope faded, and citizens turned instead towards drugs and alcohol, seeking relief in the emptiness of addiction. The following quote captures the reality of heroin as a temporary relief, which aligns with the idea of drug addiction as a response to the

societal fears at the time. Heroin provided a sense of illusion amidst the difficulties of life: “Eftir that, ye see the misery ay the world as it is, and ye cannae anaesthetise yirsel against it” (Welsh, 1993, p.98).

Addiction is a cycle that, for many, can only be broken by death. The characters in Welsh’s novel are key representations of the reality of addiction and the endless cycle of their lives, always haunted by the feeling of destruction. Addiction, attempts to escape, frequent relapses, and starting again. As Cohen’s second thesis defends,— ‘The Monster Always Escapes’— the monster of addiction never truly disappears. It may retreat for some time, seeming to loosen its grip on its victims, but it never vanishes, it may even come back stronger as a sign of weakness. In *Trainspotting* (Welsh, 1993), the cycle revolving around addiction results in monstrous: characters attempt to break free but the intensity of heroin’s power is inescapable, and drags them back into its claws.

> Ma problem is, whenever ah sense the possibility, or realise the actuality ay attaining something that ah thought ah wanted, be it girlfriend, flat, job, education, money and so on, it jist seems so dull n sterile, that ah cannae value it any mair. Junk’s different though. Ye cannae turn yir back oan it sae easy. It willnae let ye. Trying tae manage a junk problem is the ultimate challenge. It’s also a fuckin good kick” (Welsh, 1993, p.99).

Drug users have completely crossed the line between pleasure and self-destruction. Cohen’s third thesis claims that monsters break down previously established distinctions, just like heroin does. Drug use shatters the fine line that exists between life and death—as it is being constantly crossed—, between what is real and what exists in one’s mind, and between those who act out of self-interest, and those who act out of genuine worry. The mental wall individuals had built is broken down.

Thus, the third thesis by Cohen, the monster as a ‘Harbinger of category crisis’, proves correct.

Welsh’s characters exist in an ambiguous zone where the use of heroine no longer represents pleasure or enjoyment in social contexts, but a necessity to individuals who have become unaware of their reality and fate. Addiction turns users into fractured figures who are stuck in limbo, neither alive nor dead, like ghosts. This is strongly reflected in the following quote, as one character states: “when you put heroin into it, they’re no longer their own. Less Matty, more heroin” (Welsh, 1993, p. 297), pointing out how the drug consumes individuals entirely.

One of the consequences of addiction is isolation. Victims of substance abuse often become marginalized by those who once stood alongside them—family, friends, and society. There always is a breaking point in which addicts must choose between survival or becoming social outcasts. Cohen’s fourth thesis claims that historically, monsters have always been excluded from societies and treated as the ‘Other’. This idea aligns with the concept of the ‘Other’, a term coined by Edward Said in postcolonial theory, where those who are seen as different are cast as outsiders and excluded from societal norms. Drug users in Welsh’s novel are excluded from what is considered as a ‘normal’ life of stability and are treated as the ‘Other’—dangerous outsider individuals who pose a threat for those around them—, isolating individuals from society and transforming them into monstrous figures. The country of Scotland and its working-classes have often been depicted as an internal colony within the United Kingdom, which serves to reinforce this postcolonial reading of Edinburgh and Leith. Consequently, Cohen’s thesis ‘The monster dwells at the gates of difference’, is accurate.

Drug addiction and, particularly heroin, represents the dangers of crossing the boundaries of desire and attraction, as well as the possible risks that our forbidden

instincts pose for mortal beings such as humans. Monsters are fascinating to us, however, that attraction can turn into a trap, a loop —using, withdrawing, and using again—, and the creation of a world in which escape seems possible. Heroin as a monster dictates the way individuals envision their lives, even allowing users to build a false sense of possibility of a life outside of the reality surrounding them, proving the thesis 'The monster polices the borders of the possible' to be true. For the majority of the middle-class citizens in Scotland during the 1980s, heroin provided the illusion that their deepest dreams may turn possible, but said illusion vanished as soon as the effects of the drug wore off. The scene in which Lesley's baby tragically dies represents the ultimate collapse of the boundaries between the possible and the unreal. The death of her child cannot be emotionally processed, so her immediate response —asking for a shot—reveals how heroin dictates her emotional reaction: "Yeah, likesay, cot death man… ken what ah mean?"... Ah'm cookin. They look at us, fuckin scoobied… Ye "cookin? Ah need a shot Mark. Ah really need a fuckin shot. C'moan Marky, cook us up a shot" (Welsh, 1993, p.64). For her, using is the logical response to numb her pain. Heroin creates a world where the illusion of escape might feel real, but in reality, it only delays the pain, intensifying it.

Individuals who consume heroin tend to be afraid of the side effects or possible consequences, even the possibility of death, despite this, they feel attracted to it. Drugs and their promise of euphoria, escape, forgetfulness, and even happiness lures victims as monstrous beasts do, catching the attention of their future prey before destroying, hurting, or killing them. Characters in *Trainspotting* (Welsh, 1993) hate their addiction to heroin but still, they crave it and feel attracted towards it, completely unable to resist the urge— 'Fear of the monster is really a kind of desire'—. The selected quote captures perfectly the internal contradiction and the attraction of heroin, even while being aware of the consequences of its consumption. On the one hand,

the “ocean” (l. 2) represents the temporary relief provided by the drug; on the other hand, the “poison” symbolises the aftermath of said relief, supporting the idea of heroin being both a monster and a desire.

> JUNK DILEMMAS NO.63. Ah’m just lettin it wash all over me, or wash through me. … This internal sea. The problem is that this beautiful ocean carries with it loads ay poisonous flotsam and jetsam . . . that poison is diluted by the sea, but once the ocean rolls out, it leaves the shite behind, inside ma body.(Welsh, 1993, p.22)

Heroin transforms those individuals who use it and reveals the real instability of their identities. Addicts’ personalities change when they are under the influence of drugs, turning into numb individuals completely detached from the reality surrounding them, and even turning dangerous, posing a threat not only to those around them but also themselves. Addiction truly reshapes addicts’ personalities, illustrating how the monster forces them to change and adapt to their new reality. As a result, the last of Cohen’s thesis, ‘The Monster stands at the threshold of becoming’*,* is verified. Renton captures this instability when he states: “Ah always felt thit a slight shift in the cunt’s perception ay ye wid be sufficient tae change yir status fae great mate intae persecuted victim.” (Welsh, 1993, p. 83). These words highlight how identities can fracture in its totality reinforcing the monstrous essence of addiction.

According to my reading of the text and following Jeffrey Cohen’s 1996 essay *Monster Culture (Seven Theses),* part of the book *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (1996), as a monster, heroin “is both corporal and incorporeal; its threat is its propensity to shift” (Cohen, 1996, p.39), it is both corporeal as a drug that destroys users’ bodies, and incorporeal as a force that dictates individuals’ manners and lives. The need for drug use represents the collapse of the society under Margaret Thatcher, reinforcing Cohen’s affirmation that “monsters must be examined within the intricate

matrix of relations (social, cultural and literary-historical) that generate them" (Cohen, 1996, p. 39).

4.2. THROUGH THE LENSE OF SOCIAL ANXIETY

Social anxiety as discussed by Stefan G. Hofmann and Patricia M. DiBartolo in *Social Anxiety: Clinical, Developmental, and Social Perspectives* (2014) is influenced by cultural factors that can reduce or magnify its severity. At its core, social anxiety involves a deep fear of being judged or shunned, causing severe distress to those suffering from it, who often turn to substance and alcohol abuse. In *Trainspotting*, the characters portrayed are strongly influenced by the social and political environment of the 1980s in Scotland, shaped to an extent by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's policies.

The weight of unemployment, economic decline, and social exclusion heighten the social anxieties of the victims of the system, who turn towards harmful coping methods. This connection is a central theme in Welsh's novel, whose characters seek an escape for the pressures of reality. The following paragraphs will review the behaviours and internal conflict of key characters from *Trainspotting*, as it is evident how social anxiety significantly shapes their decisions, reactions and life experiences.

4.2.1 MARK RENTON

Mark Renton is the protagonist of Welsh's novel —a bright man who struggles to leave the cycle of addiction he is trapped in—. His various internal monologues, referred to as 'junk dilemmas', expose his internal turmoil and his desire to leave, as well as his response to the expectations society has imposed on him, which he feels unable to meet. Renton lives in Leith, a place where the younger generations struggle enormously with the striking levels of unemployment and the lack of opportunities,

which turns many into young people with excessive free time and no clear purpose. A large number of young adults facing such circumstances tend to make poor decisions, which ultimately can lead to self-harm and addiction.

The community around Mark Renton has collapsed: there is no access neither to housing nor stable jobs, and the support systems have failed citizens. He is trapped in the cycle that is addiction, which isolates him both from those who once cared about him, as well as from society. He has a sense of being trapped in a world he no longer feels part of, and is overwhelmed by feelings of invisibility. He questions—Who is he? What is he supposed to be doing? Who is he meant to be? What does he want in life?—, reflecting his internal turmoil. What he feels—isolation, uncertainty, disappointment—, are symptoms that feed his social anxiety as well as desire to escape reality.

Renton's inner struggle deepened right after his brother's death, which causes him an emotional trauma that he never fully confronts. Later in the novel, we learn that he is seeing a psychiatrist, and admits: "Ah despiss masel and the world because ah failed tae face up tae ma ain, and life's limitations" (Welsh, 1993, p. 192). This line suggests that he despises himself and the world, something rooted in his inability to confront his pain as well as the limitations society has imposed upon him. He then reflects on his disconnection from the traditional structures of society: "due tae this failuretae recognise societal reward, success (and failure) can only ever be fleeting experiences for me, as that experience cannae be sustained by the socially-supported condoning of wealth, power, status, etc., nor, in the case ay failure, by strigma or reproach" (Welsh, 1993, p. 192). For him, success is not a realistic goal, he does not believe in the values that define the term so, in relation to this, 'failure' also loses its meaning, since he has rejected the system that characterizes the concept and that would judge him. This internal conflict creates a kind of limbo for Renton, where he

shifts constantly between indifference and anxiety. Even though he never truly engages in life, he is afraid of being left behind by the system he so much criticizes. His desire to escape paired with his internal conflict reveal his social anxiety.

His words: “so it goes back tae ma alienation from society…society cannae be changed tae make it significantly better, or that ah cannae change tae accommodate it…a void grows within ye. Jynk fills the void, also also helps us tae satisfy ma need tae destroy masel.” (Welsh, 1993, p. 192), highlight a deep frustration towards both himself, and the world. He feels society has failed to create for him a safe space in which he can truly grow and give life a meaning.

In the final scene of the novel, we see Renton finally leaving behind everything that once consumed him. Walking away from his life of chaos and addiction represents both escaping and fighting for a new beginning, despite the uncertainty of not knowing what the future holds for him. He is liberated from the forces that dictated his life and is now open to new possibilities and choices. As Renton expresses, “He had done what he wanted to do. He could now never go back to Leith, to Edinburgh, even to Scotland, ever again. There, he could not be anything other than he was. Now, free from them all, for good, he could be what he wanted to be. He’d stand or fall alone. This thought both terrified and excited him as he contemplated life in Amsterdam” (Welsh, 1993, p. 344). His departure is both literal as well as symbolic, as he is also breaking free from his old self-destructive patterns. He is attempting to reclaim control over his life, now free from the anxiety that once paralysed him.

4.2.2 BEGBIE

Francis Begbie is the most violent member of the group, an aggressive man whose anger is rooted in his deep insecurities and refusal to accept his vulnerability. His response to social anxiety is extreme: violence turns into his way of reflecting his

discomfort and disagreement. Originally from Leith, he does not show at any moment any sign of vulnerability, he refuses to be seen as weak, which leads him to perform the stereotypical role of a ‘tough guy’: someone who never expresses fear or sadness. As the following quote exemplifies, he battles his insecurities by asserting dominance over others, attempting to construct a strong and respectable persona, especially in social contexts: “Begbie’s sense ay humour is solely activated at the misfortunes, setbacks and weaknesses ay others, usually his friends” (Welsh, 1993, p. 90). These words reveal Begbie’s need to elevate himself over others, using cruelty to hide his personal fear of being seen as anything less than perfect. He uses humour as a tool to hide his deeper insecurities, which he conceals in order to create distance between himself and the people that surround him, making sure he remains in a position of power over everyone else.

He fears being judged or perceived as anything less than how he wants to be seen; therefore, his violence turns into a coping mechanism: instead of showing any sign of anxiety, he erupts. Thus, it could be said that his discomfort and emotional disorder are masked by violence. He places himself in a position that comes across as aggressive and powerful but still, he reacts to the smallest things and does not seem to know how to behave correctly in social contexts. This usually leads to him starting fights, such as the one occurring in the pub while accompanied by Renton and two other girls: “then he throws the empty gless fae his last pint straight ower the balcony, in a casual, backhand motion. It’s one ay they chunky, panelled glesses wi a handle, n ah kin see it spinnin through the air oot ay the corner ay ma eye. Ah look at Begbie, whae smiles, while Hazel n June look disorientated, thir faces reflecting ma ain crippling anxiety.” (Welsh, 1993, p.87). His inability to remain calm in social gatherings and his fear of expressing his vulnerability could be interpreted as social anxiety strongly masked by rage and carelessness. Begbie might even function as a

sort of tragic figure—despite his desire for control and dominance over others, ultimately, he is someone being consumed by his own insecurities, the same ones he refuses to recognise—. This behaviour exemplifies how violence has become his way of expression, a way that enables him to avoid confronting his real issues that cause him to suffer from social anxiety. To bring it all together, his violent persona is constructed to survive in an unchanging world that chokes him.

Even though he is not an addict like his friends, he surrounds himself with users, which hints at a fear of being alone, of isolation. This suggests that, despite his facade, he needs the presence of others in order to avoid confronting his fear of loneliness and facing who he truly is.

Additionally, the fact that he surrounds himself with people dependent on substances, may add to it a sense of power, as he might perceive himself as less broken than them. He views his friends through a lens of superiority and indifference, rather than understanding and concern. Ultimately, this reinforces his inability to form real connections, which deepens his own isolation.

4.2.3. SICK BOY

Sick Boy is a manipulative but charming character who is motivated by his deeply egocentric perspective. His charismatic personality masks his rooted insecurities and desire to be a part of something bigger than himself. He acts as if he were in control of the situation, establishing himself above the people he surrounds himself with, using this persona as a coping mechanism. Sick Boy fears becoming invisible and displaying the anxiety that eats him alive, therefore, he tries to suppress it through arrogance. Intentionally, he avoids showing his vulnerable side or expressing emotional reactions, revealing how emotionally broken he is in reality. He struggles to form deep emotional connections, instead, Sick Boy engages in

transitional relationships to avoid any real pain of rejection or being judged. He does not confront the despair of his life's circumstances, instead of resignation, he answers with sarcasm. The following passage from the novel reveals Sick Boy's manipulative and egotistical nature, providing readers a deeper perception into his hidden insecurities:

> Ah shake off Rents, he can go and kill himself with drugs. Some fucking friends I have. Spud, Second Prize, Begbie, Matty, Tommy: these punters spell L-I-M-I-T-E-D. An extremely limited company. Well, ah'm fed up to ma back teeth wi losers, no-hopers, draftpaks, schemies, junkies and the likes. I am a dynamic young man, upwardly mobile and thrusting, thrusting, thrusting… the socialists go on about your comrades, your class, your union, and society. Fuck all that shite. The Tories go on about your employer, your country, your family. Fuck that even mair. It's me, me, fucking ME, Simon David Williamson, NUMERO FUCKING UNO, versus the world, and it's a one-sided swedge" (Welsh, 1993, p.38).

His words reveal his need to position himself above others, who he refers to as "losers", in contrast, he identifies himself as the "NUMERO FUCKING UNO" in order to establish his own value in a world he sees as insufficient for him. This alter ego allows him to mask his fear of not being different from those he mocks: unimportant and with no life expectations. He distances himself from his friend group to avoid being associated or compared to those individuals, who he sees as failures, even though they are the only ones who fill his void by offering him company.

The relationship he maintains both with women and his friends is a clear reflection of his fear of showing vulnerability and his inability to form real emotional connections with other humans. By forming these unreal and superficial connections he is trying to avoid confronting his fear of being insufficient. However, by doing so,

the further he distances himself from society, heightening his isolation. Despite his efforts, he experiences the same pain as the rest of his friend group.

Sick Boy's relationships with women are temporal, he views them as sexual conquests, often seeing himself as a charming man. However, his encounters with them lack any emotional connection or depth. For him, women are a tool he uses to validate his ego and his masculinity. Even though he is a bright young man, Sick Boy uses his intellectual abilities to manipulate others and commit crimes—such as scamming or drug dealing— as he does not see any other possibilities for his future. He uses confidence as a mask, his attitude turns into a defence mechanism to avoid any intimacy and vulnerability that could expose emotional instability.

Therefore, he experiences anxiety that, because of his denial to express it, leads him to hide it by putting himself above others and hiding his real emotions. By doing so, he loses his humanity and capacity to express his concerns in a society that paralyses any possibility of him reaching his full potential. Mediocrity is inevitable.

4.2.4. SPUD

Spud is a considerate and credulous character that hides his confidence issues behind the mask of addiction. However, there is no real response to his life circumstances from him, seemingly he is comfortable with his position of marginalised. Yet again, for Spud, addiction is the answer, a way of disconnecting from his pain temporarily.

He is sweet but nervous and unsure of himself, demonstrating low self-esteem and a belief that he is living the life that he deserves, evidently expressing a deep-rooted anxiety. He is a victim of the environment—poverty, no education and the lack of a strong personality—, which makes him more vulnerable than the rest of his social

circle. He is unable to assert himself, allowing others to constantly dismiss him, leaving him to be treated as a failure, which deepens his anxiety.

Heroin is used as a way to numb his sadness and fears— a temporary relief of what he cannot escape by himself —. Over time, it becomes something he feels he cannot exist without. Even within the outcasts of society, he is isolated, constantly searching for a sense of belonging. He is aware of how others see him —the idiot—, which causes him emotional pain. His strong fear of judgment leads to strong social detachment and, consequently, going to extremes in order to please others.

During the job interview scene, his social anxiety becomes visible as readers become aware of his inability to cope with the pressure of having to present his persona in a formal social setting. He behaves as if he was deeply uncomfortable and stressed by having to please others, and his way of expressing and answering the questions of the employer reveals his nerves. “It’s cool man. Ah’m relaxed. It’s jist that ah really want this job, likesay. Couldnae sleep last night though. Worried ah’d sortay blow it likesay, ken?” (Welsh, 1993, p.75). Instead of facing the possibility of rejection, he intentionally sabotages the interview: “The O Grades wis bullshit, ken? Thought ah’d use that tae git ma fit in the door. Showin initiative, likesay. Ken? Ah really want this job, man.” (Welsh, 1993, p. 75). This self-sabotage illustrates his fear of being rejected and judged poorly. Spud’s anxiety could be seen as a symptom of his assimilated belief that he is not enough to be a part of the ‘normal’ structures of society and that he deserves to be pushed into isolation.

His nervous personality and intense fear of failure capture how his character is a harsh example of what can happen to individuals suffering from mental illnesses when they are unsupported or rejected by society. For Spud, social anxiety is debilitating, manifesting itself in every aspect of his life, both in his physical

behaviour— such as avoiding eye contact and twitching—, as well as his way of communicating.

5. CONCLUSION

Trainspotting reveals that the monstrosities in 1980s Scotland were not mythical, but actually, a reality: political failure and heroin addiction were destructive forces that shattered any hope for a future, devastated entire communities and left behind a generation that was trapped between the urge to give up and the need to persist.

This final degree dissertation has proposed that *Trainspotting,* a novel written by Irvine Welsh in 1993, presents Margaret Thatcher and addiction as two kinds of monstrosities, exemplifying how political strategies, government measures and a collective feeling of despair affected Scottish working-class communities in the end of the 1980s. This dissertation has analysed Welsh's novel through two theoretical perspectives: Monster Theory and the concept of social anxiety, and examined how these two monstrous forces inflicted persistent harm on the general population.

The first part of this dissertation has focused on the figure of Margaret Thatcher and her depiction as a monstruous figure, contextualizing her persona within the general landscape of 1980s Britain and Scotland. *Trainspotting* (Welsh, 1993) is set in 1980s Edinburgh, a period of economic distress and social turmoil in the United Kingdom and especially in Scotland, strongly influenced by Margaret Thatcher and her neoliberal policies. These policies, that emphasized privatization and cuts to public investments, weakened the traditional industrial sectors, leading to massive unemployment and the collapse of many working-class communities; the Prime Minister's indifference towards the situation in Scotland deepened the resentment towards her political administration. The social consequences were harsh: an epidemic of drug addiction, especially heroin, and the spread of bloodborne diseases such as HIV. Areas like Leith were the most affected as public services like the NHS struggled to manage the crisis. The social and literary context of the period shaped *Trainspotting,*

an outstanding piece of literature that reflects the disillusionment, chaos, and desperation of a forgotten generation.

Monster Theory, coined by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, invites us to think that monsters are cultural constructions that reflect societal fears. In the novel, Thatcher can be understood as a figurative monster that devastated entire communities such as Leith, whilst drug addiction can be perceived as a more literal monster –both of these shaping the characters' lives. Cohen's seven thesis exposed how monsters embody cultural fears, challenge the traditional norms, represent the 'other' and act as a warning against overstepping, while simultaneously triggering terror and attraction.

Therefore, this dissertation has explored how Margaret Thatcher is depicted as a monster in *Trainspotting,* and how Welsh's characters view her and her government as culprits for the unemployment, poverty, and sense of hopelessness that fills the novel. Relying on Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's *Monster Theory,* Thatcher embodies various of Cohen's thesis: her neoliberal polices turned her into a 'cultural monster' feared by the entirety of the Scottish population; she continued to shape lives even after she left office, she 'always escapes'; she blurs boundaries by being seen both as a strong positive leader and as a destroyer of society; and she reinforced societal division by dividing it into elite versus the working class

The following section explored heroin addiction as a figurative monster in the novel, also drawing on Jeffrey Cohen's 1996 *Seven Thesis of Monster Culture* to analyze its symbolic importance. Amid the socio-political climate of Thatcher's Britain, heroin became a response to poverty, desperation and misery, especially in the Scottish middle-class communities. Given this, addiction is illustrated as a way to evade the shattering society whilst shaping the character's lives and futures. Some of the characters in the novel reflect these patterns, trapped in cycles of both violence

and dependency shaped by Thatcher. As a result, the Prime Minister's monstrous influence is portrayed as unavoidable, restricting the future of those it affects.

The second lens, social anxiety, has been based on Hofmann & DiBartolo's 2014 work. Said publication focuses on how individuals react to social expectations and fear of rejection. In the world of *Trainspotting,* anxiety is portrayed as generalized. Many of the characters have assimilated the marginalization of a society that judges based on economic value. As a result, individuals seek refuge in heroin in order to escape suffocating anxiety and social isolation. Through this analytical view, the novel reveals how societal inequalities might lead to emotional and psychological consequences that could be read as collective trauma.

From this analysis, we are able to picture a society facing total collapse. *Trainspotting* is not simply a novel about drug users; it is a deep critique of a system that failed its citizens in moments of need. The monsters that have been identified in this final degree dissertation do not belong to the fantasy realm, they are actually persistent realities. These monstrous forces are not confined to the margins; they are unavoidable aspects of a society that has been built on constant inequality and abandonment.

In conclusion, the novel emphasizes how the effects of economic decline, social decay and institutional decisions during Margaret Thatcher's tenure seemed to amplify the feelings of desperation and hopelessness. Through Cohen's Monster Theory and the lens of social anxiety, this dissertation has explored how political decisions and ideologies intersect with internal conflicts in Welsh's *Trainspotting*, which served as a way to illustrate the persistent impact of the socio-political conditions of the 1980s on Scotland's working classes. Monsters, as portrayed in Welsh narrative and interpreted by me, are not fictional, they are very much real, and their impact continues to resonate.

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