**Trainspotting, review: 'brave and glorious'**

**Trainspotting was a film that made a whole generation think about their choices in life, says Rupert Hawksley**

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5  By [Rupert Hawksley](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/journalists/Rupert-Hawksley/), The Telegraph, 19 Apr 2014.

“Choose Life. Choose a job. Choose a career... But why would I want to do a thing like that?” Even if you haven’t seen Trainspotting, you’ll be aware of the opening lines of Danny Boyle’s 1996 masterpiece. They have become as famous as the film itself. Spoken by Ewan McGregor as he hurtles down an Edinburgh backstreet with Iggy Pop’s frenzied Lust for Life blaring out, those simple words conceal a far from simple truth – and an entire generation has clung to them.

Like a Che Guevara T-shirt, they have come to represent a flat-packed, easy-access ideal of youth rebellion. This defiantly nonconformist message has been greedily swallowed by the mainstream. Choose Life. Choose a job. Choose a career. Choose a Trainspotting poster for the wall of your university accommodation.

Watch the film again, however, and one is immediately reminded that Trainspotting is so much more than an easily-quotable opening sequence, so much more than a cloak of phony counterculture for the middle classes. Supported by five effortlessly assured central performances, it is cool without ever having to try, funny but deeply tragic, alluring but faintly terrifying – and it has the finest soundtrack of any film in the last 20 years.

Adapted from Irvine Welsh’s darkly comic novel of the same name, Trainspotting follows the lives of five Edinburgh-based scallywags: Renton (Ewan McGregor), Spud (Ewen Bremner), Sick Boy (Jonny Lee Miller), Tommy (Kevin McKidd) and Begbie (Robert Caryle). Junkies, drunkards, thieves and fighters, they are the sort of friends every parent prays their child will never have. In spite of this, or perhaps because of it, you cannot help but love every one of them. Even the bullying and manically violent Begbie possesses, if not a certain charm, then a deluded arrogance that at least gives rise to some of the funniest lines in the film: “How the f—k can it be an armed robbery with a f—king replica?”

There is a vague plot that revolves around Renton’s only half-serious attempt to kick his heroin habit but Trainspotting is essentially a collection of loosely-related episodes as the five ne’er-do-wells drift through the tedium of life – a tedium relieved, with the exception of Begbie who drinks instead, by a belt around the arm and a needle in the vein. “Take the best orgasm you’ve ever had, multiply it by a thousand, and you’re still nowhere near it,” Renton tells us as he prepares to inject more chemicals into his bloodstream.

Trainspotting is brave enough to bring a humour and levity to the subject of drug abuse, without ever ignoring the accompanying and unavoidable squalor and devastation. We might laugh at the antics of Renton, Spud and Sick Boy as they cavort through Edinburgh, hopelessly wrecked and loving every minute of it, but the death of Tommy from HIV reminds us of the perils of the lifestyle choices they have made. "The streets are awash with drugs you can have for unhappiness and pain," Renton tells us and the point is clear. For all their obstinate refusal to conform, to live life their own way, each of the five central characters is struggling to cope.

Even if we did have that Trainspotting poster on our walls, declaring our intention to defy society’s expectations, in the 18 years since the film’s release, most of us will have chosen Life and all that that entails – we will have chosen the career, the low cholesterol, the dental insurance and the fixed interest mortgage repayments. Trainspotting is a glorious reminder of what we missed out on, but it is also a welcome assurance that we were right to make the choice to do so.