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psychiatry in the movies

T2 *Trainspotting*: addiction in a digital age

Peter Byrne

Renton (Ewan McGregor) – the fifth main character in the original film and in this sequel – returns to Edinburgh from 20 years in Amsterdam with a bitter monologue:

'Choose life
Choose Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and hope that someone, somewhere cares
Choose looking up old flames, wishing you'd done it all differently
And choose watching history repeat itself
Choose your future
Choose reality TV, slut shaming, revenge porn
Choose a zero hour contract, a two hour journey to work
And choose the same for your kids, only worse, and smother the pain with an unknown dose
of an unknown drug made in somebody's kitchen
And then . . . take a deep breath
You're an addict, so be addicted
Just be addicted to something else
Choose the ones you love
Choose your future
Choose life'

In revisiting the original film's characters, writer John Hodge adapting Irving Welsh serves us a portion of only the first half of the 'learning and hugging' formula of US sitcom. Renton has acquired self-knowledge and Simon (Jonny Lee Miller) knows his new drug of choice, cocaine, traps him in his narrative where his 'best friend ruined [his] life'. In a key scene, Simon reminds Renton that he sold heroin to their friend Tommy who died a lonely drug-related death in the first film, but Renton retorts with the death of Simon's baby Dawn – again collateral damage of heroin use. Choose death. But when they score money, they score some novel psychoactive agents and shoot up again, though in nicer environs, with big screen TV and nostalgia-pumping speakers. Their friend Spud Murphy (Ewen Bremner) struggles even harder with his addiction but ultimately finds his voice as chronicler of this Underworld. Even their mutual fiend, Franco Begby (Robert Carlyle) – who cannot resist blue collar criminality and violent revenge – learns not to revisit the damage on his son that he himself had suffered from his addicted father.

The sequel avoids its plot's motif 'first there was an opportunity . . . then there was a betrayal'. It revisits the fierce musicality of the original *Trainspotting* and fills the screen with visual nods to the film that nailed 1990s UK. Some critics cite the social media of Renton's rant as the new addiction, but the film has lots to say about other modern afflictions: gentrification, globalisation, gym treadmills, the sex industry, cybercrime, webcams and CCTV. Its four female characters have little to do, as agents of the men – though one has the last laugh. The main grumble is how well three junkies look 21 years later: in our reality, they should be dead or struggling from ravages of risks taken. But this creative team has not betrayed the original. Director Danny Boyle has brought Renton home.

T2 Trainspotting directed by Danny Boyle, UK release 2017, distributed by TriStar Pictures.

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