

Withnail and I: the Original Screenplay

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Presents the screenplay of the classic cult film by Bruce Robinson, with an introduction by the director.

Withnail and I: the Original Screenplay Details


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Author : Bruce Robinson

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From Reader Review *Withnail and I*: the Original Screenplay for online ebook

Jay Odd says

Just perfect.

Ernest Rowe says

Forever one of my favourite films. An absolute pleasure to read Robinson's honest and somehow familiar language - the amusing and honest stage directions add so much more to each scene than what is conveyed in the already clever dialogue alone. In particular with the final scene - Withnail's rendition of Hamlet's 'i have of late...' - is enriched with a heavy, dark humour that is not present even in Richard E. Grant's sublime performance. Robinson's introduction with its dedication to his friend and inspiration for Withnail is moving and puts the whole thing into a melancholic perspective. Beautiful film & screenplay.

Antonomasia says

Only the second time I've bought and read a screenplay; the other was *Double Indemnity: The Complete Screenplay* .

Double Indemnity was simply so good a film, with dialogue so quickly fired, that I was desperate to see the words again on the page. This one I got because of a new crush on the author*; obviously it goes without saying that *Withnail* is an excellent film too, but then I couldn't have a crush on someone who wrote less than very well indeed.

You've probably seen *Withnail & I* more than once, and know perfectly well that it's very funny, but there's more here than just the words from the film itself. A few scenes which didn't make it into the movie. Wonderful descriptions of the characters and their actions, and settings so well realised that the words are almost sensual despite being used of a squalid place; these are especially good in the first half. And an introduction which is one of the best pieces I've read about having difficulty writing the item itself properly and on time. In part because of the opening tone of malaise and angry desperation very funny but deeply, not flippantly felt, and over a few pages it moves through reminiscences and old diary entries about the original Withnail (his former flatmate Vivian MacKerrell), via stream of consciousness to the ache of missing a deceased friend, just as mood does change when you begin to read about then write about a thing which has great meaning to you. But also its structure isn't fully tightened, unlike 90% of such I-can't-write-this-column columns which always rather diminishes the meta-effect.

My only qualm about *Withnail & I* is fuelled by the minority-awareness - or as some might say political correctness - which is the legacy of work in the public and voluntary sectors for nearly a decade and then reading a bunch of feminist websites. It's not a question I feel qualified to answer myself, but because it's partly about fear of one particular predatory homosexual, do some people feel there's anything generally homophobic about the film? Having read how Uncle Monty was partly inspired by Robinson's memories of being sexually harrassed by Franco Zeffirelli on the set of *Romeo & Juliet*, it's also a great example of a

traumatic experience sublimated to create some legendary comedy.

* Which wouldn't have started if Alex hadn't posted about *A Fantastic Fear of Everything* (thank you!) which I watched and thought was fantastic, if someone else hadn't told me the film was based on Robinson's story *Paranoia In The Launderette* and if my Netflix free trial hadn't recommended *Still Crazy* in which Robinson's character would have utterly melted me anyway, but he was gorgeous too. I'd really needed something like this as rebound.

Chris Morton says

Excellent. It helps to picture Richard E Grant as Withnail, but that aside, it works just as well as a filmscript as it does a film.

Stop says

Read the STOP SMILING interview excerpt with author Bruce Robinson

Against the Grain: Bruce Robinson
By JC Gabel

(This interview originally appeared in STOP SMILING *The U.K. Issue*)

Stop Smiling: Do you think there was ever a time when movie studios welcomed the creativity and passion of writers and took their ideas more seriously?

Bruce Robinson: You could answer that question with a yes and also a no and be just as accurate with either. Writers came late into the film industry as a kind of technological accident. When movies started, sound hadn't been invented, so they didn't need writers. They just needed producers, directors, cameramen and actors. So the industry was very well established by the time the technology evolved to add some words. Writers started coming in about 30 years later and were always the unwanted guests at the wedding. We were put up with. A writer does his job and delivers it. At least a year is going to go by and by then they've forgotten who the writer is and anyway by now he's probably writing something else. So writers aren't part of the filmmaking process. It's hard to get used to, but if you want to be a screenwriter, you have to.

SS: Do you or your family ever go to see films in the theater?

BR: We live in a remote part of England and rarely go to the movies. The last picture I went to see was a memorable walkout — what was that film — about Martians destroying the world? There were spaceships hanging over Washington, over the entire world?

SS: Independence Day.

BR: Independence Day. There was this huge thing, a mile up, hanging over Washington. And the line was,

“There’s going to be some very frightened people out there, Mr. President.” Fucking A there will be. Can you imagine a thing the size of Catalina Island hanging over the city and the only line they can come up with is, “There’ll be some very frightened people out there”? Who wrote that shit? No screenwriter on earth could write a line like that.

SS: In a way though, don’t you think that Independence Day, fluffy as it was, epitomized the pre-9/11 paranoia?

BR: The great abiding tradition in American entertainment is enemies. They gotta have them. They gotta have the fear. It’s a seamless slip from Commies to Arabs — hardly anybody noticed it happen. When you look through the binoculars of American entertainment, it’s stuffed with fear. Hollywood is basically about Yanks running away from special effects. From the infantile end of Scooby Doo, right up to the mainstream, it’s the same ethic of fear. There are monsters and madmen and Arabs out to get you and like I say, the only place with no fear are the ads. It’s a phenomena of America — unfortunately taking root here. Michael Moore made the point in his film. Cut to the weatherman who says, “The Midwest is cool and in Los Angeles it’s 68 degrees. It’s snowing in Vermont and today a lady in Tennessee was bitten by a rare and dangerous snake — so look out for those snakes, folks.” Fear, fear and you’re watching the fucking weather forecast. Oil that gun, there’s snakes out there and it’s 65 in Dallas. The real fear I have is that our whole political system is evolving into an optical illusion whose currency is fear. It’s a cliché, but it truly is becoming Orwellian. In my view Mr. Bush has nothing to sell anybody but fear. If kids are afraid they run to their parents. If people are afraid they run to the authorities, empowering them, who then sell them more fear. September 11 and the events around it were a true catastrophe, but unlike Independence Day, that terrible attack didn’t come out of the blue. As a matter of fact it came out of Saudi Arabia, it came out of sanctions that killed half a million Arab kids in Iraq, and it came out of a dozen years of bombing the south of that same country. But that isn’t like anyone wants to hear it. Better to keep it like Independence Day and sell them the fear. And the more fear you can inculcate, the more control you’ve got. McCarthy understood that and I can’t believe we’re falling for it again. This is the New McCarthyism. I went into East Berlin in the ’70s, Checkpoint Charlie, and there were all these stern-looking idiots with mirrors on poles under the car. Thirty odd years later I went into Paramount Studios on Melrose Avenue and got the same thing. Is that how we want to live? It’s a pantomime the whole of America is being sucked into, a show in one act called Homeland Security. And it will never have an end. The only real security anyone can ever have is being told the absolute truth.

Read the rest of the interview excerpt...

Phoebe says

This is one of my all time favourite films and I saw that there was this screenplay with Paul McGann on the cover so it was instantly bought. Without opening the cover I thought how could this be better or different to the film? After reading; it is!

The notes explaining the scenes not only create the scene in your mind but they focus on the points of the room or of an appearance of a character that you may have overlooked in the film. This really adds to the entire story. Not only that but they are also hilarious.

This is a great addition to your understanding of the film and it just solidified the love I have for this story.

Diana Nuss says

Brilliant screenplay. Bruce Robinson is so hilarious. Even the introduction had me in stitches.

Malin says

I initially gave this four stars, and I think this is the only time I've gone back and changed the rating to a higher one. This screenplay is simply fantastic.

It adds so much to the story, and watching the film again after reading it is a completely other and better experience.

The stage directions are nothing other than beautiful and read like prose in places.

Loved it, loved it so much.

Elysia Fionn says

Thanks to Anthony Bourdain, who was a guest on Turner Classic Movies, and Robert Osborne, who hosts the channel, I discovered the marvel that is "Withnail & I". Anthony Bourdain touted Withnail as his "favorite movie of all time", and so I decided to watch it. This was back in 2012. Since then, I have watched the movie over 200 times. Yes, seriously. I also carry this excellent screenplay in my bag, everywhere I go. I must have read it at least 25 times, and counting.

Bruce Robinson is wonderful. This movie/screenplay is brilliant. My favorite thing EVER. So much so that I decided to start a collection of vintage items seen in the film. It went from a small collection to a rather large one (and still growing). If you're interested, you can Google "Wall-O-Withnail" and you'll find it.

Best thing about this screenplay is that it reads wonderfully as a book. The scene notes, by themselves, are worth the cost of the book. Just simply great stuff. It helps if you have a dry, British sense of humoUr, and watch a lot of BBC, because this is chock-full of phrases and references most Americans just wouldn't get. For example, "going for a slash" might sound like the intentions of a murderer in America, but in the UK it means someone's bladder is uncomfortably full.

Whatever you do - WATCH THE MOVIE! It just might change your life.

Bill Lynas says

Withnail & I is one of my favourite films. It's a film unlike any other, & this screenplay is equally unique. In the opening few pages Bruce Robinson describes two rooms & their contents in beautiful, almost poetic, prose. Wonderful.

What follows (in my third or fourth reading of this screenplay) is the most amazingly quotable dialogue. Robinson's characters of Withnail, Marwood, Monty & Danny leap off the page & by the end you feel you know them as well as any real people. There's a lot of humour & a little sadness, which all add up to a work of genius. (For added effect I listened to the film soundtrack while reading!)

David says

I will never play the Dane.

Lauren Hansen says

brilliant, beyond brilliant and ever so darkly funny

Mervyn S Whyte says

Poetry in action.

Realini says

Withnail & I, written and directed by Bruce Robinson
10 out of 10

Notes and thoughts on other books are available at:

- <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list...> and <http://realini.blogspot.ro/>

Withnail & I is a glorious comedy that is included in my personal top twenty and I think Time Out has listed as the best ever.

There is a funny aspect regarding the preview, during which nobody in the audience laughed...not even once...

- Nevertheless, it was discovered that the members of the public... were Germans...and could not speak English

And this is mostly a dialogue film, even if there are many scenes where we could laugh out loud at the face of Withnail or his friend, for the latter, especially when he is approached by a very horny Monty.

At the start of the film, one could almost feel sorry for Withnail and his buddy Marwood, as they have no acting job and from the looks of it, no prospect of ever having an offer, given the circumstances: "Withnail: I feel like a pig shat in my head..."

By the way, all actors involved in this majestic comedy are Super Comedians, with Richard E. Grant

mesmerizing as Withnail, Paul McGann brilliant as Marwood aka I, Richard Griffiths as Monty and the fabulous Ralph Brown as Eddie.

Orson Welles told Peter Bogdanovich that he thinks the film is a success or failure depending on the performances.

In this case, the cast is out of this world, but I think that half or more of this hilarious comedy is made historical by Bruce Robinson.

The writer and director has been involved in other great works, like *The Killing Fields*, but Withnail & I would be remembered for centuries or forever...

"If I medicined you, you'd think a brain tumour was a birthday present...Danny: I don't advise a haircut, man. All hairdressers are in the employment of the government. Hair are your aerals. They pick up signals from the cosmos, and transmit them directly into the brain. This is the reason bald-headed men are uptight"

The lines are so fantastically gorgeous that I am tempted to stop my "Rattle and Hum" and let the FLOW - Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi- of this epic treatment for depression take you to the Zen zones and Nirvana... If you ever feel depressed or low, this is the very pill that you could and maybe should take to let you out of grey area.

Otherwise, Withnail can be a coward that abandons his friend at any sign of danger..." [close to tears] My wife is having a baby! Listen, I don't know what my f... acquaintance did to upset you but it's nothing to do with me. I suggest you both go outside and discuss it sensibly, in the street... [suddenly runs out of the pub screaming "AAAARGGHH!"]"

Withnail and Marwood go to the countryside and enjoy the hospitality of the former's uncle, Monty who arrives unexpectedly in the middle of the night.

Knowing they have made some enemies, the two friends expect the man at the door to be a dangerous intruder.

But when they see it is only Monty, Withnail is again taking the "path of least resistance „and pushes Marwood into the tentacles of his uncle.

"Withnail: This place is uninhabitable...Marwood: Give it a chance. It's got to warm up...Withnail: Warm up? We may as well sit round this cigarette. This is ridiculous. We'll be found dead in here next spring."

The approach of the peculiar, non-sexual couple is negative, most of the time, but the results are humorous. Perhaps even when they deal with a live animal that they need to kill in order to eat and it may get gruesome...

"Withnail: This is ridiculous. Look at me, I'm 30 in a month and I've got a sole flapping off my shoe... I have of late, but wherefore I know not, lost all my mirth. And indeed it goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory. This most excellent canopy, the air, look you, this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire, why, it appeareth nothing to me but a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours. What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason! How infinite in faculties! How like an angel in apprehension. How like a god! The beauty of the world! The paragon of animals! And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust? Man delights not me, no, nor women neither. Nor women neither."

Withnail: "How can it be so cold in here? It's like Greenland in here. We've got to get some booze. It's the only solution to this intense cold. Something's got to be done. We can't go on like this. I'm a trained actor reduced to the status of a bum. I mean look at us! Nothing that reasonable members of society demand as

their rights! No fridges, no televisions, no phones. Much more of this and I'm going to apply for meals on wheels.”

This might be the equivalent of Beethoven’s eighth symphony for comedy.

Janitag says

It is hard for me to pour my heart out for *Withnail and I*, because I haven't got enough words to tell just how utterly *brilliant* it is.

The character descriptions are vivid and the dialogues clever. I'm a big time lover of *words* and this is the kind of play that makes me want to read the lines over and over again, to really *see* everything written down on paper.

Funny play, but see here's the thing, it's so much more than that. A story about friendship, of addiction, of wasted talent, of being too dependant on another person. Because you goddamn well know by the end that Withnail simply will not manage without Marwood. Which makes the introduction by the author really hit home. The play works on so many levels and the ending is the big final enigma of the whole story.

Adore, adore, for always.
