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Hubert Selby Jr.: It/II Be Better Tomorrow

Picture: B- Sound: B-
Extras: B
Program: A

Not enough people know about Hubert Selby Jr. and if they do happen to have heard the name it's

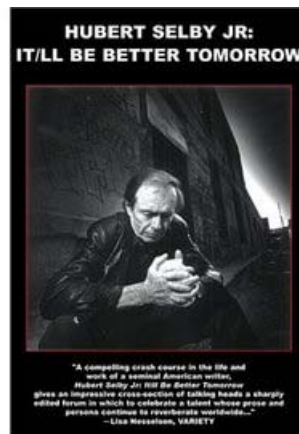
most likely because they scanned the credits of the few movies based on his novels. Selby was born in Brooklyn in 1928, cut out of school the first chance he got, and joined the merchant marines just like his father. He was diagnosed with tuberculosis and soon began a series of surgeries and treatments that would lead down the road to addiction – painkillers then heroin.

Out of the merchant marines, Selby drifted around unfit for most kinds of paying labor. It was desperation that led him to put an old card table out back of the place he was living and set his typewriter on top. He wrote long letters to everyone he knew. It was his strategy to learn how to write. Eventually, he composed his first novel, *Last Exit To Brooklyn*. It was published in 1964 by Grove Press. It was soon followed by *Requiem For A Dream*, *The Room*, *The Demon*, and more.

Dean and Shiffryn's documentary tracks Selby's life and career from gutter punk to university instructor. Among the interviewed are Selby, Richard Price, Jerry Stahl, Darren Aronofsky and Gilbert Sorrentino. Interspersed among the interviews are clips of Selby reading from his books and scenes from the films.

Selby's is a harrowing tale. His heroin addiction almost destroyed him and cost him all the money he made from his first book. But he continued to write and to mete out a meager existence for himself. Never a big name in America, Selby's reputation has been mostly as a cult writer; although, in Europe he enjoyed a much greater renown.

It/II Be Better Tomorrow is a well made piece of work. It's certainly worth viewing if only for all of the footage of



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Selby. It would sound like griping to suggest that the filmmakers could have gone deeper into their subject matter. As interesting as this documentary is, it still feels a little cursory. Still, that's a mild complaint. I suppose it's enough, for the moment, that even this film exists.

- Kristofer Collins

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