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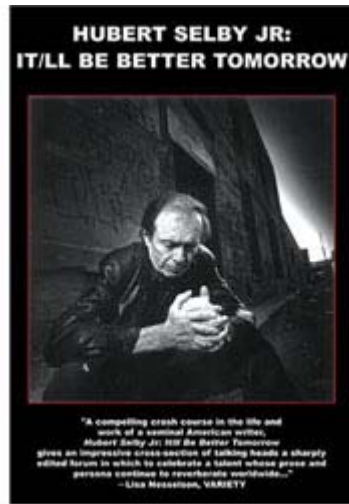
FILM

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DVD Review: Hubert Selby, Jr.: It/ll Be Better Tomorrow

By [John Thomason](#)



It/ll Be Better Tomorrow, Michael W. Dean and Kenneth Shiffrin's loving tribute to cult author Hubert Selby Jr., suffers from a frustrating tendency common in cinematic biographies: It takes the unpredictable, unusual life of an American maverick and banally molds it into a safe and familiar structure. According to the appreciative theories and reflections in this documentary, you'll be convinced Selby is the most important person to hold a pen since Shakespeare, revitalizing American literature with an idiosyncratic style that transcended mere

DVD Information:

Name: Hubert Selby, Jr.: It/ll Be Better Tomorrow
 Rated: None
 Studio: Eclectic

content to reject the established norms of grammatical form (hence the backslash in place of the apostrophe in the film's title, a recurrence in Selby's jazz-like prose). Certainly drug-addled bestsellers like Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting* and James Frey's *A Million Little Pieces*, among others, wouldn't exist without the seedy novel that paved for the way for the rest of the world's junkie-lit, Selby's *Last Exit to Brooklyn*.

A figure this important and influential deserves a cinematic rendering just as rule-breaking. Alas, as polished, informative and heartfelt as *It/ll Be Better Tomorrow* is, this obsequious hagiography is probably not the kind of film its subject would ultimately approve of. You know the kind of documentary this is — voice-over narration by a sorta- kindred spirit (Robert Downey Jr.), yellowed photos of Selby as a child, book jackets fading into each other, talking heads fawning over their experiences working with the subject, clips from the film adaptations of Selby's works and archival interviews of Selby himself, all cleanly collaged and packaged for fast and forgettable consumption. At its worst, a few moments of ill-advised special effects and a cameraman's inability to properly frame one of the interviewees bring an out-of-tune amateurism to an otherwise cookie-cutter formula.

Not that the movie isn't entertaining; many of the anecdotes shared by Ellen Burstyn, Lou Reed, Jerry Stahl, Nick Tosches and others illuminate the author's demeanor and worldview. The film hops smoothly from subject to subject: his alcoholism and drug addiction, his doctor-defying long life, his literary inspiration, his notoriety abroad compared to his domestic neglect. Its most fascinating section deals with Selby's grammatical innovations, and includes insightful observations by literature professors and publishing industry brethren. A newcomer to Selby before viewing this documentary, I now want to immerse myself in his work, wholly convinced that he was the Godard of literature. In this way, *It/ll Be Better Tomorrow* succeeds, but his legion of fans will likely want something a little more challenging.

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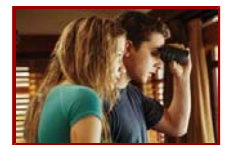
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