

# An Enemy Deep: Spectacular Addiction in Hubert Selby's *Requiem for a Dream*

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According to Sadie Plant in *Writing on Drugs*, the “addict” as an identity emerged in the late nineteenth century as an outsider, a “figment[] of a modern imagination that needed to define its own normality, drawing the boundaries around the upright, productive, and reproductive members of twentieth-century society” (164). The addict, a “thing” for which desire existed without regulation, soon became mythologized in American society as a creature that voraciously consumed but offered little in return. As the nineteenth century concluded and the twentieth began, there was little the government could do to stop the influx of this monstrous consumer. In an attempt to halt the growing number of addicts, the American government enacted several laws and regulations; these only resulted in much larger, and certainly more insidious, threats emanating from within both official medical channels and the increasingly sophisticated underworld of “street” drugs. By the time World War II ended, and American prosperity was at an all-time high, the country was deeply entrenched in the first of many “Wars on Drugs,” and addiction was no longer limited to repressed middle-class females—the “reproductive” members of nineteenth-century society—who were victims of iatrogenic practices. Instead, a new breed of addict was born in the postwar world.

In the preface to the newest edition of *Requiem for a Dream*, which was released concomitantly with Darron Aronofsky's cinematic version in 2000, Hubert Selby writes that, while every individual has his or her own preconceived notion of the “American Dream,” too many are afraid to pursue it, or to even recognize and accept its existence. Selby muses,

I believe that to pursue the American Dream is not only futile but self-destructive because ultimately it destroys everything and everyone involved with it. By definition it must, because it nurtures everything except those things that are most important: integrity, ethics, truth, our very heart and soul. Why? The reason is simple: because Life/life<sup>1</sup> is about giving, not getting. (vi)

For Selby, the American Dream represents an archaic myth, one that may have been prevalent during the early years of America's foundation but has long since disappeared. This illusive—and elusive—dream nurtures the idea that, in order to be happy, we must first achieve success and money; however, this is, as Selby advocates, a false happiness. *Requiem for a Dream* deals with the consequences of following an illusion over truth, and as Aronofsky suggests, no human in the novel acts as the “hero.” Instead, the novel “is a manifesto on Addiction's triumph over the Human Spirit,” an enemy that lives “deep in the characters' heads” (Aronofsky 1). The commodities Selby's

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characters tie themselves to become their own worst enemies, and instead of salving their souls and allowing them to feel whole, addiction takes over so completely that they can only live for the next fix.

In *Requiem for a Dream*, Selby introduces four characters, Harry Goldfarb, his mother Sara, his girlfriend Marion, and his best friend Tyrone C. Love, in order to show his hypothesis that “Life/life” is about “giving, not getting.” Each of the characters searches for their own version of the American Dream in different ways, and though the substances used are varied, the final desired feeling is the same: Harry, Sara, Marion, and Tyrone want to feel whole. For Harry and Tyrone, this means scoring a pound of pure heroin so they can be rich; however, the two end up using more than they sell. Harry eventually loses his arm from a gangrenous infection brought about by his heroin addiction, and Tyrone ends up on a chain gang in a Georgia prison. Marion prostitutes herself to feed her heroin addiction and not only loses Harry, but more importantly, her sense of self. Finally, Sara consumes both food and television in an effort to stave off loneliness but enters the dangerous world of amphetamine addiction instead, which leads her to develop schizophrenia and lands her in a mental institution. Selby’s novel illuminates contemporary society’s desire for wholeness, as well as the search for an identity and a meaningful life, through the mass consumption of “junk,” including chemical means and other addictive compulsions. More particularly, it is no accident that his tale interweaves drug and television consumption, revealing, especially through Sara, a synergistic effect between drugs and images which, though sought for personal fulfillment, only affords participation in the illusion of the spectacle.

When Selby first published *Requiem for a Dream* in 1978, the United States was still dealing with the aftermath of the turbulent Vietnam War. In *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Frederic Jameson suggests that the sixties gave birth to a media that became “a collective actor on the historical scene, feared by politicians and tolerated by the ‘public,’” essen-

tially developing into “virtually a human being in its own right” (347). This virtual human being broadcast to the world what was happening in Asia, projecting the struggles of society and the war onto President Lyndon B. Johnson and the generals—authoritarian figures considered to be pursuing, without rational motive, a war “out of sheerly patriarchal malignancy” (Jameson 347–48). Christopher Lasch notes that many Americans desired to forget the sixties and all that went with the tumultuous decade: the riots, the new left, the Kent State University Shooting, and “their entire collective past” (5). In forgetting, though, a new collective character of the American was formed, resulting in a representational paradox that takes away any subjectivity and autonomy because the image becomes divorced from the actual object (Jameson 348). The advent of a global media, coupled with the stripping of the individual, resulted in a void that could be neither articulated nor understood.

The turbulent sixties and seventies, however, find roots in the early postwar years. At the height of global power at the end of World War II, Americans were able to experience, for the first time, a leisurely and luxurious existence where items, desired instead of necessary, could be purchased by almost anyone. The postwar years ushered in what David Riesman in *The Lonely Crowd* refers to as a revolution that cut Americans off from traditional family values that historically existed, giving way to “a whole range of societal developments associated with a shift from an age of production to an age of consumption” (6). In *A Consumer’s Republic*, Elizabeth Cohen agrees, noting that the aftermath of World War II provided a fundamental shift in America’s politics, economy, and culture, creating major consequences for how Americans began to live, as well as what they expected from their government (8). Cohen indicates that postwar mass consumption was less of a personal indulgence and more a “civic responsibility” encouraged by the government in order to provide “full employment and improved standards for the rest of the nation” (113).<sup>2</sup>

The political and business leaders of postwar America hoped that a dynamic mass consumption

economy would deliver prosperity and fulfill society's loftier aspirations, creating what Cohen refers to as "the Consumers' Republic." This new economy included more social egalitarianism, political freedom, and democratic participation; furthermore, in an ideal America, jobs would be plentiful, increasing the act of purchasing and allowing citizens to live better than they had before World War II. America's social landscape where the populace lived and consumed helped reshape the nation's class and racial profile, as well as gender dynamics both in the family and in the workplace (Cohen 404–06). Peter Whybrow, in *American Mania: When More is Not Enough*, remarks that the American society in the postwar world was one embellished by a commercially contrived illusion of infinite opportunity (4); in spite of all this, or perhaps because of it, most Americans felt increasingly empty and lost. In *The Society of the Spectacle*, Guy Debord states that the illusion of infinite prosperity and the individual's feeling of aimlessness resulted in the spectacle of the society that only served to create isolation and general separation (12). In short, the mass consumption perpetuated by the American government managed to boost spending and wealth, but also increasingly isolated citizens from each other, creating only the illusion of unity.

This consumption of illusion created a general feeling of apathy and emptiness in America. As Jean Baudrillard theorizes in *America*, the United States "lives in perpetual simulation, in a perpetual present of signs" (76), which Jameson echoes when he notes that the spectacle of America is akin to addiction based wholly on a "historically original consumers' appetite for a world transformed into sheer images of itself" such that "the culture of the simulacrum comes to life in a society where exchange value has been generalized to the point at which the very memory of use value is effaced" (18). In spite of the ideological clashes, two devastating world wars, and a cold war that pushed the United States into a powerful global leadership position, the twentieth century actually, as Gary Cross in *An All-Consuming Republic* suggests, did not "culminate in the victory

of American political ideas. Rather, the real winner of the century was consumerism" (1). Essentially, the "consumption of sheer commodification as a process" took over (Jameson x), resulting in a place where only illusion is being consumed, since "[t]he commodity is this illusion, which is in fact real, and the spectacle is its most general form" (Debord 32). The empty and meaningless feelings the illusion created ultimately caused Americans to fill this void with "junk," resulting in addiction in its most spectacular form. As Selby ultimately shows in *Requiem for a Dream*, this type of "junk" is futile at best, as it in no way creates a sense of connection or wholeness on the part of the consumer.

When someone feels full, when his or her life is "filled," he or she is able to navigate the world in a satisfied manner. In *Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva suggests that "a lust for swallowing up the other" develops into a "deathly drive to devour the other" (118). *Fullness* is often used when discussing food consumption, and in the case of Kristeva, this occurs through the oral-dietary satisfaction that involves connection with another human being. Essentially, the feeling of fullness is in fact the act of being fulfilled in some way. Kristeva's idea that "swallowing up" the other can be interpreted in such a way that "other" stands for any commodity used to attain satisfaction. Because of this, "whole" identities actually cannot exist—human beings tend to rely too heavily on outside influences to achieve this state of being. Wholeness is metaphysical in meaning and indicates the act of being complete and satisfied. In Selby's *Requiem for a Dream*, the desire for this sensation, as well as the ability to be consciously aware of the feeling, is sought through "junk," which results in addiction. Addiction acts as a way for the junkie to achieve a sense of fullness, though inevitably, the addicts mistake this feeling for one of wholeness. Wholeness is never attained because the characters in Selby's novel can only articulate the feeling they desire through the rhetoric of fullness. While the characters in *Requiem* act on their desires, they ultimately fail because they are unaware that the substances they rely on are just as empty as they are.

For Harry, Tyrone, and Marion, the feeling of being complete comes through the relationships the characters have, particularly with heroin. Harry and Tyrone, with the financial backing provided by Marion, score a pound of pure heroin. Pure heroin would be highly desirable, particularly since much of the dope found on the street contains additives that do not wholly dissolve, including anything from coffee to quinine to glass particles (Ashton 115; Moraes 64). While the three know that the dope they get is excellent, they “dont want to get into it too heavy” because they have “seen cats get strung out and they blow their whole scene and end up in the slammer” (Selby 31).<sup>3</sup> It is interesting to note that jail, not death, is the fear, and as the characters get deeper into their addictions, dying actually never occurs to them. Instead, Harry, Tyrone, and Marion feel they are “a part of something . . . [to be] looked forward to with the greatest of joy and anticipation” because heroin is “symbolic of their life and needs” (Selby 184). For instance, after finding a favorite vein, this feeling of excitement and warm contentment occurs, and the three “s[*it*] back feeling whole and invulnerable and safe and a lot of other things, but mostly whole” (Selby 184). As heroin creates in the body a warm, euphoric feeling, it also dissipates fear, pain, hunger, frustration, stress, and other normal human anxieties, providing the user with a safe place, “[w]rapped up in cotton wool” (Ashton 114; Fernandez 57). Harry, Tyrone, and Marion desire this warm, safe feeling, but what they fail to realize is that heroin steals their autonomy and individuality, creating a barren and meaningless space.

In fact, heroin ingestion actually affects the body on a cellular level. Heroin mimics the action of natural chemicals, endorphins, which the brain produces in response to pain. These endorphins act on specific opiate receptor sites in the brain and spinal cord, dampening the flow of impulses in the nerve tracts that carry information to the brain (Ashton 111). The concentration of the neurotransmitter dopamine increases, the body adapts to the repeated ingestion of the drug, and addiction occurs (West 95–97, 125). Because the human body is full of these opiate receptors,

when a person ingests heroin, the receptors located in the brain are responsible for the pain-relieving and pleasurable effects that the drug offers. When taking over the body’s initial response to pain by dulling sensation, heroin then affects the hypothalamus, the area of the brain responsible for controlling the body’s hormonal balance, thus influencing the levels of testosterone in the blood (Ashton 111–12). The chemicals in heroin then attach to the cells, altering the body’s homeostasis and resulting in an increase in tolerance so that the user needs more to maintain equilibrium. Because of this, there can never be enough heroin to fill the void; in short, Harry, Tyrone, and Marion might pump their veins full of the drug, but they will never be whole because they rely on junk for the feeling.

Heroin provides Harry and his friends with a type of prepackaged identity of a drug user, but instead of possessing a self that is whole, they instead lack the ability to sense any deficiency resulting from their addiction in themselves. In an effort to articulate the concept of identity, Marion tells Harry that one of the problems in America is the fact that people no longer know who they are. While people actually think they do know themselves, Marion rants, they are really just a bunch of

*schleppers* who have no idea what a search for personal truth and identity really is, which would be alright if they didnt get in your way, but they insist that they know everything and that if you dont live their way then youre not living properly and they want to take your space away . . . and they just cant believe that you know what you are doing and that you have your own identity and space and that you are happy and content with it. You see, thats the problem right there. If they could see that then they wouldnt have to feel threatened and feel that they have to destroy you before you destroy them. (Selby 130–31)

While Marion appears to be railing against consumer culture and being bound up with the judgment of her peers, as based on David Riesman’s definition of the other-directed personality, she herself is clearly a victim of the invisible hand of the market just as much as those she rails against. The spectacle in which Marion resides, and in particular her reliance on heroin for her insight, erases what Debord refers to as the

dividing line between the ideas of self and the world. The self is always “under siege by the presence/absence of the world” and is overwhelmed by the loss of division between truth and fiction. People are “condemned to the passive acceptance of an alien everyday reality” and steered toward a form of madness, resulting in the “consumption of commodities” that occurs in order to communicate because a response is simply not possible (Debord 153). Marion feels that her identity is being threatened by some alien outsider because she possesses no real identity—she is a conglomeration of images and events dictated through the heroin she uses in order to feel “whole.” The same can be said for Harry, Tyrone, and Sara, though the latter’s wholeness stems from different types of junk entirely.

Sara’s emptiness and loneliness transpires not only from being a widow, but also from her non-existent relationship with her son Harry. In fact, the only way Sara and Harry are able to communicate is through the medium of commodities. Harry, in a rare fit of consciousness, elects to replace Sara’s battered television set (the one that he constantly pawns in order to get money to feed his heroin habit before he hits it “big” with his pound of pure). Harry describes Sara as “a TV junkie,” informing Marion that he wants to replace her set with a color TV in order to “make her forget about the times I borrowed her set” (Selby 128). Harry does not really love his mother, though he does seem to want to make her happy; some part of him understands that she is lonely. He tells Marion that his mother is always sitting in her apartment “wearing the same old house dress, you know even if it isnt the same it is, and I dont know what to do . . . Its not important. Now that Im set I can take care of her and visit her once in awhile” (Selby 128–29). Harry completely misses the point, though; while he participates openly in giving her something to help her replace the void he believes she must feel, instead of love—which he is not capable of giving—he offers prepackaged emotions in the form of television programs. Clearly, Harry’s use of dope to fill his own void causes him to believe that something material will make Sara “whole,” too.

For Sara, television allows an escape from the banal and tedious routine of every day life, offering “moments portrayed, like all spectacular commodities, *at a distance*, and as desirable by definition. This particular commodity is explicitly presented as a moment of authentic life whose cyclical return we are supposed to look forward to” (Debord 112). In this way, Harry’s gift is not so far off base. The beginning of the novel shows Sara huddled in a closet while Harry once again steals her set; while hiding, she moans to Seymour, her dead husband, reassuring them both that “it wasnt happening. And if it should be happening it would be alright, so dont worry Seymour. This is like a commercial break. Soon the program will be back on and youll see, theyll make it nice . . . In the end its all nice” (Selby 4). Sara’s small world exists almost exclusively in and around her apartment, where she has only her memories of Seymour, scant visits from her itinerant son, and the friendship of the other Jewish ladies who dwell in her building. Her truest companion is the television set, and she prefers the shows to real life because they always have a happy ending. She can relax while watching TV because she is possessed with the knowledge that everything will turn out perfectly, even though Harry “is a little mischief” and her life really is not all that great (Selby 14).

In *New Maladies of the Soul*, Kristeva states, “if drugs do not take over your life, your wounds are ‘healed’ with images, and before you can speak about your states of the soul, you drown them in a world of mass media.” Images harness anxiety and desire, taking on the illusion’s intensity while alternately suspending the meaning (Kristeva, *NM* 8). Concurrently, mass media, including movies, radio, comics, and popular culture in general influences the post-war America persona, allowing Sara to become overwhelmed and carried away by these images (Kristeva, *NM* 8; Riesman 21). Television, the illusion of an illusion that punctuates time in the cycle of hour and half-hour programming “pass[es] off as authentic life [what] turns out to be merely a life more *authentically spectacular*” (Debord 112; Jameson 76). In doing so,

television “reveals itself for what it really is: a video of another world, ultimately addressed to no one at all, delivering its images indifferently, indifferent to its own messages” (Baudrillard 50). For Sara Goldfarb, the images present on her television screen addict and overload (Whybrow 243), permitting her to fill the void in her life. While television has no physical side effects,<sup>4</sup> Sara’s reliance on TV leads her to believe in the “happily ever after,” and this is exacerbated when Lyle Russell of the McDick Corporation<sup>5</sup> calls her and informs her that she has been chosen to appear—sometime in the vague future—on a new game show.

Sara willingly trades in reality for the guise of illusion. Sigmund Freud in *Civilization and Its Discontents* writes that when happiness is sought through a disconnection with reality, illusion is the only way to obtain satisfaction, and the line between truth and fiction becomes erased (30–31). The images Sara clings to provide valid compensation for the loss of her loved ones (Kristeva, *Black Sun* 5, 6), causing her to believe that, once she appears on the unnamed game show, her life will also have a happy reconciliation. Sara insists that people will see her and fall in love with her, and the promise of this television appearance gives her “a reason to get up in the morning” because, as she admits to Harry, she is lonely and old (Selby 142–43). Sara’s life is no longer something to just endure because she “ha[s] been given a future” (Selby 66). Not only does she imagine making Harry proud, but she also believes that, by appearing on television and becoming one of the spectacular images she so desires to be, her loneliness will disappear, millions will love her, and she will finally have her happy ending.

Unfortunately, Sara’s addiction shifts in a dangerous direction the more obsessed she gets with this television appearance. She trades a somewhat harmless addiction to TV for the frightening world of drugs without even realizing what she is doing. Sara enters the world of dieting with good intentions, but she soon realizes that the rules set forth in various diet books will not work for her. She turns to the world of medicine to help lose the extra pounds, returning from a visit to the doctor

with a packet of pills that makes her feel young and vibrant. In fact, Sara informs her friends that she has found “the fountain of youth” (Selby 124). In America, the omnipresent cult of the body causes Sara to want to be slim; her plump figure is “an object of frantic concern” because it shows “failure or substandard performance” (Baudrillard 35). In order to be accepted, and acceptable, and to alleviate this frantic concern, Sara must rely on drugs. As a result, though, she becomes frantic thanks to pills, which keep her so full of energy that she can no longer sit still and dwell in her favorite pastime of watching TV. Sara replaces the happy families and resolutions with the purple, red, orange, and green amphetamine pills. Unbeknownst to Sara, dexedrine is actually a stimulant with bio-behavioral actions similar to cocaine (Brick and Erickson 83). Diet pills were common in the 1970s, and doctors often prescribed dextroamphetamine—dexies—to help women lose weight. Unfortunately, these “miracle” pills created more problems than they solved, as tolerance develops very rapidly to amphetamines, and the pills are, in fact, highly addictive (Brick and Erickson 83–84). Sara effectively substitutes one addiction for another.

These drugs, and the mental stimulation produced, are Sara’s attempt at feeling whole. Neurochemical substances treat anything from insomnia to anxiety to depression, and as the body conquers “the invisible territory of the soul,” images inundate Sara. She finds that “[t]he spectacle of life is a dream” (Kristeva, *NM* 8). This once again echoes Debord’s assertion that the spectacle overwhelms our everyday lives through a series of images, and once Sara replaces television with drugs, her life takes on a surreal quality. Chronic use of amphetamines produces “a toxic psychosis or schizophrenia characterized by confused, disorganized behavior, stereotypy, paranoia, hallucinations, and delusions” (Brick and Erickson 84–85). Sara falls victim to this toxic psychosis, imagining herself actually in the television: “[s]he saw the announcer, the audience, the prizes, and heard the laughter and applause . . . she couldnt control herself and she left the screen and came into the room and walked around the

apartment . . . trying to get back into the set” (Selby 162). This schizophrenia is a by-product of both the drugs and the spectacle because, as Debord suggests, we are “[i]mprisoned in a flat universe bounded on all sides by the spectacle’s screen” and our consciousness “has only figment interlocutors which subject it to a one-way discourse on their commodities” (152–53). The flat television screen comprises Sara’s equally flat universe, and her use of pills traps her inside an addiction she attempts to escape through another form of consumption. Sara’s dream to be on television is slowly replaced by the nightmare from which she cannot get out; however, when she sees herself leaving the show, she finds that she cannot get back in. Sara’s confusion blurs the line between reality and fiction to the point where she mourns the loss of joy she used to feel in watching TV, but at the same, she fears being watched by others.

Like many Americans abusing prescription drugs,<sup>6</sup> Sara believes her use of pills is legitimate because she gets them through a medical doctor. Harry, a denizen of the drug world in his own right, notices her strange behavior. On a visit to inform her of the impending arrival of her new television, he notices that she continually grinds her teeth and refuses to sit still. He asks Sara if she is “making a croaker for speed,” and Sara, who has no idea that “croaker” means doctor, tells him her physician is genuine; the pills only help her lose weight, nothing else. Harry comments that the “croakers no good. Ya gotta stop takin those pills. Youll get strung out” (Selby 139–40). Of course, Harry sees his own drug use—he uses dexies, too, if the need arises, in addition to his heroin addiction—as harmless, but the fact that his mother takes speed in order to give herself the pleasure of a slimmer body bothers him. For her part, Sara gains no enjoyment from using the drugs; they are merely a means to an end, allowing her the body she so desires. Receiving the prescription from a doctor further validates the drug’s legitimacy, causing Sara to believe that her life is finally coming together. After all, Harry returns (if only for a minimal visit—he never comes back); she loses weight; and soon, she will appear on television,

validating her existence in the spectacle. The amphetamines help her retain her reason for living: Sara simply wants to matter to someone, anyone.

In the end, the pills prove more trouble than they are worth. Despite Harry’s warning, Sara continues on her destructive drug-taking path, eventually developing the schizophrenia that accompanies both amphetamine addiction and living in the spectacle. She ignores the warnings of her well-meaning friends and peripatetic son and soon begins obsessing over her appearance in the McDick Corporation’s obviously fictional television game show. She lives, as Kristeva proposes, in an accelerated space and time, lacking any real identity, and turns into a body that simply performs (*NM* 7–8). Sara’s addiction, like her love for television, merely serves to mire her in a false consciousness that does not accede to self-knowledge (Debord 154). Using television to paint a picture in her head of the perfect family, Sara’s attempt is thwarted by her real one. She turns to diet pills to achieve the perfect body, and though she does get skinny, she also loses her mind in the process. Sara’s desperation to feel whole and happy is never met, and the means by which she tries to achieve this feeling fail her in the end. Instead of attaining her eventual goal of earning the love of millions of television-viewing Americans, Sara Goldfarb ends up in Bellevue Mental Hospital, where her only audience is the doctors and nurses who administer the shock treatment therapy prescribed to treat her drug-induced schizophrenia.

Hubert Selby’s *Requiem for a Dream* chronicles four individuals searching for the American Dream. However, as Baudrillard notes, “America is neither dream nor reality. It is a hyperreality. It is a hyperreality because it is a utopia which has behaved from the very beginning as though it were already achieved. Everything here is real and pragmatic, and yet it is all the stuff of dreams” (28). Harry, Marion, Tyrone, and Sara attempt to live in this nonexistent utopia, focusing on themselves and fulfilling their lives through empty means. Sara’s use of the television, for example, indicates a time period before the 1980s when mass media first encroached on people’s lives

through advertisements and shows displaying the “perfect” family, something Sara desperately longs for and never gets. Cross notes that the 1970s intimated a definition of self based on goods rather than relationships (181); in *Requiem for a Dream*, these goods come in the form of heroin, television, and amphetamines. The passion Selby’s characters place in these objects responds to the rise of suburbia and prosperity in the postwar United States, the end of the turbulent Vietnam War, and the shattering of the perceived utopia. The wholeness Harry, his friends, and his mother seek through substances causes them to become victims of their own desires, and at the end of the novel, they are alone and even emptier than they were at the beginning.

Addiction, Selby remarks, is inherently selfish, and while junkies believe “that they would never get that bad, that they would never get strung out and live just for shit” (220), in the end, this is what happens to everyone who is an addict. The spectacle present in *Requiem for a Dream* appears as a place where commodities run rampant, and where unification between the characters does not exist. The only way Harry, Marion, Tyrone, and Sara unite is through their reliance on different forms of junk in order to feel what they believe is a sense of wholeness. Instead, the characters mistake being full for being whole, spending a majority of the text searching for ways to fill the void inside, resulting in them getting lost in their own addictions, unwilling and unable to find a way out of the society of the spectacle. Selby details television, food, surreal images, and empty relationships throughout his novel, indicating that the absolute excess offered by consumer culture in postwar America signifies the ever-increasing turn toward emptiness. Selby muses, “I suspect there never will be a requiem for *the Dream*, simply because it will destroy us before we have the opportunity to mourn its passing” (“Preface” vii). As long as Americans continue to seek happiness and wholeness through the use of substances, Selby’s bleak prediction for a life lived as a junkie will inevitably prove to be true, and in the end, there can only be a requiem for something that never truly existed in the first place.

## Notes

1. Selby’s separation of “Life” and “life” indicates the difference between those who give (Life) and are thus able to attain a sense of wholeness, as opposed to those who take (life) and merely search for fullness. Selby’s epitaph in the novel comes from the Bible, so it is probably safe to assume that “Life” and “life” hearkens to the capitalization of the usage of God in Christianity. The capitalization indicates a type of higher being, or, I suppose in the case of Selby, a more enlightened form of (L)iving.

2. Cohen quotes from “Family Status Must Improve: It Should Buy More for Itself to Better the Living of Others,” an article from the May 5, 1947 issue of *Life* magazine where Ted and Jeanne Hemcke and their three children evolve from a “workingman’s family” to the new imagined “middle class” life. The children are fashionably dressed, Ted wears a suit, and Jeanne has shiny new appliances in her kitchen. The article also cites a Twentieth Century Fund projection for the economy in 1960, urging “a health and decency standard for everyone,” requiring a “pleasant roof over its head” and all types of consumer goods to be included in the household (Cohen 112–13).

3. Selby sporadically uses punctuation throughout *Requiem for a Dream*. While this makes his text somewhat difficult to read (and cite), it also creates a “schizophrenic” reading experience, which is probably what Selby (and his conceit) wants. As a result of this, and to avoid problems with the continuity of the text, I have elected to keep the text as is and not include [sic] after every incorrectly punctuated word.

4. I say this in spite of the fact that many children are told by their parents that their eyes will “go bad” if they keep watching TV all the time. Of course, the argument could be made that a serious physical side effect of television is obesity, as is evidenced through the term “couch potato” and the rising obesity among Americans in the twenty-first century. As for addiction (concurrent with, for example, heroin addiction), TV does not cause one to become physically addicted, or go crazy. Sara finds a different way to achieve schizophrenia, and though TV is at the root of her psychosis, it does not cause her madness.

5. While the “McDick Corporation” is Selby’s invention, the name is reminiscent of McDonald’s, bringing to mind something generic and prepackaged. The word *dick* has multiple meanings: it is the abbreviation of the word *dictionary*, hence, “Fine language, long words.” A man who uses fine words without judgment is said to have “swallowed the dick.” Dick also means penis. A “dick-ass” is a jackass, and a “dick-head” is a stupid person. “To take one’s dick” is to take one’s declaration, and the vulgar phrase *up to dick* means up to the proper standard, excellent, “proper” (*Oxford English Dictionary*). Any and all of these definitions juxtapose nicely with Selby’s coinage of McDick as the name of a corporation who “dicks” Sara over and employs people who “swallow the dick.” Selby also appears to be making an argument about the superficiality and generic nature of television shows with his choice of the name for this particular corporation.

6. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), this attitude is still prevalent today. In 2008, 15.4 percent of high-school seniors reported using prescription drugs for nonmedical reasons, including “amphetamines, sedatives/barbiturates, tranquilizers, and opiates other than heroin. Vicodin continues to be abused at unacceptably high levels” (NIDA). According to the 2007 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), “From 2002 to 2007, the use of prescription pain relievers among young adults (18–25) increased from 4.1 to 4.6 percent. Among adults aged 26 and older, 2.2 percent use prescription-type drugs non-medically. Older adults (50–59) show an irregular increasing trend between 2002 and 2007, showing an increase from 3.4 in 2002 to 5.7 in 2007. These

patterns and trends may partially reflect the aging into these groups of the baby boom cohort, whose lifetime rates of illicit drug use are higher than those of older cohorts." Clearly, abuse of "doctor prescribed" medications is still rampant across all age groups.

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