

Brightness Falls flat

by Tina Novotny

Any writer called the "voice of his or her generation" interests me. Particularly if that generation is my own. What can you say about a bunch of people weaned on happy faces, coming of age to the flash of disco balls? Don't forget, these are the same people who grew up in the "me" decade, only to find employment in the 1980s and start the consumer culture of more-of-everything.

Jay McInerney's first book, *Bright Lights, Big City*, took shallow excess and made a good story of it — helping us 20-something readers find some redemption. I didn't even mind when McInerney turned the book into a screenplay for Michael J. Fox, and made even *more* money. That kind of success didn't endear poor Jay to too many people, even though he was just realizing his dream. That's why I supported him throughout the lambasting he took for his next two books, *Ransom* and *Story of My Life*. (Insiders say *Ransom* was actually his first book — an oh-so-serious ex-patriot novel of Japan that sat in a shoe box

Book *Brightness Falls*
Written by Jay McInerney
Published by Alfred A. Knopf

After all, the whole lit world was abuzz when Wolfe moved from New Journalism to fiction (and his so-called re-invention of the great social novel). It was astounding to hear McInerney say, "I wondered what *Bonfire* could have been like if it had real people in it". *Brightness Falls* is nothing more than McInerney's diary of the late 80s. Peopled with nothing more than thinly disguised portraits of his friends instead of well-developed characters, it's minimalism as narcissism at its worst. While *Bonfire* was a finely-tuned modern morality play, McInerney's latest could be called *Brightness Falls*: a novel about turning 30 and learning nothing.

It's no great pleasure trashing this new book, because I really did like McInerney's early work. His switch to female sensibilities and secrets in *Story of My Life* was impressive, and written in second person, *Bright Lights* was quite a literary feat. Unfortunately, it seems McInerney has become totally enamored with *only* telling stories about his own life, and passing them off as literature.

In *Brightness Falls*, a bunch of thirty-ish people in the New York publishing world get wasted, break

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under his bed 'til his wife left him; setting off the autobiographical events of *Bright Lights*).

After a few more wives and girlfriends, McInerney finally got around to a new novel, released this spring, *Brightness Falls*. What could a wunderkind at "a new level of maturity" write? It seems he's found a new level of egoism. McInerney seems too busy dining at "21" (a New York restaurant that probably charges more than its name for a glass of water), distilling his kidneys, and running for the Norman Mailer literary ego of the year award to actually write anything. He even had the gall to compare his book to that other New York, book Tom Wolfe's *The Bonfire of the Vanities*.

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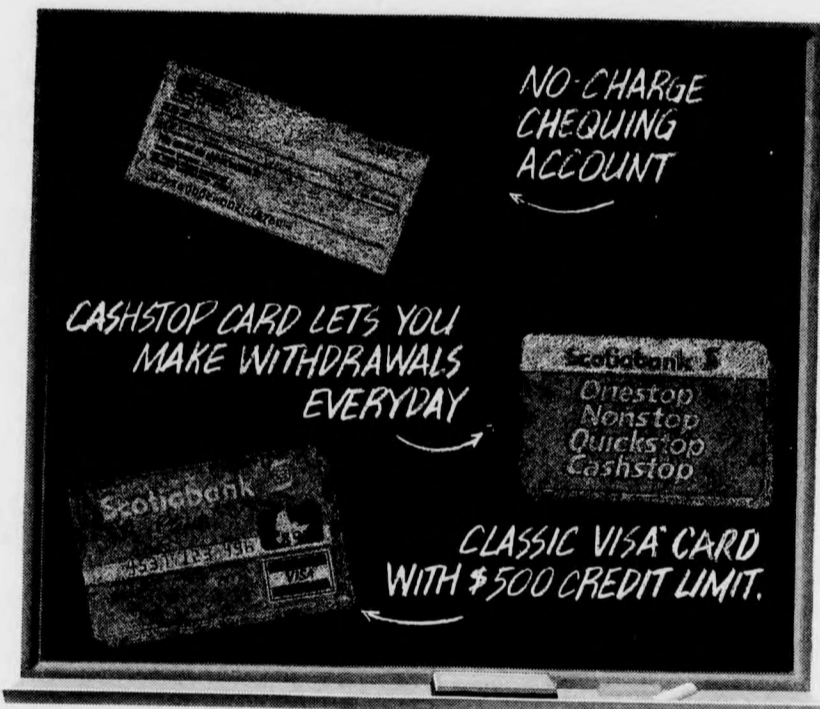
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