

### You are the Coma Baby

The novel *Bright Lights, Big City* by Jay McInerney relates the tale of a young man working for a prominent newspaper in Manhattan by day, while visiting many bars and nightclubs during the night. He manages to accomplish this through the help of his use of cocaine, to which he is powerfully addicted. Throughout the novel McInerney employs the use of the Coma Baby, a current story in the *New York Post*, a local tabloid, as a symbolic representation of the main character. The Coma Baby has been residing in its mother's womb after the mother suffered a car accident and entered a coma. The debate is to whether the Coma Baby will see the "light of the delivery room". In this passage the main character is experiencing a dream where he interacts with the Coma Baby in his workplace. This passage, through the words and phrases employed by McInerney as both dialogue and narration, is strong support for the concept that like the Coma Baby, the main character wants to avoid facing the harsh realities of life and continue living isolated in his world of narcotic-induced pleasure. The author uses the interaction of the main character and the Coma Baby as proof that the main character will not realize the fallacies of his ways until he has hit rock-bottom.

The Coma Baby is shown to be the symbolic representation of the main character through his actions and philosophy toward life, a philosophy wholly irresponsible and unmotivated. As the main character approaches he asks the Baby if he's going to come out. The Baby responds with "No way José. I like it in here. Everything I need is pumped in."(line 11) This remark illustrates the main character's attitude toward life. With the condition that the Baby gets what he needs, he has no motivation to improve his situation. This parallels with the main character, who, provided he has his cocaine, does little to improve his situation. For example, he continually shows up late to work, and then after completely botching a project is fired from his job. The drugs have completely stolen his motivation towards life. After this, when the main character tries to reason with the Coma Baby about improving his situation, the Coma Baby plays a deaf-and -dumb routine(line14), highly symbolic of the main character's actions toward those that have been trying to help him. For example, the main character continues to avoid Clara Tillinghast, his boss, in her attempts to bring him to work on time. Suggestions from Wade and Megan about his lifestyle fall on the main character's deaf ears. The main character's attitude

toward Clara is shown in the passage when the doctor knocks at the door on line 16 and her voice is that of Clara's saying: "Open up. It's the doctor." To this the Baby responds with "They'll never take me alive", a clear representation of the avoidance and rebelliousness the main character demonstrates toward Clara.

The use of certain language references related to the main character work to further the notion that the Coma Baby is representative of the main character. At the opening of the passage, the main character enters the "Department of Factual Verification" with the plaque of "L'Enfant Coma" written upon the door. Inside, two of his colleagues, Elaine and Amanda, are doing lines of cocaine upon a desk while swearing in French. Near the end of the passage the main character answers the phone with "Allô?", the French way of greeting. The usage of the French language associates this entire dream setting with the main character and his premise of French knowledge. In line 11, the Coma Baby uses the phrase "No way Jose", a phrase used by the main character throughout the novel. The usage of these work to show the reader that the Coma Baby dream scene is representative of the main character in the novel.

Through the dream scene related by this passage, the Coma Baby is shown to be symbolic of the main character in the novel. The author's purpose in doing so is to show the fallacy of the main character's situation: that he will not realize how he is destroying his life until he has hit rock bottom. Throughout the passage the main character tries to convince the baby to improve its life, yet the Baby remains stubborn as does the main character in his own life. As the main character does not realize he is represented by the Coma Baby, he will continue to throw away his life and fortune in the pursuit of a good time. Only when he must peddle his brand-name sunglasses in order to buy food will he "acknowledge loss, and possibly, to rediscover his better instincts."

