

*Ministry of Higher Education
And Scientific Research
University of Al-Qadisiyah
College of Education
Department of English*

Victimization in Saul Bellow's Seize the Day

Submitted By:

*Fatima Flaih
Marwa Abboudi*

Supervised By:

Instructor . Ahmed Saad Aziz (Ph D)

DEDICATION

To our dear parents for their patience, help, understanding and support.

First of all, our thank go to Allah who gave us the power to complete this work . A special thanks with deepest respect to our supervisor **Dr. Ahmed Saad** for his guidance, help ,encouragement and academic support .

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ABSTRACT

Saul Bellow literarily expounds in *Seize the Day* the existentialist propositions of Sartre, such as forlornness, freedom, individual choice, anguish and death. He exposes in the novel the living condition and the psyche of modern man through the exploration of the Protagonist's inner world. He echoes with Sartre's existentialist spirit to be, which is of positive significance for man to live in an absurd world.

This research consists of two chapters. Chapter one focuses on with Franz Kafka's life and career. Chapter two deals with victimization Saul Bellow's *Seize the Day*

Finally the conclusion sums up the findings of the study.

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CHAPTER ONE

Saul Bellow's Life and Career

Saul Bellow is an American author, winner of the nobel prize for literature in 1976. He is among the major representatives of Jewish-American writers. His works have widely influenced American literature after World War II. Bellow was born in Lachine, Quebec. His parent had emigrated from Russia to Canada in 1913. Bellow was raise until the age of nine in an impoverished, polyglot section of Montreal, full of Russians, Poles, Ukrainians, Greeks, Italians.¹

After his father was beaten - he was a trafficker, the family moved in 1924 to Chicago. Although Bellow is not considered an autobiographical writer, his Canadian birth is dealt with in his first novel, *The Dangling Man* (1944), and his Jewish tradition and his several divorces are shared by many of his characters.²

His mother died when he was 17, he was shocked emotionally. In 1933 Bellow entered the University of Chicago, then he moved to northwestern University, where he studied anthropology and sociology and graduated in 1937. During the winter vacation Bellow fell in love, married, and abandoned his postgraduate studies at Wisconsin University to become a writer.³

At the beginning of his career, Bellow was influenced by Trotskyism and the

Partisan Review group of intellectuals. He rejected Ernest Hemingway's 'tough guy' model of American fiction, and became engaged with a wide range of cultural fields and tradition - Nietzsche, Oedipal conflicts, popular culture, Russian-Jewish heritage.⁴

In the play *The Last Analysis* (1965) Bellow attacked naive Freudianism, *The Dean's December*, *More Die of Heartbreak*, and *A Theft* deepened his engagement with the writings of Jung, *Seize The Day* used motifs from social anthropology. With *The Adventures of Augie March* Bellow changed his style, and made his homage to *Mark Twain*. *Herzog* (1964), Bellow's major novel from the 1960s, centers on a middle-aged Jewish intellectual.⁵

Bellow, too, is convinced that to have a conscience is, after a certain age, to live permanently in an epistemological hell. The reason his and Dostoevsky's heroes are incapable of ever arriving at any closure is that they love their own suffering above everything else. They refuse to exchange their inner torment for the peace of mind that comes with bourgeois propriety or some kind of religious belief. From 1960 to 1962 Bellow was co-editor of the literary magazine *The Noble Savage*, and in 1962 he was appointed professor on the Committee of Social Thought at University of Chicago. In 1975 Bellow visited Israel and recorded his impressions in his first substantial non-fiction book, *To Jerusalem and Back* (1975).⁶

Bellow disenchantment with the liberal establishment reflected in his novel *Mr Sammlers Planet* (1970). *Humboldt's Gift* (1975), which won the Pulitzer Prize, was narrated in the first person. Bellow has also published short stories and plays.

His conservative tone of the 1970s and early 1980s changed with the short story collection “Him With His Foot in His Mouth” (1984) into a more relaxed mode of his earlier works.⁷

The Bellarosa Connection (1989) was based on an anecdote Bellow overheard at a dinner party. Bellow has three sons from his first four marriages. In 1989 he married Janis Freedman. They have one daughter, born in 1999. Bellow has not lost his ability to arouse controversy, as his 13th novel *Ravelstein* (2000) proves. It draws a portrait of Abe Ravelstein, a university professor and a closet homosexual who ultimately dies of AIDS-related illnesses. Ravelstein's character is based on Allan Bloom, Bellow's colleague at the University of Chicago and the author of *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987), who died in 1992. The cause was officially announced as liver failure.⁸

The role of nature in Bellow's fictional world is thus far less significant than that of either religion or family. It has a prominence and a grandeur, to be sure, but it exists at a distance from the main struggles with which Bellow is concerned. His protagonists are urban-bred and urban-oriented. Their native habitat is the modern metropolis cities of elevated trains, overheated apartments, traffic, universities and museums, slums and suburbs, city parks and anonymous cafeterias, the subway rumbling underfoot and the smog polluting the upper air.⁹

In the city the Bellow hero is almost at home; he can take the city for granted because he knows its ways its bus routes, its expressway exits, the correct tip for the cabdriver, the right response to the newspaper vendor, and he knows as well the sudden absurd beauties which are a gratuitous by-product of its thriving

ugliness. But he is at least equally responsive to the traditional attractions of nature also. He has an unusual competence in the names and habits of fish, birds, animals, and even insect life. Not only is he a devotee of zoos and aquariums, but he is a rapt student of trees and flowers, a follower of the seasonal changes in the foliage and the mysterious portents of weather. In fact there are moments in Bellow's fiction which come very near to a wholehearted acceptance of some variety of nature mysticism .¹⁰

In almost everything he wrote, Saul Bellow asserted his authority as artist, thinker, moralist, and lover. His admirers rejoiced in his authority and celebrated a new kind of dominant voice in American fiction: expansively ambitious, philosophical, and demotic, the voice of a moralizing comic hero unlike anything in the genteel or frontier traditions.¹¹

Bellow left Chicago in 1993, tired of passing the houses of his dead friends, as he said, and settled in Boston, where he began teaching at Boston University. In 1994 he became seriously sick after eating a toxic fish on a Caribbean vacation. Bellow had three sons from his first four marriages. In 1989 he married Janis Freedman, his assistant .¹¹

The most influential movement in poetry after the Second World War, prominent in the late 1950s and beyond , the term was first used by M. L. Rosenthal in his review of Robert Lowell's (1917–1977) *Life Studies* (1959) confessional approaches are represented in history for instance by Sappho, St Augustine, William Wordsworth Walt Whitman (1819–1892) used a first-person speaker, though as a poetic persona rather than his own person Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882) predicted and defined confessional poetry in his essay 'The

Poet' (1844) the confessional poets are not associated with any central leading figure or any formally declared manifesto ,share their preoccupation with their personal lives, especially under the stressing circumstances of a life crisis .Describe their own private suffering to make it universally shared, often drawing a parallel to a crisis of nation, give an autobiographical impression, which it often is, but also often render fiction as if it were autobiography and focus on developing the content rather than elaborating the form of a poem, prefer open forms and free verse .¹² .

American Poets Since World War II, Sixth Series is devoted to American poets who have made a significant contribution to their art after 1945. Such a criterion allows for the inclusion of poets of different age groups, diverse styles, and competing poetic principles. Some of the poets presented here had already established their careers by the close of World War II; others have only recently begun to attract or provoke the critical attention that their talents deserve. The presence of poets accomplished in traditional forms and familiar genres alongside those practiced in a resolutely avant-garde approach is not an accident of this volume but its intention ¹³ .

Write highly subjective poetry, offer an expression of personality rather than an impersonal withdrawal regard poetry writing as an act of purifying self-therapy, focus on sick, imbalanced and suffering protagonists favour narrative poetry, employ irony and understatement to gain detachment of the author from the subject abolish taboos and obstacles between the poet and the audience, discuss freely suicide, alcoholism, perversion tend to express defiance of the establishment, present isolated protagonists often suffering from estrangement represented by Randall Jarrell (1914–1965), John Berryman (1914–1972),

Elizabeth Bishop (1911–1979) many confessional poets were subjected to depressive illness and many of them committed suicide, including Sylvia Plath (oven gas poisoning), Anne Sexton (car gas poisoning) and John Berryman (jumping off a bridge).¹⁴

American poetry after the second World War was dynamic, and new as it gave fresh images of contemporary places, activities, and persons. It assimilated the modernist style of the preceding period, and stretched it in many directions. The poets of the postwar period were born in the shadow of great writers of modernism such as Pound, Eliot, Yeats, Stevens, and Williams. The term "modern" has several relevant connotations. It expresses the scientific and technological progress of civilization and the social attitudes of urbanized communities. In literature, it is associated with the writings of T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, W.B. Yeats, and Conrad Aiken. It is characterized by persistent experimentalism. Modernism is the tradition of the new. Modernism is based on the sharp rejection of the procedures and values of the immediate past, to which it adopts an adversary stance. It rejects narrative, description, and rational exposition in literature.¹⁵

If the poets of the 1950s and 1960s suffered somewhat from the anxiety of influence, they also enjoyed the largest and broadest readership for poetry in this century: unofficial tabulation from royalty statements, course enrollments, political rallies in public parks, and the burgeoning popularity of poetry readings in academic lecture halls and bohemian clubs suggest that the cachet of poetry reached its peak in this countercultural era. Individual volumes of poetry by Bly, Creeley, Plath, Sexton, Snyder and Ginsberg sold tens of thousands of copies. Like many other aspects of American life at mid-century, poetry enjoyed a period of

unbridled expansion¹⁶.

In their efforts to expand the canon, pluralists have introduced a remarkable number of special-interest anthologies that identify poets by gender, race, ethnicity, sexual preference, and nationality, or some combination thereof. Among these are *Breaking Silence: An Anthology of Contemporary Asian American Poets* (1983), *Harper's Anthology of 20th Century Native American Poetry* (1987), and *Gay and Lesbian Poetry in Our Time* (1988). As Alan Golding points out in "American Poetry Anthologies," an essay in *Canons* (1984), such collections have the notable virtue of preserving a specific tradition and rehistoricizing our understanding of literary heritage. But they are also symptoms of an increasing literary balkanization through which one reader's familiar figures of contemporary poetry escape the notice of another¹⁷.

Notes

¹ Elinor Slater, Robert Slater "Saul Bellow: Winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature ." *Great Jewish Men* .Jonathan David Company,1996, p. 42.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid,p.43.

⁴ Tony Tanner, *Saul Bellow* (New York: Chip's, 1978) ,p.4.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.,p.5.

⁷ J. Atlas ' *Bellow: A Biography* .Random House,2000,p.3

⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Saul_Bellow&oldid=804384129.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Earl Rovit, *Saul Bellow*(Minnesota:Minnesota University Press,1967),p.14.

¹¹ James Atlas ' *Bellow: A Biography*) New York: Random House, 2000,(p.34.

¹² Marcel Arbeit, "Confessional Poetry Sylvia Plath,Anne Sexton, Theodore Roethke , John Berryman", 1983 , p. 1 .www.anglistika.webnode.cz

¹³ Jeffrey W. Hunter, *Carol Shields's The Stone Diaries: A Reader's Guide* (Las Vegas:University of Nevada Press, 1991), p.156

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Judith Brown, *The Twentieth Century, The Oxford History of the British Empire Volume IV* (Oxford: Oxford University Press ,1998),p.98.

¹⁶ Ibid,p.101.

¹⁷ Ibid.

CHAPTER TWO

Victimization in Saul Bellow's *Seize the Day*

Seize the Day, first published in 1956, is considered one of the great works of 20th century literature. *Seize the Day* was Saul Bellow's fourth novel. It was written in the 1950s, a formative period in the creation of the middle class in the United States. *Seize the Day* is set in New York City in the area around Broadway from 70th Street up to the nineties. The events begin in the Hotel Gloriana where Tommy Wilhelm is staying. Wilhelm is separated from his wife who worked as a salesman and resigned from his job and became unemployed. It is a little unusual for him to be at a hotel like the Gloriana, since most of its residents and guests are elderly, while Wilhelm is in his mid-forties.¹

At about eight o'clock in the morning, Wilhelm comes down to the lobby, and goes out of the hotel to the nearby newsstand, owned by a man named Rubin. They chat for a few minutes. Rubin compliments Wilhelm on the shirt he is wearing, and says he is looking sharp. Wilhelm is surprised because he does not think he looks good. Rubin talks about the card game the previous evening, which Wilhelm usually attends. But Wilhelm was fed up with losing and went to the movies instead.²

Wilhelm buys a newspaper to check the prices in the commodities market. He and his advisor, the psychologist Dr. Tamkin, had bought three orders of lard four days ago, but since then the price of lard has been falling steadily. Wilhelm

blames Tamkin, who also lives at the Gloriana, for persuading him to invest. Tamkin seems to know a lot about the market and how it works, and makes it sound as if it is a simple task to make large sums of money. Wilhelm told Tamkin that he had no desire to be rich, he just wanted to use the market to make a little steady income. Tamkin promised that he would be able to achieve his goals.³

Wilhelm starts thinking about his father. Dr. Adler, a retired physician, lives at the same hotel, but in an entirely different world than his son. Wilhelm resents his father's detached manner towards him. He cannot speak his mind to his own father, or unburden himself of his problems. Dr. Adler, who is still active and respected by many, has considerable money, but has made no effort to help his son financially, even when Wilhelm confessed that he needed some help. He feels that his father is ashamed of him, because he is the only member of the family not to have completed a college education. However, this does not stop Dr. Adler boasting about his son to his friends, telling them he is a sales executive who makes a lot of money. But his father wants no part of his son's problems.⁴

Wilhelm delays the moment he must go into the dining room and have breakfast with his father. As he stands at the edge of the newsstand with the newspaper, he thinks back to when he was about twenty, when he went to Hollywood to become an actor, against the wishes of his mother. This episode began when Wilhelm received a letter from Maurice Venice, a talent scout who had seen Wilhelm's picture in the college newspaper. Venice invited him to New York for a screen test. Venice was a shady character but Wilhelm did not see through him.⁵

Venice insisted that he knew how to spot talent, and saw Wilhelm cast in the movies as the steady, faithful type who loses the girl to the more rakish type of character. Wilhelm was not keen on this kind of role, but Venice insisted that it would make him famous. Wilhelm quit college and went to California, quarreling with his family over the move. But Wilhelm did poorly on the screen test, and Venice dumped him. In California, Wilhelm learned that a recommendation from Venice was the kiss of death anyway. Venice was later sent to prison for running a call-girl ring. It was while he was in California that Wilhelm changed his name to Tommy Wilhelm. His father never accepted the change and still calls his son Wilky. Wilhelm now realizes that a man cannot change himself. He regrets the name change because he has never succeeded at becoming Tommy Wilhelm. Close to despair, Wilhelm prays to God for help, asking that he be allowed to do something better with his life.⁶

Victimization refers to a person being made into a victim by someone else and can take on psychological as well as physical forms, both of which are damaging to victims. Forms of victimization include (but are not limited to) bullying or peer victimization, physical abuse, sexual abuse, verbal abuse, robbery, and assault. Some of these forms of victimization are commonly associated with certain populations, but they can happen to others as well.⁷

The relationship between victim / victimizer is an age-old issue. It begins with the birth of human beings. Relations in human society are determined by the power structure of the society. In the struggle for existence, the one who is powerful survives. The one who is weak and powerless has to yield to others and to circumstances. This view is aptly summarized in 'Might is Right'. Those who are powerful, victimize the powerless or the weak. The poor and the weak are the

natural targets of the mighty; hence, they become easy victims. The people with power control the society and institutions in the society and in this way, they rule the people in the society.⁸

Each of Bellow's novels reads like an autobiography. Each autobiography is of a different life. the culmination of his developing talent in handling the symbolic mode that was strongly evident in in *Seize the Day*. Bellow's novels are not stories whose lives have been chalked out, and the chapters simply coloured in: they are a process of discovering, revelations which are incomplete for the author as well, until the last page is reached. In each book, it is as though some wonderful actor is creating himself through roles that are wholly imaginary.⁹

Seize the Day can be regard as a probing exploratory literature in victimization and spiritual survival in a hostile environment. The novel depicts the death throes of a drowning man. Tommy Wilhelm, the protagonist, is a character in turmoil. He is a man in his mid-forties. The novel traverses one very important day in the life of Tommy Wilhelm: his 'day of reckoning'. Tommy Wilhelm is a victim who is able to forsake his 'pretender soul'. He is different from others in his instinctive distaste for the inveterate cynicism of society. The setting of the novel is 1950s America, within the time frame of one day. A flashback occurs about times from 1930s to 1950s. Tommy Wilhelm is living in the Hotel Gloriana, where he is "out of place" among the old inmates of Hotel Gloriana. He and his father live separately in the hotel¹⁰.

Throughout the novel, Tommy is a figure of isolation amidst crowds. Keith Opdahl observes:

The ambiguity of Wilhelm's drowning, which is both a failure and a triumph, is the central problem of *Seize the Day*. Because the water in which Wilhelm is immersed presents the "cavernous distortions" of his character, it reflects the conflict in Bellow's view of human nature. Bellow sees man as D.H. Lawrence does, as "hard, isolate, and a killer." Wilhelm denies the existence of the predatory in man, and in doing so exemplifies one of Bellow's most frequent themes, the destruction of man by his humanitarian ideals.¹¹

As the novel opens, Tommy is descending in the hotel elevator, on his way to meet his father Dr. Adler for breakfast. His victimization begins with the estrangement between him and his father. Dr. Adler refuses to be kind or helpful to his son. He sees his son as a failure in every sense of the word. Tommy's father is a man whose thoughts and actions are reduced to money and to "law and order", even to "hoarding". The reader is viewing him through Tommy's perspective. Adler warns his son " 'You make too much of your problems . . . They ought not to be turned into a career' " *Seize the Day*. (24 Adler does not want to have his son remain "a child" forever. Even Tommy claims that he is often times a "kid." Dr. Adler criticizes everything about him, his appearance, the way he eats, and also the number of pills he takes. Adler believes in the protestant work ethic, whereas his son grew up and lives in a different America¹².

Adler is under the spell of power, success and rationalism. He is a self-made man. Tommy is a naturalist and an idealist. He cares too much about how his father sees him. And he often becomes the "failure" that he believes his father sees in

him. He is sensitive and almost, at times, feminine. This femininity is poked at and criticized by his father. Dr. Adler is a retired physician. Tommy Wilhelm resents his father's detached manner towards him. He cannot speak his mind to him. Wilhelm feels that his father is ashamed of him, because he is the only member of the family not to have completed a college education ¹³.

The experience of victimization was severe when Tommy was about twenty. He went to Hollywood to become an actor, against the wishes of his parents. Maurice Venice, a talent scout who had seen Wilhelm's picture in the college newspaper, invited him to New York for a screen test. Venice insisted that he knew how to spot talent, and saw Wilhelm cast in the movies as the steady, faithful type who lost the girl to the more rakish type of character. Wilhelm was not keen on this kind of role, but Venice insisted that it would make him famous¹⁴.

Wilhelm quit college and went to California quarreling with his family. In California, he learned that a recommendation from Venice was the kiss of death. Later Wilhelm came to know that Venice was sent to prison for running a call-girl ring. It was while he was in California that Wilhelm changed his name to Tommy Wilhelm. His father never accepted the change and still called his son "Wilky." Tommy regrets the name change, because he has never succeeded in becoming Tommy Wilhelm ¹⁵.

Wilhelm is a victim of the materialistic society. Dr. Adler, who is always indifferent towards his son, boasts about how much his son has earned as a sales executive in Rojax Corporation and Mr. Perls is impressed, speculating about what tax bracket this puts Wilhelm in. Wilhelm despises them both for the way they

worship money: “How they love money! Holy money! Beautiful money! It was getting so that people were feeble-minded about everything except money) ”*Seize the Day*¹⁶.(41

The materialism of society means that the values of the heart are trampled on because everything revolves around money. Wilhelm is unable to establish the deep human connections that he longs for. Tommy Wilhelm victimizes himself by allowing his wife to dominate him and by foolishly expecting perfection from his marriage. Wilhelm feels the pressure of the estrangement between him and Margaret ‘his wife again becomes “choked and congested”¹⁷’.

Wilhelm reflects his marriage as another experience of victimization in his life. Margaret refuses to give him a divorce, and he has to support her and the children. He collects the bills she has sent him for the boy’s educational insurance policies. His mother-in-law has taken out the policies, but after her death, the premiums become his responsibilities. He resents his wife, believing that she knows he is in financial difficulty and is trying to get as much as out of him as she can. Thus, Wilhelm confirms that he is somehow “married” to suffering¹⁸.

Tommy Wilhelm allows himself to be victimized by Dr. Tamkin, who takes the role of a surrogate father for Wilhelm. Wilhelm has no choice but to trust him in the financial venture Tamkin has set out upon. Tommy follows Tamkin’s advice to invest his money in the stock market. Tamkin is a visionary who indulges in sweeping theories and explanations of human life and behaviour. Wilhelm is drawn to Tamkin, because he longs to believe in something. But Tamkin hits the nail on the head as far as Wilhelm’s situation is concerned. Dr. Adler, Wilhelm’s father, warns him not to trust Tamkin because he is a liar. But Wilhelm tries to

defend Tamkin. He has given Tamkin power of attorney over his last seven hundred dollars. Tamkin reassures Wilhelm that the price of lard will go up; Wilhelm listens incredulously¹⁹.

In *Seize the Day* the alienated hero is a terribly oppressed individual and it is with the feeling of his oppression that the fiction begins. The non-human, diabolic forces of materialism pose serious menace to overthrow him and subdue or demolish his human traits. Tommy Wilhem journeys through chaotic situations, through a metropolis (city) of peril (danger); he fights a solitary battle against what is annihilating for mankind²⁰.

Despite all these, Tommy is a hero, as he possesses something noble and magnanimous. Despite all circumstances of oppression, despite the violence and threat of being overthrown, Wilhem decides to retain humanity. He refuses to become a heartless money-thirst maniac. Tommy is placed in a perplexing situation of making a choice between humanity and heartlessness. Though he sees nothing but a bleak future before him, he decides to retain humanity, admits love and longs to have a place in the human community²¹.

Tamkin talks about the strange and sensational case history of his patients. He insists that “the facts are always sensational but people do not always realize this about their own lives)” *Seize the Day* .(69 He goes on to say that he works not for the money but for the spiritual compensation. He likes to bring people into the present rather than allow them to live in the past or future²².

Tamkin explains his theory of two souls within everyone:

There are two main souls, the real soul and a pretender soul. Every man realizes that he has to love something or somebody. He feels that he must go outward. . . . The interest of the pretender soul is the same as the interest of the social life, the society mechanism. This is the main tragedy of human life. . . . the true soul is the one that pays the price. It suffers and gets sick and it realizes that the pretender can't be loved) *.Seize the Day*(71-70

Wilhelm is awed by the description of the two souls because he knows he is in the grip of the pretender soul. He is not really himself. He is tormented by these ideas and hopes that Tamkin will give him advice that will help to transform his life. Whenever Wilhelm asks what happens in the market, Tamkin tells him not to worry. The system will not allow him to go into debt. Wilhelm's feelings toward this magician are ambivalent in his remarks about real soul and pretender soul. Tamkin gives a genuine insight into his situation. He makes Wilhelm believe that his father is jealous of him as he has left his wife, and his wife envies him too because he is free and is now able to see young women²³.

Tommy Wilhelm is a victim of the society. He lacks the shrewd aggression capitalism demands. Behind the practical motives of those who cheat him, however--his wife's need for support, his father's frugality and Tamkin's need for capital--lies a purer, deeper malice. Wilhelm is also the victim of his society's peculiar emotional sterility. In that sense *Seize the Day* is the city dweller's fulfillment of personal needs of strangers. The feelings that usually involve private commitment are casually exchanged in public. Wilhelm's father finds fulfillment not in his children, but in the admiration of his hotel associates. He creates his own praise²⁴.

Wilhelm thinks:

People were primed and did not know it. And what did he need praise for? In a hotel where everyone was busy and contacts were so brief and had such small weight, how could it satisfy him? He could never matter much to them) .*Seize the Day*(12

Wilhelm is a victim of himself. His emotion reflects his dependency and his masochism. The people around him are really his weapons for suicide. Bellow uses the philosophy of Tamkin, who is responsible for Wilhelm's bankruptcy, as an ironic revelation of why Wilhelm destroys himself. Tamkin tells Wilhelm that because man is inherently good, he has only to "seize the day", or rest content in his own being to be happy. The desire to murder by means of moneymaking is an artificial trait acquired from society. Wilhelm's belief in Tamkin's philosophy reflects his own denial of human depravity; his partnership with him reveals the self-deception and destruction that accompanies such a denial²⁵.

Tamkin tells him that he must accept his relations to the world, but his problem is that he defines himself almost entirely by how he appears in the eyes of others. As an active man, seeking to rise above the average, Wilhelm is dependent in the world. He adopts a name that is not his in order to be accepted by the movie goers. He needs the essential self. When Tamkin mentions a "true soul" which lies beneath social identity, Wilhelm is intensely interested. He wonders and asks: What did it look like? Does my soul look like me? Where does the true soul get its strength) ”? *Seize the Day* .(72 Wilhelm's change of name from Wilhelm to Tommy

Wilhelm also embodies his suicidal desire. The change has been “His bid for liberty, Adler being in his mind the title of the species, Tommy the freedom of the person) *Seize the Day*²⁶.(25

Finally at the market Wilhelm discovers that lard has dropped twenty points. Rye has fallen too. Wilhelm looks around for Tamkin, but he is nowhere to be seen. Wilhelm is in a panic, since he is wiped out financially. Thus, Tamkin makes it possible for him to go through a symbolic drowning. Although Wilhelm struggles to keep “the waters of the earth” from rolling over him, he looks “like a man about to drown.” He has foolishly quit his job and has no money to meet the demands of his wife, who seeks to punish him for leaving her²⁷.

Wilhelm’s relations with his father, whom he has denied by changing his name, deny his plea for help by calling him a slob. He finally loses the little money he has left on the commodities market, where he has speculated at the urging of a phony psychologist, Dr Tamkin. When Wilhelm loses everything on the market, “he smelled the salt odour of tears in his nose. His unshed tears rose and rose and he looked like a man about to drown) ”*Seize the Day*²⁸.(104

Bellow as a modern master touch up the subject of modern man’s misery. Bellow’s themes namely alienation, hard world of money, anxiety, deception and selfishness not only depict the American life but also the complexity of modern society. Saul Bellow generalizes his theme. So from this point of view we can say that *Seize the day* is an ethnic rather than an American novel .²⁹

All of Bellow’s novels deal with family conflict, but *Seize the Day* is unique

in that it is his only work which attempts to explore the relationship between father and son against a backdrop of a complex view of the dissolution of the Jewish American family. As an assimilated Jew, Tommy has equivocal Jewish values. For example, family is important to him, yet he breaks away from his family twice: the first time he quits school (against his parents' expectation) to go to Hollywood; the second time he seeks to divorce his wife and marry a Catholic girlfriend. He also doesn't know how to show the reverence for the patriarch of the family that is so much a part of Jewish heritage.³⁰

The problems of father and son are further complicated by a cultural schism: the father, a product of German upbringing, manifests German mannerisms, while the son possesses qualities that are antithetical to the German mind. The discord in the family is heightened by the fact that both father and son are at crucial stages of their lives: the father is an octogenarian, facing the end of his days, while the son is middle-aged, attempting to grasp the significance of his life.³¹

The parent-child relationship is fundamental in Judaism because it is recognized that the survival of Jewish life depends on this bond. Judaism is only viable in a patriarchal society, and the tradition of honoring one's parents remains a vital aspect of the Jewish child's life. As the family chief authority, the father commands and rebukes; however, his duty to his son which requires the provision of maintenance and education lasts until the son reaches the age of six, anything beyond that would come under "charity". In *Seize the Day*, the son is already forty-four years old.³²

The ambiguity of *Seize the Day*, especially the ending, reflects the dilemma

portrayed in all of Bellow's fiction. "Seize" denotes aggression; to live fully man must assert his will against circumstance. To seize the "Day," however, suggests an acceptance of the present moment. If he accepts the limitations of fate, man finds joy instead of the agony of fruitless rebellion. In *Seize the Day*, it is Dr. Tamkin who exhorts Wilhelm to seize the day so that he won't hesitate in going along with him on the speculative venture in the commodities market. Gullible and reckless, Wilhelm falls prey to this enticement. As the phrase *carpe diem* is used by Horace, the emphasis is upon the word "seize." What Horace means to say is that one should make every moment count. In contrast, the emphasis placed upon this phrase by Tamkin accentuates "day." This is the thought that is romanticized in the mind of Wilhelm. He sees life composed, not as a broad panorama of human experiences, but rather as a disjointed series of days. He can't see the perspective of his whole life spreading before him.³³

A moral masochist, Tommy Wilhelm is actually his own most difficult obstacle, his own worst enemy. What he believes to be his troubles are not his real troubles. He allows Margaret to place burden upon burden on him, when he knows that "No court would have awarded her the amounts he paid" (*Seize the Day*, 34). He chooses to live with a cold, carping father in a hotel for retired people. He chooses, out of pride, to leave the company where he had been employed, and does not look for other work. In his own view, he is "still paying heavily for his mistakes" (*Seize the Day*, 34). But who hasn't made some mistakes in his/her life? Thus, it never occurs to Wilhelm that he might not deserve to be sympathized.³⁴

Actually, most of Wilhelm's troubles are self-imposed. Throughout his life he has made bad decisions he knew in advance to be bad. He had decided that it

would be a bad mistake to go to Hollywood and then he went. Though he has doubt about Tamkin's "deeper things of life" absurdist philosophy, mangled Freudianism, alienation ethics, and cheap nihilism Wilhelm still trusts his last money to him (*Seize the Day*, 74). While Tommy longs for accessible, sensible truths, Tamkin assures him there are only crooked lines. When Tommy asks him where he gets his ideas from, Tamkin ironically replies he reads "the best literature, science, and philosophy" (*Seize the Day*, 77). In his *carpe diem* sermon, Tamkin tells Tommy to take no thought of tomorrow because the past is "no good" and the future is "full of anxiety" (*Seize the Day*, 72). Despite all this, Tommy seems naively determined to recover the good, and seek simplicity.³⁵

In his relation with his father, Tommy constantly provokes his father into punishing him. Knowing his father's attitude toward his drug-taking, Tommy nevertheless swallows a phenaphen in front of him. He indulges in sloppy habits which disgust the old man. When he makes a scene in the restaurant, choking himself in demonstration of what Margaret does to him, he certainly knows that his father will snap. "What a dirty devil this son of mine is. Why can't he try to sweeten his appearance a little," Dr. Adler laments (*Seize the Day* 47). Tommy knows well he is tiring his father's patience, but he can't help himself (Clayton, "Alienation" 80). On this day of reckoning, when Wilhelm goes to his father for the last time for help paying the hotel's monthly rent, Dr. Adler is so roused that he cries angrily to him, "Go away from me now. It's a torture for me to look at you, you slob!" (*Seize the Day* 117).³⁶

Yet Wilhelm only dimly suspects his self-destructive impulse. He sees himself as a victim:

It isn't my fault" fate, the world, the hotel clerk are against him. He believes that he is simply unfortunate and is being murdered. "You must realize, you're killing me," he tells his wife. "Thou shalt not kill! Don't you remember that? (*Seize the Day* ,120).

When his father gives him advice, Wilhelm reflects on how much the old man is *not* giving him. The city itself is against him, slapping parking tickets on his car or frightening him with handbills that look like tickets. But Tommy sees in the city what he is himself. Is the city grasping, money sucking, self-centered? So too is Tommy, who tries to drink or eat his way back to childhood security, who begs for love and pity. Tommy hates the city as he hates his own "pretender" soul . Yet he has chosen the city, and will come to see this mistake only later when he is caught by the riotous fluctuation of commodity market, "I'll get out of here. I don't belong in New York any more" (*Seize the Day* ,88).³⁷

Tommy luxuriates in his suffering and he sees himself as a sacrificial victim. Both doctors, his own father and Tamkin, tell him: "You make too much of your problems. . . . They ought not to be turned into a career" (his father) (*Seize the Day* , 50); "Don't marry suffering. Some people do" (Tamkin) (*Seize the Day* ,105). Although realizing that his father only "wanted to be left in peace" (*Seize the Day* ,48), Tommy kept pestering him for help until his father's "old face lost all of its composure and became hard and angry," enumerating a series of errors Tommy had made. Dr. Adler also questioned Tommy of losing his job and wanting to get a divorce. However, Tommy only complained.³⁸

Ah, Father, Father! It's always the same thing with you. Look how

you lead me on. You always start out to help me with my problems, and be sympathetic and so forth. It gets my hopes up and I begin to be grateful. But before we're through I'm a hundred times more depressed than before. Why is that? You have no sympathy. You want to shift all the blame on to me. Maybe you are wise to do it. And I'm your son. It isn't my fault in the first place. . . . All you seem to think about is your death. Well, I'm sorry. But I'm going to die too. . . . So you can lay the whole responsibility on me so that you won't have to help me? D'you want me to comfort you for having such a son? (*Seize the Day* 58).

On this day of reckoning, both father and son bring out a long list of the events in their lives and try to justify their own position. Seeing his father was still unmoved, Wilhelm continued to appeal: "Don't you think I know how you feel? I have pity I want you to live on and on. If you outlive me, that's perfectly okay by me" (*Seize the Day* 60). Dr. Adler didn't respond to him, and Tommy suddenly burst out.³⁹

No, but you hate me. And if I had money you wouldn't. By God, you have to admit it. The money makes the difference. Then we would be a fine father and son, if I was a credit to you so you could boast and brag about me all over the hotel. But I'm not the right type of son. I'm too old. I am too old and unlucky. (*Seize the Day* ,60).

Dr. Adler's response is "I want nobody on my back. Get off! And I give you the same advice, Wilky. Carry nobody on your back" (*Seize the Day* 60). Getting nowhere with money from his father, Wilhelm was mad at himself.

Ass! Idiot! Wild Boar! Dumb mule! Slave! Lousy, wallowing

hippopotamus! Wilhelm called himself as his bending legs carried him from the dining-room. His pride! His inflamed feelings! His begging and feebleness! And trading insults with his father and spreading confusion over everything. Oh, how poor, contemptible, and ridiculous he was! When he remembered how he had said with great reproof, 'You ought to know your own son' why, how corny and abominable it was. (*Seize the Day* ,61).

Besides his “cruel” father, the “cold” society is another source of Wilhelm’s misery and grudge. It would help to point out that Saul Bellow never draws away from the frightening implications of an impersonal, mechanical society. The distinctive achievement of Bellow, however, lies in his depiction of the individual in such a society, for it is the plight of the man, not society, that is emphasized throughout his works. In Bellow’s world, society is rendered in an almost naturalistic manner as an almost unchanging, indifferent, yet powerful background against which his protagonists in all of their sensitive awareness, their vitality, their frustrating absurdities, are seen.⁴⁰

Thus, it becomes an important issue for Bellow’s hero “in all of his individuality, with his dreams, aspirations, and idealism, along with his ever-present awareness of society as a naturalistic reality” to “find a place for himself, establish a personal and a unique identity, and still maintain an honest integrity of self”. The struggle of Bellow’s protagonists is to break through to life and to achieve their human potentiality, especially their individual potentiality; however, they “must do so without the loss of a moral and intellectual humanism basic to their views of themselves”.⁴¹

Bellow is concerned with the well-worn dilemma of the individual desperately isolated and profoundly alone, intermittently shunned and used, in a society whose only God is Mammon. As the story opens, Tommy is in just such a state of ignominy. Forty-four years old, huge, bearlike, overemotional, and heavily dependent, he is caught in a world devoid of heart, one in which there is no caring and real communication among men .⁴²

The title of this work, *Seize the Day* has a impression of powerful and active words, but a careful reading and analyzing of the work enables reders to notice a lot of contradictory factors of protagonist Wilhelm. Wilhelm prays in the final paragraph of chapter one.⁴³

Oh, God, "Wilhelm prayed. " Let me out of my trouble. Let me out of my thoughts, and let me do something better with myself. For all the time I have wasted I am sorry. Let me out of this clutch and into a different life. For I am all balled up. Have mercy. ((*Seize the Day* , 22).

This is certainly a symbolic utterance meaning tragedy by Wilhelm, because the utterance represents " mercy "in contrary to " seize "of this work's title. Title hints the active and positive nuance, but mercy is passive and negative nuance. This utterance implies about Wilhelm's impossibility of decision-making at his will by showing the opposite concept to the title.⁴⁴

A lot of critics point out that father and paternity play a important role in *Seize the Day*. This is proved by the fact that the conversation with Adler takes up many pages in this work. How about the relationship between Wilhelm and Adler?

Wilhelm continues to appeal to his plight to his father, but Adler does not care about at all. He even despises his son. It is clear that the relationship between father and son is no desirable. Adler is respected by many people as a doctor. Now he is away from a clinical position, but lives a graceful life as an old gentleman. His position is in contrast with Wilhelm. This is the second reason why Wilhelm feels

antipathy with Adler, in addition of the reason why Adler does not help him.⁴⁵

The Hotel named Gloriana where Adler lives at present after his retirement implies the incompatible situation between father and son. Certainly the hotel living is in a sense convenient when an old man lives by himself. There is no need for worrying about meals, cleanup, and washing. Furthermore hotel staffs play a important role when troubles happen for an old man, so that anxiety seems to decrease. Hotel Gloriana is, as it were, a first-rate nursing home for Adler. In chapter two , Wilhelm feels depressed when Adler can not answer the day of mother's death.⁴⁶

Yes, it was age. Don't make an issue of it, Wilhelm advised himself.

If you were to ask the old doctor in what year he had interned, he'd tell you correctly. All the same, don't make an issue. Don't quarrel with your own father. Have pity on an old man's failing. ((*Seize the Day* , 24)

This is the obvious scene that clarifies that Wilhelm feels a strong affection for the dead mother and his antipathy with Adler who doesn't feel anything about the dead wife. But we can not say that Wilhelm only feels hate to Adler. Wilhelm also feels love to him. It is not because Adler doesn't help him but because Adler is indifferent toward him that Wilhelm reacts with father. In other expression,

Wilhelm is afraid of father's indifference. Love's opposite conception is not hate, but indifference. Hate is near to love, because the sentiment is concerned with the object.⁴⁷

Notes

¹ Chinsu Joy ,”The Theme of Victimization in Saul Bellow’s *Seize The Day*” *International Journal Of Creative Research Thoughts*, Volume 1, Issue.11, November 2013,p.6.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid,p.7.

⁴ Irving Malin ‘*Saul Bellow’s Fiction*) Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969,(p.6.

⁵ Ibid,p.7.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Chinsu Joy ,p.11.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid,p.12.

¹⁰ Joyshree Deb, “Materialism Precedes Murder: Saul Bellow’s *Seize*”. *IOSR Journal of Humanities And Social Science (IOSRJHSS)*,2014,p..59

¹¹ Saul Bellow ‘*Seize the Day* .New York: Penguin Publishers, 1996,p.97 .All further quotations are taken from this copy.

¹² Green’s blog Green, A Critical Reading of *Seize the Day*, Posted at September 27, 2012. <http://www.greenzblog.com/literature/seize-the-day>.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Joyshree Deb, “Materialism Precedes Murder: Saul Bellow’s *Seize the Day*” *IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)* (Volume 19, Issue 1, 2014 ‘p.. 59 www.iosrjournals.org.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid,p.60.

¹⁸ A. DelVesco, A Novel Failure: The Unsuccessful Story of Tommy Wilhelm «*Seize the Day*», p.211
<http://www.studymode.com/essays/Seize-The-Day-600902.html>

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Jacob John Clayton «*Saul Bellow: in Defense of Man*»^{2 .nd} (London Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), (p.65.

²¹ Ibid.

²² L. H. Goldman «*Saul Bellow's Moral Vision: A Critical Study of the Jewish Experience*» New York: Irvington Publishers, 1983, (p.41 .

²³ Ibid, p.43.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ James Nagel, *The American Novel: American dreams reality or myth*, 2007.
http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americannovel/ideas/american_article.html

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ L. J. Richmond, *The Maladroit, the Medico, and the Magician: Saul Bellow's Seize the Day* .*Twentieth Century Literature*, 1973 p.15 .

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ De Lima Barbosa, *Bellow view's of Man and Contemporary Society* (America: Curitiba, 1979), p.52.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid,p.54.

³³ Paul Levine, *Recent Jewish-American Fiction: From Exodus to genesis Contemporary American Fiction*. (London: Edward Arnold, 1987),p. 71.

³² Ibid.

³⁴ Gilead Morahg, “The Art of Dr. Tamkin.” *Saul Bellow* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1986),p. 147.

³⁵ Ibid,p.148.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Keith Michael Opdahl, *The Novels of Saul Bellow: An Introduction* (London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1978),p.76.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid,p.77.

⁴⁰ Eusebio L. Rodrigues, “Beyond all Philosophies: The Dynamic Vision of Saul Bellow.” *Saul Bellow and theStruggle at the Center* (New York: AMS Press, 1996),p. 161.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Richard Chase, “The Adventures of Saul Bellow.” *Saul Bellow* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1986),p. 25.

⁴³ Robert Kierhan, The Style of Saul Bellow *Saul Bellow and the Struggle at the Center* (New York: AMS Press, 1996),p. 91.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid ,p.102.

⁴⁶ Ellen Pifer, *Saul Bellow against the Grain* (Philadelphia: University of

Pennsylvania Press, 1990),p.32.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

CONCLUSION

Saul Bellow, through his novel *Seize the Day* ‘has attempted to show the 20th century post-war American society where human fellow- feeling is trivial to materialism and owing to material success, people are being murdered. The emotional sterility and lack of fellow-feeling have made the American society a true waste land. Tommy always strives for financial success maintaining his feeling of love and affection. Wilhelm’s biological father doesn’t care about him and not interested to be involved in his son’s destitute condition. He has ability to assist his son but continuously denied of helping him. In such a condition, he takes shelter in a father figure, Tamkin who eventually murders his (Wilhelm) dream, eluding with his last means. He depends on a wrong person who is making delay to go to market and talking about the abstract things of life; actually he is always planning a plot to murder Wilhelm successfully.

The idol that America worships is materialism and due to this materialism Tommy estranges from his family as well as from mankind. Henceforth, it sprouts the bestial sense of people which persuades to commit murder, either physically or

psychologically. It seems that the world is full of murderers. Hence, it can be said that protagonist, Wilhelm symbolizes the simple-hearted American common people at the capitalist society and the rest characters symbolize the exploiter, money minded as well as successful commercial people of that society.

The main conflicts in *Seize the Day* are mainly between father/son, man/society, and husband/wife. Thus, on this day of reckoning, how to achieve reconciliation in these aspects becomes essential for possible redemption. First of all, Tommy Wilhelm was not really so slovenly as his father takes him to be, for in some aspects, he even had a certain delicacy, and he still has faith in himself. He naively thinks that his father should and would help him with real money after his persistent pleading as a miserable son and a victim without luck of the cruel society.

Bellow seeks to take the self underground and to bring it above ground. This process, he consists in putting the self in dialectic with the other under the form of tradition, environment, society, and persons. More specifically, the dialectic moves at different levels of conflict between the needs of man for freedom and his needs for acceptance that is between individuality and community. He gives no pat answers to the problem of life rather he affirms the mystery.

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