

Tommy Wilhelm: In Quest of Love

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Abstract

The article aims to provide certain assertions about the character Tommy Wilhelm who unlike other members of the society longs for love and compassion and through which he steps to glory: discovers the true meaning of life. The study was documentary analysis type. Data and information were collected from secondary sources. Data and information were collected from Books, Research report, Journal, Internet etc. From all the sources it was found that Tommy Wilhelm was the central character of the Saul Bellow's novella, *Seize the Day*. He was presented as a failure in his life and was a very lonely being who is almost trapped within social demands. He was a unsuccessful husband, unsuccessful actor and unsuccessful son of his father. He was occupied gravely in a fight for endurance. He had no greed for money so he never hankered after money. He only tried to earn money to support his family. According to social notion he fails in his personal life, he suffers, he is spurned, he is prostrated, he is turned into a puppet at the hands of scrubby opportunist, his hope is ever crossed, and his mind suffers the stings of torments. According to his opinion he crumbles but he is not completely crushed. He knows his limits so he was away from the dark forces of materialism. Though he was a failure, he inwardly vows to continue his struggle against the stream. Being trapped in the money-cultured world, he longs for sympathy, for affection, for love. He feels the necessity of human touch and relationship. Throughout the novella he hankers after a little warmth which not his father nor his wife could supply him. He fights a lonely battle against selfishness, cold heartedness and cynicism of the modern world and ultimately triumphs.

Key words: Love, humanity, human relationship, modern predicament, materialism.

INTRODUCTION

Tommy Wilhelm, the protagonist here is presented as a very lonely being who is almost trapped within social demands. But unlike others he feels the necessity of human touch and relationship. Throughout the novella he hankers after a little warmth which not his family nor his fellows could supply him. He fights a lonely battle against modern predicament which makes him understand the real worth of life.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. Tommy Wilhelm is mostly judged in terms of his weaknesses only and is considered to be a complete failure; this paper tries to throw light on the other aspects of his character: which has a compassionate heart ready to deliver and receive love.
2. This paper also tries to project light on the showy relationships of urban life and its impact on human psychology.
3. Concentrates on individual suffering in a money-monger society.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The study was documentary analysis type. Data and information were collected from secondary sources: from Books, Research report, Journal, Internet etc.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Tommy Wilhelm, Saul Bellow's hero in *seize the day*, is an ignominious failure: failed husband, failed actor, broken, appealing to his father for the rent, pleading with his wife not to squeeze him so hard. He, though a failure, who stumbles and dwindles at every step, he soars up with heroic grandeur because he is human. He is a dangling man, but he has his strength, the openness of a heart, his philanthropic attitude to humanity these are rare qualities completely alien to the denizens of wasteland like western civilization rendered arid and vapid by Mammon worship. In *seize the Day*, Tommy, being caught in an existential crisis, is in quest of identity or meaningful existence. He is engaged seriously in a struggle for survival. But he never hankered after money: he tried for only a 'steady income' 'not much'. He fails, he suffers, he is spurned, he is prostrated, he is turned into a puppet at the hands of scrubby opportunist, his hope is ever crossed, and his mind suffers the stings of torments. He crumbles but he is not completely crushed. He knows his limits and he possesses the heart not to accept his defeats; rather than giving himself away to the dark forces of materialism, he inwardly vows to continue his struggle. Being trapped in the money-cultured world, he longs for sympathy, for affection, for love.

Tommy Wilhelm finds himself completely in the grip of the chaos of an egoistic and driving society-a society detached and cold, refusing the pleas of the individual for a meaningful and endearing relationship:

“Every other man spoke a language entirely his own, which he had figured out by private thinking; he had his own ideas and peculiar ways....You had to translate and translate, explain and explain, back and forth, and it was the punishment of hell itself not to understand or not to be understood, not to know the crazy from the sane, the wise from the fools, the young from the old or the sick from the well. The fathers were no fathers and the sons no sons. You had to talk with yourself in the daytime and reason with yourself at night”

In *size the day*, Tommy Wilhelm is shown in desperate loneliness and life annihilating alienation and he is in dire need of an understanding heart. Dr. Adler, a symbol of professional success is reluctant to play any part that may bring consolation and comfort to Tommy`s heart. Leaving in ``an entirely different world from his son`s``, he refuses any kind of emotional or financial support; the only thing he is capable to give is advice:

“I`m still alive, not dead. I am still here. Life isn`t over yet. I am as much alive as you or any one. And I want nobody on my back. Get off! And I give you the same advice, Wilky. Carry nobody on your back”.

Even Tommy`s last desperate confession that he is virtually “wiped out” goes in vain:

“It is n`t all a question of money there are other things a father can give to a son one word from you, Just a word, would go a long way”.

But as the father has the “right to be spared”, he mercilessly rejects:

“You want to make yourself into my cross. But I am not going to pick up a cross. I`ll see you dead, Wilky, by Christ, before I let you do that to me..... Go away from me now. It`s torture for me to look at you, you slob!”

Tommy`s heart cannot find any ease with his wife either. She is extremely hostile to Tommy and tries her best to ruin him. In his miserable state, Margaret appears to Tommy as a symbol of oppression, only to add to his predicament:

“I feel that she’s strangling me. I can’t catch my breath. She has just fixed herself on me to kill me. She can do it at long distance. One of these days I’ll” be stuck down by suffocation or apoplexy because of her. I just can’t catch my breath.”

Tamkin-the man trusted by Tommy, who promises him a world of hope, also deceives him painfully. His failure with his biological father turns him to accept Tamkin as a sort of surrogate father; in his words:

“At least Tamkin sympathizes with me and tries to give me a hand where Dad doesn’t want to be disturbed”

But, this man cheats him and he becomes disillusioned at last:

“I was the man beneath; Tamkin was on my back, and I thought I was on his. He made me carry him, too, besides Margaret. Like this they ride on me with hoops and claws. Tear me to pieces, stamp on me and break my bones.”

Tommy Wilhelm shows human traits despite being tormented with ceaseless oppression; he is ever competent to give to the fountain of love. He spurns the idea of “the pretender soul” and adheres firmly to the real one whose fountain flows forth the balmy passion Called love:

“And in the dark tunnel, in the haste, heat, and darkness which disfigure and make freaks and fragments of nose and eyes and teeth, all of a sudden, unsought, a general love for all these imperfect and lurid-looking people burst out in Wilhelm’s breast. He loved them. One and all, he passionately loved them. They were his brothers and sisters. He was imperfect and disfigured himself, but what difference did that make if he was united with them by this blaze of love? And as he walked he began to say, ‘Oh my brothers... my brothers and my sisters’ blessing them all as well as himself.”

The text is evident of Tommy’s deep longing for love, for affection for something that would ease his heart; “merely to pronounce the word love made him tremble”. He was thirsty, he does not want money, when he is badly in need, but begs for feeling.

“It isn’t money, but only the assistance: not even assistance, but just the feeling.”

“When Tamkin affirmed that he has been “treating” him, his mental state is depicted thus:

“That the doctor cared about him pleased him. This was what he craved, that someone should care about him, wish him well, Kindness, mercy, he wanted....”

Even he helplessly thought himself childish when nobody was there to soothe him:

“It is my childish mind that thinks people are ready to give it just because you need it.”

At the very last when he dreams to couple with Olive-his beloved that shows his yearning for love:

“...Stand by me a while. ...I'll try to start again with Olive. In fact, I must. Olive loves me. Olive...”

Tommy Wilhelm is crushed financially but though, he is a failure by the standard set by overwhelming materialism; he is a man of good will a man in possession of a true heart, a man capable of love. By his sense of compassion, he finds a place much higher than that occupied by all the so called successful- morally and spiritually. His magnanimity lies in his resistance to nihilism and that gives him a heroic dimension indeed. At the end, while he wishes self- annihilation, the very sight of corpse swells in his heart: passion, an affirmation of the need, not to die, but to live and love. Tommy at the last extremity of his need seizes the day and moves towards the “Consummation of his heart’s ultimate need”.

In *Seize the Day* Tommy Wilhelm is shown in desperate loneliness and life annihilating alienation and he is in dire need of an understanding heart.

CONCLUSION

In *Seize the Day*, Tommy Wilhelm is shown in desperate loneliness and life annihilating alienation and he is in dire need of an understanding heart. In a society, where everybody is busy money worshipping, Wilhelm's single heart throbs for human compassion that ultimately soothes him. In conclusion we can say that in the materialistic world where everybody is busy Mammon worshipping, Tommy Wilhelm lives a human living.

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