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Saul Bellow's *Seize the Day*: Awakening through Tears

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M. Gilbert Porter said in his book entitled *Whence the Power? The Artistry and Humanity of Saul Bellow* that "Critical opinion of *Seize the Day* reveals almost unanimous agreement that it is the most well made of all Bellow's novels."[1] Robert Detweiler mentioned in his small book entitled *Saul Bellow* that "*Seize the Day* (1956) has been called by some critics the best piece of writing that Bellow has yet produced," though "it is too slight a book to deserve such singular praise."[2] I quite agree with those two critics that *Seize the Day* is among the greatest novels ever written by Saul Bellow.

Seize the Day was published as a collection including a novella which gives the book its title, three short stories, and a one-act play. I am very much impressed by one of those three stories which is entitled "A Father-to-Be." It is a very short story consisiting of only ten pages in Penguin edition. But to read this short story seems to me very helpful when we try to understand *Seize the Day*.

Rogin, a protagonist of the story who is a thirty-one-year-old research chemist, is on his way home to have supper with his fiancée. She is "beautiful, well educated, aristocratic in her attitude." Joan, as she is named, spends much money to keep up with her wealthy roommate. Rogin needs a great amount of money not only for his younger brother, who is a college student and his mother "whose annuity wasn't quite enough in these days of inflation and high taxes"[3] but also for his beautiful, spendthrift, sweet heart. She phoned him to ask him to buy a quarter of a pound of beef and some shampoo. Rogin goes to the drug store.

A clear idea occurs to Rogin while he waits for the woman to wrap up the shampoo bottle :

> Money surrounds you in life as the earth does in death. Superimposition is the universal law . Who is free? No one is free. Who has no burden? Every one is under pressure. The very rocks, the waters of the earth, beasts, men, children—everyone has some weight to carry... The notion that all were under pressure and affliction, instead of saddening him, had the opposite influence. It put him in a wonderful mood.[4]

After going to the delicatessen for beef he rides on the subway. On the subway he gazes at the people sitting next to him, wondering about their family ties. His attention is drawn by a dwarf sitting with his mother, a middle-aged man who is sturdy, with clean skin and blue eyes, and a small girl. For a moment he is flooded with love. Then a strange idea occurs. The middle-aged man begins to resemble the hero's girl friend Joan, and her father. He even becomes an image of a son. The latter image primarily disturbs Rogin :

> Rogin was frightened and moved. 'My son! my son!' he said to himself, and the pity of it almost made him burst into tears... We worked towards ends we thought were our own. But no! The whole thing was so unjust. To suffer, to labour, to toil and force your way through the spikes of life, to crawl through its darkest caverns, to push through the worst, to struggle under the weight of economy, to make money—only to become the father of a forth-rate man of the world like this, so flat-looking with his ordinary, clean ... bourgeois face.... The life force occupied each of us in turn in its progress towards its own fulfilment, trampling on our individual humanity, using us for its own ends like mere dinosaurs or bees, exploiting love heartlessly, making us engage in the social process, labour, struggle for money, and submit to

> the law of pressure, the universal law of lawyers, superimposition.[5]

The notion that the dwarf sitting next to him will be a son of him and Joan makes the hatred for Joan rise in his breast, and suddenly a great many complaints which have been fermented in his breast for a long time boil out. Revolted by "the image of this white-haired, gross, peevish, old man with his ugly selfish blue eyes," Rogin strongly admonishes himself not to be "a damn instrument but to get out of the way." But it is too late for him to do so. Rogin is very much upset by the fact that he cannot escape from this fate. At this moment the antipathy against Joan climaxes. When he approaches her door he takes on a very cool appearance:

> I won't be used, he declared to himself. I have my own right to exist.[6]

This strict attitude toward her, however, gives way before Joan's very affectionate welcome:

> 'But there's absolutely nothing wrong with you,' she said, and pressed against him from behind, surrounding him, pouring the water gently over him until it seemed to him that the water came from within him, it was the warm fluid of his own secret loving spirit overflowing into the sink green and foaming, and the words he had rehearsed he forgot and his anger at his son-to-be disappeared altogether, and he sighed, and said to her from the water filled hollow of the sink, 'You always have such wonderful ideas, Joan. You know? You have a kind of instinct, a regular gift.'[7]

To accept a tyrannical, very spendthrift girl as his wife seems to me a kind of superimposition, which means spiritual as well as physical burden. This also means affirmation of suffering through burden. Rogin is shouldered with burden of every sort

and kind—so much so that in spite of his stoutness he almost stumbles down to the ground under a great weight of it. His burden is a monetary one. He is forced to work to pay for the articles he has to buy for his girl and his younger brother's college tuition and his mother's living expenses. His burden is a mental one, too. Rogin chooses Joan as his wife, and is destined to marry her, who is very vain and spendthrift. His burden is also a hereditary one. Rogin imagines the dwarf sitting by his side to be Joan's son and himself to be his father. Rogin is frightened at his hereditary, unescapable bondage with him. The surprising thing about him is that he somehow feels obliged to take these up as unavoidable burden.

Shackled all over with various kinds of burden, which he is struggling to take off in vain, he approaches Joan's door. What is important to him at this moment is to put up with walking under a great weight of burden in spite of repeated complaints against it. This will lead him to accomplish his redemption like Frank Alpine in Bernard Malamud's *Assistant*. Frank Alpine takes over from Morris Bober the prison-like store which may go bankrupt at any moment and gets married to Helen, who is anything but a beautiful girl. In addition, he gets circumcised in hospital and endures severe pain between his legs in order to win Helen's love completely. The difference between Frank and Rogin is that the former is much more positive to take up burden than the latter, who may be comically forced to take it up by his love for Joan at the last scene. Bellow uses the word "superimposition" twice in "A Father-to-Be." The word "superimposition" can be aptly applied to express the main features of "A Father-to-Be" and *Seize the Day*. The past-dominated, or history-domimated Jew suffers from every kind of superimposition, whether it is spiritual or physical and puts up with it, and through that suffering he transcends superimposition and attains moral strength or stability. I will make an attempt to examine how *Seize the Day* works in view of superimposition.

The criticisms of Saul Bellow's *Seize the Day* roughly fall into two categories—one led by the criticism made by Daniel Weiss in terms of the father-son relationship and the other led by the criticism made by Keith Michael Opdahl in terms of water imagery. Daniel Weiss and Michael Opdahl both wrote a very convincing, very meticulous criticism of *Seize the Day*. I have neither intention nor courage nor ability to challenge their interpretations which are so good, so precise that there may be nothing for me to add to them. But it might be yet more enlightening and make it easier for the reader to understand *Seize the day* if a criticism is to be made from a different angle.

Daniel Weiss writes in the criticism entitled "Caliban on Prospero: A Psychoanalytic Study on the Novel *Seize the Day*, by Saul Bellow" :

> I should like to consider, with what I trust is neurotic sensibility, Saul Bellow's *Seize the Day* as a novel in which the character and the action of the central figure, Tommy Wilhelm, are determined by and represent the neurotic conflict between instictual cravings and outwardly determined frustrations. The conflict between father and son is central to the novel, but its repressed content is latent throughout until the last moment, when, as Freud describes it, "the repression is shattered."[8]

Irving Malin mentions in his book *Jews and Americans* that "Jewish literature often refers to the father-son relationship."[9] It is quite natural for Daniel Weiss to utilize the father-son relationship as a means of interpretation of *Seize the Day*.

Michael Opdahl begins his excellent criticism :

> "Seize the Day," a novelette Bellow published in 1956, depicts the death throes of a drowning man. Tommy Wilhelm faces complete submergence in failure. He begins his day by plunging downward in a hotel elevator to a city sunk metaphorically beneath the sea. The New

> York streets carry a "tide of Broadway traffic" which is the "current" of the city (77, 100). The barogue hotel he sees from the lobby window looks "like the image of itself reflected in deep water, white and cumulous above, with cavernous distortions underneath" (5). Although Wilhelm struggles to keep "the waters of the earth" from rolling over him he looks "like a man about to drown" (77, 104).[10]

Saul Bellow quotes in *Seize the Day* the line from "Lycidas,"—"Sunk through he be beneath the wat'ry floor." Milton wrote "Lycidas," wailing "a learned friend, unfortunately drowned in his passage from Chester on the Irish seas, 1637." Judging from his quotation from "Lycidas" we can see Bellow consciously make use of water image, or the image of a drowning man. What makes that surmise more truthful is Richard P. Adams' article on Lycidas in which he says:

> The fact that King died by drowning perhaps fortuitously but nonetheless effectively opened up to Milton a much larger range of death-and-rebirth imagery, which he exploited with his usual thoroughness. No less than fifty lines, out of a total of 193, are concerned with water in one way or another. Water was of course a prime symbol of fertility in all the ancient cults... Several references involving water are specifically to themes of death and rebirth...[11]

Daniel Weiss criticizes *Seize the Day* from the viewpoint of the father-and-son relationship which is very peculiar to the Jewish people, while Michael Opdahl interprets the same book by means of water imagery. I am confident that these two criticisms are the greatest ever written on *Seize the Day*. Though I have a great deal of doubt that it is possible, I would like to criticize *Seize the Day* from quite a different angle—superimposition.

The story begins when Tommy Wilhelm wakes up in the morning and comes down from the twenty-third floor for

breakfast. On the fourteenth floor he looks for his father to enter the elevator. He worries about his appearances perhaps mainly for his old widowered father. He and his father live in the Hotel Gloriana where most of the guests were past the age of retirement. As quoted by Daniel D. Galloway, we are presented with a painful picture of a morbid gerontocracy...[12] Tommy Wilhelm is a shlemiel-type person who always makes mistakes. He quit the university and went to Hollywood to become a star in spite of his family's opposition to it and failed at the start because of his speech difficulty and other natural defects. He married his wife though his father, who is a retired rich doctcr, disapproved of their marriage. Bellow describes Tommy Wilhelm who is a Yiddish shlemiel:

> After much thought and hesitation and debate he invariably took the course he had rejected innumerable times. Ten such decisions made up the history of his life. He had decided that it would be a bad mistake to go to Hollywood, and then he went. He had made up his mind not to marry his wife, but ran off and got married.[13]

Earl Rovit writes in his book *Saul Bellow* that "the Bellow hero can be justly termed a shlemiel type." and adds that "if he is a victimized figure, he is a victim of his own moral sense of right and wrong—his own accepted obligation to evaluate himself by standards that will inevitably find him lacking."[14] Because of these past mistakes Tommy is now out of work after quiting the Rojax Corporation where he worked as a salesman, and lives away from his wife and children in the hotel where his father stays.

The elevator does not stop on the fourteenth but "sank and sank," until he comes down to the dark, sleepy lobby where the great dark red uneven carpet "billowed towards Wilhelm's feet."[15] The verbs—sank, billowed—must be paid attention to. They are

both related to the sea. Bellow may mean to say that the lobby where the elevator sinks and the carpet billows is the bottom of the sea. Some critics put an emphasis upon water imagery seen in this passage and try to explain the action of the protagonist. I, however, want to emphasize hydraulic pressure operating in this passage and delineate the protagonist's behavior influenced by the hydraulic pressure on the bottom of the sea—the lobby which means the first floor. Tommy sinks down to the bottom of the sea where of course hydraulic pressure is superimposed on him. He makes strenuous efforts not to collapse under the weight of the water.

Many things are imposed upon him. One of the most important things which make up his mental burden is money. Having resigned from the Rojax Corporation because of dispute as to his promotion with the owner, he is out of work. His wife, who sought to rob him of his identity during marriage, is now determined to rob him of his scanty money. He must send her the usual support payments, takes responsibility for his son's insurance policies, and subsidies her higher education. He must therefore give up his spacious apartment in the Massachusetts countryside to take a small room in the same New York hotel where his father resides. Here at the Hotel Gloriana Wilhelm, a man in his middle forties, is compelled to be a child again to obtain affection and money from his niggardly parent. On "his day of reckoning,"[16] when something fatal is about to happen, his father refuses to help him financially. He now faces total financial ruin. Here staggers on the brink of total financial ruin Tommy Wilhelm who is so clumsily heavy as to look like a hippopotamus. Bellow describes Wilhelm:

> By a peculiar twist of habit he wore his coat collar turned always, as though there were a wind. It never lay flat. But on his broad back, stooped with its own weight, its strength warped almost into deformity, the collar of his sports coat appeared anyway to be no wider than a

ribbon.[17]

Earl Rovit quotes Irving Malin's interesting statement:

> Irving Malin has pointed out that there is a startling preponderance of *weight* and *deformity* imagery in all of Bellow's stories. His protagonists seem always to be labouring under immense loads and pressures from which they receive only temporary release.[13]

Bellow depicts Wilhelm who is about to collapse under the weight of many kinds of burden:

> The spirit, the peculiar burden of his existence lay upon him like an accretion, a load, a hump. In any moment of quiet, when sheer fatigue prevented him from struggling, he was apt to feel this mysterious weight, this growth or collection of nameless things which it was the business of his life to carry about. That must be what a man was for.[19]

Wilhelm thinks just as Levin in Bernard Malamud's *A New Life* does that it is a man's duty to carry about heavy burden. His wife is another thing which makes up his mental burden. Wilhelm describes his wife during his argument with his father:

> Well, Dad, she hates me. I feel that she's strangling me. I can't catch my breath. She just has fixed herself on me to kill me. She can do it at long distance. One of these days I'll be struck down by suffocation or apoplexy because of her. I Just can't catch my breath.[20]

His wife Margaret is so oppressive a woman that Wilhelm is almost suffocated to death. For several reasons, however, he cannot divorce her. It is a very important point that he cannot divorce her but must bear her cruel oppression. Does he really want a divorce? This is the same question Dr. Adler, his father, asked of him. His answer was that "For the price he paid he

should be getting something."[21] Then his father said that it seemed to him no normal person would stand for such treatment from women. The old man doubts his son's real intention to divorce his wife. Indeed, after attaining his redemption at the end of the story, he feels obliged to put up with his financial trouble and his wife's cruel treatment. It may seem to the reader that his father is a very heartless person who does not understand his son. To me at least Dr. Adler seems to be a sort of savior for his son, because his advice has helped his son bear his difficulties. This story tells us only about Wilhelm's action for a single day. During that single day his father is being cruel and heartless. Before that day he seems to have been very sympathetic to his son's troubles and have helped him financially, otherwise he would not be staying in the same hotel where his father stays.

It is Dr. Tamkin, a con man, who teaches Wilhelm how to love people, perhaps including his father and his wife. He says:

> In here, the human bosom—mine, yours, everybody's—there isn't just one soul. There's a lot of souls. But there are two main ones, the real soul and a pretender soul. Now! Every man realizes that he has to love something or somebody. He feels that he must go outwards. "If thou canst not love, what art thou?" Are you with me?[22]

Dr. Thmkin is such a charlatan that he tells Wilhelm a great many lies, but he considers that he tells him at least two truths: love for people in general and the loneliness they suffer. As to general people's loneliness he says a very impressive thing:

> If you only knew one per cent of what goes on in the city of New York! You see, I understand what it is when the night comes and he feels like howling from his window like a wolf.[23]

Bellow's description of loneliness is very Oriental. It is not certain whether he has learned something about Zen Buddhism,

but it is very surprising how clearly his idea of loneliness resembles that of Zen Buddhism. In connection with loneliness which is "howling from his window like a wolf," Tamkin goes on to say further:

> "What art thou?" Nothing. That's the answer. Nothing. In the heart of hearts—Nothing! So of course you can't stand that and want to be Something, and you try. But instead of being this something, the man puts it over on everybody instead. You can't be that strict to yourself. you love a little. Like you have a dog (Scissors!) or give some money to a charity drive. Now that isn't love, is it? What is it? Egotism, pure and simple. It's a way to love the pretender soul. Only vanity, is what it is. And social control. 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.[24]

Tamkin emphasizes the fact that a man is nothing and that he must be thoroughgoing in nothingness. It may be that such a person howls from the city window like a wolf. Tamkin seems to say that it is love for the true soul which suffers and becomes sick that saves people from the utter loneliness and feelings of nothingness. Tamkin, I am sure, is one of the most attractive and impressive characters that have ever appeared in American fiction. Wilhelm puts his last cash in the hands of the dubious but attractive Dr. Tamkin, who promises him a killing on the stock market that will give him financial security for the rest of his life. That is because Wilhelm thinks he is on Tamkin's back. Even so he sometimes thinks Dr. Tamkin is a lunatic, which reminds him of the fact that it is very difficult to communicate with others in a city like New York. Wilhelm thinks:

> 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... You had to talk with yourself in the daytime and reason with yourself at night. Who else was there to talk to in a city like New York?[25]

Wilhelm, who has learned about the ultimate solitude general people are suffering from, will soon attain such a high frame of mind that the alienation in a city where people cannot communicate with others does not matter at all, for in due course he realizes that there is a larger body, from which you cannot be separated. A few days ago the following splendid idea occurred to him :

> He was going throgh an underground corridor, a place he had always hated and hated more than ever now. On the walls between the advertisements were words in chalk: 'Sin No More', and 'Do Not Eat the Pig', he had particularly noticed. And in the dark tunnel, in the haste, heat, and darkness which disfigure and make freaks and frangments 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 his 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.[26]

While listening to Dr. Tamkin tell him to try "here and now" mental exercises Wilhelm is hearing Margaret's voice as she reads :

> Come then, Sorrow!
> [Sweet Sorrow!]
> [Like an own babe nurse thee on my breast!]
> I thought to leave thee,
> And deceive thee,
> But now of all the world I love thee best.[27]

Those are famous lines from John Keat's *Endymion*. It is very interesting to note that the lines emphasizing the importance of "nursing sorrow" instead of avoiding it are read by his tyrannical wife Margaret. Though a great many critics may present a strong opposition to it, yet I cannot help thinking in the light of the fact that he must love Margaret, who might be a source of his sorrow. In the Judaic thought, love must be accompanied with the suffering caused by putting loved ones on the back.

Such various thoughts are passing through his mind while Tamkin is in the process of losing his last cash on the market. Wilhelm reaches the market only to find that he has lost his last money after helping Mr. Rappaport buy his cigars. Tamkin vanishes and he is left alone to contemplate his complete financial ruin. Wilhelm for the first time realizes:

> 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 hoofs and claws. Tear me to pieces, stamp on me and break my bones.[28]

Comically enough birds as well as hydraulic pressure are superimposed on Wilhelm. Sarah B. Cohen refers to bird imagery in *Seize the Day*:

> Tamkin, with whom he has been dealing with, is depicted in birdlike imagery: "What a rare peculiar bird he was, with those pointed shoulders, that bare head, his loose nails, almost claws, and those brown, soft, deadly, heavy eyes." (82) According to the folklore of natural history, birds ride on the backs of hippopatami to pull out insects from their hide and to guide them. Tamkin is clearly the bird on Wilhelm's back who is more of a parasite than a guide. When it comes to his wife, Wilhelm immediately grasps the full import of his bitter hyperbole that he is a "brahma bull" being devoured by piranha fish." (76)[29]

It was mentioned earlier that every trouble in life, or rather life itself is superimposed on Wilhelm. To add to his tragedy Tamkin, who is the only person on whose back he thinks he is, does ride on his back "with hoofs and claws." This is all his inescapable fate, just as Wilky is his inescapable self although he changed his name from Wilhelm Adler to Tommy Wilhelm. It does not do any good but causes him to make much more mistakes to avoid facing his inescapable fate, just as "the new name which Wilhelm thought would allow him to project a more winning self has not freed him of his old undesirable identity," and in reality "imposes the added strain of keeping up appearances."[30] In Bernard Malamud's short story "The Lady of the Lake" Henry Levin fails to win the lady's love because he changed his name from Henry Levin to Henry R. Freeman, which is an unJewish name. The fact that changing names brings about tragedy seems to me a very Jewish theme, for the Jew cannot escape from Jewishness which has been accompanied by tragedy for more than 3,000 years.

The very important moment in *Seize the Day*, therefore, is when Wilhelm ceases to escape from superimposition but transcends it and attains "a state of grace." That moment comes when Wilhelm turns to his father for help but is rejected and his wife more heartlessly than ever demands that he send the money. The most important moment comes when "Pursuing Dr. Tamkin through the crowds on New York's streets, he is shouldered into a synagogue where a funeral is taking place."[31] He approaches the coffin where the corpse lies. This final scene is very important and filled with so much ambiguity that many critics say numberless things about it. It needs a long quotation:

> The dead man was grey-haired. He had two large waves of grey hair at the front. But he was not old. His face was long, and he had a bony nose, slightly, delicately twisted. His brows were raised as though he had sunk

into the final thought. Now at last he was with it, after the end of all distractions, and when his flesh was no longer flesh. And by this meditative look Wilhelm was so struck that he could not go away. In spite of the tinge of horror, and then the splash of heartsickness that he felt, he could not go. He stepped out of line and remained beside the coffin; his eyes filled silently and through his still tears he studied the man as the line of visitors moved with veiled looks past the satin coffin towards the standing bank of lilies, lilacs, roses. With great stifling sorrow, almost admiration, Wilhelm nodded and nodded. On the surface, the dead man with his formal shirt and his tie and silk lapels and his powdered skin looked so proper; only a little beneath so—black, Wilhelm thought, so fallen in the eyes.

Standing a little apart, Wilhelm began to cry. He cried at first softly and from sentiment, but soon from deeper feeling. He sobbed loudly and his face grew distorted and hot, and the tears stung his skin. A man—another human creature, was what first went through his thoughts, but other and different things were torn from him. ... The source of all tears suddenly sprung open within him, black, deep, and hot, and they were pouring out and convulsed his body, bending his stubborn head, bowing shoulders, twisting his face, crippling the very hands with which he held the handkerchief. His efforts to collect himself were useless. The great knot of ill and grief in his throat swelled upward and he gave in utterly and held his face and wept. He cried with all heart....

The flowers and lights fused ecstatically in Wilhelm's blind, wet eyes; the heavy sea-like music came up to his ears. It poured into him where he had hidden himself in the center of a crowd by the great and happy oblivion of tears. He heard it and sank deeper than sorrow, through torn sobs and cries toward the consummation of his heart's ultimate need.[32]

Many critics refer to this last scene in their own respective ways, but the point in which all of them except Jerry H. Bryant

and Allen Guttmann are unanimous is that in the last scene Wilhelm transcends superimposition through his suffering and, affirms it and attains a rebirth. Bryant says that "Tommy Wilhelm is the picture of a man unable to transcend his condition into a higher consciousness, totally frustrated by being denied his escape."[33] Allen Guttmann writes, defying the almost unanimous opinion :

> Almost every commentator on *Seize the Day* has seen the conclusion as a rebirth. "Seize the Day," writes one of the more acute critics, "does not end in Tommy's masochistic acceptance of his role as victim; it ends for a new life." The final scene is one in which he drowns metaphorically, but "is also a symbolic rebirth out of water." In Tommy's capacity for grief, there is "the possibility of his freedom."...The difficulty with such interpretations is that marine imagery and Tommy's prior quotations from "Lycidas" and from Shakespeare do not enable the reader to conclude that Tommy has been reborn.... To accept his own failure? It is impossible to say. At this moment, Tommy seems pitiable but hardly tragic. He lacks Augie March's "larky" acceptance of fate and Asa Leventhal's ability unconsciously to assume his place in life's theater. Able neither to struggle greatly nor to adjust to mediocrity, he is the victim of his own weakness and confusion. He is the rebel unable to carry through his rebellion, the emigrant who changes his name and his environment and is then stranded in a romantically imagined noplace. Weeping pathetically before the image of his own death, he is cautionary rather than exemplary.[34]

It is certain that those are the most representative critical opinions of the interpretation of the final scene of *Seize the Day* by means of "rebirth theory."

I mentioned earlier that the conclusion of the story is ambiguous enough to admit of any kind of interpretation. The same thing was mentioned by Keith Michael Opdahl, who says

Harvey Swados is correct in saying that "Seize the Day" culminates in an extraordinary ending which is going to be read and argued over for a long time to come.[35] I, as a Japanese student of American literature who has just become interested in Buddhism, think that the conclusion of the story might be understood more easily if it were to be interpreted in terms of a Buddhistic theory of rebirth. By a Buddhistic theory of rebirth I mean that man can understand the value and the meaning of living in the present world by realizing from the bottom of the heart that everything with a form which man knows by means of five senses is nothingness. This is the thought of *Prajna-paramita-sutra*. *Prajna-paramita-sutra* says that the moment of that realization comes when man faces another man's death. Wilhelm realizes that everything including money is nothingness when he confronts the unknown person's corpse. It can be easily understood from his violent crying or howling with his tears pouring from his eyes that his realization is very thoroughgoing. At that moment he transcends individual persons, such as his father, his wife and his mistress and attains a general love for a larger body. In Buddhistic terms he attains *satori*—spiritual awakening. It is very interesting to note that John J. Clayton who is severely criticized by Allen Guttmann mentions some connection between the last scene and Zen Buddhism. He writes:

> further, as each novel fulfills its essential rhythm, we find that Bellow points toward a loss of selfhood—as the way the burdened hero can redeem his humanity. It is an answer quite contrary to his love of nobility, his love of the individualist; it is an answer which goes beyond simple goodness to a kind of sainthood, a spiritual condition like that of the Jewish zaddik or the Zen monk. Bellow is not satisfied with the loss of Self: he cannot rest in this answer, for he is fiercely individualistic. Yet his fiction shows that the only redemption is through a loss of individuality and a cessation of striving, an absorption into reality rather than an imposition of

Self or reality.[36]

It might take my further study of Zen Buddhism to make my theory of Buddhistic rebirth more persuasive. I am confident that studying Bellow's fiction in view of Buddhistic thoughts will be my task for the next several years. For the moment I must feel only content to have found some connection between Bellow's fiction and Buddhism.

NOTES

[1]M. Gilbert Porter, *Whence the Power? The Artistry and Humanity of Saul Bellow* (Missouri : University of Missouri Press, 1974), p. 102.

[2]Robert Detweiler, *Saul Bellow* (Michigan : William B. Eerdmans/ Publisher, 1967), p. 15.

[3]Saul Bellow, *Mosby's Memoirs and Other stories* (Penguin Books, 1971), p. 138.

[4]*Ibid.*, pp. 138–139.

[5]*Ibid.*, pp. 144–145.

[6]*Ibid.*, pp. 145.

[7]*Ibid.*, pp. 147.

[8]Daniel Weiss, "Caliban on Prospero : A Psychoanalytic Study on the novel *Seize the Day*, by Saul Bellow" in *Saul Bellow and the Critics*, ed. Irving Malin (New York : New York University Press, 1969), p. 117.

[9]Irving Malin, *Jews and American* (Illinois : Southern Illinois University Press, 1965), p. 32.

[10]Keith Michael Opdahl, *The Novels of Saul Bellow* (University Park : The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1970), p. 96. The page numbers in parentheses in the original text are to *Seize the Day* (New York : Viking Press, 1956)

[11]Richard P. Adams, "The Archetypal Pattern of Death and Rebirth in Milton's *Lycidas*" in *Myth and Literature*, ed. John B. Vickery (Lincoln : University of Nebraska Pess, 1969) , p. 187.

[12]David Galloway, *The Absurd Hero in American Fiction* (Austin : University of Texas Press, 1974), p. 104.

[13]Saul Bellow, *Seize the Day* (Penguin Books, 1956), pp. 26–27.

[14]Earl Rovid, *Saul Bellow* (Minneapolis : University of Minnesota, 1967), p. 12.

[15]Saul Bellow, *Seize the Day*, p. 7.

[16]*Ibid.*, p. 91.

[17]*Ibid.*, pp. 19–20.

[18]Earl Rovit, *Saul Bellow*, p. 11.

[19]Saul Bellow, *Seize the Day*, p. 44.
[20]*Ibid.*, p. 53.
[21]*Ibid.*, p. 58.
[22]*Ibid.*, p. 76.
[23]*Ibid.*, p. 72.
[24]*Ibid.*, p. 76.
[25]*Ibid.*, pp. 89–90.
[26]*Ibid.*, p. 91.
[27]*Ibid.*, p. 97.
[28]*Ibid.*, p. 113.
[29]Sarah Blacher Cohen, *Saul Bellow's Enigmatic Laughter* (Urbana : University of Illinois Press, 1974), pp. 96–97. The page numbers in parentheses in the original text are to *Seize the Day* (New York : Viking Press, 1956)
[30]*Ibid.*, pp. 98–99.
[31]Jerry H. Bryant, *The Open Decision* (New York : The Free Press, 1970), p. 349.
[32]Saul Bellow, *Seize the Day*, pp. 124–126.
[33]Jerry H. Bryant, *The Open Decision*, p. 350.
[34]Allen Guttmann, *The Jewish Writer in America* (New York : Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 200–201.
[35]Keith Michael Opdahl, *The Novels of Saul Bellow*, p. 176.
[36]John J. Clayton, *Saul Bellow : In Defense of Man* (Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 1971), p. 135.

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