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**ALIENATION AND ENDANGERED RELATIONSHIP IN SAUL
BELLOW'S *SEIZE THE DAY***

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Abstract

The trend of modern materialistic society modifies several different dimension of an individual life. The change is identified to be liable for the transformation of a selfless, warm and cordial individual to a cruel, soul less and self-centred man in a modern society. The novel of Saul Bellow's *Seize the Day* 1956 portrays the American capitalist society where the material goods is considered more valuable than the family member relationship; money is important than love and eternal goal is more precious than cordiality. In this society 'man is alone in a crowd'. It is observed that Bellow's novel has a realistic reflection of American society when the country was uplifting to its zenith; the development, prosper, property were last pronounced words at the end of the day. This article examines the influence of materialism among the characters and discusses how the impacts of materialism affects social bonding between sibling. Bellow's sense of changed human psychology, changed social relations and the representation of protagonists' warns us that sooner or later the difference between robot and human being may not be distinguished. So the novel may be analysed through the lens of alienation, depression and discrimination of heartless, self-centred modern capitalist society.

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1. Introduction

Seize the Day 1956 *Seize the Day* 1956 is an American novel that represents the trouble beneath the modern materialistic system practiced in American capitalist society. Unlike sociological research, literature analysis does not deal with the number of social problems rather it focuses the impact unseen before us with hard sublime actions of the characters presented through the story. So literature observes the scope of being understandable; the inner tension, jealousy, conspiracy, and mindsets of the characters are publicized. *Seize the Day* 1956 depicts a live portrait of American materialistic society conveys the alienation of individual who practiced it from the very beginning of their freedom—the independence of the United States of America. This alienation is a poisonous fruit of materialism where money and property are the reflections of a successful individual. This materialistic mindset interrelates with their lifestyle, ideology, personality which reveal a picture of an endangered society. Alienation represented in *Seize the Day* 1956 as all characters seem to be alienated from their family and public life. The causes of this alienation represented in a very charismatic way; the materialistic thinking and consumerist attitude the character embraced have been analyzed thoroughly in different parts of the novel to understand what motivates an individual's isolation from his family and society. In *Seize the Day* 1956 the novelist invites readers to ponder about the human existence compared to the machines; what differentiates human from the machine is the soul to love, to empathize, and to weep.

1.1. Literature Review

Saul Bellow's *Seize the Day* is widely discussed as an existential novel and isolation of the protagonist suffering from the modern thrust and materialistic attitude. The scholarly article of Nita Novianti has shown the disintegration family depicted in *Seize the Day* 1956 in light of family system theory which makes us avail of new insight on literary criticism as well as problems in modern life. *Seize the Day* is also shown as an example of 'human-reluctant modernity' (Alam) or as a 'modernist study' (Hooti & Omrani, 2011) and for an 'existentialist look' (Wu, 2013) in American literature. The works mainly focused on the protagonist's experience of misery in a growing capitalist economy where an established father only cares about the material success of his son. The precious family bonding and affection are seen absent severely. As a successful novel in existentialists' perspective, it is told that: "His speculative ideas conveyed in all the novels inevitably take on the print of currently popular existentialism. *Seize the Day* 1956 possibly best represents his understanding of life, human nature and individuality from the perspective of "existentialism" (Wu, 2013).

This study of alienation and the endangered relationship has focused on the causes of thinning family bonding in the light of psychoanalysis of the protagonist and his father, Dr. Adler. The previous researchers focused on the issue of modernity, existentialist work and alienation though, the inner causes of mental agony the protagonist experienced, is not analyzed in those studies. This paper discusses the incidents that respond to the father-son and husband-wife relationship in an adverse stage which is an ultimate fruit of materialistic motivations in a capitalist society. The exploration of materialistic philosophy the characters possess an explanation of the actions such as behavioral analysis of them may provide a deeper understanding of the dilemma of the modern society.

2. Problem Statement

America was populated by immigrants who believed about the equal opportunity to gain the eternal prosper. Being a capitalist society, the economic structure encourages aggressive economic activities with sheer individualism. The idea of individualism is, the rights and freedoms of individual beings are the most important rights in society. But over practiced individualism becomes the cause of alienation. In *Seize the Day* 1956, the sense of paranoia from Tommy Wilhelm's characterization in a modernist narrative can be conceived remarkably; Talking about "truth", Tommy says: 'But what of the truth? Ah, the truth was that there were problems, and of these problems, his father wanted no part. His father was ashamed of him. The truth, Wilhelm thought was very awkward.' (Bellow, 1977, p. 17)

In a capitalist society, the ultimate goals of materialism are very transparent. Materialism is a belief that money, possessions and physical comforts are more important than spiritual values; the belief that only material things matter the most. These beliefs deconstruct human relationships specifically related to social bonding. As a result, the family bonding and brotherhood are breaking apart; men become crazy about material possessions, property, and personal belongings more than morality. Individualism creates better opportunities for them to accumulate personal assets. This madness further solidifies a wall detaching the family bonding. This madness creates a monster in an individual who feels he does not belong to anybody—relatives, parents, and children are useless to his flourish. As a result, the isolation, disconnection, and estrangement the individual from the huge crowd. There are lots of people around him but all they are in a drift; nobody is for anybody.

3. Research Questions

There are several research questions of the study.

- a. How a materialistic goal-oriented in the society weakens the relationship among the individuals in Saul Bellow's *Seize the Day*?
- b. What are the elements in the materialistic society specifically designed to alienate the protagonist in Saul Bellow's *Seize the Day*?

4. Purpose of the Study

The study aims to examine the sufferance of the alienated characters—to understand the causes and the effects of the sufferings of the individual in a capitalist society suffers, and to examine the steps that make the individual alienated from. The study aims to examine the impossibility for constructing moral and ethical values to chase social problems and anomalies away and identifies specifically the potential damage of alienation in modern society.

5. Research Methods

The method of the research is firstly the close reading of the novel. The textual analysis will be utilized to analyze the characters' psyche, plot, setting, theme, and the symbol of material wealth. The portrayal of the materialistic society and the characters will be examined thematically to provide answers

for the research questions identified earlier. Using the theory of psychoanalysis, the characters' psyche along with motivation, actions and will power will be examined thoroughly.

6. Findings

The protagonist of *Seize the Day* is Tommy Wilhelm, who is aged forty above and does not have smart exposes. This novel is the narrative of his one-day event; full of sorrow, failure, present disgrace, and untold agony. The style of this novel is the stream of consciousness and flashback:

In Saul Bellow's *Seize the Day*, the second form rendered by Jesse Matz has been adopted so that "a very direct pursuit of some train of thought" is followed by Tommy Wilhelm as the main character in the novel. So the kind of misunderstanding about the stream of consciousness as only collecting irrelevant perceptions of thought is demystified here, as opposed to other modernist narratives in which associations are mostly unrelated and randomized according to "multitudinous thoughts and feelings" (Cuddon, 1977, p. 661).

Bellow (1977) expresses the condition of Wilhelm from the beginning to the present. The narration draws the reader into the flow of the story. Wilhelm's father, Dr. Adler is a successful physician whereas Wilhelm is the contrary of his father who faces unfortunate luck in all jobs that he touches. His father disowned him for the fear of losing his wealth, his property marks the symbol of success in modern society. Dr. Adler's philosophy views everyone either as a beggar or a mugger to him. So property/material wealth disintegrates him from the warmth of any relationship possible. The story of that particular day also conveys another wrong decision Wilhelm made where he supposes to be cheated. He bought trading lard with his last \$700; against the will of his father. His failure starts from 20 years ago while he arrived at Hollywood wanted to be a hero. He married a woman who considers Wilhelm an automatic teller machine. The decision of marrying Margaret was a big mistake. When Wilhelm realizes that he was cheated by Dr. Tamkin, his father Dr. Adler assumes his son seeking his help for money after his no beneficial business deals. Wilhelm went out seeking his for fatherly sympathy and mental asylum but it was refused. The following excerpt can best present the discussion:

You have some purpose of your own, said the doctor. In acting so unreasonable. What do you want from me? What do you expect? What do I expect? Said, Wilhelm. He felt as though he, were unable to recover something. Like a ball in the surf, washed beyond reach, his self-control was going out. 'I expect help! Wilhelm's hair, the color of whitened honey rose dense and tall with the expansion of his face, and he said. When I suffer – you aren't even sorry. That's because you have no affection for me, and you don't want any part of me. (Bellow, 1977, p. 58-59)

The materialistic mindset recognizes only familiar matters that can be turned into money, how to increase money and strategic way to snatch money from the others. Adler was part of American society chasing wealth through material gained. The materialistic viewpoint teaches them what cannot produce anything is considered to disable and useless. So Wilhelm is labeled as useless here. One example of the materialistic society in New York city is evident:

No, Dad, it's not the pills, it's that I'm not used to New York anymore. For a native, that's very peculiar, isn't it? It was never so noisy at night as now, and every little thing is a strain. Like the alternate parking. You have to run out at eight to move your car. And where can you put it if you

forget for a minute, they tow you away. Then some fool puts advertising leaflets under your windshield wiper and you have heart failure a block away because you think you've got a ticket when you do get stung with a ticket, you can't argue. You haven't got a chance in court and the city wants the revenue (Bellow, 1977, p.38).

In a capitalist society, the sense of alienation is the end-product. The lifestyle materialistic society designed as a trap that eventually leads to the jail of alienation. This society functions like a big factory which carries only the man's toils who sells his time and effort. When this product seems useless or defected it is thrown to bin. So people look for a good machine, they advertise themselves by making Curriculum Vitae, sells on salary, released while disabled. That is a drift of insects to fire, which attracts but burns out. Wilhelm feels:

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. (Bellow, 1977, p. 44)

The causes of the alienation of the character are overwhelming; the representation of Margaret—Wilhelm's wife is the epitome of a modern gold digger who glorifies money than her wifely duties to the family. Without any humane attraction and affection toward her husband, Margaret embodies the estrangements of a husband and wife relationship. Only money will keep her alive and the family bonding is secondary. This results in the alienation between the couple. It is seen at the last part of the novel Wilhelm's conversation with Margaret regarding the divorced was unsuccessful as his wife hangs it out in a fear that he could marry his beloved Olive. Margaret cut her call as if talked to a beggar; no money, no need! The frustrated Tommy says: "Dad, I can't take city life anymore and I miss the country. There is too much push here for me. It works me up too much. I take things too hard. I wonder why you never retired to a quieter place" (Bellow, 1977, p. 49).

In the last part of this novel Wilhelm is seen relieved which does not match with his early phase, he was relieved from the sorrow he bears. He cries for the unknown dead. He feels the dead man—whether the dead man got a brother like him or have a son or daughter but he is alone in the coffin. No one is with him now, an abandon dead man. Wilhelm feels deep sorrow to be a worthless man in American society. The worst part about Wilhelm is his association with failure in every aspect of life. Searching for the property as personal belonging as a symbol of success, the property left him bankrupt; turning to society for moral boost deems Wilhelm as an outcast as he is only relevant with money in his wallet.

Material wealth dictates man's power in the family and society. Without a successful job, the relatives abandoned him without mercy. He cries because he feels! The imagery of a crying man deconstructs Wilhelm to be a human, unlike any other Americans. Chasing the American dream can be attained and make possible with sweats and toils but the transformation of society takes place causes an innocent stranger to being deluded with its intricate maze. He weeps for humanity; he weeps because he is not a machine who could stand the complexity of life itself.

The helplessness embodies in the context of a materialistic society. The telephone booth is a symbol of a mechanical object to communicate while we see Wilhelm and his wife communicate only with matters about money issues without cordiality, emotional attachment or conjugal compromise.

Wilhelm shows that human values and empathy do not earn respectable concerns in the complexity of materialistic society of the west; if anyone wants a glass of water here he would be suggested to gather more knowledge about history and society: That sick Mr. Perls at breakfast had said that there was no easy way to tell the sane from the mad, and he was right about that in any big city and especially in New York- the end of the world, with its complexity and machinery, bricks and tubes, wire and stones, holes and heights, and was everybody crazy here? What sort of people did you see? Every other man spoke a language entirely his own, which he had figured out by private thinking, He had his idea and peculiar ways. If you wanted to talk about a glass of water, you had to start back with God creating the heavens and earth, the apple; Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, ... after reviewing this and getting it all straight again you could proceed to talk about a glass of water. (Bellow, 1977, p. 89-90)

Everything needs to be exchanged by money transactions in New York. As an 'Unreal city' of Baudelaire, New York is a home of people wearing masks pretending to be individuals they are not. They walk and do not use the mortal eye rather, they are using robotic radar to navigate. Here the life of men is considered only as objects of existence. They do not even look at each other; men only gaze attentively at the pretty ladies as other attractive materials. A get-together party means not to get to know the selfless heart rather build a network or raising funds for material gaining. In this mechanical and materialistic world of American society, Wilhelm deems himself to be a worshiper of soul, he exceptionally senses the need to nurture man's relationship and bonding with the mankind which is impossible to happen.

Bellow (1977) satirizes the humanistic characters of Wilhelm in a mechanical modern world in this novel. His robotic characters are the epitome of a hollow man of the modern age. The portrayal of Rappaport who cannot see being blind, he takes his money from Wilhelm but was very alert about his interest as he does not disclose any information or game of the stock market. His physical blindness does not make hindrance to his earnings: 'Old man to speak the single word that would save him, give him the merest sign. Oh, please—please help. If Rappaport would close one eye or lay his head to one side, or raise, his finger and point to a column in the paper or a figure on his pad, a hint! A hint!' (p. 94) But Wilhelm represents a traditionally honest man who can neither lies nor cheat on others like Dr. Tamkin and Dr. Adler does. Bellow sketches the portrait of an ideal Americans man. They are the worshiper of the present. They do not any pay attention to their conscious souls. As Tamkin elaborates, "Nature only knows one thing, and that's the present, present, present, eternal present, like a big, huge, giant wave you must go along with the actual, the Here-and-Now" (Biswas, 2001, p.14). And the present expectation is money laundering and money rolling. It does not matter who would be the victims as long as the end goal of success is achieved.

Seize the Day 1956 depicts a representation of human relationships and in a broader extent of 'existentialism'. After the two World Wars, the condition of human bonding further deteriorates—trust between humans is betrayed—men become suspicious about their existence. Their uncertain existence as the impact of the World Wars deems themselves to be meaningless and ambiguous. They could not find the answers to his questions of being alive specifically the definite purpose of life. The existentialists answer the questions with another fact related to existence that is a burden until it is acknowledged that life should be worked out as a whole. According to the existentialist, the purpose of life is working for self and others. Men exist to make other exists; his purpose is to serve with love. Bellow was influenced by philosophers like Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Franz Kafka. Wilhelm is an existential character

who is a believer in his existence. His tension does not push him to nihilism. His belief restrains him from committing self-torture. The other character, Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment* (1956) by Dostoyevsky kills a woman to get relief of boredom. Raskolnikov has no idea about God or the meaning of his life. But at last, he decides to surrender so that the police could not make any allegation against him. But he surrenders to get the liberation of the soul, to get a release from his conscience. Wilhelm and Raskolnikov both realize the ultimate need of a soul. That is love, affection, and empathy from another fellow, to all humanity, to all mankind. This is the ultimate weapon to sustain. Wilhelm got the idea of life at last when he is rejected by his father lastly; his father was too mean to console his blood, Wilhelm. After leaving his father he joined a burial ceremony and cries for his unknown human brother, weeps heavily though it is not his relative, friend or introduced by any means. He got peace feeling that the dead is a human, someone's father, someone's bother, someone's husband. This feeling makes Wilhelm and the dead bonded—the isolation bonding.

7. Conclusion

As the question arises, should we not be 'progressed', 'developed', 'industrialized', 'urbanized', the answer is absolute yes! But still, there is a 'but'. Should we leave a sense of ethics and humanity while doing 'development'? The answer is, not at all. Literature shows that our race is at risk of being explicitly materialistic. We are destroying our green, our environment, our peace and our sense of humanity only for capital. We need all of the eternal belonging not escaping from our human qualities and feelings. *Seize the Day* (1956) indicates the social bonding is endangered due to the sense of ownership through characterization and the portrayal of reality. All of the characters are drifting away to nothing, making money but unaware of the reason for that material needs and a drift avoiding the cause of human existence; work for self and others. But they are willing to sell their soul to the capital as Dr. Faustus did to Mephistopheles, confined themselves in a self-made cage, the cage of alienation. Nobody but themselves imprisoned them. We are unaware of the danger of this alienation as if Bellow indicates that our birth is the result of love and the death of our race will be the cause of no love.

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