

The Conflict between Individuals and Society in *Seize the Day*

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Abstract: This paper explores the existential problem in *Seize the Day*—the conflict between individuals and society in modern society. With a brief introduction of Saul Bellow and the novel, the paper emphasizes the analysis of the conflict and the sources of the conflict. Besides, Saul Bellow uses many rhetorical devices to intensify the conflict. The analysis of these rhetorical devices is beneficial for us to interpret and understand the true meaning of the novel. Through the study of Bellow’s vision and the novel’s metaphorical meaning, we may find an effective solution to the conflict that our human being is involved in, and realize the social values of this novel.

Keywords: Conflict; Individual; Society; Rhetorical devices; Existentialism

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1. Introduction

1.1. The introduction of Saul Bellow

Saul Bellow^[1] is unanimously regarded as the most distinguished novelist of post-war America^[2]. Saul Bellow was born into a Russian-Jewish family in Canada in 1915 and grew up in Chicago. For over half a century, he has written a good number of novels, short stories, and plays, and won numerous awards. In 1976, he received the Nobel Prize for Literature chiefly for “the human understanding and subtle analysis of contemporary culture that are combined in his work”^[3].

He is capable of capturing the contemporary experiences, perplexities, and uncertainties, and is acutely alert to history, culture, and human consciousness at the contemporary stage of history. The conflict between individuals and society is clearly shown in his novels. Most of his protagonists are often rejected by modern society^[4]. The awareness of being self intensifies the agony of the rejection. Bellow is keenly aware of his Jewish heritage. Most of his characters are Jews^[5]. The Jewish condition offers a valid metaphor for Bellow to talk about human existence. Thus, the conflict between individuals and society is identical to that of the general humanity in modern society. He has transcended the Jewish label and reached the general humanity well.

1.2. The introduction of *Seize the Day*

Seize the Day, as a typical example, depicted the fragmented state of postwar America^[4]. The conflict between individuals and society in modern society is its basic issue. The protagonist Tommy Wilhelm finally achieves reconciliation with the unsympathetic society that neither knows nor cares to know of his existence through love recognition of the natural bond between hearts. The novel involves an important and meaningful issue—the existence of human beings in modern society. The conflict between individuals and society makes people ill at ease, and people find it hard to achieve spiritual harmony. *Seize the Day* faithfully presents the underlying problem and finds a solution, so the novel is chosen as the access to this research paper for its typicality, universal meanings, and functions.

2. Analysis of the conflict between individuals and society

In *Seize the Day*, Bellow is concerned with the conflict between individuals and society. In a modern society that lacks love and understanding between people, and is full of chaos and confusion, urban life is a real burden of existence for such a person as the protagonist Tommy, who is passive, impotent, and indecisive. Such a person is doomed to be a dangling man in his absurd quest for the meaning of life in the meaningless world. The conflict between individuals and society is emphasized throughout the novel. As the story opens, Tommy gets involved in such a state of conflict. Forty-three years old, huge, overemotional, and heavily independent, he is caught in a world devoid of heart, which lacks care and real communication among men. In this lower-middle-class, and densely populated section of New York, Hotel Gloriana, people talk to each other, do business, and pass the time of day superficially. The human heart is never reached, and masks and deceptions are the rule. There is no compassion, understanding, and love but frustration. The theme of the conflict between individuals and society is established in the first several pages of the novel when Tommy stops to get his morning newspaper from Rubin, the newspaper vendor. They only talk about the weather, Tommy's clothes, and last night's gin game. Although both men know many intimate details of each other's personal lives, none of those can be mentioned, and the great weight of the unspoken left them little to talk about. At the end of the story, through a stranger's death and thus the realization of his own mortality, protagonist Tommy Wilhelm has come to a compromise with society and seize the day^[6].

2.1. Analysis of individual (Tommy Wilhelm)

Seize the Day is a clear example of what Bellow means to be a human being having the power to overcome the conflict between individuals and society^[7]. The protagonist Tommy Wilhelm is a dangler who is drawn back from the rush of the world by the force of the circumstances around him. He is a failure in life as a breadwinner of his family, a son, and a husband. His character is passive, impotent, emotional, and indecisive. His passiveness and impotence lie in the fact that he does not prepare himself for anything and just goes on luck and inspiration. He is apt to be angry and easy to lose his self-control. For instance, when he begs for help from his father, "his self-control was going out. 'I expect help!' The words escaped him in a loud, wild, frantic cry and startled the old man, and two or three breakfasters within hearing glanced their way." His indecisive character is clearly shown in the novel, as follows:

"After much thought and hesitation and debate he invariably took the course he had 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. He had resolved not to invest money with Tamkin, and then he had given him a check."

Tommy is found in a situation that involves a good deal of suffering, feebleness, and servitude and is seen

behaving in an impotent, tragicomic way. Moving in his cold and apathetic world, his impotence makes his life ignominious and absurd. The wretchedness of his existence is so overwhelming that one wonders how he can struggle through the world of despair.

On the other hand, Tommy is a kind-hearted and sympathetic person. He is so kind-hearted that he cannot bear hospitals because he worries that he “might make mistakes and hurt someone or even kill a patient.” Even when he feels sad, he can still “wrinkle his forehead in a pleasing way” and speak “in his sociable, good-natured way.” He “would never willingly hurt anybody’s feelings” even when he is forced to differ, he would declare that “well, I’m not sure. I don’t really see it that way. I’m of two minds about it.” He is such a sympathetic man that even Venice, who deceived him into going to Hollywood, wins his “greatest sympathy.”

2.2. Analysis of society

The story is set in New York, the natural environment and social circumstances are so chaotic and confusing that people living there, especially the protagonist Tommy Wilhelm find it to be hell. New York is ‘like a gas’ and is regarded as “the end of the world, with its complexity and machinery ...” The environment is extremely disgusting because the blood of chickens fills “the Gulf of Mexico.” The traffic is so congested that it seems “to come down Broadway out of the sky” and taxis “want to run everybody down.” The air is so badly polluted that “Broadway, not clear but throbbing through the dust and fumes, a false air of gas visible at eye level as it spurts from the bursting buses.” The chaotic situation is vividly described as follows:

“Seven percent of his country is committing suicide by alcohol. Another three may be narcotics. Another sixty just fading away into dust by boredom. Twenty more who have sold their souls to the Devil. Then there’s a small percentage of those who want to live. That’s the only significant thing in the world of the today. These are the only two classes of people there are. Some want to live, but the great majority doesn’t.”

Besides, in this lower-middle-class, and densely populated section of New York, Hotel Gloriana, people talk to each other, do business, and pass the time of day superficially. There is no compassion, understanding, and love but frustration. People are cold, apathetic, and indifferent towards each other no matter whether they are strangers, relatives, or even members of a family. The world is a hell that lacks mutual understanding and true love. The cold, indifferent relationship between people can be found in Tommy’s family. When Tommy prepares to start out for Hollywood with the desire for “the blessings of his family,” but they are never given. His wife Margaret, with whom Tommy also finds no comforting solace, leaves him but will not agree to a divorce if she does not gain much money from Tommy^[8]. She “hit him and hit him, beat him, battered him, wanted to beat the very life out of him.” Dr. Adler is a cold-blooded figure. He refuses to get involved in his son’s desperate situation. Tommy needs money that his father can easily supply, but he is greatly pained, and even shies away, when the subject is mentioned. More than money, however, Tommy needs communication with an understanding heart, and he appeals to his father for compassion again and again, but the appeal is always futile, for his father’s response is cold, detached, bitter, and angry. He speaks to his only son with “a detachment.” He “behaved towards his son as he had formerly done with his patients.” The world is deprived of mutual understanding and love to such an extent that a city, like New York, has become “the end of the world” where fathers are no fathers and sons are no sons.

Furthermore, money plays such an important role in the relationship between people that even the father and the son are strangers or enemies^[9]. Just as Tommy says, “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.” Clearly, the society depicted in the novel is a money-dominated one where people are almost slaves to money.

In a word, in a modern society where money is the dominating force, where there is full of chaos and

confusion, where there is a lack of love and understanding between people, and where people are disoriented and twisted, urban life becomes a real burden of existence for people.

2.3. Analysis of the conflict

The weakness of the individual and the indifference of modern society makes the conflict established. It is common to find the juxtaposition of a static society and the organic individual in *Seize the Day*. How does Tommy in all of his individuality, with his dreams, aspirations, and idealism, along with his ever-present awareness of society as a naturalistic reality, find a place for himself, establish a personal and unique identity, and still maintain an honest integrity of self? This question is emphasized throughout the story. The distinctive achievement of this novel lies in Bellow's exploration of existential ideas in modern society. Just as Bellow says: "The living man is preoccupied with such questions as who he is, what he lives for, what he is so keenly and interminably yearning for, what his human essence is." The protagonist Tommy Wilhelm finds the complexities of his dilemma not only in an alienation from society; he is also confronted with a kind of conflict within himself, which creates an even more insoluble problem. He struggles to break through a predominantly intellectual and moral approach to achieve his possibilities and his individual potential. The strong sense of self is Bellow's greatest concern in *Seize the Day*, for Tommy is also troubled by the nature of the self.

There are three types of people in modern society who argue with the protagonist Tommy, and plead with him to make a compromise with the world. In other words, they can be regarded as the hostile forces in modern society that threaten the individual existence. The first belongs to the hard-boiled type, of which Dr. Adler is a typical example. Second, it is the soft sentimentalist who uses emotional blackmail to try to force Tommy to make a compromise with modern society. Tommy's wife belongs to this type. The third one, the most typical representative of "the world," is Dr. Tamkin. The conflict between individuals and society lies in the fact that Tommy cannot find a way to fit into the world, and he lacks the motivation that can lead him to create an alternative world. He cannot sit still, but he fails to find the confidence in himself to make a change because of his indecisive character. In order to get rid of the mental agony and solve the conflict with society, Tommy fights against the world unremittingly. However, he seems to fall into a kind of absurdity. No matter how he looks for the meaning of his existence, he cannot get rid of the predicament, and Tommy feels more and more pain.

2.3.1. The individual value versus the popular values of the modern society

First, although Tommy cherishes the principles of reason and humanitarianism, he still cannot familiarize himself with the world. His values contradict the popular spirits, so he cannot find a place for the existence of his spiritual ideal; therefore, he lives in a floating state, and his existence is characterized by isolation, suffering, and weakness^[10].

As Bellow describes, the money-dominated society becomes a threat to human life and human integrity. Everyone is "supposed to have money" and is forced "to think out ways to raise the dough." Otherwise, it is "a shame not to have money." Therefore, Tommy is set to work like a horse while "in the old days a man was put in prison for debt." That is why Tommy tries every possible means to make a fortune. People's soul is surrounded by material society and shadowed by barrenness and isolation. The pervasiveness of materialism brings an end to love and pure feelings between individuals. The modern world tends to ignore the existence of individuals and to be alienated from men. The conflict can be clearly seen in Tommy's comment about money:

"Uch! How they love money, thought Wilhelm. They adore money! Holy money! Beautiful money! It was getting so that people were feeble-minded about everything except money. While if you didn't have it you were a dummy, a dummy! You had to excuse yourself from the face of the earth."

On the contrary, people around Wilhelm have quite different attitudes towards money. They are interested in money and worship it. His wife Margaret, with whom Tommy finds no comforting solace, leaves him but will not agree to a divorce if she does not gain much money from Tommy. Dr. Tamkin, from whom Tommy hopes for a “mess of new miracles.” It is Tamkin who provides the irony of Bellow’s title *Seize the Day*. He urges Tommy to grasp the hour, but his advice is based on materialistic achievement, and on making one’s way in an envious, and belligerent world. Therefore, Tommy is doomed to be a failure.

2.3.2. Individual’s yearning for peace versus the chaotic and confusing society

Society is so chaotic all over that men can be “both insane and crazy” because these days “nobody can tell for sure which is which.” Modern civilization tends to dehumanize, making people lose their distinction and turning them into madness. The seriously bad effect produced by “the ruins of life” is so intense that the world is no longer the world, it is “a kind of hell” or “at least a kind of purgatory,” or it is “a world of maladjustment.” Tommy cannot bear the chaotic and confusing environment. In his birth city, New York, he even does not know who is “not used to New York anymore” and who does not “belong in New York anymore.” In a word, he is a dangling man in New York who cannot find his position. Where and how to acquire order and peace^[11]? Tommy chooses to escape from urban life and go to a country where there are “so kind, ordinary, and helpful people.” Actually, Bellow states a way seemingly beyond dispute—seize the day, as is suggested in the title. Man should choose dignity, live in harmony, and complete his own life. He should not waste it lamenting and suffering from past mistakes, from old and lost experiences (Dr. Adler), and from the disillusionment of Dr. Tamkin.

2.3.3. Individual’s yearning for love versus the cold and loveless world

As is revealed in the novel, society is cold, apathetic, indifferent, and even hostile. In other words, the world lacks mutual understanding and true love. New York is described as follows:

“New York—the end of the world... You had to talk with yourself in the daytime and reason with yourself at night. Who else was there to talk to ...?”

The cold relationship between people can also be traced in the novel. For instance, although Wilhelm and Rubin know each other, they do not like to exchange their feelings and ideas with each other. The clerk who gives Wilhelm the mail does not care what sort of appearance Wilhelm wears. He only glances at Wilhelm when the letters are changed by hand without any exchange of words. Tommy’s sister Catherine, “won’t even talk to him.” Dr. Adler is a cold-blooded creature, who cannot even remember the exact day of his wife’s death. As Tommy’s father, he never ceases to recall his son’s mistakes. While Dr. Adler is hiding Tommy’s financial failures by praising him to Mr. Perls, Tommy thinks, “It’s Dad... who is the salesman. He is selling me. He should have gone on the road.” Dr. Adler is such a cold and indifferent father that he has lost his sense of family. To Tommy, his father is just “something of a stranger,” and Tommy cannot speak his mind or ease his heart to him. Instead of encouraging his son, Dr. Adler curses his son when Tommy gets involved in his predicament. Therefore, Tommy turns to his spiritual father Dr. Tamkin. Tommy thinks, “At least Tamkin sympathizes with me and tries to give me a hand, whereas Dad does not want to be disturbed.” Actually, Tamkin is just a creature of Tommy’s imagination—a kind-hearted and helpful person, who deceives Tommy’s last seven hundred dollars.

As an overemotional creature, Tommy cannot bear the cold and indifferent relationship between people, and he is in desperate need of love. To some extent, his overemotional character attributes to his failure. He yearns for help, more exactly for love, but he is refused and deceived again and again by his dearest relatives and friends. Not only does Tommy need love, also Bellow directly expresses his desire and hope that people need love:

“There is a larger body, and from this you cannot be separated... the idea of this larger body had been

planted in him (Tommy) a few days ago beneath Times Square... all of a sudden, unsought, a general love for all these imperfect and lucid-looking people burst out in Wilhelm's breast. He loved them. One and all, he passionately loved them. They were his fathers 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?"

2.3.4. Individual's struggle for success versus the hostile society

Tommy struggles for his life and wants to change his terrible circumstances. No matter how he fights for his future, he cannot reach his destination of success. He tries to find consolation from persons around him, but again and again, he fails. It seems that there is a kind of hostile force preventing him from success. Dr. Tamkin is a sort of a second father to Tommy. Although he feels that he can talk to and be understood by him, a barrier of communication exists^[12]. Finally, he finds that Dr. Tamkin does not truly care about him or his problems: "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." There are other characters with whom Tommy finds no comforting solace: his wife Margaret, who has left him but will not agree to a divorce; his children Maurice Venice, the talent scout, another agent of disillusion; Mr. Perl, a German refugee from a concentration camp; and Mr. Rappaport, an elderly, clutching player of stock markets. The role of each of these figures only reinforces Tommy's difficulty in achieving his success and spiritual harmony and becomes the hostile element in the way of his bright future.

In a word, the conflict between individuals and society in *Seize the Day* can be analyzed in four levels: (1) the individual value versus the popular values of the modern society; (2) the individual's yearning for peace versus the chaotic and confusing society; (3) the individual's yearning for love versus the cold, indifferent, and loveless world; (4) the individual's struggle for success versus the hostile society. In other words, the unreasonable society makes the individual futile to fight against hostile forces. The conflict between individuals and society leads to the failure of both individuals and society and arouses the thinking of the human existential problem in modern society. The awareness of the crisis makes people see the rather weak position in the cold, indifferent, and hostile society.

3. The sources of the conflict

The conflict between individuals and society in *Seize the Day* has been analyzed in the first chapter, and this chapter explores the sources of the conflict^[13]. As one aspect of Saul Bellow's literary ideas, not only can it help us interpret and understand the profound and complicated ideas in this novel, but also can acquaint us with the whole picture of post-war American literature.

Bellow centers on the conflict between individuals and society in *Seize the Day*, and reveals the absurdity, abnormality, and confusion of the world. Meanwhile, he gives a detailed account of human beings' vain and painful existential experiences after the self-loss, self-reflection on the redundancy and solitude of existence. In a word, the world is absurd, and life is miserable. In *Seize the Day*, Tommy tries to find his authentic self and authentic existence, but he is fooled by society again and again. At the end of the novel, it shows such a kind of life attitude as self-responsibility, also a compromise to the hostile world, and the protagonist Tommy achieves the harmony of individual and society.

3.1. Personal experiences and background information of post-war America

Firstly, Bellow's literary ideas are influenced by his personal experiences and the background information of post-war America^[14]. The post-war prosperity produced a sense of optimism, which was soon corrupted by the

“Cold War” between the powers. Crisis was impending; chaos set in; a sense of absurdity undercut the existence of man. The life of the 1950s was poisoned at the root by McCarthyism, and that of the sixties was enriched by the Civil Rights movement, the appearance of counter-culture, and an upsurge of feminism and feminist power. The nightmare of the Vietnam War was haunted around the Americans, and life was disturbed by violence and racial persecution, including the assassinations of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King. Everything seemed to be subjected to a prevailing skepticism. New advances in science and technology gave people an increasing sense of pressure and corrupted the harmony of life. Therefore, American Literature has acquired an imposing stature since World War II. Vast quantities of influential writers appeared on the stage of American literature. They dealt with new experiences and vividly reflected the predicament people had got involved in the modern society. Saul Bellow is a typical writer of that generation, as his turbulent personal and professional life unfolds against the background of twentieth-century events—the Depression, World War II, the upheavals of the sixties—and amid all, the complexities of the Jewish-immigrant experience. He was born into a Russian-Jewish family in Canada in 1915 and grew up in Chicago. With his turbulent personal and professional experience, he is capable of capturing contemporary experiences, perplexities, and uncertainties, and is acutely alert to history, culture, and human consciousness at the contemporary stage of history. There is an obvious affinity between Bellow and his protagonists in their intense way of feeling agony and passion in modern society. The conflict between society and man becomes Bellow’s major concern.

3.2. Bellow’s keen insight into the realistic world

Secondly, the conflict results from Bellow’s keen insight into and serious thinking for the realistic world. *Seize the Day* can be a vivid reflection on the existential dilemma of the individual. Bellow views contemporary society as a threat to human life and human integrity. In Bellow’s opinion, modern civilization tends to dehumanize, make people lose their distinction, and turn them into a predicament. Material affluence distracts and produces conflict between individuals and society. Living in such a cold and indifferent society, people become impotent, weak, indecisive, and lose their sanity, like the protagonist Tommy Wilhelm. He goes through a hard phase and finally realizes his personal potential. In *Seize the Day*, Bellow shows his protagonist Tommy to be responsible for his particular conditions, dilemmas, and conflicts. How should the individual evaluate his life and selfhood when an overpowering modern world threatens to swallow the self? The question is asked in *Seize the Day*, and it is also Bellow’s major concern about this novel. Maxwell Geismar states the dilemma in an implicit correlation between Bellow and his protagonists: “Part of our sympathy and concern with Bellow’s career lies with his own struggle to break through a predominantly intellectual and moral approach to life”^[15].

Here is precisely the struggle of Bellow’s protagonists—to break through to life and to achieve their potentialities, but they must do so without the loss of a moral and intellectual humanism basic to their views of themselves. Bellow highly evaluates individuality and defends the self. He usually takes a humanistic stand against nihilism, against the destroyed civilization of post-war America. Therefore, he creates a depressive fictional world where the character is haunted by the emptiness of modern life, and where the character is a misfit, a victim, and an alienator.

3.3. Potential elements in Jewish culture

Thirdly, some potential elements in Jewish culture contribute to the formation of the thought such as the contradictory characteristics and the consciousness of the spiritual exploration^[16]. Born into a Russian Jewish family in Canada, Bellow grows up in Chicago. He is keenly aware of his Jewish heritage. He reminds his readers in subtle or apparent ways that his characters are Jews. The Jewish condition offers a valid metaphor for

Bellow to talk about human existence. The Jews think that they are God's chosen people, but are often rejected by modern society. The awareness of being the chosen intensifies the agony of the rejection. The Jewish point of view has been formed by many centuries of suffering and endurance and by the Jewish religion. Some Jews believe that God has sent perpetual suffering to his chosen people to strengthen and purify them. Others cannot comprehend it but accept it as an inevitable part of Jewishness. Perhaps the most important element in their point of view is the emphasis that Jews place upon the power of intellect. It is considered a high virtue for Jews to have the power to understand their own experiences, to judge their lives rationally, and to think well. In *Seize the Day*, the protagonist Tommy is a typical Jewish immigrant who lives in the U.S. but possesses the background of the Jewish culture. He consequently feels that he is not a self-confident American, but also a traditional Jew. He only lives in the margin of the bi-cultural system. Tommy is rejected by society again and again, and his indecisive and weak character intensifies the agony of the rejection. Although he lives through frustration and defeat, he manages to grapple with destructive historical pressures and strives for certain durable human goods—truth, freedom, and love^[17]. He is found in a situation that involves a good deal of suffering and feebleness and is seen behaving in an impotent, tragicomic way. Moving in his cold and apathetic world, his impotence makes his life ignominious and absurd. The wretchedness of his existence is so overwhelming that one wonders how he can struggle through the predicament. Thus the conflict between Jews and other Americans is identical to that of the general humanity in modern society. He has transcended the Jewish label and reached the general humanity well.

4. Solutions to the conflict

4.1. Bellow's vision

The chaotic and confusing society makes Tommy futile to fight against the hostile forces, so he is tripped by the conflict with the material world and is rejected by the world again and again. How can Tommy get rid of the burden or pressure of the modern world? This question also puzzles many people and needs us to find the answer. In *Seize the Day*, Bellow seems to give some advice, and it is worth studying Bellow's suggestions. Through Bellow's vision, we may get some hints to get rid of the conflict between individuals and society, and realize the social value of *Seize the Day*.

Bellow received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1976 chiefly "for the human understanding and subtle analysis of contemporary culture that are combined in his work." In his novels, dignity is ferociously challenged by violence, cruelty, indifference, chaos, and distractions in modern society. His protagonists fight against the tough life and are usually futile in fighting, but they finally find their problems and see the positive side of life. Bellow's strength lies in his faith in man and man's ability to offer spiritual resistance to the hostile forces of modern society. Bellow feels that "on nobler assumptions, man should have at least sufficient power to overcome ignominy and to complete his own life." More exactly, he means that any depiction of man should grant him the power to rise above the indignities of complete subjection to unseen and unknown forces and to give him a new nature against the miserable naturalistic impotency^[18]. Furthermore, the nature of man is finally defined by no one but himself, and that definition must include the power of the imagination. Bellow is consistent in his affirmation of man's potentialities. He has confidence in the potential power of the individual to free himself from the clichés of the prophet of the culture. In order to check and balance the extremity of the self, he adheres to love which binds humanity together and works against the prevailing trend of the conflict between individual and society in modern society. In *Seize the Day*, he shows his protagonist Tommy to be responsible for his particular conditions, dilemmas, and conflicts. Certainly, Tommy is also regarded as capable of altering those conditions. In the end, Tommy's own tears supply the waters for his baptism.

Saul Bellow's ambition is to be a social historian. He places emphasis on the truthful representation of life and is highly critical of modern life in which the old value system is no longer functioning. *Seize the Day* represents Bellow's vision of a disoriented modern man in an urban society where humanism is under determining pressures; meanwhile, it shows Bellow's credo that art aims at achieving order in the midst of chaos and that a novelist, beginning with disorder and disharmony, goes towards order by an unknown process of the imagination. The conflict of Bellow's protagonists falls into crisis because of the breaking up of the real and the spiritual, and this in turn forces him to examine the relationship between individual and society. After painful reflection, the protagonists realize that they must first change their understanding of the world, rearrange their principles of behavior and high expectations towards the world, accept the real society, and combine the spiritual world and the real society with the love and understanding between hearts. Actually, love is the only thing that makes reality a reality. Thus, they gain the correct attitude towards life and are able to coexist in the pluralistic world. The realization also makes them able to face life actively and makes it possible for them to find the meaning of life in the real world. In this way, the conformity of the relationship between individual and society is achieved.

4.2. The solution to the conflict in *Seize the Day*

After the analysis of Bellow's vision and artist credo, we turn to the question—how can the conformity of the relationship between individual and society be maintained in *Seize the Day*? Finally, the protagonist Tommy achieves reconciliation with the unsympathetic society that either knows or cares to know of his existence, and with the world that offers no spiritual guidance^[19]. At the end of the novel, Tommy is “moved forward by the pressure of the crowd” into a chapel where the funeral of a stranger is held. He breaks down in great grief. As he looks down on the corpse of the stranger, “with great stifling sorrow, almost admiration, Wilhelm nodded and nodded.” Tommy gazes with new understandings: “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 tears. He heard it and sank deeper than sorrow, through torn sobs, and cries toward the consummation of his heart's ultimate need.” For Tommy sinks deeper than sorrow—not to sorrow, but beyond—to a certain peace. Tommy's own tears supply the waters for his baptism. They come from deep within, from his own sources, from the personal and immediately heartfelt understanding that man in his mortality has little choice but to ‘seize the day.’ As he looks down on the corpse of the stranger, he also understands or at least feels the basic relationship between himself and all men—a relationship established by the bond of mortality, in spite of superficial and man-made barriers. Tommy is no longer isolated, but absorbs the full meaning from the line of poetry that has earlier slipped from his mind: “Love that well which thou must leave ere long.” Bellow implies that the understanding allows Tommy the dignity of position in modern society. The world carries on as before, as cold and indifferent as ever, but there is observable in Tommy a subtle transformation that ensures his future survival. It seems Tommy's revelation is Bellow's answer to human beings' dilemma in modern society^[20]. The end arouses some positive apprehensions of what it really means to be a human being. Bellow is stating a case beyond dispute—seize the day. Man should choose dignity, live in harmony, and complete his own life. Tommy should not waste time lamenting and suffering from past mistakes and past memories.

5. Conclusion

Saul Bellow's works can be regarded as a mirror to reflect the situation of human beings—the conflict between individuals and society in modern society. His works have already transcended the Jewish Label or the

American label and reached general humanity well. *Seize the Day* is without an exception. The study of the conflict reflected in his novels has realistic meanings. It is beneficial for us to understand the general situation of human existence in modern society, find the problem that man is facing, and find an effective solution.

Disclosure statement

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