1. **Topic sentences for all body paragraphs Mrs. Bowe**
2. **Tying in your evidence to your thesis 9 Dec. 2014**
3. **Evidence is properly cited (Bellow 86). or (Foster 161). Period 2**



Accepting Sorrow



The ineffable suffering of humanity is a sorrow which many authors have addressed throughout time. Saul Bellow, in *Seize the Day,* approaches this sorrow in his protagonist Tommy Wilhelm Just as we cannot see below the surface of many ponds and lakes, we cannot and Tommy cannot see below the superficial to view the bottom and cause of his pain. It is not until Tommy is finally sinking and accepting his fate that he touches the bottom, touches his pain, and finally touches his true identity. He can shake off the perception that others are weighing him down and accept that it is his own human sorrow that is on his own back. Through this name changing charlatan, we too can feel our heart strings tugged by that elusive fish of indescribable sorrow which afflicts humanity. Bellow explores the difference between what we perceive reflected off the surface of the lake of humanity and what is really in the water through his characterization of Tommy Wilhelm as a superficial floater, through his contrasting settings of the hotel, the baths, and the chapel, and through his extensive use of water imagery. Through these devices, Bellow reveals that until humanity is willing to accept the reality that life is sorrow and is willing to submerge itself in the great water of sorrow, it will not be able to rise above. In the end, there is a spark of hope for Tommy to rise back up out of the water if only to face his own mortality.



Tommy Wilhelm is not satisfied with himself. He is willing to forgo his past, such as when he changes his name from Wilhelm Adler to Tommy Wilhelm. However, with turning his back on his identity, he also begins the process of turning his back on himself. Were Tommy on a quest, which as Thomas Foster states is always a “search for self-knowledge,” he would be an abject failure (3). After all “four-five year old men either have self-knowledge or they are never going to get it” (Foster 3). Tommy is in a state of perpetual adolescence which is perhaps why he cannot recognize the sorrowful truth in front of his face. He prefers to view the world and himself superficially. He is concerned with his appearance but not enough to really look at himself to make a judgment. “He believed – he hoped – he looked passably well” (Bellow 1). He is unsure if he even appeared to be making it in the world. He is a fake human with fake emotions, constantly believing that other people are weighing him down and burdening him. It is when he loses everything through misplacing his trust in Tamkin and when he looks into the face of a dead stranger, that he finally recognizes himself. He becomes a kin to the stranger. He recognizes the “black,” the void of humanity, beneath all men’s skin as he gapes at the open coffin (Bellow 113). He is finally hooked into his life by this “man – another human creature” and realizes that he is the burden upon others. “Oh Father, what do I ask of you? … And Olive? … you must protect me…” (Bellow 113). His lack of seeing reality finally catches up to him as he begins his descent into his own ineffable sorrow, past his superficial life, past his desire for easy success. Tommy is now Wilhelm who has depth by recognizes that his floating upon the surface of life has ended and his true swimming must begin if he is to survive. Bellow shows the problems with floaters like Tommy though his skimming through this one day of failure but also emphasizes this description through the settings of Tommy’s journey.



*Next paragraph is about setting – focus on past glories; decent into the baths under the hotel (like Orpheus?); reconciliation in a funeral parlor chapel – nondenominational – perhaps a commonality among all humans?*

*Followed by a paragraph about all the water imagery, particularly the one with the fish biting on a line as it represents Tommy’s feelings towards his father*

Why is it that humans suffer this angst, this unspeakable knowable sorrow? Is it part of the human condition to seek to put a name to that which weighs upon us? Is it part of the knowledge that we, too, will eventually die no matter how much success or failure we achieve in our lives? That we “love that much which [we] must leave ere long”? Saul Bellow uses Wilhelm to demonstrate how in the pursuit of success we as humans often forget to pursue our own humanity. Wilhelm is sinking, but it is his recognition of his humanity and his need that creates the possibility that he will rise up, renewed and reborn. No matter how much we would like to perceive that life is meant to be all glorious happiness, until we recognize that humanity has sorrows and that we are meant to feel our sorrows, we will not truly live, only float along at the mercy of other currents.

