

Student's Name

Professor's Name

Course

Date

***God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater*: “A poor man with gumption can still elevate himself out of the mire.”**

God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater is arguably one of Kurt Vonnegut's the bestselling novels. Having published the novel in the 1965, Vonnegut's main idea relates more to the present world as it reflected then. Similar to many of his other novels, *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* discusses real world issues with a mixture of humor, irony, satire and suspense. However, critics presume that some of his ideas in the novel are hard to understand. When developing the story line in the novel, *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater*, Vonnegut through the senator says, “*A poor man with gumption can still elevate himself out of the mire* (Vonnegut, 76).” At this point, Vonnegut's discussion is complex and thus there is a need to investigate his intentions by considering the characters of Eliot, the Senator and Fred Rosewater. It would then lead to an examination of how true or untrue this quote is with regard to the three characters.

Eliot Rosewater, the main character in Vonnegut's novel is young millionaire and army veteran who has returned to his hometown during the great depression. Many people were poor in his hometown, and like many rich families, the *Rosewater Family* had started a Rosewater Foundation for the poor (Simpson 262-272). Through this foundation, Eliot being the oldest son of the creator; Senator Lister Ames Rosewater, was supposed to be the president. Unlike the other members of the family who were focused on amassing wealth and maintaining the family

values, Eliot was a different person. Simply put, he was more like the black sheep in his family and always against the values of his father; the senator (Finkle, 1). In his quote, Vonnegut denotes that a poor aggressive person can still improve their situation through hard work (Vonnegut 8-24). Interestingly, Eliot Rosewater seems to be a good part in Vonnegut's discussion. Through his satirical representation of Eliot, it is plausible to assume that coming out of poverty requires more than getting help from the rich (Simpson 261-272). Throughout the novel, Eliot is portrayed as a kind person who intends to change the lives of the poor by giving them money. However, the author uses irony to depict that even though Eliot's actions were good and showed his care for the poor, he was a careless individual (Hubbard 78). In one way or another, this proves the senator's quote that if a poor man has the passion, only they can elevate themselves from poverty. Vonnegut uses Eliot's character and actions to portray how the rich interact and perceive the poor. Eliot's egalitarian initiatives make his family and friends to assume that he is insane and delusional (Simpson 270). However, even though Eliot's acts of love are satirical, the author leaves room for the audience to appreciate his dignity and love for the poor. Eventually, his efforts to help the poor seem to be fruitless yet Vonnegut's main justifies this by touching on Eliot's alcoholic and delusional side.

Nevertheless, unlike Eliot, his father the senator is appalled by his son's actions. In fact, through his speech on the floor of congress, he feels that the poor do not deserve mercy or help. In his words, the senator feels that his son is, "*a chronic drunk* (Vonnegut, 8)." The senator compares America to the time of Caesar Augustus where people were poor and liberal. In his opinion, the impact of liberalism is worse than the resulting conservatism (Hubbard 78). During the time of Caesar Augustus, the lazy were punished and as the Senator notes, they should be equally treated today as they were treated then (Vonnegut 8-15). Prior to saying the quote, the

senator acknowledges that American's have been taught to hate the lazy and the poor as if to appreciate this doctrine of hatred. Vonnegut through the senator's speech further notes that the do-gooders like Eliot Rosewater had gone against the basic principles of the American founding fathers. The senator says, "*let us force American to be as good as they should be (Vonnegut, 9).*" Through Vonnegut's quote, the senator's character in one way shows that the quote is true, but in another instance attempts to prove that the quote wrong. Simply put, when he suggest that the poor should be forced to be as good as they should be, then it proves that for someone to elevate themselves from poverty, they need the help of another person. Vonnegut's views are not isolated because this was the ultimate role of the *Rosewater Foundation* (Simpson 270-272). However, this is followed by the irony in the senator's view that the poor should not be supported. Indeed, Vonnegut paints a picture which reflects the state of today's society and their struggle to elevate poverty (Hubbard 45-51). While the senator had acquired much of his wealth through the foundation, he uses the Eliot Rosewater to discredit the need to help the poor. Through Vonnegut's use of the senator, the poor man can still work through sweat and blood and change their situation just like the founding father of America. Working hard and attaining wealth go hand in hand in respect to the law of nature (Simpson 261-272). All people have been born in a free world and thus they have an equal chance to success if they are motivated to work and struggle. In fact the senator says, "*Who thought people should not ever have to struggle for anything, hand bugged the logic of the system beyond all recognition (Vonnegut, 9).*" In this quote, the senator thinks that helping people with money as the do-gooders is equivalent to working against the system. In short, Vonnegut seeks to prove that success is based on a person's gumption.

Nevertheless, by introducing Fred Rosewater to his storyline, Vonnegut leaves the audience to presume that the quote may not be true. Fred Rosewater was a distant cousin of Eliot and he was the rightful heir of the *Rosewater Foundation* if Eliot was proved to be legally insane (Vonnegut, 27-41). He worked as an insurance prospect at a drugstore in Indiana. Interestingly, he did not know that he was related to the rosewater family. From Vonnegut's narration, Fred Rosewater was educated and he was mostly welcome into the home of the wealthy (Finkle 1). Ironically, Eliot's wife considered Fred to be poor. Yet he worked really hard to earn a few hundred dollars. Vonnegut says, "*Poor Fred worked like hell for the few dollars he brought home once in a while...*" (Vonnegut, 39)." Through this quote, Vonnegut proves that a poor person cannot elevate their status regardless of how hard he or she works. The author's inclusion of Fred Rosewater gives an interesting turn to the story. Through Fred's character, Vonnegut presumes that a poor person is worth dead than alive (Simpson 261-272). This proves the senator's quote untrue because regardless of how hard a person like Fred worked, he was poor and always thought of suicide. This shows that even though Fred was that hardworking, he was always poor and never achieved the expectations of his family. Similar to many of the characters in Vonnegut's novel, Fred is suffering from a mental syndrome (Hubbard 62-71). Fred's poverty had made him to think of suicide. At the coffee shop, Fred Rosewater discussed suicide as the best option for the poor because they do not have to suffer with work and money anymore. Everything that Fred Rosewater represents goes against the senator's quote. Vonnegut says, "*Lila glanced at Fred with pity—because he was poor...*" (Vonnegut, 44)." Fred Rosewater's character helps to prove the quote untrue but spread Vonnegut's theme of kindness. Ideally, kindness does not have to come from the rich but it is a basic human virtue (Simpson 261-272). In one way or another, the author leaves the audience to pity for the poor

Fred Rosewater while assuming that being rich is a matter of luck and opportunity. Vonnegut later reveals Fred's discovery that he is an ancestor of the Rosewater family and this turned everything around (Finkle 1). After reading the story in the newspaper and talking to Norman Mushari, Fred fainted by the thought of becoming rich if the court case proved that Eliot was legally insane (Vonnegut 59-60). From Vonnegut's point of view and use of Fred's character, wealth is a birth right and thus a poor person can do little to elevate their situation.

In short, Vonnegut's novel, *God Bless Mr. Rosewater* is as relevant today as it was in 1965. The book undertakes to explore the most interesting social experiment of all times. Vonnegut's use of satire and the three characters; *Eliot, the Senator and Fred Rosewater*, Vonnegut present different but fascinating view points to the senator's quote. However, he does not discredit the work of Eliot Rosewater and he does so good to appreciate the do-gooders and the work they do to make the world a better place.



Want a similar paper?

ORDER NOW

Work Cited

Finkle, David. "First Nighter: "God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater" Revived With Mixed Results This Weekend." *HuffPost*, 30 July 2017, www.huffingtonpost.com/david-finkle/first-nighter-god-bless-y_b_11267744.html.

Vonnegut, Kurt. *God bless you, Mr. Rosewater: or, Pearls before swine*. Dial Press Trade Paperbacks, 1965.

Simpson, Josh. "' This Promising of Great Secrets": Literature, Ideas, and the (Re) Invention of Reality in Kurt Vonnegut's *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater*, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, and *Breakfast of Champions*" *Fantasies of an Impossibly Hospitable World*": Science Fiction and Madness in Vonnegut's Troutean Trilogy." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 45.3 (2004): 261-272.

Hubbard, James Robert. *A Moral Being in an Aesthetic World: Being in the Early Novels of Kurt Vonnegut*. Diss. Wake Forest University, 2015.