

Book report

Literature



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The book under analysis is the work by Frey James My Friend Leonard. This choice was spurred by controversial reaction it provoked among the public and literary critics. This novel is, actually, a sequel to the book A Million Little Pieces published a year before. The genre of My Friend Leonard may be defined as a memoir though, as the author himself admits, it contains a certain degree of fictional elements. Frey James is an extraordinary figure in modern American literature. His own biography of a person who experienced problems with alcoholism, drug addiction, and even being a convicted criminal provides Frey with the manifold material which he successfully employed in the memoir.

The main character of the memoir is obviously author's namesake James who serves time in a prison. After jail release James returns to Lilly, his girlfriend, to Chicago but the life outside the prison is far from harmony. James finds his girlfriend dead after committing suicide overnight. Being struck by this dreadful discovery the main character still does not go to seeds; he decides to stay in Chicago and takes up job of a bouncer in Chicago pubs. However feeling of rage and the weight of reality makes James be scared of relapse thus he appeals to his old friend Leonard.

Since their meeting the story assumes its main plotline – the relations between two men, the relations which border upon the friendship and father-son bonds. Leonard is an Italian mobster who offered James to be his “stepfather” when they both were in rehabilitation: “ I would like you to be my son.” Leonard gladly relieves his friend and “ son” and helps him to get him on his feet.

As the time lapses the scene of action together with the main character transfers from Chicago to Los Angeles. James changes his activity. Now he is a writer. He still maintains close relationship with Leonardo, who remains his faithful friend and tutelary father. The relations that develop between them are presented from deeply psychological side. The author aims to show the deep feeling of people who far from ideal figures still are human and exhibit the best example of the relations called friendship.

The depiction of feelings expressed to animals is as masterfully executed as the feelings among humans. Thus while reading the passage where James takes his dog to the hospital to put it to sleep and the farewell scene makes the reader feel the same emotions. “ The vet inserts the needle, depresses the plunger. Cassius yelps like a little puppy, my big tough pitbull feels the sting, I hold him as his blood courses through his veins I hold him as he stumbles, as he falls, I hold him as he dies. I look into his eyes and I tell him I love him and I’ll miss him and I’m so so so sorry. He dies in my arms and I hold him and I cry, I cry, I cry.”

Returning to the main character and his friend Leonard we witness how their relations arise to its peak point and suddenly Leonardo vanishes. After insistent search James finally finds Leonard and learns that Leonard is gay, suffers from AIDS, and lives his last days. James remains with him and spends these few days near Leonard.

Speaking about the mood left after reading the story, it is a deep impression created by its emotionality and at the same time this emotionality at some moments seems exaggerated not typically for that kind of genre.

Nevertheless the style does not allow the story turning into melancholy narrative. Frey writes in short simple sentences, often neglects punctuation and thus creates easy reading that develops fluently. As a result we receive favourably distinguishable prose in the genre of memoir but with flavour of captivating fiction.

Reference:

Frey James (2005). *My Friend Leonard*. New York: Riverhead.