

Chapter VI

Conclusion

Asked in his later years what part of his life he regretted, Saul Bellow told an interviewer, "I gave a lot of time to women and if I had my time again I don't think I would do it that way ... I married several times with my ends in view and I didn't reckon on the ends of the wives. Then I found myself being carried out of my depth." This quotation is important because it is like a passage directly coming out of his novels. In More Die of Heartbreak, Kenneth warns Benn about being carried out of his depth due to women. It seems his various male characters are in a way recognizable version of himself. They are overeducated, but equally clumsy in the china world of love, marriage, family, fatherhood, and celebrity.

But, whether Bellow's male characters are recognizable version of the writer himself has not been our concern in this thesis. As mentioned earlier, it is irrelevant to look into Bellow's own views, as the writer's, about women, love, marriage and heterosexual relations. Indeed, holding on the essential principle of new criticism, we must explore the text and not the writer. Therefore, the preceding survey has largely focused on the texts. The goal of this thesis was to show how patriarchal assumptions, gender ideologies and cultural code of gender relations have been incorporated in Bellow's texts. Indeed, his text has only re-articulated the old patriarchal signification of women.

The second chapter of this thesis elaborates on the theoretical basis on which the whole projects lies. To grasp the soul and the nature of feminist reading of literary texts, a holistic view of the matter was imperative. Although critics such as Simon De Boveauvoir, Mary Elleman, and Kate Millette were among the first to reveal literary history of women's images and to discuss the dominant stereotyped images of women characters in literature, the history of literary criticism goes back hundred years in time. Thus, in the first part of the second chapter, the attempt was to outline the history of feminist criticism from the very beginning to recent years.

In the course of its historical developments, feminist criticism had to undergo a self transformation due to its encounter with disciplines such as Marxism, psychoanalysis, post structuralism, post-colonial theory, and ethnic study. Presently feminist criticism enjoys an unprecedented diversity. To have a view of the variety of paradigms in feminist criticism, in the second part of the chapter, the major contours of disagreements within feminist criticism were outlined.

Out of this diversity, one approach takes the question of how women are represented in literature. In the third part of the second chapter, the attempt was to show that the representation of women in literature constitutes an important part of patriarchal culture under which women learn to shape their own image. Nevertheless, the basic assumption of women's image approach is open to discussion. The view of literary works as ideologically distorting the reality of women brings calls back the old question of realism. In its crudest version, the demands of women's image approach may reduce all literature to rather naïve forms of reports or autobiographies. It may kill artistic creativity in literature.

Judith Fetterly, as one of the most well-known American feminist critics, took up the issue of how reading male literature absorbs the reader into the logic of patriarchal text. Her emphasis on the reading as a process of identification with male system of values makes her a critic different from earlier feminists in women's image approach. Indeed, she argues that not only the text, but also the way one reads a text contributes to the manipulation of the reader into a passive self- image. To resist this manipulating aspect of literature, he proposes *resisting reading*. Judith Fetterley's theory of *resisting reading* is thoroughly discussed in the last part of the second chapter.

Theoretically, Judith Fetterly's theory in her The Resisting Reading has been the focal point of this thesis. This critical approach rejects hierarchical modes of reading which grants the author a godlike power to be humbly obeyed. Instead,

it argues that the reader has every right to distrust the text- the writer's creation- and measure it against her or his own experiences. According to Fetterley's, female readers have to be aware of the dangers of being assenting readers. These dangers arise especially from the fact that woman readers have already been raised in a language system and literature that still presumes its writers and readers all men.

Resisting reading, as a feminist approach, advises women to be aware of impalpable designs, male- authored texts have on them. These texts *immasculate* women, so female readers are manipulated into an experience from which they are excluded. Indeed, she is asked to identify with a selfhood that defines itself in opposition to women. In other words, she is asked to identify against her own selfhood. In this way, women readers are doubly oppressed, not only by not seeing their experiences articulated, clarified, and legitimized in the text, but also by endless division of self against self, through identifying with male selfhood. The consequence of this division of selfhood is endless alienations with female selfhood. Women readers are constantly being reminded that to be male is to be universal. The goal of resisting reading, then, is to disrupt this process of implanting the male mind in the readers.

Nevertheless, resisting reading, in spite of all its merits, leaves certain questions unanswered. Where does the text get its power to draw us into its logic? Why do some overtly sexist texts, for example, some of Bellow's novels, manage to remain fascinating even after being subjected to feminist reading? On the other hand, it seems Fetterly sees patriarchy as a unified and malignant ideology contaminating innocent and virtuous female consciousness. Such an assertion undermines Fetterley's otherwise powerful and persuasive arguments with the same kind of essentialism that we usually see in the works of Irigaray. In other words, as soon as *essence* is highlighted, there is a temptation to polarize, and uphold *difference* behind and beyond history and culture and ironically this is the very point patriarchy has always favored throughout the history.

Drawing on the theoretical basis, developed in the second chapter, the third chapter examines Bellow's female characters in Herzog, Mr. Sammler's Planet, and More Die of Heartbreak. The goal was to focus on how Bellow weaves his women images into impalpable designs with underlying patriarchy of which women readers are not usually aware. Indeed, the attempt was to demonstrate the extent to which Bellow's female figures are employed to alienate the women readers with female selfhood. Many women, of course, appear in his novels, but they are rarely given voice and most of them are delineated very stereotypically. Major roles are usually given to men while women function on the sideline.

In Herzog, woman characters lack the same depth, range, and complexity as the male hero who experiences various crises. In other words, they do not go beyond types and images to achieve the complexity of believable human beings. They are three predominant female types in Herzog. Madeline clearly belongs to castrator type; she has all the features of such a type. Daisy, Phoebe and Sarah Herzog can be grouped as maternal, since their main trait is to protect the family in spite of all the problems. Ramona and Sono, however, belong to exotic type.

With these images of women in Herzog, which is regarded as a major success in Bellow's career, the basic question is how it affects the consciousness of female readers. Is it possible for a female reader to identify with one of these women characters in the novel? Can Madeline with that blind hatred be a character with whom a female reader identifies? Or Daisy with that servant-like house holding? Or Ramona or Sono as merely existing in the novel to pamper Herzog with sex? What about Sarah Herzog? Is she attractive enough for a modern woman reader to identify with? It seems the responses will not be positive.

Obviously, woman characters in the novel exist only in relation to Herzog. As Abraham Bezanker maintains, "women characters reveal some aspects of male protagonist without any substance of their own (58). In other words, female characters are in the novel to shed light on the intricacy of Herzog's psyche. To

reveal Herzog's masochism, Bellow creates Madeline, one of the most castrating female characters in the history of fiction. Ramona functions as a sexual professional in the novel to restore Herzog's virility after his being sexually damaged by Madeline. Daisy in Herzog represents another part of his character, which longs for order and stability in the home. Through Sono Qguki, we understand that Herzog extends his need for a mother even to the sexual realm. The memory of mother Herzog, constantly coming to the fore of his mind, is to show how Herzog clings to his childhood self- image.

Examining the images of women in Mr. Sammler's Planet, the attempt was to show how evidently sexist Bellow's text is in its portrayal of women in the novel. This prejudice is, above all, evident in the images he gives of women in the book. What is the judgment of readers about Margotte whose silly and talkative conversation is violently stopped by her intellectually powerful husband? Similarly, how can readers identify with Shula with her "hunting through Broadway trash Baskets" (MSP19). Or what do readers think about Angela who "has done it in too many ways with too many men", and her father calls her Bitch, Cow! Or Sloppy cunt. (MSP 143)

The text is barren in Mr. Sammler's Planet, so that readers have no choice except identifying with Sammler himself. Other characters either male or female do not have enough space to compete with Sammler in significance. On the other hand, when Sammler is identified, his angle of vision and resulting tone cannot be easily avoided. In other words, the misogyny in the book is not something avoidable; it is an inseparable part of the very structure of the novel. Indeed, readers yield their awareness to a person whose misogyny overwhelms the whole text.

The images of women in More Die of Heartbreak are not much different. There is no woman character to be admired by the readers. There are such images of women that makes the readers alienated with women. These images

dichotomize men as balanced, superior, intellectually capable, morally dependable and sexually admirable and women as *lack* and *other*. Through the images the text gives of women, the idyllic aspects of love and romantic part of marriages disappear. What remains is just a literal description of women which kills any idealization of love and marriage. "When it becomes a matter of limbs, members and organs, Eros faces annihilation" (MDH 90).

Fourth chapter provides a resisting reading of Herzog. Based on the earlier argument in the second chapter of this thesis, it is an oversimplification to suggest that a literary text is a monolithic, one-dimensional hegemonic construct. Therefore, it provides some spaces for resistance. Indeed, through intense focusing on the text, a resisting reader can locate the breaks, gaps, fissures and discontinuities, and can make use of them to go beyond what the writer tries to enforce as the only way of reading.

In resisting reading, one reads the text as it was not meant to be read. Indeed, the text should be read against itself in an act of resistance. In this kind of reading, a female reader is not surrendering her consciousness to a male author's hands to shape as he wishes. Rather she approaches the text to see if it- at least parts of it or a different reading of it- is accommodating to her consciousness. As the fourth chapter demonstrates, in a resisting reading, Bellow's *Herzog* yields a totally different account of the story which is much more accommodating to female selfhood.

In the fourth chapter, the attempt was to thwart the text's politics to exonerate Herzog as an innocent man castrated by an evil woman. Indeed, the goal was to see to what extent it is possible for a resisting reader to use the very text to give a new image of woman character. In other words, the attempt was to see Madeline not as a *bitch*, but as a resisting female who does not give in Herzog's patriarchal indulgence. Rather, she directly goes against patriarchy without making any concession to historically constructed gender ideology. She is an emancipated

woman but unlike Ramona who is trying to make a compromise through finding a husband for herself, she subverts the whole institution of marriage. Madeline marries Herzog, but, unlike Daisy, Herzog's first wife does not succumb to Herzog's whimsical ego. As a result, she enters a power struggle with him instead. This power struggle is central to the whole novel. Their struggle is a fighting for mastery. Madeline becomes the first woman whom Herzog can never overpower. "She gives a sense of significant encounter- with life- a beautiful, brilliant person *with a fate of her own* as a woman" (Herzog 106, Italic mine). Not being able to master her, Herzog's pompous masculinity is shattered.

Therefore, in a resisting reading, the text of Bellow's Herzog drops its false solidity and reveals its underlying politics of gender. From one point of view, Herzog is a study of the distortion of modern human relations, the failure of modern marriage and the comic incompatibility of heterosexual love with the male quest for higher consciousness. Nevertheless, the way Bellow renders all these themes leads to negative stereotypes of women in his text. Indeed, behind its intelligence, sophistication, observation, there is a virulent hostility to women, which calls upon the sympathies of readers. The gender policy as such not only fails to illuminate the subject of gender relations, but also succeeds very well in reinscribing the old damaging female stereotypes.

Fifth chapter focuses on the theme of misogyny in Mr. Sammler's Planet and More Die of Heartbreak. In Mr. Sammler's Planet, Bellow presents us with a male character, Mr. Sammler, a seeking, dissatisfied intellectual who seems not prepared for a modern existence that is wild and chaotic. With such a male hero, a distinct part of the pain in reading the novel originates from the fact that Bellow's readers are all invited to follow a moral consciousness whose explicit revulsion from sexuality amounts to his hatred of women. This hatred even comes between him and his daughter as a modern woman.

In Sammler's opinion, the modern women, revolting against the traditional female role of service to men and family, change into insatiable monsters, destroying civilization in their passion for self-gratification. Indeed, the whole text is revolving around this view of Sammler. All the women in the novel, from his daughter Shula to his niece Angela, are portrayed as restless creatures destroying everything in their mania for self- fulfillment. The unusual point about the women characters in Mr. Sammler's Planet is that they are not lovers, wives, or former wives of the protagonists.

Misogyny in More Die of Heartbreak is the result of a comic incongruity between the male protagonist's idealization of romantic love, on one hand, and the narrator's cruel, arrogant, and taunting depictions of women. Misogynous in his depiction of women, Bellow constructs a drama about the male evasion of love and marriage and the expulsion of women from the male higher sensitivity. The main character in this drama is Kenneth, the narrator of the story, whose misogynist attitude is fuelled by fury at his father's success with women, his own failure with Treckie, his ex-girlfriend and his childish fear of losing Benn to ladies.

In More Die of Heartbreak, the dominant voice in the text openly invites readers to despise women and blame them for the suffering of men. We are co-opted to understand Kenneth and blame ungrateful Treckie for rejecting him. We are influenced as readers to admire Benn for his classic view of love and heterosexual relations. We are also pleased with Benn displaying disgust at the literal view of sex and women. Through our absorption into the male logic of the text, we pass only a light judgment on these misogynous characters, as according to the text, Kenneth and Benn are lovable types after all. This co-option into the logic of patriarchy closes up any prospect of undistorted view of heterosexual relations.

In spite of all the intricate aspects of Bellow's text, one point is clear. The readers never get clear pictures of the women characters in his text. As the

preceding study shows, the images of women is distorted by the rage of dominant male narrators at women's increasing struggle to question their traditional female role of service to men and family. Indeed, these narrators, due to their American and Jewish backgrounds, are ideologically conditioned in their viewing women. The center of consciousness located in masochistic male characters is another cause for the distortion of women images. Psychologically viewed, Bellow's male characters blame their own inability to have fruitful heterosexual relations on women.

Providing no space for women characters to tell their side of the story, Bellow's novels, selected in this study, invokes sympathy and amusement at destructive male signification of *women*. Indeed, in case of not resisting the text, women readers learn that the ontological status of women is nothing more than what they see in the text. But what is the effect of what they see in the text? Women readers are usually being coerced into sympathetic recognition of male characters as the unfortunate sexual victims of women. They turn against themselves seeing what women do to the charismatic, innocent men of thinking.

Thus, Bellow's text is really interesting to read. He was the most acclaimed of his generation. He was also compared to Faulkner in the earlier part of the century. After Hemingway's anti-intellectual style he brought American letters the notions of intellect and high-mindedness. However, in spite of his high-mindedness, Bellow's politics of gender seems not much different from that of his anti-intellectual forerunners. Although he has tried to thoroughly examine heterosexual relations in post World War II America, he has failed to escape the patriarchal signification of women.