Chapter III

Woman Characters in Saul Bellow’s Herzog, Mr.Sammler’s Planet, and More Die of Heartbreak

In all descriptions of women, one only common factor is that all use the same standard of measurement, the characteristics of men are the norm, those of women subsidiary.

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The Images of Women in Herzog

Her speech continued for several minutes. Her sentences were well formed. This speech had been rehearsed and it seemed that he had been waiting for the performance to begin.

Their was not a marriage that could last. Madeleine had never loved him. She was telling him that. ‘It's painful to have to say I never loved you, I never will love you either', she said. 'So there's no point in
going on.'

Herzog said, 'I do love you Madeline.'

[...]

'You should hold on that feeling,' she said, "I believe it's true. You do love me. But I think you also understand what a humiliation it is to me to admit defeat in this marriage.' (Herzog 15)

This passage is a good example of how Bellow renders his politics of gender in his novel, Herzog. Here, in this passage, Madeleine, the protagonist's wife, wants to put the end to her married life with her husband, Herzog, but the way Bellow illustrates this moment is as significant as the event itself. What impresses the reader here is the sheer dominance of woman over the man. As the text itself demonstrates, the whole moment is acted out as a stage performance in which there is just one performer, Madeleine, the wife. Like all stage performers, Madeline speaks out well-formed sentences with good command, as if the whole speech had been rehearsed. In this power play, however, Herzog, the husband, is forced out to take the role of a viewer who has no choice but to watch an event in which the destiny of his marriage life is decided.

Apart from the theatricality of the situation, the words exchanged between Madeline and Herzog demonstrates how dominant the wife is. She uses never when she speaks of her love toward Herzog. Herzog, however, uses the word do when he speaks of his love toward Madeline. In addition, in their conversation, Herzog mentions her name, while Madeline never addresses him by name. Indeed, she gets the control of the situation in her hands and manipulates Herzog as she wishes. This handling of the situation by Madeline becomes much more effective as the conversation goes on:

Step by step, Madeline rose in distinction, in brilliance, in insight. Her colour grew very rich, and her brows, and that Byzantine nose of hers, rose moved; her blue eyes gained by the flush that kept
deeper, rising from her chest and her throat. She was in an ecstasy of consciousness. It occurred to Herzog that she had beaten him so badly, her pride was so fully satisfied, that there was an overflow of strength into her intelligence. He realized that she was witnessing one of the very greatest moments of her life. (Herzog 15)

Indeed, both sides know their positions in this power play. Madeline enjoys the dominant position and tries to use it in beating her husband and Herzog, beaten and humiliated, pictures "what might happened if instead of listening so intensely and thoughtfully he had hit Madeline in the face. What if he had knocked her down, clutched her hair, dragged her screaming and fighting around the room, flogged her until her buttocks bled" (Herzog 16).

Nevertheless, this mental violence was soon overcome. "He was afraid he was really given in secret to this sort of brutality"(Herzog16). He thought of telling her to leave the house. "After all it was his house"(Herzog16), but he did not dare. He still thought perhaps he would win by the appeal of passivity, of personality, win on the ground of being, after all, Moses Elkanah Herzog- a good man, and Madeline's particular benefactor. He had done everything for her- everything "(Herzog16).

Without question, the most telling statement in the above quotation is its last sentence: *He had done everything for her*. Moreover, he has appeals of personality, of being Moses Elkanah Herzog, of being a good man, even of passivity. But all these attributes are worthless for Madeline. She does not care how good Herzog has been to her, or who he is. She is a type for whom any relationship with others is nothing but some sort of power-play.

What the ordinary reader is experiencing here is what the writer intended. Saul Bellow tries to show how Madeline exercises her castrating influence on sensitive -souled Herzog, and how the man has no choice but his passivity to win the battle already been won by his wife. Indeed, all these images conspire to
convince the reader of Madeline's sheer malice and Herzog's helpless loving soul. In the last part of their conversation, Herzog asks:

‘Have you discussed this decision with Doctor Edvig? What does he think?’

‘What difference could his opinion make to me? He can’t tell me what to do. He can only help me to understand…I went to a lawyer. She said’ (Herzog 16)

Madeline's arrogant way of answering Herzog's question sets the tone of the whole conversation. Nobody can tell her what to do. She is so self-confident that he does not feel any need to consult with a psychologist about such a serious decision. She had already gone to a lawyer without even telling her husband. She holds the ultimate power.

After the conversation, Herzog, unprepared for the event, tries to make himself busy, because "he couldn't allow himself to feel crippled. He dreaded the depth of feeling he would eventually have to face, when he could no longer call upon his eccentricities for relief" (Herzog17).

Reading this sentence, one is persuaded about Herzog's suffering caused by Madeline's decision. Indeed, he is not brave enough to face what Madeline is going to do. Therefore, he has to suffer, and this suffering is not unusual for him as "there was a flavor of subjugation in his love for Madeleine. Since she was domineering, and since he loved her, he had to accept the flavor that was given"(Herzog14). Thus suffering was a part of his love for Madeleine, it was a price, which he had to pay. To have a better understanding of the relationship between Herzog and Madeleine, the readers must look at the analysis of the thematic construct of the novel.
Herzog opens with Moses Herzog at his country house in Ludeyville, Massachusetts, in the Berkshire, in midsummer. The narrator describes him "fallen under a spell," and as a result," writing letters to everyone under the sun", including family-dead or alive-friends, ex-friends, politicians, philosophers, historical figures, while there, he reflects on his life focusing especially on the past few months. His recollections of these past few months constitute the rest of the novel, until the story returns to the present time, with Herzog in Ludeyville. He has recently learned that his ex-wife Madeline, is living with his friend Valentine Gershbach, and the two had been lovers while she and Herzog were still married. Herzog writes letters because of his overwhelming need to "explain, to have it out, to justify, to put in perspective, to clarify, to make amends (Herzog 8).

He thinks of returning to New York to see Ramona, his lady friend, but instead flees to Martha's Vineyard to visit some friends. He arrives at their house, but writes a note saying that he has to leave. He goes to New York to start finishing some unfinished business, including regaining the custody of his daughter, Junie. After spending a night with Romano, he heads to courthouse to meet with his lawyer to discuss his plans, and ends up witnessing a series of tragicomic court hearings, including one where a woman charged with beating her three-year-old to death by flinging him against a wall. Moses, already worried after receiving a letter from Junie's babysitter about an incident where Valentine, his ex-friend, and the lover of his ex-wife, locked Junie in the car while he and Madeleine argued inside the house, heads to Chicago. He goes to an aunt's house and picks up an antique pistol with two bullets in it, forming a childish plan of killing Madeleine and Valentine and running off with Junie.

Predictably, plan goes awry when he sees Valentine giving Junie a bath and realizes that Junie is in no danger. The next day, after taking his daughter to the aquarium, Herzog is involved in a car accident and ends up charged with possession of a loaded weapon. His brother, the coldly rational Will, picks him up and tries to get him back on his feet. Herzog heads to Ludleyville, where his
but his brother meets him and tries to convince him to check himself into an institution. But Herzog, who had previously considered doing just that, is now coming to terms with his life. Ramona comes up to join him for a night - much to Will's surprise - and Herzog begins making plans to fix up the house, which, like his life, needs repair but is still structurally sound. Herzog closes by saying that he does not need to write any more letters.

**Herzog** is a novel of ideas. “The ideas are so profuse in the novel, and are so clearly Bellow’s own, that Herzog seems merely Bellow’s spokesman” (Clayton 188). In addition, Bellow narrates his story from the point of view of one of the most intellectual protagonists of his novels. Indeed, Herzog’s mind is cut off from others through words. “He is living in words, not in the world and letters far from attaching him to other people make him more distant and unreal” (Clayton 191). In a sense, Herzog uses words to gain control over the world, to keep it for himself but it makes the world more distant and more out of control and this, in turn, forces him more into the realm of abstraction and intellectualism. This realm is so vital for him that “he had always thrown himself into intellectual work as if it were the struggle for survival. (Herzog 89)

The ideas in the novel carry the narrative to the realm of abstraction. Clearly, the protagonist is alienated from reality. Since he cannot get along with people, ideas are the only resort he has. Inside his intellectual resort, “one corner of his mind remained open to the external world” (Herzog 8). Nevertheless, outside reality is humiliating and chaotic for him. It confuses Herzog. He sees the disorder of the world gone out of control.

But, the origin of his confusion mostly lies in external realities, especially in his relationship with Madeleine. Herzog’s was not entirely prepared for Madeleine’s intention to divorce. He had really thought matters were improving, and since it is not easy for him to come to terms with the matter, he becomes
confused. To look for the origins of his problem with Madeline, the readers should take cognizance of the very beginning:

With Madeline, several years ago, Herzog had made a fresh start in life. He had won her away from the church- when they met, she had just been converted. With twenty thousand dollars inherited from his charming father, to please his new wife he quit an academic position which was perfectly respectable and bought a big house in Ludeyville, Massachusetts. (Herzog11)

Several points are evident here. The words fresh and won in this passage suggest how optimistically Herzog looked at his marriage with Madeline. As a result, he does whatever he can to please his new wife. He quits his respectable academic position and buys an expensive house in a solitary location. He does all these just because Madeleine wants him to do so:

Herzog did not leave academic life because he was doing badly. On the contrary, his reputation was good. His thesis had been influential and was translated into French and German. His early book, not much noticed when it was published, was now on many reading lists, and the younger generation of historians accepted it as a model of the new sort of history,’ history that interests us-personal, engagee- and looks at the past with an intense need for contemporary relevance. (Herzog11-2)

Here, the reader is informed that the male character in the novel is not an ordinary person, but respected academic. This is important as it heightens the prestige of the male protagonist and along with it, his sacrifice in quitting his prestigious job for the sake of Madeleine. He also buys that big old house in Ludeyville just to please his new wife - it was another sacrifice. Indeed, Bellow tries to show how Herzog, in spite of his privileges, tries to please his wife.
In return, however, Madeleine changes her mind after a short while:

She was dissatisfied. At first, she had not wanted him to be an ordinary professor, but she changed her mind after a year in the country. Madeleine considered herself too young, too intelligent, too vital, and too sociable to be buried in the remote Berkshire. She decided to finish her graduate studies in Slavonic languages […] The house in Ludeyville was closed up- twenty thousand dollars’ worth house, with books and English bone china and new appliances abandoned to the spiders, the moles, and the field mice- Papa’s hard-earned money. (Herzog 12)

The key point here is Madeleine’s change of mind. We should also remember that she had just converted when Herzog met her for the first time. Indeed, she is always changing, she converts, she becomes a graduate student, she makes Herzog shift to Berkshire, and after a short while, tired of its mournful surrounding, she makes him return to Chicago. They move to Chicago “but after about a year of this new Chicago life, Madeleine decided that she and Moses could not make it after all- she wanted a divorce (Herzog 13). So Madeleine’s is not settled. She is constantly on the move. She is never satisfied enough to let things stand. Indeed, she wants to see things in moving. Herzog himself was aware of this side of her character when he decided to marry her. Her mother, Tenny tells Herzog “that he could bring stability into the life of this neurotic girl and cure her by his steadiness” (Herzog 116), and Herzog chooses to accept Madeleine in the hope of changing her character through “patience, loving kindness and virility” (Herzog 115).

Herzog’s hope, however, is shattered when he sees his wife behaving very peculiarly. Madeleine is given to violent fits of anger. “One night, in the disorderly bedroom, when they were both naked, and Herzog lifting the sheet, made a sharp remark about the old books underneath (big, dusty volumes of an
ancient Russian encyclopedia), it was too much for her" (Herzog 63). Her reaction was unexpectedly furious. "She began to scream at him, and threw herself on the bed, tearing off blankets and sheets, slamming books on the floor, then attacking the pillows with her nails, giving a wild, choked scream. (Herzog 63) Herzog reaches out a hand to calm her, and at once "she straightened and hit him in the face, too clumsily to hurt him. She jumped at him with her fists, not pummeling woman-like a street fighter with her knuckles (Herzog 63)."

Saul Bellow is an expert in creating such scenes, which are vivid and striking. Here, he masterfully manages to present Madeline as psychologically castrating. Indeed, this passage is powerfully aiming at achieving readers’ trust about what the novel presents as its female character. It catches the readers’ attention due to its vivid presentation of one of the recurring literary female stereotypes, castrating bitch.

In order to complete the image of Madeleine as a castrating bitch, Bellow’s text provides the readers with other arresting moments where Madeleine’s terrifying power is revealed. One of these passages, which is a brilliant example of Bellow’s ability in creating such scenes, is Madeleine’s reaction to Herzog’s complaint of the disorder in the house:

‘We have got to have a little order in these surroundings’,

Madeleine said quickly, firmly and accurately, ‘You’ll never get the surroundings you want. Those are in the twelfth century somewhere. Always crying for the old home and the kitchen table with the oilcloth on it and your Latin book. Okay- let’s hear your sad story. Tell me about your poor mother. And your father. […]and your Aunt Zipporah […]Oh, what balls!’

‘As if, you did not have a past of your own.’
‘Oh balls! So now we’re going to hear how you SAVED me. Let’s hear it again. What a frightened puppy I was. How I was not strong enough to face life. But you gave me LOVE, from your big heart, and rescued me from the priests. Yes cured me of menstrual cramps by servicing me so good. You SAVED me. You SACRIFICED your freedom. I took you away from Daisy and your son, and your Japanese screw. Your important time, money, and attention.’

‘Madeleine!’

‘Oh-shit!’

‘Just think a minute.’

‘Think? What do you know about thinking?’

‘May be I married you to improve my mind! said Herzog. I am learning.’

‘Well. I’ll teach you, don’t worry! said the beautiful, pregnant Madeleine between her teeth. Madeleine’s wild blue gaze was so intense that her eyes seemed twisted. (Herzog131-132)

Both Madeleine’s gestures and use of language in this scene clearly indicate that she is castrating Herzog. In this passage, she uses words like will, balls, shit, reflecting power, masculinity and disgust in a quick, firm, and accurate way. Thus, reading this passage, readers will get what the text intends to put across, that is, Herzog really is a victim in the hands of his wife. The passage becomes much more telling about Herzog’s being bullied by his wife with his modest acceptance of the position of a learner in front of his wife adopting the role of a teacher.

Apart from psychological castration, the text also provides other scenes where readers see Madeleine crippling Herzog intellectually. “She decides to finish
her graduate studies in Slavonic language” (Herzog 12). She always prefers scholarly discussion, remains busy with her books, and becomes so serious in her intellectual ambition that Herzog feels that Madeleine’s aspiration is to “take his place in the learned world.” (Herzog 82). In a letter to his friend, Shapiro, Herzog says, “to overcome me. She was reaching her final elevation, as queen of the intellectuals, the castiron bluestocking. And your friend Herzog writhing under this sharp elegant heel” (Herzog 82)

In another passage, Madeleine’s desire for intellectual rivalry with Herzog is blamed for her disorderly way of housekeeping. Ludeyville house is usually in a chaotic and filthy state. “The kitchen was foul enough to breed rats. Egg yolks dried on the plates, coffee turned green in the cups[...]toast, cereal, maggots breeding in marrow bones, fruit flies, dollar bills, postage stamps and trading soaking in the Formica counter”(Herzog127- 8).Herzog, therefore, cannot find an orderly corner to work on his great project. Indeed, Madeleine destroys the tranquil atmosphere Herzog requires to get his scholarly work done. So he thinks “in treating him as she did Madeline injured a great project” (Herzog132). Thus, Herzog’s intellectual power is devastated and “this was in the eyes of Moses E. Herzog what was so grotesque and deplorable about the experience of Moses E Herzog” (Herzog132).

On the other hand, Herzog’s sexual experience with Madeleine has also devastating consequences for him. He often describes her look during intercourse as murderous. Indeed, Herzog feels that Madeleine is utterly dispassionate in her sexual response toward him during intercourse:

We had intercourse the night before. But as soon as it was done, she turned on the light, picked up one of those dusty Russian folios, put it on her chest and started to read away. As I was leaving the body, she was reaching the book. Not a kiss. Not a last touch. Only her nose twitching. (Herzog 66)
What impresses the readers here is Madeleine’s utter sexual indifference toward Herzog. In fact, Madeleine reduces sexual intercourse to a mechanic expression of her animalistic lust without any sensibility or human affection. While, Madeleine’s aunt, Zelda, accuses Herzog of being selfish in sex, he knows that “no man can satisfy a woman who doesn’t want him” (Herzog 46). But the most irreparable injury to Herzog’s sexual power is the result of Madeleine’s cuckolding Herzog with Herzog’s friend, Valentine Gersbach. Her cuckoldry, started almost from their wedding day, takes a nasty shape when she convinces her naïve husband to install a shower in their home for Gersbach. When Herzog tries to inquire about Gersbach, Madeleine says, “he is the brother I never had, and that is all” (200). When Herzog hesitates to accept this, she insists:

Now do not be fool, Moses. You know how coarse he is. He is not my type at all. Our intimacy is a different kind altogether. Why when he uses the toilet in our little Boston apartment it fills up with stink. I know the smell of his shit. Do you think I could give myself to a man whose shit smells like that! (Herzog 200)

Thus, with these words, Madeleine tries to calm Herzog about her affair with a man whose accomplice enables her to run Herzog’s life with a meticulous precision. In his talking to Ramona, his girl friend, Herzog speaks about their control over his life. “All the decisions were made by them, where I lived, where I worked, and how much rent I paid. Even mental problem were set by them. They gave me my homework” (Herzog 201). Herzog goes on saying how they decided that he had to go. “They worked out all the details-property settlement, alimony, child support” (Herzog 201).

Gradually, readers gather all the impression from the text needed to trust Herzog as a victim. Poor Herzog, “writhing under this sharp elegant heel” (Herzog 82), loses his friends one by one to Madeleine. Madeleine is conscious of her beauty and brilliance and openly tells Herzog that her body is an object to be used
to achieve other goals. In one of their quarrels, she tells Herzog she was not going to waste her young, beautiful body on him” (Herzog 27). Instead, she uses her body to manipulate Herzog’s best friends, his lawyer, and his psychiatrist to achieve her goals.

To complete Madeleine’s image as the archetype of domineering woman, the text also depicts her as the financial castrator of her husband. She gradually destroys Herzog’s financial resources. Her passion for spending money knows no limits. She likes large homes, buys expensive clothes, fancy goods. She spends lots of money on things just to fill the home. In Berkshire, she habitually writes bad cheques and, because of it, throws Herzog’s money away. Her psychoanalysis in Chicago costs a lot. Despite Herzog’s complaints, Madeleine persists with her wasting money. Herzog himself interprets her lavish spending of money as a castrating act. Later Herzog discovers that Madeleine has been banking large amount of money during their marriage in preparation for divorce.

As we see Madeleine attempting to commit Herzog to a lunatic asylum, it seems there is no limit to the extent of female brutality to which the Bellow’s text is leading its readers. With sinister and cleverly thought out manipulation, Madeleine spreads the rumor that Herzog is mentally ill and needs to be treated in a lunatic asylum. She cannot achieve her goal in sending her husband to a lunatic asylum, but with another equally cunning plan, she prepares to get rid of him.

Six weeks before sending him out of her life, Madeleine had him lease a house near the Midway at two hundred dollars a month. When they moved in, he built shelves, cleared the garden, and repaired the garage door; he put up the storm windows. Only a week before she demanded a divorce, she had all things cleaned and pressed, but on the day, he left the house, she flung them all into a carton, which she then dumped down the cellar stairs. She needed more closet space. (Herzog13, 14)
Through Herzog’s mind, impinged with his horrific experiences of past marriage, Bellow’s text exposes for the reader how well Madeleine prepares to get rid of her husband and how cunningly she uses Herzog for her own end. From flashback scenes and his conversations with other characters, Herzog is seen as someone who is helpless in the hands of a strong, destructive woman who enjoys nothing but torturing her husband for no good reason.

Nevertheless, Madeleine’s cruelty in the novel is not accounted for. Put simply, it is not clear what motivates her to do these horrific things to Herzog in the novel. It seems that she is simply there in the novel just to castrate the male protagonist. Although, to look for the origin of castrating women in the personal experiences of the novelist can be illuminating, I will not try to see if Madeleine originates from Bellow’s own experiences with women or not.

Technically viewed, however, Herzog can hardly be expected to give a dispassionate account of women as it leads the readers to look at the women exclusively through the perceiving consciousness of its misogynous protagonist. In other words, because of the limitations in Bellow’s artistic technique in Herzog, Madeleine emerges as deliberately harmful who “eats green salad and drinks human blood” (Herzog 48). In fact, in Herzog, Bellow focuses on his male protagonist so intensely that it affects the whole novel. In other words, the whole novel depends on the distorted perception of a male character who calls himself prisoner of perception. Then, it should not be so hard to understand some of the causes behind the novel’s intense misogyny.

But whatever the causes may be behind the novel’s misogyny, one point is clear, and that is the power of the text in arresting the mind of its readers. In other words, the important thing is the power with which the text conveys its ideas, among which misogyny, to the minds of its readers, especially female ones. Indeed, what happens in real life is not Herzog’s emasculation in the hand of Madeleine, as they are both fictional characters, but the immasculation of women
readers of the novel. When immasculation happens, as Fetterley puts it, “the readers are taught to think as men, to identify with a male point of view, and to accept as normal and legitimate a male system of values (566-567).

This process of immasculation is the characteristics of those texts that fail to integrate female experience into their view of the human predicament. Critics have accused Bellow of failing to make an imaginative and probing leap into the psyche of his female characters. Among his novels, Herzog is best example for its immasculating effects. Throughout the novel, there is just one discourse, just one sensibility, and only one logic to which a reader should subscribe, if he or she wants to enjoy the text. Indeed, the whole novel revolves around the agonizing crisis of a man whose bitter experience of married life leads to his breakdown. This exclusive male point of view, however useful for the writer to explore his hero’s psyche, restricts the accesses of the writer – also the readers – to the minds of women characters.

Thus, in Herzog, the perceiving consciousness of the male protagonist is the only place in which a reader can find the whole story. But the fact is that individual consciousness is unique and cannot be reliable as a faithful mirror of experiences. Especially, in the case of Herzog as “a prisoner of perception” (Herzog 72), this uniqueness of the mind becomes much more obvious. In fact, by calling himself as a prisoner of perception, Herzog suggests the capacity of the mind in shaping our experiences. With the same token, one can understand the extent to which the readers are the prisoner of Herzog’s state of mind as the sole narrative center in the novel. Given this narrative structure, Saul Bellow’s art is to absorb his readers into such a consciousness and make them understand its logic. To do this, Bellow employs in Herzog certain popular themes typical in American post-world literature.

One often-noticed theme of Bellow’s Herzog, is that in this narrative the hero is an outcast, an outsider, and more a victim. Indeed Herzog is a victim story:
His sexual powers have been damaged by Madeline the bitch. She has her heel in his groin. She wishes to do him in; she votes for his nonexistence. She (like Margaret, Tommy Wilhelm’s wife) wants to bleed him, to take all his money or, symbolically, to castrate him. All these metaphors recur. And not only have she and Valentine Gersbach betrayed him; so have his lawyer, his psychiatrist, Mady’s aunt. Over and over’ as he bitterly admits, he tells his story to whoever will listen. (Clayton 192)

Bellow himself denies that Herzog is victim literature. Nevertheless, internal evidence in the book is enough to repudiate this claim. As victim literature Herzog’s appeal lies in Moses Herzog’s suffering, which bestows upon him a romantic flavor, very agreeable and to the liking of readers. In fact, Bellow manages to create a fascinating male character, whose dignity in the face of suffering, and whose knowledge in the face of intellectual pitfalls, makes him admirable for the readers. Obliviously, readers enjoy reading a victim story as it touches their sense of self-pity. In other words, they identify with the victim hero, because their see his suffering as their own and when they feel pity for him, their own sense of self-pity is satisfied. Here, we can see why in spite of Bellow’s effort to avoid writing stereotype victim story, Herzog has to be a victim narrative in order to act upon its reader’s feelings.

At the same time, Bellow is fully aware that modern reader is not naïve. He is careful not to reduce Herzog to a tattered stereotype. As a result, his male protagonist is subtle, sophisticated and humorous. He is a “suffering joker” (Herzog17) Thus, Saul Bellow has not created an utterly innocent hero to be victimized just for the sake of creating pity in readers. He creates a man who is caught up by his own flaws in an endless crisis leading to his victimization. Readers, through Bellow’s exploration of Herzog’s psyche, find it appealing to see how intricate human soul is. Indeed Bellow’s subtle rendering of his hero’s psyche adds to the power of Bellow’s text and acts strongly upon the readers.
Another theme is alienation. Alienation is a paradoxical theme in Herzog. While attacking tradition of alienation and despair, Bellow makes his hero an exacting figure of alienation. So here, we see a tension between intention and reality. Throughout Herzog, the hero rejects what he had called “the cheap mental stimulants of alienation, the cant and rant of pipsqueaks about inauthenticity and forlornness” (Herzog 324), but at the same time he sorrows over a world in which the individual is sad, lonely, cut off not only from society but from his own family also:

Nor is it only from strangers that he is alienated. He is unable to remain with Libby and Arnold at Martha’s Vineyard: he runs from Ramona’s kindness. During his marriage to Mady, Herzog recalls, he ignored or fought with her, and remained aloof watching the garden when Shapiro came to visit. (Clayton 191)

Indeed, the novel begins with description of an alienated hero and his need to explain for himself and for the reader the process of his alienation. The rest of the novel shows his struggle from alienation to accommodation. In practice, the writer has transcended themes like victimization and alienation to use as his subjects in Herzog. All these themes are in the novel to add to its charm. Put simply, these themes are in the novel to captivate the readers and to bring them into the logic of the narrative center.

Herzog attracts its readership, because it narrates another story of our modern plight, because its hero is another casualty of a disintegrating world. It relates the story of a man who is unable to rise above his fate. The protagonist in the novel seems to be descendants of the American Adam, innocent in paradise whose affirmative views have not been bought at a high price. Innocence is Bellow’s rootstock in Herzog, but onto that innocence has been grafted a full emotional and intellectual awareness of the plight of contemporary man. Intellectually viewed, Herzog is a masterpiece. Irving praises Bellow as one of the
most powerful minds among contemporary American writers and one who best assimilates his intelligence to creative purpose (Herzog 34).

Thus, Herzog is a powerful text and this is the reason why the female readers should be on guard not to be taken into the logic of the text blindly. Indeed, this is a text with little space for women to enter with their own true self and while the “narrative is all littered with broken marriages and washed up relationship, and in spite of the assertive, intelligent women in the novel, they are endowed with no truly admirable quality” (Anand 43). Although, there are many women in Herzog, they are not in the novel to expand the female spaces but to “enhance the saintliness of the male protagonist by highlighting their ruthless power, viciousness and monstrosity” (Anand 42). A brief survey of these women character in Herzog will display how Bellow deprives his female characters from their due spaces.

Madeline, the main female character, is the “archetype of domineering woman” as Irving Malin calls her (141). With her, wickedness is at its highest possible. Maybe the best word to characterize her is hatred:

As she stared at him her colour receded and her nose began to move very slightly. She seemed to realize that she must control her tic and the violence of her stare. But by noticeable degree her face became very white, her eyes smaller, stony. He believed he could interpret them. They expressed a total will that he should die. This was infinitely more than ordinary hatred. It was a vote for his nonexistence, he thought. (Herzog 308)

At other times, Herzog receives Madeline hatred in a more open form. In an incident, she attacks Herzog physically and hits him in the face, then she jumps at him with her fists (Herzog 63). In the police station, Herzog observes Madeline’s “fire-blue eyes, her spiky glances and her small mouth ready with any wickedness” (Herzog 306). Herzog realizes that “she was canny, a superbly cunning, very canny
woman. But there was also the violence of her hatred, and that hatred had a fringe of insanity” (Herzog 307).

Richard Ellman sees Madeline as a symbol of the evil of the world. According to him, “her ultimate malevolence is a mystery that refuses solution” (1-2). In practice, she is more than a castrating woman, who seems solely responsible in emasculating the male protagonist and causing him pain. She is entirely and inhumanly evil and “is drawn with pure venom” (Howe 22). She rejoices in wielding power and hurting others. Glanday identifies Madeline with power-oriented society where “to be strong one had to be beyond the vulnerability of commitment, to dissemble with conviction, to be amour-plated” (Herzog 99). It seems life is nothing more for Madeline but to hate and hurt.

Ramona, another female character in Herzog poses no threat of any sort of castration as Madeline does. On the contrary, she is devoted to the gratification of Herzog’s desires. Indeed, she is a woman of pleasure, not “believing in any sin but the sin against body, for her the true and only temple of the spirit” (Herzog 158). To Herzog Ramona seems exotic. He is fascinated by Ramona’s:

full, substantial figure, a good round seat, firm breasts (all these things mattered to Herzog; he might think himself a moralist but the shape of a woman’s breast matters greatly). Ramona was unsure of her chin but had confidence in her lovely throat, and so she held her head fairly high. She walked with quick efficiency, rapping her heels in energetic Castilian style. Herzog was intoxicated by this clatter. She entered a room provocatively, swaggering slightly, one hand touching her thigh, as though she carried a knife in her garter belt. […] playfully in the role of a tough Spanish broad. (Herzog 22)

Reading this passage, one can see her function in the novel. Herzog’s observation that Ramona “wanted to give him pleasure in anyway he might choose” (Herzog 24) clearly indicates her role as a woman to releases the male hero from his
agonizing experiences. Ramona usually appears at a time when Herzog wishes to escape the tension of marriage and to get rid of the feelings of inadequacy, and when his is not certain about his next move.

Nevertheless, for all these problems, Ramona offers just one solution. She says, “Constitutional tension of whatever origin needed sexual relief” (Herzog 209). Indeed Ramona is there in the novel to perform as a psychosexual refuge for Herzog. After having endured a brutal castrating female in Madeline, Herzog finds his self-confidence in Ramona. In fact, he learns from her that he is still sexually potent. Keith Michael Opdahal opines that Ramona not only provides Herzog with sex, but also theorizes sex as the only therapy for his intellectual but confused mind (149-50). As a sexual professional, Ramona knows how to put Herzog at ease, to make him feel confident happy and admired, and she does this through her erotic appeal.

Besides her erotic appeal, “Ramona was an excellent cook, too, and knew how to prepare shrimp Arnaud, which she served with Pouilly fuisse” (Herzog 21). Romana’s skill in cooking goes beyond just Herzog’s nutritional needs. The meals, which she prepares, are intended to stimulate his sexual appetite. She regularly treats him to “Pouilly Fuisse, shrimp remoulade, [...] cheese and cold water biscuits, rum-flavored ice cream, plums from Georgia early green grapes” (Herzog 194). The sexually stimulating food, served in exotically decorated setting of Romana’s room, encourages Herzog’s maximum sensual pleasure.

Thus, there is a limited space for Romana in the novel. In fact, her small space is only enough to play the role of a sex provider for the male protagonist. It is, of course, true that she is an intelligent woman, but it seems that her intelligence also is better expressed in a justification for eroticism than other things.

Daisy, Herzog’s first wife, also has a very limited space in the novel. If Romana provides Herzog with sex, Daisy provides him with a comfortable, well-arranged home. Herzog needs this comfort, because he works on his first book,
Indeed, “as long as Moses was married to Daisy, he had led the perfectly ordinary life of an assistant professor, respected and stable” (Herzog 12). Daisy views it her duty to do everything for her scholar husband. “She took Moses’ word for it that he was seriously occupied. Of course, a wife’s duty was to stand by this puzzling and often disagreeable Herzog” (Herzog 132).

A very different type, compared to his second wife, Daisy is “cooler, more regular, a conventional Jewish woman, […] Stability, symmetry, order, containment were Daisy’s strength” (Herzog 132, 3). She is able to give system to Herzog’s evidently formless life:

She was childishly systematic about things. It sometimes amused Moses to recall that she had a file card, clumsily printed out, to cover every situation. Her awkward form of organization had had a certain charm. When they were married, she put his pocket money in an envelope, in a green metafile bought for budgeting. Daily reminders, bills, concert tickets were pinned by thumbtacks to bulletin board. Calendars were marked well in advance. (Herzog 132-3)

Nevertheless, the important point is that Daisy’s talent for order is employed to create comfort and stability for her irregular and unstable husband. Herzog’s intellectual achievement in writing his first book is partly due to Daisy’s efforts to provide him with a well-arranged home. Daisy’s sacrifice becomes much more obvious when we see Herzog admit that his” irregularity and turbulence of spirit […] brought out the worst in Daisy” (Herzog 133). Daisy’s reaction to his husband’s irregular and turbulent spirit during those difficult days of Herzog’s book writing is expressed in these sentences of Herzog:

Of course, a wife’s duty was to stand by this puzzling and often disagreeable Herzog. She did so with heavy neutrality, recording her objection each time once but not more. The rest was silence-
such heavy silence as he felt in Connecticut when he was finishing
*Romanticism and Christianity.* (Herzog 132)

Thus, Daisy’s image in the novel is that of a stereotypical conventional wife, apparently happy with her lot, and dedicated to enlarge her husband’s spaces. Therefore, her reaction to his husband’s irregularity and turbulence of spirit is mostly to remain silent - much similar to that of the stereotype. In fact, Daisy’s character in the novel does not go beyond her typecast as a servant wife.

In spite of all her services, Daisy, however, cannot keep her husband. To justify his separation from Daisy Herzog says:

> I gave up the shelter of an orderly purposeful, lawful existence because it bored me, and I felt it was simply a slacker’s life[...] So I took my papers and books, and my Remington office machine with the black hood, and my records and oboe and music down to Philadelphia. (109).

In fact, Daisy’s presence in the novel is to bring stability and order to a period of Herzog’ life in which he writes his first book, a book that “was now in many reading lists, and the younger generation of historians accepted it as a model of new sort of history” (Herzog12). In other words, Herzog establishes his name with the book for writing which Daisy was instrumental. But when he was finishing *Romanticism and Christianity*, the last chapter “ended them both”, and “Daisy picked up and left” (Herzog133).

Another female character is Sono Qguki, a woman of Japanese origin, who is in the novel to pamper Herzog for not any obvious reason. Sono, like Ramona, gives Herzog satisfying sexual experiences, but in her treating him there is a flavor of *mothering*. She is clearly mothering Herzog, when she bathes him:
She would immediately run the little tub and fill it with Macy’s bath salts. She unbuttoned Moses’ shirt, took off his clothes, and when she had him settled (‘Easy now, it’s hot) in the swirling, foaming, perfumed water she let drop her petticoat and got in behind, singing that vertical music of hers. (Herzog 175)

Sono’s mothering treatment is also evident after the bath, when “Herzog’s body was red...she had dried and powdered him, she dressed him in kimono [...] brought him tea” (Herzog 177). Indeed, her attentiveness toward him goes beyond that of a mistress, she undressed him, bathed him, massaged him and fed him. Like a mother, she does all these things and asks for nothing special in return:

Sono asked for no great sacrifice. She did not want me to work for her, to furnish her house, support her children, to be regular at meals or to open charge accounts in luxury shops; she asked only that I should be with her from time to time [...] She told me no such broken truths and dirty lies. (Herzog 180)

Again like a mother, “Sono had a tender heart, and Herzog knew that if he wrote her of the sadness of his life, she would certainly cry. Instantaneous tears.” (Herzog 175). She is also possessive, and at times, “examines Herzog’s body for signs that he was unfaithful” (Herzog 181), and on discovering that Herzog is seeing Madeline, she goes back to Japan. Thus, she also does not occupy a substantial space in the novel. She just appears as a mother- mistress to pamper Bellow’s male protagonist.

Perhaps, Phoebe Gersbach, the wife of Valentine Gersbach is the weakest female character in the novel. She refuses to help Herzog get the custody of his daughter, June, just because she does not dare to fight Gersbach and Madeleine. Indeed, “they bullied her” (Herzog 270), and her being bullied so indecently exasperates Herzog, “life could not be as indecent as that. Could it? It must be inconceivable to her that one should set such modest, such minimal goals-
Indeed she accepted her situation as a poor neurotic, dry, unfortunate, mud-stuck, middle-class woman. In response to Herzog’s insistence to persuade her to sue for divorce, she answers that: “It is not my fault that you refuse to understand the system other people live by. Your ideas get in the way. Maybe a weak person like me has no choice” (Herzog 269). When Herzog tries to provoke her by referring to her husband’s living with Madeline, she denies the whole fact, “Val? I don’t know why you say that! I am not deserted” (Herzog 269). In order to justify her situation, Phoebe views Gersbach “not an ordinary man, and because of his richness of character, his spiritual-erotic drive, or God knows what foot-smelling metaphysics, he required two wives or more” (271).

Indeed, Phoebe’s own words: “Either do something or forget it” (Herzog 271) characterizes her own behavior towards her being betrayed by her husband. Admitting that she is not strong enough to do anything, she tries to ignore it. “I was seeing a psychiatrist, and he advised me to keep away. To keep away from you, most of all from you and all your trouble. He said I wasn’t strong enough, and you know it’s true—I am not strong (Herzog 269).

Sarah Herzog, Herzog’s late mother, who is just living in her son’s memory throughout the novel, symbolizes another female character. She represents the ideal maternal qualities of the woman in the Jewish heritage. Indeed, Sarah Herzog fits well into the type of women, who are always supposed to keep the family together. She was, Herzog recalls, “a cook, washerwoman, seamstress on Napoleon Street in a Slum. Her hair turned grey, and she lost her teeth, her very fingernails wrinkled. Her hands smelled of the sink.” (Herzog145). Mother Herzog’s role is to sustain the family and protect it from the harsh realities of life which resulted from his husband’s constant failure in almost any job. Herzog’s father:

failed as a farmer. Then he came into town and failed as a baker; failed in the dry-goods business; failed as a jobber; failed as a sack
manufacturer in the War, when no one else failed. He failed as a junk dealer. Then he became a marriage broker and failed too short-tempered and blunt. And now he was failing as bootlegger, on the run from the provincial Liquor Commission. (Herzog 143)

Despite these discouraging failures, Sara Herzog manages to provide a warm protective refuge for the four children of the family. Although they were poor, the maternal love sustains the family. Reflecting over his childhood, Herzog repeatedly remembers “mother Herzog, large-eyed, sat with the children in the primitive kitchen, which the sun never entered. It was like a cave with the ancient black stove, the iron sink, the green cupboards, the gas ring” (145) This recurring image of mother sitting with her children in a cave like kitchen suggests maternal dedication and affection in a poverty-stricken Jewish family.

In another scene, Sarah Herzog’s persistent sacrifice is dramatized, so that readers can clearly see how dedicated she is in supporting her family:

Mama’s brother Mikhail died of typhus in Moscow. I took the letter from the postman and brought it upstairs […] It was washday. The copper boiler steamed the window. She was rinsing and wringing in a tub. When she read the news, she gave a cry and fainted. Her lips turned white. Her arm lay in the water, sleeve and all. We two were alone in the house. I was terrified when she lay like that, legs spread, her long hair undone, lie down mouth bloodless, death-like. But then she got up and went to lie down. She wept all day. But in the morning she cooked the oatmeal nevertheless. (Herzog 146)

Sarah Herzog goes beyond just supporting her family. Her willingness to sacrifice and destroy herself for her children goes to the extent that she practically spoils her children:
Once, at nightfall, she was pulling me on the sled, over crusty ice, the tiny glitter of snow, perhaps four o’clock of a short day in January. Near the grocery we met an old baba in a shawl who said,’ Why are you pulling him, daughter!’ Mama dark under the eyes. Her slender cold face. She was breathing hard. She wore the torn seal coat and a red pointed wool cap and the button boots…’Daughter, don’t sacrifice your strength to children’, said the shawled crone in the freezing dusk of the street. I wouldn’t get off the sled. I pretended not to understand. One of life’s hardest jobs, to make a quick understanding slow. I think I succeeded, thought Herzog. (Herzog 145)

Sarah Herzog is a woman of suffering. Her face reflected “the deep experience of a race, its attitude toward happiness and toward mortality (Herzog 239). Indeed, she is ready to suffer for the happiness of the children of the race. Her ambition for her children imposes extra suffering on her, but she is dedicated to their happiness and resists the criticism of practical-minded Aunt Zipporah who “opposed Mama’s ambition for her children, because she wanted them to be lawyers, gentlemen, rabbis or performers” (Herzog 146). Mother Herzog is, particularly, hopeful about the future of Herzog. She speaks proudly about his intelligence at an early age, “what a little tongue it has. Moshele could talk to the President” (Herzog 103).

Another significant cause behind Sarah Herzog’s ambition for Herzog is her strong Jewish faith and her emotional attachment to Jewish Heritage. A scholarly bearded rabbi is her idea of what a man should be. “Herzog’s mother had a weakness for Jews with handsome beards. In her family too, all the elders had beards that were thick and rich, full of religion. She wanted Moses to become a rabbi” (Herzog 28).
In fact, Sarah Herzog is trying to create larger spaces for her children, particularly, Herzog to develop his intelligence. To do this she destroys herself. Even “after she had lost the power to speak, she was still trying to comfort him by stroking his head” (Herzog 241). Nevertheless, her excessive mothering and her high expectation of Herzog indoctrinates in him a false self-image leading to his inability to encounter reality and “meeting the present with a partly averted face” (Herzog 145).

Having examined Herzog’s female characters, one can presume that Bellow’s work is marred by sexism. Obviously, women 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 complexity of Herzog’s psyche.

To demonstrate 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.

In fact, women characters in Herzog lack the same depth, range, and complexity as the male hero who goes through various crises. In other words, female characters in the novel do not go beyond types and images to achieve the complexity of plausible human beings. In Louana L. Peontek’s typology, there are three predominant images of women in Bellow’s work: the maternal woman, the castrator, and the exotic woman (quoted in Anand 4). Analyzing Herzog’s female characters according to this typology, Madeline clearly belongs to castrator group.
Indeed, she has all the features of such a type. Daisy, Phoebe and Sarah Herzog can be classified as maternal, since their main trait is to protect the family in spite of all the problems. Ramona and Sono, however, belong to exotic women.

Nevertheless, this classification has its own problems, and except Madeline, other female characters do not fit well in their due types. Maternal women, for example, are grouped under this heading just because they protect the integrity of the family. Otherwise, they are different in terms of their idiosyncrasies. In exhibiting loving care towards the members of family, Sara Herzog tops the others, whereas in keeping the house tidy Daisy is the best. In weakness and passivity, however, Phoebe is moving far ahead. Exotic women also are different from each other in terms of the way they sexually pamper the protagonist. Indeed both Romana and Sono provide Herzog with satisfying sexual experience. However, in Sono’s sexually treating him, there is a flavor of mothering, while Ramona views sex as a curing experience for him to deal with his problems of any kind.

With these images of women in Herzog, the fundamental question is how this acclaimed novel, which is regarded the major successes in Bellow’s career, 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 answers will not be positive.

As a result, woman readers entering the world of Herzog have to follow the only roadmap, which is leading to the male protagonist. In other words, women readers, through impalpable designs, unconsciously recognize Herzog as the sole important human being whose vision is the universal and consider female
characters as related to him. “When only one reality is encouraged, legitimized, and transmitted and when that limited vision endlessly insists on its comprehensiveness, then we have the conditions necessary for the confusion of consciousness in which impalpability flourishes” (Fetterly 561).

Indeed, Herzog stands as the universal, or the self, while female characters are the other. The self is the same dynamic, knowing male subject, in a higher position to the other. Consequently, women characters, occupying a secondary place, cannot be equal complements to Herzog as the male protagonist. Therefore, in the entire novel Herzog is the most likeable human being. Even his failings add to his charms and credits. His passivity in front of cruel Madeline is understood as a code of civilization and gentlemanliness while the same passivity from a female character like Phoebe is interpreted as just timidity and helplessness.

Thus, readers, in the processes of reading, gradually learn to adopt double standard and treat Herzog differently. Herzog himself blames women for doing the thing he himself does. He accuses Madeline of theater in her looks, but he himself is theatrical. Often he pauses before mirrors, watching himself as he changes his clothing and facial expression.

**The Images of Women in Mr. Sammler’s Planet**

To Margotte it was fascinating. Anything fascinating she was prepared to discuss all day, from every point of view with full German pedantry. Who was this black? What were his origins, emotions, his aesthetic, his political ideas? Was he a revolutionary? Would he be for black guerrilla warfare? Unless Sammler had private thoughts to occupy him, he couldn’t sit through these talks with Margotte. She was sweet but on theoretical side very tedious, and when she settled down to an earnest theme, one was lost. This was why he ground his own coffee, boiled water in his flask, kept onion rolls in the humidor, even urinated in the washbasin (rising on
his toes to meditation on the inherent melancholy of animal nature, continually in travail, according to Aristotle). Because he had learned his lesson one week when she wished to analyze Hannah Arendt’s phrase The Banality of Evil, and kept him in the living-room sitting on a sofa […] He couldn’t bring himself to say what he thought. For one thing, she seldom stopped to listen. For another, he doubted that he could make himself clear (MSP 14).

The above passage provides the readers with the first image of a woman character in Mr. Sammler’s Planet. Margotte’s image given by Mr. Sammler, the male hero, is part humorous and part humiliating. He depicts her as talkative, tedious, silly and nonsensical.

The passage begins with Mr. Sammler presenting Margotte’s curiosity about black pickpocket. He ridicules her using words like origins, class, racial attitudes, psychological views, aesthetic, political ideas. In fact, Mr. Sammler doesn’t listen to a woman who is sweet -or supposed to be sweet- discussing the black pickpocket issue from intellectual point of view. To him a woman, “settling down to an earnest theme” (MSP 14) is very tedious. This impatience in Bellow’s male characters with women speaking intellectually is a recurring motif in Bellow’s works. For instance, Sammler’s irritation with Margotte intellectualizing the issue of pickpocket reminds one of Herzog’s exasperation and asking Ramona to stop lecturing. “Please Ramona …you are lovely, fragrant, sexual, good to touch- everything. But these lectures! For the love God, Romana, shut it up” (Herzog 159). This discrediting Margotte’s intellectual ability, however, is not the whole issue in the above passage. It goes on to humiliate Margotte as a talkative person who “seldom stopped to listen” (MSP 14). It furthers goes on to deny her ability to understand what Sammler says. “He doubted that he could make himself clear” (MSP 14).
The text tells the readers how it happened for Margotte to develop an interest in intellectual matters. After her husband’s death in an accident, she wants to take his place in the realm of intellect:

The late Arkin, generally affectionate and indulgent, knew how to make Margotte shut up. He was a tall splendid, half-bald, moustached man with a good suitable brain in his head. Political theory had been his field. He taught at Hunter College- taught women. Charming, idiotic, nonsensical girls, he used to say. Now and then, a powerful female intelligence, but very angry, very complaining, too much sex- ideology, poor things. It was when he was on his way to Cincinnati to lecture at some Hebrew college that his plane crashed. Sammler noticed how his widow tended now to impersonate him. She had become the political theorist. She spoke in his name, as presumably, he would have done, and there was no one to protect his ideas. (MSP 15)

Sammler’s view of Margotte in this passage is obviously offensive. He admires late Arkin, because he “knew how to make Margotte shut up” (14). Sammler’s disrespect toward Margotte is evident from the phrase shut up he uses. However, the words he uses to describe Arkin, Margotte’s late husband, suggest respect. Arkin was affectionate, indulgent, tall, and splendid with a good subtle brain. Nevertheless, this man with a good subtle brain used to call his girl students as idiotic and nonsensical. Arkin’s sexist view of women is also reflected in his behavior toward Margotte:

Up to a point, Arkin had enjoyed Margotte’s tormenting conversation, it must be admitted. Her nonsense pleased him, and under the moustache he would grin to himself, […] but after she had gone on a while, he would say, Enough, enough of this Weimar schmaltz. Cut it, Margotte! (MSP 16)
Arkin’s addressing his wife with words like *Enough, Cut it* clearly shows how humiliating his behavior is toward her wife. In another passage, Margotte is likened by her husband to “a first class device as long as someone aimed her in the right direction. She was a good soul, he told him, but the energetic goodness could be tremendously misapplied” (MSP 16). She is not only presented as intellectually boring, but also physically clumsy. “She couldn’t wash a tomato without getting her sleeves wet” (MSP 16)

Nevertheless, her clumsiness is not so important. The important thing about her, which exasperates both Arkin and Sammler, is her entrance into intellectual realm. Indeed, one of recurring themes in Saul Bellow’s works is women’s struggle to take the place of their husbands in the realm of intellect. In Madeline’s growing intellectual abilities, Herzog sees a threat to himself:

> I was trying to take stock of my position. I understood that Madeline’s ambition was to take my place in the learned world. To overcome me. She was reaching her final elevation, as queen of intellectuals, the castiron bluestocking. And your friend Herzog writhing under this sharp elegant heel. (Herzog 82)

Also in *Mr. Sammler’s Planet*, Sammler notices how Margotte tends to impersonate her late husband, and becomes a political theorist. “She spoke in his name, as presumably he would have done, and there was no one to protect his ideas” (MSP 15). But the important point in both *Herzog* and *Mr. Sammler’s Planet* is the fact that male characters overreact with fear and anger to female character’s efforts to take their places. Indeed, they are clearly intimidated by the intelligence they see in a new female generation. In other words, Saul Bellow’s male characters are usually threatened be a new generation of women whose most important characteristic is their intellectual accomplishment.

Intellectual rivalry between men and women is a recurrent theme in Bellow’s works. In his novels, while male protagonists are depicted as real
intellectuals, the women characters are just shown to be aspiring minds seeking for intellectual self-realization. Male characters, however, mock their aspiration. “Arkin had enjoyed Margotte’s tormenting conversation, it must be admitted. Her nonsense pleased him, and under her moustache he would grin to himself” (MSP 15). Viewing his girl students as “charming, idiotic and nonsensical” (MSP 15) in general, Arkin goes on to damage few especial female powerful minds with being “very angry, very complaining, too much sex-ideology, poor thing (MSP 15).

Set in 1960s New York City during the student radical movements, Mr. Sammler’s Planet tells the story of Mr. Sammler, a classic old world literary thinker and European aristocrat who lives exactly Bellow’s own period of social and philosophical acculturation. Here the elderly Holocaust survivor from the old Austro-Hungarian Empire walks in the alien world of hippie-era New York; where to his American Jewish relatives he becomes a heritage from another age, a blessed man, and a survivor of both a symbolic and a literal holocaust. Presented as a psychologically damaged holocaust survivor, a Swiftian misanthrope, and a persistent misogynist, we learn that though Sammler was born in a Polish aristocrat family, he has made an Anglophile of himself at an early age. He has received his early intellectual acculturation in London in the era of H.G. Wells and the Bloomsbury intellectuals. In the eve of World War II he accompanies his wife and daughter to Europe to help his wife settle her father’s estate where the two are cut off by the Nazi invasion. His wife dies, and his Jewish daughter, Shula-Slawa, remains hidden by nuns until after the war. Sammler himself barely escapes death as he first crawls out from under a pile of dead Jewish bodies, and later again shoots a soldier in the Zamosht Forest where he is hiding. He subsequently spends the rest of the war hiding in a dark tomb. After the war when he and his daughter are reunited, they are subsequently brought to America by a wealthy American relative, Dr. Elya Gruner, who has found their names on a dispossessed persons list. Bellow presents Sammler as a withdrawn man whose entire acculturation and education, not to mention near-death experiences during the Holocaust, have rendered him alienated. Spiritually and emotionally, Sammler, has put himself on
ice, and now in late life he must allow his familial and humane feelings to return. He must accept the family which has accepted him, and the by now neurotic daughter he finds it hard to love.

Three distinct plots can be traced in the novel: a pickpocket exposes himself to Sammler to intimidate and prevent him from interfering with his crime. Sammler’s adult daughter Shula steals a manuscript on space travel written by an Indian scientist, and Dr Elya Gruner, Sammler’s elderly nephew who has supported Sammler since his arrival in United State is gradually dying of disease.

Mr. Sammler’s planet brims with Sammler’s harsh judgment on women. He launches a fierce attack on women in the novel and becomes one of the most spiteful women haters in the world of fiction:

Some of the poor girls had a bad smell. Bohemian protest did them the most harm. It was elementary among the tasks and problems of civilization, thought Mr. Sammler, that some part of nature demanded more control than others. Females were naturally more prone to grossness, had more smells, needed more washing, clipping, binding, pruning, grooming, perfuming, and training. These poor kids may have resolved to stink together in defiance of a corrupt tradition built on neurosis and falsehood, but Mr. Sammler thought that an unforeseen result of their way of life was loss of feminity, of self-esteem. In their revulsion from authority, they would respect no person. Not even their own persons. (MSP 31-32).

The novel tries to support Mr. Sammler’s view of women. The women in Mr. Sammler’s Planet are depicted in a way to prove what Sammler tries to show. Women characters in the novel are intellectually blurred, sexually degenerated, socially pervert and individually confused. They usually yield to their wild fantasy and try to gratify their numerous desires. They are shown by the text as insatiable monsters destroying civilization in their passion for self gratification.
Shula, Sammler’s own daughter, is a ludicrously stupid but destructive woman who must be controlled by his father even when she is in her forties. She is jobless in spite of her education, and depends on the charity of Dr. Elya Gruner for her living. The first passages about her in the novel:

But when it came to clutter, his daughter, Shula, was much worse. He had lived with Shula for several years, just east of Broadway. She had too many oddities for her old father. She passionately collected things. In plainer words, she was a scavenger. More than once, he had seen her hunting through Broadway trash baskets (or as he still called them dustbins). She wasn’t old, not bad looking, not even too badly dressed, item by item. The full effect would have been no worse than vulgar if she had not been obviously a nut. (MSP 19-20)

The passage gives the readers the impression of a person whose oddities indicate a fundamental personality problem. The impression becomes stronger when Sammler describes her way of dressing: “She turned up in a miniskirt of billiard-table green, reveling legs sensual in outline but without inner sensuality, at the waist a broad leather belt; over shoulders, bust, a coarse strong Guatemalan embroidered shirt” (MSP 20). Shula is also odd about her hair, which “had a small curl, a minute distortion. It put her in a rage. She cried out that it was thin” (MSP 20). To explain her rage and crying, the text blames another woman: “She had it straight from Sammler’s mother, a hysterical woman” (MSP 20). So she put on a wig which “has mixed yak and baboon hair and synthetic fiber” (MSP 30), a hairpiece which “a female impersonator might put on a convention of salesman.”(MSP 30) Her house is usually in a state of chaos, so that, Sammler had to move out to live in Margotte’s apartment. Indeed, “she had too many oddities for her old father” (MSP 19).
Readers also find Shula’s behavior unusual when they see her attending famous temples and synagogues. “She went to sermons and free lectures everywhere” (MSP 20). Her patience for sermons surprises Sammler who “could bare no lecture for more than ten minutes” (MSP 20). Her image also suggests stupidity when she, with loony, clever, large eyes, the face full of white comment and skin thickened with concentration sat on her rucked up skirt, the shopping bag with salvage, loot coupons, and throwaway literature between her knees” (MSP 20). After the sermons or lectures, “she was the first to ask questions” (MSP 20). As a result, “she becomes well acquainted with the rabbi, the rabbi’s wife and family” (MSP 20). But she has a Christian name as well. For four years, “she had been called Slawa, and now there were times when she answered only to that name” (MSP 21). She observes Ash Wednesday and at Easter, she was a catholic (MSP 21). Like Madeline she is not settled. She is scatter-minded.

On the other hand, like all other fashionable women in Saul Bellow’s novels, Shula’s image is also that of a modern woman obsessed with self-gratification:

Shula, like all the ladies perhaps, was needy -needed gratification of numerous instinct, needed the warmth and pressure of men, needed a child for sucking and nurture, needed female emancipation, needed the exercise of the mind needed continuity needed interest-interest, flattery, needed flattery, needed triumph, power, needed rabbis, needed priests, needed fuel for all that was perverse and crazy, needed noble action of the intellect, needed culture, demanded the sublime. (MSP 30)

This passage reminds one of the views of Zelda, Madeline’s aunt, on the rights of a modern girl. “A girl in Zelda’s view had a right to expect from her husband nightly erotic gratification, safety, money, insurance, furs, jewellery, cleaning women, drapes, dresses, hats, night clubs, automobiles, theatre” (Herzog 46). Putting these
two passages together one can get the picture Saul Bellow tries to put across about modern women in his works. In his view, modern women are demanding creature. Hungry in the soul, they are, indeed, insatiable monsters threatening civilization in their passion for self-realization. In their effort to achieve what they want, they recognize no moral principles.

To illustrate this, Bellow fits in the novel the story of Shula’s theft of Dr. Lal’s manuscript, and her absence of guilt about her fault when being confronted by Dr Lal and her father. Indeed, when Shula steals the manuscript, the Future of the Moon, she does not care about the human consequences of her deed. What she cares is what she wants. After retrieving the manuscript, Mr. Sammler, mails a letter to Dr. Govinda Lal to apologize for the trouble his daughter makes, while upon confronting Dr Lal, Shula just says, “there was a misunderstanding” (MSP 166) and starts to seduce him, presenting herself in a saree with exposed breasts, false eyelashes and a Hindu spot on her forehead. In reaction to Shula’s seductive manners and words that: “I never meant to make trouble” (MSP 166), Sammler thinks: “No. Not trouble. Only to dig a pit and cover it with brushwood, and when a man falls into it lie flat on the ground and converse amorously” (MSP 166).

This incident in the novel shows the degree to which modern women are ready to shoulder the moral responsibility of their deeds. Bellow tries to show that women are different from men in terms of their sensibility to the consequences of their deeds. Thus Sammler says, “in women, the keenest sense of wrongdoing seems to be in different place” (MSP 179) and concludes that she “had desires. Needs. Was a woman, after all” (MSP 179). Here, Sammler could not use words that are more sexist, with the use of the phrase after all and his assigning women with needs and desires.

To stop Shula seducing Dr. Lal, Sammler orders her to go to the kitchen and help Margotte to prepare food. While women in the kitchen, Sammler finds an opportunity to engage Dr Lal in an intellectual discussion about H.G.Wells and the
meaning of man’s landing on the moon. Indeed, only in the absence of women, Bellow’s male characters can please each other in an intellectual interaction. Sammler “had been charmed by Dr. Lal”, (MSP 179) because in him he had seen or imagined, a resemblance to Ussher Arkin, Sammler’s misogynous relative. “He was beginning to think, however, that this Lal was, like Ussher Arkin, a man he could talk to” (MSP 169). Apart from his resemblance to Arkin, Lal was “intelligent and sensitive man with an expressive face” (MSP 169). In addition, “Lal was the real thing. His conversation was conversation. It was not a line. This was no charlatan, only an oddity. He was excellent, solid” (MSP 179). Indeed, Sammler is so fascinated by Lal that he feels “he was about to speak his full mind. Aloud [...] he was about to say what he thought” (MSP 181). In fact, Dr. Lal, as another male character, is the only person who manages to bring back Sammler into the life. “More green growth rising from the burnt black would simply be natural persistency, the life force working, trying to start again” (MSP 182). Before Dr Lal, he never speaks to women intellectually.

To get back to Shula, her oddities which sometimes go hand in hand with insanity do not arise from frustration or anger as in the case of Madeline Herzog. It is an integral part of her character. Awkward, troublesome and simple minded, Shula tries to rationalize whatever she does. In another occasion, after finding Dr.Gruner’s hidden money, earned through illegal abortions, she argues “its only right that I should take it” (MSP 249). To justify her idea she adds, “I think Elya would agree. I am a woman without a husband, I’ve never had children, this money comes from preventing children, and I think it is only right that I should take it” (MSP 249). However, she is unable to persuade Sammler who asks her to give the money back. He explains, “We are not thieves. It’s not our money” (MSP 249). Shula’s stealing of Dr. Lal’s manuscript and her idea of taking the hidden money of Dr. Elya Gruner is to show how immoral Shula is and how Sammler as a moralistic man is pitted against her wrong doings.
Angela Gruner, in Mr. Sammler’s Planet is another female character whose main characteristic is her animalistic sexuality. Unlike therapeutic sexuality of Ramona, Angela’s sensuality is unfeeling, ugly and without any human touch. “In Angela you confronted sensual womanhood without remission. You smell it too” (MSP 27). Indeed her sensuality exist in such irresistible proportions that she is vulgar, cheap and above all insensitive:

She crossed her legs on a chair too fragile to accommodate such thighs, too straight for hips. She opened her purse for a cigarette and Sammler offered a light. The smoke came from her nose and she looked at him, when she was in good form, cheerfully with a touch of slyness. The beautiful maiden. He was old hermit. When she became hearty with him and laughed, she turned to have a big mouth, a large tongue. Inside the elegant woman, he saw a coarse one. The lips were red, the tongue was often pale. That tongue, a woman’s tongue—evidently it played an astonishing part in her free, luxurious life. (MDH 58)

Nevertheless, she is typical of her own age, or better to say she symbolizes sexual revolution of the Sixties. Yet, what are the characteristic of this revolution? Prafulla C. Kar writes that it “favors novelty, experiment and unbridled freedom. The youth in particular, are most iconoclastic in their actions and attitudes […] there is mad everywhere for free and spontaneous expression” (MSP 43-44). Indeed Angela represents the new sexual ethics in which “fidelity, strict and literal, was not Angela’s dish”. (MSP 56) Though most of the critics identify Angela with the modern woman, Sarah Blucher Cohen, however, disapproves the judgment and argues that Angela is “Bellow’s caricature of the emancipated woman who is more enslaved than liberated by the free expression of sexuality” (227).

Angela Gruner is one of the most harshly portrayed women in Bellow’s novels. If Madeline is unforgettable for her hunger of power, Angela Gruner is
memorable for her animalistic sensuality. Indeed, she cannot see beyond her mere sexuality. Even family feeling doesn’t move her much. She offends her dying father and when Sammler tries to alert her about her responsibility towards the dying man, she is just thinking about the share of money she may lose as the result of her dying father’s anger. When Sammler continues to awaken her, Angela becomes angry, saying, “All the oldest, deepest, worst sexual prejudices are mobilized against me” (MSP 131). In Angela’s view, Sammler wants to “make an old-time deathbed scene” (MSP 245). So she refuses to “make some signs” (MSP 245) of love towards her dying father to “give the man a last opportunity to collect himself” (MSP 245). In reaction to her refusal to make amends for the annoyance she has caused her father, Sammler expresses his anger:

I don’t know what happened in Mexico. The details do not matter. I only note the peculiarity that is possible to be gay, amorous, and intimate with holiday acquaintances. Diversions, group intercourse, fellatio with strangers - one can do that but not come to terms with one’s father at the last opportunity. (MSP 246)

Angela’s sexuality excludes any higher, more human feeling. For her, sensuality becomes an end in itself. She calls herself “A dirty little bitch really” (MSP 123). Wallace, Angela’s brother describes her sister as a gross nymphomaniac and her father sees his daughter as a woman “who has done it in too many ways with too many men. By now, she probably doesn’t know the name of the man between her legs. And she looks ... Her eyes - she has fucked eyes” (MSP 143). In another scene, the text displays the reaction of her father toward Angela:

Tempering his great affection, mixing fatherly love with curses, Gruner would mutter Bitch when his daughter approached with all her flesh in motion _ thighs, hips, bosom displayed with a certain fake innocence. Presumably maddening men and infuriating
The passage here shows how Angela’s sexually provocative manners exasperate her father. Not only her way of dressing and walking suggest sex, but also her vocabulary is obscene. Sammler “fetches back for example, a statement by Angela Gruner, blurted out after several dreams when she was laughing, gay and evidently feeling free( to the point of brutality) with old Sammler. “A Jew brain, a black cock, a Nordic Beauty, she had said is what a woman wants” (MSP 55). Obscenity is also evident in her behavior when she in her first meeting with Wharton Horricker cries, “we’re going to fuck all night” (MSP 58). In fact everything about her, from her vocabulary to her dressing, demonstrate her vulgar sexuality.

Having examined the images of women in Mr. Sammler’s Planet, it is not difficult to recognize that Bellow is evidently sexist in his 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)

Indeed, the text is so barren 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. It is simply a problem of angle of vision and its resulting tone. In fact, the novel takes most of its energy from the polemics of the male character against modernism, sexual revolution, Bohemian
protest and women, and this polemics itself depends on the characterization of Mr. Sammler. In other words, the paradoxical fact about Mr. Sammler Planet is that its very success is its very failure. To put it more simply, Sammler’s persuading argument against modernism cannot be something different from his harsh judgment on females. To his view, the wicked sexual customs of the 1960's and the collapse of modern civilization are the results of corrupt feminity. As a result, for most of the novel he is in retreat from feminity, his daughter and other relatives, preferring to read only his old misogynous male mentors, the Bible and Meister Eckhardt.

Bellow is obsessed with the sexuality of new generation. “Girls with sexual odors, young people like young dogs with their first red erections, and pimples sprung to the cheeks from foaming beards” (MSP 37). Again, on the street, Sammler sees women with dogs leashed, unleashed- dogs usually signifying disgusting sexuality. Indeed, whatever he sees in New York in the 1960’s is charged with vulgar sexuality. The black pickpocket exposes his sex organ to threaten Sammler. The young students who interrupt Sammler’s speech shout, “His balls are dry” (MSP 36).

Thus, in a resisting reading, one can notice an infuriated masculine voice behind Sammler’s argument against new emancipated sexuality. Sammler sees in Angela’s sensuality something fatal for masculinity:

She is a female-power type, the femme. Every myth has its natural enemies. The enemy of the distinguished-male myth is the femme fatale. Between those thighs, a man’s conception of himself is just assassinated. If he thinks, he’s so special she’ll show him. Nobody is so special. Angela represents the realism of the race, which is always pointing out that wisdom, beauty, glory, courage in men are just vanities and her business is to beat down the man’s legend about himself. That is why she and Horricker are finished, why she
let that twerp in Mexico ball her fore and aft in front of Wharton, with who-knows-what else thrown in free by her. In a spirit of participation. (MSP 150)

Clearly, in the text, there is an angry voice, whose main concern is to keep male-myth intact, but the problem is that male-myth is challenged by modernism. Indeed, Sammler’s struggle for upholding masculine ideology is thwarted by sexual revolution of the 1960s, and that is why Sammler’s politics is either to retreat from women or to attack them as the cause of the sexual revolution. In 1960’s, however, sex is the spirit of the age, and Angela represents this spirit. In other words, Angela represents an age, which challenges the traditional masculine ideology. Then, it is not surprising why Angela is so harshly treated in the novel. On the other hand, Sammler’s holding fast to his masculine ideology, as a man of thinking, leads him to go against not only the new values in the field of gender, but also the epistemological foundation on which these values are based. Mostly, in the novel, he is preoccupied with the assumptions behind sexual emancipation of new age:

But I don’t want to. What was I saying. You see I am getting old. I was saying that this liberation into individuality has not been a great success. For a historian of great interest, but for one aware of the suffering it is appalling. Hearts that get no real wage, souls that find no nourishment. Falsehoods, unlimited. Desire, unlimited. Possibility, unlimited. Impossible demands upon complex realities, unlimited. Revival in childish and vulgar form of ancient religious ideas, mysteries, utterly unconscious of course- astonishing. Orphism, Mithraism, Manichaeanism, Gnosticism. When my eye is strong. I sometimes read in the Hastings Encyclopedia of religion and Ethics. Many fascinating resemblances appear. But one notices most a peculiar play-acting, an elaborate and sometimes quite artistic manner of presenting oneself as an individual and a strange
desire for originality, distinction, interest- yes, interest! A dramatic derivation from models, together with the repudiation of models. Antiquity accepted models, the Middle Ages- I don’t want to turn into a history book before your eyes- but modern man, perhaps because of collectivization, has a fever of originality. (MSP 184)

Sammler holds responsible modern man’s fever of originality for his sufferings. Indeed, he is angry, because modern people are no longer ready to follow old models. But what models is he preoccupied with? It seems that his ideal model is patriarchy. He expresses his dissatisfaction with the modern man’s desire for originality, manifested in hippie cult of 1960’s:

The idea of the uniqueness of the soul. An excellent idea. A true idea. But in these forms? In these poor forms? Dear God! With hair, with clothes, with drugs and cosmetics, with genitalia, with round trips through evil, monstrosity, and orgy, with even God approached through obscenities? How terrified the soul must be in this vehemence, how little that is really dear to it it can see in these Sadic exercises. (MSP 184)

In fact, he suggests that “these poor forms” are the result of modern people’s “repudiation of models”. In his analysis, because modernism encourages individualism and believes in uniqueness of soul, nobody feels any need to follow the models. As a result, “a sexual madness was overwhelming the western world” (MSP 54). Sammler’s obsession with this sexual madness is so severe that he frequently recalls an apocryphal story saying, “A President of the United State was supposed to have shown himself in a similar way to the representatives of the press (asking the ladies to leave), and demanding to know whether a man so well hung couldn’t be trusted to lead the country” (MSP 54)?

Sammler’s obsession with sexual revolutions in sixties, however, ends in his blaming young people, especially women. All over the text, women are mostly
associated with their foul odors, their unclean organs and their corrupt nature. Since women are thought to embody nature rather than culture, Bellow links the sexuality of women to the decadence of the land “Millions of corrupt ladies corrupt every body. (MSP 64)” Men, thought Sammler, often sin alone; women are seldom companionless in sin” (MSP 130).

Thus, Sammler sees sexual madness, like a plague, affecting everybody. In fact, it is in the air:

From the black side, strong current were sweeping over everyone. Child, black, redskin-the unspoiled Seminole against the horrible Whiteman So “millions of civilized people wanted oceanic, boundless, primitive, neck free nobility, experienced a strange release of galloping impulses, and acquired the peculiar aim of sexual niggerhood for every one”. (MSP 130)

This joining to the pleasure of the age knows no limit. “Even doctors nowadays made sexual gestures to their patients. Put women’s hand on their parts. Sammler had heard of this. Physicians who rejected the Oath, who joined the Age. (MSP 130) Sammler knows another reason for this. “Humankind had lost its old patience. It demanded accelerated exaltation, accepted no instant without pregnant meaning as in epic, tragedy, comedy, or films” (MSP 130).

To interpret Sammler’s comment on the roots of sexual madness in sixties, one should pay attention to the word patience. In fact, Sammler is so horrified of women and sexual revolution that he retreats into the defense of the old regime. In other words, he invites women to embrace patriarchy and endure its repression in return for leading a moral life. Sammler does not recognize the ideological consequences of enduring patriarchal system. It seems he does not regard the oppression of women as a sin. The only sin for him is sexual freedom. With the word patience, the morality he invites people to observe reminds one of the slavery period.
He himself admits that he does not belong to the age. It seems he has just come out of history and he is at a loss what to do with the things happening around him.

**Women Images in *More Die of Heartbreak***

From childhood—hell, from birth!—she was demanding, moody, contrary, tetchy, a complainer and a schemer. She was bad enough in high school, but when they sent her to Vassar she took up with town punks in Poughkeepsie and did everything you read about in the papers. (by papers he meant the National Enquirer and checkout-counter publications.) In Italy, I swear she would have joined the Red Brigades. Normal people like you can’t begin to picture what kind of sex activities they had. We never combined sex with LSD. (MDH 136)

This is a description of Matilda Layamon by her own father in *More Die of Heartbreak*. Like Bellow’s other castrating women characters, Matilda also is toughie and a real bitch (MDH 254) as well as a schemer and a complainer. Her father is happy about her and Benn Crader’s plan to marry because “by choosing you she showed that she wanted to make her life stable at last” (MDH 136). This sentence reminds one of Madeline’s mother’s sentences telling that Herzog’s marrying her daughter “could bring stability into the life of this neurotic girl and cure her by his steadiness” (Herzog 116).

In addition, as in *Mr. Sammler’s Planet*, in *More Die of Heartbreak* also sexual madness among young females is one of the obsessions of men characters. Indeed, according to one of these characters, “normal people” cannot imagine the extent to which this madness goes, but men’s sensitivity and their longing for female love makes them vulnerable to this type of females. One of these vulnerable men is Benn Crader, the narrator’s uncle in the novel, who is the world’s famous
Botanist. As we see again in Bellow’s works men characters enjoy a prominence never obtainable for women.

However, as in case of Herzog, Eros also, carries Benn to the outskirts of the unattainable but tempting earthly erotic paradise but soon he realizes that the paradise is just an illusion. Therefore, the whole novel becomes a lengthy biting comment on the ideals of love and marriage. Indeed, the novelist through the narrator, Kenneth and his uncle, Benn Crader, gives vent to harsh remarks about the concept of happiness through love and marriage.

More Die of Heartbreak opens with an introduction of characters, and with Kenneth, the narrator, describing his complex relationship with his maternal uncle, Benn Crader, a world-renowned botanist. He then discusses the differences between himself, and his father, a man who, as he describes him, “[puts] on the kind of sex display you see in nature films, the courting behavior of turkey cocks or any of the leggier birds… Dad was a hit with women” (MDH 24). Indeed, this theme is central throughout the book, with Kenneth accepting his problems with women. He also introduces his mother, a woman who allowed her husband to step out, and only left after realizing that he did not understand what made her happy. She needed intellectual encouragement of a literary style, while he bought her materialistic goods to make up for his infidelities. To compensate for her past life, Kenneth’s mother is now living an African community, helping a refugee camp.

Kenneth then turns to an overview of Benn’s recent sexual history. He presents a man who, while admiring the beauty of women, is not quite rooted enough in human society to understand the sexual pretexts he encounters. One incident is discussed many times during the novel: a middle aged neighbor of Benn’s, an attractive professional who has a slight drinking problem, asks Benn to help her change a light bulb, a not too subtle hint which Benn ignores until she makes a move. The next day, when he shows no interest, and expresses regret for the act, she exclaims, “What am I supposed to do with my sexuality?” Benn then
attracts the attentions of another older woman, Caroline who is controlling, indifferent, and loving all at the same time.

While Benn, without informing Kenneth, is dealing with a planned wedding to Caroline, Kenneth is in Seattle to discuss with his ex-girlfriend, Treckie, what they should do about raising their child, now three years old. Treckie, a beautiful, half-sized woman, has been seeing another man, a fact Kenneth knows because of the bruises on her legs - lovemaking injuries he refused to ever give her. Kenneth has discussed this peculiar fetish with his father, who knows women, and received the knowledge that some smaller women must do it to show they are women, and not fully matured girls.

Escaping from the wedding to Caroline, Benn flies to Kyoto at the expense of a lecture series, inviting Kenneth to join him. The Japanese sense of order and utility appeals to Benn, until a strip show he sees at the insistence of his colleagues, upsets him with its overt sexuality, at which point, he and Kenneth return to their home in the Midwest. Benn’s next partner is Matilda Layamon, a beautiful, Midwestern daughter, who wants to settle down with a distinguished, older man who can calm her wild side. Benn, perhaps fearing that Kenneth will convince him that it is a foolish idea, weds her without Kenneth’s knowledge.

Benn’s father in law, a stout man in shape with sharp, thin shoulders, is a doctor and in fact, asks that he be called, Doctor. He serves the rich, and because of this, has one-percentage point interests in many businesses around the country - an accidental fortune. He is a scheming man, and other than a few disagreements between Benn, and the man, no conflicts occur until he attempts to take advantage of Benn’s uncle, Vilitzer. Vilitzer, as the executor of the will of the Crader’s mother unfairly bought the Crader’s house, selling the land to a company, which built a tower there, resulting in millions of dollars of profit for Uncle Vilitzer and pennies for the Crader children. Because Due to Vilitzer’s influence on judge,
neither Benn nor Kenneth’s mother received their fair share, and the Doctor hopes with the help of Matilda to exploit this, so Matilda will have a rich husband.

In the end of the novel, Vilitzer dies after a heated discussion with Kenneth and Benn, while attending the funeral, sends his wife ahead to their honeymoon, and changes his ticket for Antarctica. He relays this to Kenneth who now lives in Benn’s apartment, and who has recently returned from a successful bid to Treckie that he has his daughter for a part of the year. He is aware of her impending marriage thanks to a self-expedient phone call that revealed this information. The novel ends with a conversation between the two professors in which a mutual understanding of their grievances occurs.

Matilda Layamon as the major women character in the novel is very striking in both appearance and personality. This is emphasized by narrator’s repeated use of adjectives such as classic, beautiful and hyacinth to describe her beauty. Matilda appears to Benn as a lady with a classic face, hyacinth hair and beautiful eyes. On the other hand, she seems to have a brain enough to be the chief executive officer of a blue chip corporation. “With her mentality you could manage NASA” (MDH 135). Her cleverness pleases Benn, but her sexual attractions intrigue him the most. “Consider her assets—not just her figure but her taste in dress. Substitute Nature for Teller you are holding H-bomb of beauty invented by Nature” (MDH 135). Indeed, Matilda appears to be perfection incarnate, at least to Benn’s over idealizing eyes. Benn Crader sees her as a woman who is divinely beautiful, erotically experienced and in short as the mythological Helen herself. For him she was the child of wealth cleared at last for total rest:

After much agitation, defiance, prodigal or neurotic wanderings, she was reconciled to her home. This was where Uncle Benn came in. Marriage to Crader restored her. She found rest. She resumed her earlier ways and privileges, as it were. She slept. She was an extravagant, luxuriant sleeper, fully abandoned to sleep. You could
Nevertheless, it does not take long that readers, through the narrator, become aware of the destructive nature of Matilda Layamon who, instead of being a stable wife, assumes the role of a castrator and spreads trouble and unease around her. In fact, Benn himself had a glimmer of the truth of his marriage. So the whole image of Psyche embracing Eros is deflated “If she was a Psyche, the Eros she embraced in sleep was not her husband” (MDH 142). Yet, she finds rest by marrying him “but the substance of that rest might be something else again” (MDH 142). She sleeps well, but “her waking was not happy. When she drank her coffee, she was snappish, morose. Her big eyes were still back in the sleep world” (MDH 142).

In the meantime, Benn’s acute power of observation is at work. So “before she spoke, and as her mouth was opening, Benn noticed how sharp her teeth were” (MDH 142). In fact, by and by, he began to discover to his utter horror and dismay that his second wife, Matilda was “very different, more difficult, more of a torment” (MDH 17). Her sharp teeth show her castrating type and very soon in the novel, Matilda’s distinctively feminine attributes disappear, replaced by the broad shoulders and physical appearance of transvestite male. This gradual shift in Benn’s attitude from that of idealization and adoration to that of distortions of her beloved contributes to the atmosphere in which Matilda takes a demonic shape:

Matilda’s eyes provide Benn with intimidations, not of immortality but of demonic forces. He perceives her whole physical appearance...extra large lilac eyes, the power of the hair growing dense from the low forehead narrower than ever, and darkened and sharply lined...her teeth looked sharp. (MDH 234-40)

All the above descriptions and many others in the narrative reflect the anxiety of men characters in the novel who find in Matilda a castrating female, far from a feminine, happy, loving partner. Indeed the text is all littered with sentences...
signifying Benn’s fear of Matilda’s physical appearance. He sometimes is frightened to face her masculine shoulders: “As Uncle Benn helped Tilda with her coat, he faced her shoulders again-innocent in themselves. (Or were they!)” (MDH 235). He even “avoided looking at her great- eyed, low- browed, musing, beautiful face” (MDH 235).

In the following passage, Bellow deftly shows how dominant and aggressive Matilda is compared to Benn. Having discovered his car’s headlights not working, Benn wants to come back home after seeing a film with Matilda, but Matilda insists on using emergency flashers. However, before they could reach the turnoff, a big powerful automobile rushes from behind and pushes them to the side of the road. A man not in uniform comes out using offensive language:

‘you shit-ass! You prick! You queer!

‘And who the hell are you? Said Benn.

‘I am making a citizen arrest to keep you from killing somebody.’

‘This guy is drunk, said Matilda. She leaned across to the window and said

‘You are a hazard yourself, full of whiskey and couldn’t pass a breath test.’

‘Shut that broad up’ the man told Benn. ‘Can you give a choice. Follow me back or I ll shoot your tiers out.’

Matilda challenged him again. ‘Where is your gun?’

‘You better hope you don’t get to see it.’
‘As they were driving, back to main street Matilda’s high voice was shaky with anger and she said. ‘You shouldn’t let a bastard like that talk that way.’

‘Nothing I could do’

‘You don’t have to take such stuff from anybody’

‘He is packing a gun’

‘You should have got out and kicked him right in the knackers’

‘Matilda, you’re under the Hitchcock influence. You said yourself that he’s drunk, and he looks like a Vietnam veteran. Besides, we are a hazard on the road in this old heap’

‘Backing down under threats is a Holocaust mentality’

‘I am not going to fight this football player’ (MDH 236)

As a domineering woman, Matilda becomes angry when she sees Benn’s being cowardly with the drunk who arrested them, but her aggressiveness becomes a source of anxiety for Benn himself. He is afraid of her masculine body shape, especially her shoulders. Indeed, Matilda’s physical appearance becomes an obsession for Benn and this obsession sometimes takes a very horrible shape. In a conversation to Kenneth, he says that he thanked God for not going back with Matilda to the deep wood that night because he admits that: “I couldn’t bear to think that what might happen in the night. Sometimes people are violent in their sleep and do horrible things. What if I were to do something terrible while unconscious” (MDH 237)? In fact, though not openly admitting, Benn is afraid of killing Matilda in his sleep to get rid of his obsession with her masculine appearance. To force him to spell out Kenneth asks, “You didn’t think you’d strangle her…because of those shoulders!” (MDH 237)
The grotesque point is that when Benn and Kenneth had this conversation Benn had been married not quite two months. To describe the bizarreness of Benn’s marriage, Kenneth makes a poignant observation: “A pair of psychopaths under one quilt” (MDH 238). In fact, all Benn’s dreams of marriage and love end sadly in his taking “a double dose of chloral hydrate to be sure that I’d pass out” (MDH 238). To explain Benn’s predicament, Kenneth says, “Botany absorbed you. Then you had terrifying attacks from the sexual side of things – longed for a woman’s love but didn’t have the preparation you needed. Nobody is educated for it” (MDH 241). In fact, according to Kenneth it requires great skill and preparation to long for a woman’s love. Otherwise “more die of heartbreak, yet nobody organizes against it” (MDH 241).

Matilda is not only aggressive but also very clever in money matters. She, with the help of her father, works out a plan to get a couple of millions from Benn’s uncle, Vilitzer who has deceived Benn, his naive nephew, in a property deal. She prepares her husband for an encounter with ailing Vilitzer, though he does not wish to threaten his uncle because of his poor health. However, like Herzog he has to provide resources for his stylish wife whose love for lavishness has no limit. Therefore, he meets his uncle, but the meeting ends in fiasco. Vilitzer suffers a heart stroke and dies, thus Benn finds himself caught up in the tragic episode. To appease Benn’s troubled soul after the accident, Matilda “welcomes him home in a red dress he particularly liked…not red exactly but a ripe persimmon color, reddish orange… also put her hair the way he liked it” (MDH 291). This behavior of her, does not, however, seem, in the text, as a pure act of understanding or a gesture of measuring up to the emotional needs of a husband, On the contrary, it demonstrates how Matilda exploits every occasion to manipulate Benn.

To take advantage out of Kenneth’s relation with his uncle, Benn, Matilda tries to be frank with Kenneth about her sex with uncle Benn, because she “was trying to get information out of me and spoke with some frankness in order to
induce me to level with her” (MDH 292). Matilda’s father also “had said provocative things to Benn about erotic inventions of younger generation” (MDH 164). In other words, both the girl and her father are quite outspoken about sex. Matilda says, “People do talk freely about thing today. Thank God, old reserves are gone. Indeed, like in Mr. Sammler’s Planet, Bellow’s preoccupation with the demon of sexuality is also evident in More Die of Heartbreak. He is horrified at the pre-eminence of sex in the lives of people. In fact, he sees that this sexual fever is going to move the whole generation into a well of prurience. Kenneth’s description of the Kyoto strip-tease show is a case in point. It clearly shows how even “these high-tech and management types had come to see what these girls were displaying…to see to see to see the things of things, the small organs (MDH 107-8). Another explicit and at the same time grotesque description of prurience strikes the readers when Benn’s father-in-law, Dr Laymon takes him on his rounds to inspect the genitals of his elderly female patients. Dr Laymon also peers over the urinal partition in the men’s room to inspect Benn’s- his son-in-law’s- sexual organ. Dr Laymon’s curiosity about sex is again emphasized in the text by Matilda’s asking Benn if her father has asked him what kind of lay she is and goes on to add “ Daddy is sexually curious about me” (MDH 161). These passages lay bare the prevailing obsession with the sex in American society.

On the other hand, this free and liberal sexual mores in the West seems to have its own tales of woes. Indeed, Bellow tries to shed light on the dark sides of this emancipated sexuality to show how it can trap individuals and break their hearts. However, the important thing about the destructive aspects of modern sexuality in Bellow’s text is that he holds only women as responsible for its evilness. In other words, in Mr. Sammler’s Planet, More Die of Heartbreak and even in Herzog women are depicted in their respective roles as persons of their times- a postwar affluent era with its increasing sexually emancipated mores.

Another woman character in More Die of Heartbreak, Treckie, is also a product of sexually emancipated society. She is Kenneth’s ex girlfriend and the
mother of his daughter without marriage. From the very beginning we see Treckie in the role of a woman who likes being sexually abused, but Kenneth thinks that to this day he “hasn’t shaken off the conviction that Treckie and he had matching particles. Ideally suited for a lifetime of intimacy” (MDH 63). Kenneth sees Treckie as:

a round young woman, …so receptive so pleasing. Her dark hair, in curls, usually circles her head but sometimes comes down on one side. I was particularly taken with her shape, short and firm. …Treckie has exactly the bosom- top of its class- that I prefer…Treckie is a small woman, tiny really and I have the appreciation with female maturity. This sexual kid. I went for it, her small face and miniature smiles together with the full figure, her well-developed bosom. She was like a pale aborigine. (MDH 64)

But Kenneth’s endeavors to win Treckie by affection, personal charms and persuasion are not sadistic enough to satisfy her, because she “required clutching, grabbing, rudeness, needed primitive sexual encounters”(MDH 25). Indeed, she is a masochist taking pleasure in being hurt by abusive and tough men. She also sees no reason to hide the contusions left on her body. “Her legs were disfigured by bruises. Her shins were all black and blue…she seemed to take pride in these injuries” (MDH 64). To explains Treckie’s behavior Kenneth’s father says:

And there are people who enjoy sex only when it leaves marks on them. I knew a little person once, from a small town in Ohio, a curious little lady. One of her boyfriends had given her a black eye. She told me this with special pride. What a sweet little piece she was! Well, with this black eye she went into a truck stop for her morning coffee and, if you could believe her, the truckers all stop eating to stare at her. She said she walked in wearing a simple beige linen suit…but this sensational black eye! She turned on a whole
dinerful of strong men...One session of lovemaking is converted into a proclamation. Other men, by the dozen, hear the massage, are affected by her erotic power. (MDH 65)

Through the portrayal of Treckie’s masochism, the narrator points out how dirty sex momentum of the age can cause immense damage to an educated and intelligent woman. Emblematic of her own sexually emancipated age, Treckie, as a young working girl, finds exclusive relationship with Kenneth too confining. Therefore, she engages herself in sexual relationship with abusive and sadistic men. On the other hand, it seems she gets pleasure from showing the bruises left on her body to his boyfriend, who is also the father of her child. On seeing this, Kenneth, however, is helpless and “couldn’t ask the natural question, “My God how did you get those- who did that to you?”” (MDH 64) Indeed, under the circumstance, he was not able to ask about the injuries on her body. He sees in her looking at him a gesture to encourage him to ask who did it, but at the same time “when she saw me staring at her she shrugged her bare shoulders, she laid her head to one side, and her underlip swelled softly to me. There being challenge in this, a What are you going to do about it” (MDH 64)?

Feeling not ready for the responsibility, Treckie refuses to have any permanent relationship as marriage. Nevertheless, she permits Kenneth to move in with her, temporarily though, during the seventh month of her pregnancy for their child. Kenneth mistakes her cheerful temperament to his presence around, instead of her daily tales from the hospital, a real funny place for her. The birth of their daughter does little except “putting a super edge on Treckie’s good humor, but few important changes resulted” (MDH 66). She went on living, as she was, cheerful but not loving. Kenneth, the father of her child, found no affection in her.

Kenneth attributes his frustration at gaining Treckie’s love to his Jewish heritage and says “Maybe a hereditary passion came down to me, from my ancestors who for thousands of years prescribed for everything—Benedictions for
breaking bread, for going to toilet, for returning from a funeral” (MDH 211). Indeed, he cannot bring himself to accept the values of sexual revolution, practically ending in a sexual fever not only affecting Treckie but also everybody. When Treckie decides to shift to Seattle along with her daughter, Kenneth argues against the move by warning her about the widespread sexual fever manifested in daily crimes. He warns, “You couldn’t open a paper without reading that a young woman had been kidnapped, raped, pistol-whipped, doused in gasoline and set fire” (MDH 34).

After Treckie’s move to Seattle, Kenneth makes a hurried trip to Seattle to talk sense into Treckie in an effort to work things out for the sake of their daughter. Indeed, Kenneth is worried that his child may be exposed to the open sex between Treckie and her new boyfriend, again a tough man, a ski instructor. He shows a genuine fatherly concern for his daughter, whose mother doesn’t care much to be cautious in open sex. This is reminiscent of Herzog’s similar reaction for his daughter’s probable exposure to Madeline’s sexual indulgence. As we see in all these reactions, women have no problem with sexual turbulence of the age, but men feel worried and thoughtful about the direction of all such overindulgences.

In Bellow’s text, only women—not men at all—suffer from this sexual fever of the age, and not only young women like Treckie but also the middle-aged, married women like Mrs. Tanya Sterling, Treckie’s mother, falls victim to sexual epidemic. Tanya, in the novel, has been portrayed as an insatiable Aphrodite. Middle aged, but still gorgeous, she is “downright attractive with genuine personal emanation… ray’s waves, frequencies of emissions irrational female music” (MDH 211). Indeed, Tanya is another female character in the novel that signifies sexual craziness of her time. Thinking over her instantaneous statement “I was a child bride” (MDH 211), which carried an implication that she is still a sexual woman, Kenneth concludes that—presumably Bellow’s own conclusion:
There are very few people willing to declare themselves out of the running. Stop running, and you join the census of the dead. Hence, the sexual craziness in the moves and motives of men and women. If they don’t have specific sexual intentions in any giving case, then they are rehearsing, continually trying something on, preparing, practicing their grips: just like cats when they wrestle with each other in fun. (MDH 211)

Having recently spent five years of romancing in Costa Rica, Tanya knows how to deal with men. Fully aware of Kenneth’s worries about his daughter Nancy, and also because she knows that her own daughter Treckie is not “fit to be trusted with motherhood” (MDH 215), she advises Kenneth to “bring a suit for custody” (MDH 215). She then goes over the past to inform that her daughter Treckie was “quite a sweet child until she started her development, and then Bam! Bam! Tiny as she was, looking for action. You never can tell which element is going to dominate in the nature of a woman” (MDH 214). She goes on to admit that her “daughter has no plan for happiness. She is a fool”. (MDH 214) Just as Kenneth is about to be taken in by Tanya’s unbiased and compassionate talk, he is startled to hear her bizarre proposal. She begins by admiring him as “having too much self-respect to eat yourself up with grief” (MDH 213) and ends up proposing marriage which would provide likely protection for him and his daughter, Nancy:

‘Marriage on the term I have in my mind would be a protection to you’

‘Yes, I am your senior by ten years or so. But that is why we could have a relaxed relationship. So that if an aggressive woman put her moves on you, you could say, I already am married’

‘And what you expect of me?’
'Only what you were willing to do. If you held me in your arms in bed, I’d be happy’. (MDH 217)

Thus, Tanya tries to tempt Kenneth sexually, “Let’s go back to you and me. The pleasant nights we’d spend together would give us strength for anything. Would you like to try one to see what it might be like…only to lie in bed? Talk or not, as you please” (MDH 217). Stunned by the bizarre offer from his girlfriend’s mother, Kenneth cold-shoulders her and, in spite of his interest in prosperous people, refuses to allow Tanya’s menacing sexuality a free reign, rather consigns it to its rightful place.

In the above passage, Saul Bellow again tries to demonstrate how modern women go wild under the prevailing contemporary obsession with sex. Tanya Sterling’s menacing sexuality reminds Kenneth of Caroline Bunge, his uncle Benn’s friend, again another woman representing the age of sexual madness:

If Caroline had had all her marbles, the resemblance would have been closer. Where Caroline was absentminded, Tanya enjoyed full consciousness. Both had had a considerable experience of men. Together they had probably seen more nude male than the U.S surgeon general. (MDH 214-5)

Kenneth’s being reminded of Caroline while speaking with Tanya and classifying them as sexually wild women shows his own obsession with sexual epidemic as a “most significant problem which cries for answer.”(MDH 215). He theorizes an explanation, which seems the result of Bellow’s own intellectual effort to come to clarity on it:

The sexual tastes of aristocracy, the misbehavior and hanky-panky of the haute bourgeoisie, the animal embraces of the proletarians and the peasantry, were not in the same class with the contemporary democratized- plus-third world erotic mixture. Millions of persons
had been freed from labor routine, incest, prohibitions, and the rest of that to invest freely, and all the ingenuity of humankind...was turned loose—the will of insane to suffer, pouring into erotic channels. You could believe that a divine master plan for evolution of love had miscarried, that the angels in their innocence had got the signals mixed up and inculcated all the wrong impulses into mankind. (MDH 215)

Indeed, Bellow thinks that there is something wrong with contemporary human societies, so that “pure love is overcome by perversity...love is replaced by Health and Health is obtained by anatomical means.... we shoot ourselves full drugs, hormones, narcotics, our souls are brutalized, human being becomes impervious to all higher impulses”( MDH 73). People’s longing for true love and happiness can easily lead to more die of heartbreak, as “erotic obsessions, concupiscence lewdness- the sexual furies- are streaming after us”. (MDH 73).In this circumstances, it is not difficult to understand why Bellow’s apparently innocent male characters become confused when they look for happiness through love and marriage.

It is not only Kenneth but also Uncle Benn, a world distinguished Botanist, who in his hunt for a perfect marriage partner, often enters and then retreats out of relationship with women hastily. Each time humiliated, for the woman is often not quite right, not like-minded, or castrating and entirely contrary to his expectations. Early in the novel, Bellow flash forward Benn’s futile ridiculous odyssey by describing his fascination in a Charles Adam’s cartoon, the cartoon, depicting two lovers in a graveyard, is captioned “Are you unhappy, darling? Oh yes yes, completely” (MDH 2). Indeed, Benn’s experience with women is frustrated encounters, nothing short of visiting graveyards. His encounters with women are kinds of tragicomedies, because, while sad, their irrationality and incongruity is in an amusing contrast with his metaphysical and scientific search for order and union.
Another woman with whom Benn was in a relationship for a while is Caroline Bunge. Though middle-aged, “she still stood out like a goddess from a Ziegfeld extravaganza, the Venus de Oro type... She would wear egret feathers, pearls on her throat, diamonds on her breasts... The note of the past, of the twenties and thirties, was one the strange nice things about Caroline.” (MDH 76). She has been divorced for several years, and currently owns a flat in Linden and a house in East Hampton as well. Very fluent, rarely silent, she identifies Benn as a remarkable man. Since she wants to settle down through a permanent connection, she immediately tells him that he would make a super husband. Tired of tough guys, she wants to marry Benn, because he is a gentleman and a scientist.

Indeed, like Tanya Sterling, Caroline is a female character who is helplessly looking for a man’s permanent refuge, especially when the man is an intellectual like Benn. In fact, Bellow’s women characters mostly have a weakness for advanced minds. “She was curious about the motives of advanced minds. She always had been drawn to philosophy and she assumed that as a university professor he must be in earnest about metaphysics.” (MDH 77). Out of confusion or politeness, Benn agrees to marry her but as Caroline “was closing on the man of her choice ... laying out the entire program”... and announcing her arrival by the next flight” (MDH 83), Benn withdraws. He hurries to Japan Airlines counter in the international terminal, when Caroline was landing on the domestic side of airport.

But the most wretched female character in More Die of Heartbreak is Della Bedell. As a “divorced wife of an alcoholic...a decent unhappy lady, she was nevertheless capable, and downtown she held a responsible position” (MDH 84). Physically, “in some respects an attractive woman, she had let herself become too stout for her own good and wore her hair cropped- stylish but unbecoming and modified punk” (MDH 84). Living upstairs directly above Benn’s, one night she comes down to ask for Benn’s assistance to change the bulb in her kitchen. He puts on his shoes and follows her. In the kitchen, “she suggests that he removes his
shoes. In the end, everything is removed” (MDH 85). Though embarrassed to make love to her, Benn is powerless to reject her. “She claps him like a sixteen-year-old girl, making herself drunker than she is and being belligerent about her biological rights (MDH 86). Later, after a few nights, when he, contrary to her expectations, “doesn’t ring her bell” or “doesn’t send a gracious note” (MDH 85), she comes down again by the back stairs and rings her kitchen bell. She is angry and demanding her share of life and sex, “you are pretending to be out. When do I get my chance to live! And what am I supposed to do with my sexuality?”

In its depiction of Mrs. Bedell, Bellow’s text is very humiliating. While Benn is gone, Mrs. Bedell dies of heart attack, as if Benn’s refusal to have sex with her was so vital for this wretched woman. When Benn becomes sad about her death, Kenneth advises him not to take her seriously, “We are in trouble if we don’t keep these minor absurdities minor” (MDH 87). Also, before her death, Kenneth had a very low opinion of her, “she ‘s set up to be made a fool of—the way she dresses, wears her hair, the way she speaks. Not like a woman taking herself seriously. How could you take her seriously” (MDH 86)?

In fact, Bellow creates Della Bedell as the exact representation of those unlucky women who do not know what to do with their unfulfilled sexuality in an emancipated society. In other words, Della Bedell, as Bellow’s other female characters, is plagued with sexual fever of the age without knowing how to come up with a solution for it. Moreover, the havoc of sex fever is much more severe in her case as “she is physically unsuitable for such desires” (MDH 85). Indeed, unlike Treckie who is young, sexy, and capable of attracting any man she wishes, Della Bedell “turns out to be a fat little person” (MDH 85). Then, it is difficult for her to win the sexual race, in an age when “Whatever troubles people run into, they look for the sexual remedy. Whether it’s business, a career problem, character difficulties, doubts about one’s body, even metaphysics, they turn to sex as analgesic” (MDH 86).
But, in the whole novel, there is just one female character that does not turn to sex. She is Rudi Trachtenberg, the mother of Kenneth, the narrator in the novel. As an intelligent mother and a very lenient wife, she is, however, a victim of her husband’s regular betrayal. Therefore, after years of neglect, she abandons her married life, in protest against her husband’s promiscuous way of life, and in a brave movement risks her life in an old age by joining a group of medical volunteers to serve in a refugee camp in East Africa. Indeed, by going to Somalia, she also walks out of a life of luxury. “No more high fashion cashmeres and silk, no more couturieres, an end to tea dates, according to the Paris convention with Papa’s girlfriend” (MDH29). There in Somalia, in a surrounding of famine and death, she performs the role of surrogate mother, a typical mother Theresa to countless dying people. While doing this, “in her letters she asks to be remembered” (MDH30) and she herself is concerned about her son and brother.

Rudi is worried about her son entangled in personal mess with Treckie who is abusing him. She is simply disgusted with Kenneth behaving so submissively toward his abuser. “Treckie would not be a suitable wife. She belongs to Ken Kesey acid culture and all the craziness, which now is passe and does not yet realize it. It has created no avant-garde, which would have been its only excuse (MDH 113). She is also anxious about his son’s relations with her brother Benn and his tendency to imitate him. She thinks that his brother, Benn is too dependent on his son, and that is damaging the both. Therefore, she angrily reacts to their relations. “He has tied you up by the affections (and delusions) and prevented you from developing your ambitions” (MDH 113). As a sister, she is worried about her brother as well. “In love my brother is the kind of hemophiliac who would shave in the dark with a straight razor” (MDH 113). As a wife, she is very considerate toward her unfaithful husband. When she receives the news of her father-in law’s death, she decides to cheer up her husband and gives her a big lunch in a restaurant. On the other hand, she was not jealous at all about her husband’s girlfriends. Indeed, she understood that marriage and family life could not be neat and tidy, with a husband who was a success with women:
He was a *homme a femmes, a chaser*. A man of staggering charm, he was able to make good on his *la ci darem* promises. The lady who gave him her hand wouldn’t be sorry. She wouldn’t even regret going back to her husband, since a sensible would understand that my father was a one-time event. (MDH 34)

In reaction to her husband’s success with women, she, unlike other women, opened her doors to pretty women. Doing this “mother might also have been showing Dad how fearless she was” (MDH 112). Though Kenneth believes “it was not in her mind to be his accomplice” (MDH 112), she is instrumental to her husband’s promiscuity.

*More Die of Heartbreak* is the bitterest text among these fictions. A pungent hostility to women, which calls upon the readers to sympathize, lies behind its comic treatment of gender ideologies. It seems Bellow’s mocking distance with Kenneth and Benn is nothing but a strategy to complicate the text. In other words, Bellow’s comic treatment of his male characters’ gender ideologies does not lead to a serious conclusion in his politics of gender. It just adds to the charms of his male characters.