Chapter V

The Politics of Misogyny:

Mr. Sammler’s Planet

More Die of Heartbreak

...We don’t know women, son. Not even after a lifetime of observation, practically research. Science itself is ignorant in this branch of knowledge. (MDH 65)

Mr. Sammler’s Planet

Mr. Sammler’s Planet is Saul Bellow’s ninth novel. Published in the politically turbulent and depressing spring of 1970, the book provoked remarkable and dispiriting reception and. annoyed many of its readers and outraged them to passionate condemnation. The response was mixed. Some were sympathetic to Bellow’s obvious disgust with the lack of law and order in America at that time. Others, however, found the ideas in the book unfashionable and even authoritarian to some extent. Irving How defends the book as “verbal impasto that mixes demotic richness with mandarin eloquence” (106), but John J Clayton condemns it as the defense of old values. “It reminds me of the old slave-owning class teaching the virtues of humility to its captives (246). The sharp contrast between these two critics clearly shows the extent of partisanship among the readers of the novel.
The novel is rich with ideas about life, but poor in life itself. In fact, what we see as the life in the novel is overshadowed by Sammler’s obsessive preoccupation with his own ideas about human condition in sixties. In fact, Bellow has again employed one of his men of thinking- Mr. Sammler here- to “take a harder line- more repressive and racist – than he could have if he were to argue in his own person” (Clayton 248). Bellow even seems more authoritarian in Mr. Sammler’s Planet, when it comes to deal with women:

Some parts of nature demanded more control than the others. Females were naturally more prone to grossness, had more smells, needed more washing, chipping, binding, pruning, grooming, perfuming and training. These poor kids may have resolved to stink together in defiance …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 persons. Not even their own persons. (MSP 31-2)

Sammler is openly harsh towards women in the whole book. The passage above is a typical example of his attitudes towards the women. He is not only harsh to women but also to the young in the hippie cult of sixties:

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 their soul must be in this vehemence, how little that is really dear to it it can see in these Sadie exercises. (MSP184)

His attitude toward black is also similar but more complicated. He depicts a handsome, elegantly attired black pickpocket who rides the Reverside bus and calmly pursues his crime:
Sammler saw a polished Negro forefinger without haste, with no criminal tremor, turning aside a plastic folder with social security or credit cards, emery sticks, a lipstick capsule, coral paper tissues, nipping open the catch of a change purse- and there lay the green of money. (MSP 10)

Mr. Sammler’s opinions are unquestionably old-fashioned. In his opposition to women, the young, and the blacks he has gone too far. “It may be, as some have averted, that Bellow has rushed rightward from fear of the New Left (Guttmann 393). Indeed, there is a tendency among the readers of Saul Bellow in general and the readers of Mr. Sammler’s planet in particular to believe that the protagonist’s mindset is not much different from that of the author himself. In other words, there is little ironic distance between what Sammler says and what Bellow himself believes as the writer of the novel. Yet, we are aware that we should not take them as one, as new criticism has taught us.

Thus, I focus just on the work itself to show how it is harsh to women. Whether Bellow is equally harsh is irrelevant; what matters is that he has written his hero’s misogyny into the book, and this misogyny is a basic part of the novel. But, first I want to look carefully at this strange Mr. Sammler as the narrative center of the novel and explain as accurately as I can the importance of a narrator whose obsession with sexuality of the young in sixties overwhelms the whole novel. Indeed, Bellow is a master of creation of characters whose perceptions control the whole narrative. This novel is clearly within the same mode. Beyond Sammler’s perception there is nothing which matters.

In Mr. Sammler’s Planet, Bellow is using the angle of vision of a character who has withdrawn from this planet. He looks sad, aloof, and thoughtful. Indeed he is a typical Bellowian protagonist to some extent. Bellow has always had a weakness for the lonely male thinker in an urban society. This time he has put his lonely intellectual protagonist right in the actual milieu of American sixties. Mr.
Sammler is presented as a historic repository of a certain set of humanistic ideals that Bellow greatly admires. Hence, he becomes a saintly or sacred object, survivor of both a symbolic and a literal holocaust, who now inhabits the barbarous world of hippie-era New York. The text depicts him standing outside for the rest of the novel, gazing down the sublunary world and shaking his head in sadness and disbelief. Indeed he has a Swiftian vision of the young in the sixties, especially women with their sexual freedom, of blacks with enormous sexual organs, of new revolutionaries who advocate sexuality as a standard of truth. But are these images the whole story of the revolutionary youth culture in late sixties? Or Sammler, like Herzog, sees what he wants to see. In the coming pages I will try to show how Sammler projects his own repressed self onto his age.

Mr. Sammler, the petted son of a Polish aristocrat, makes an anglophile of himself at an early age. He receives his early intellectual acculturation in London in the era of H.G. Wells and the Bloomsbury intellectuals. On the eve of World War II he accompanies his wife to Europe to help her settle her father's estate when the two are cut off by the Nazi invasion. His wife dies, his daughter is hidden by the nuns, and Sammler escapes death by shooting. He crawls out from under a pile of Jewish bodies, shoots a soldier in the Zamosht Forest and spends the rest of the war hiding in a tomb. He and his daughter, reunited after the war, are subsequently brought to America and supported by a wealthy American relative, Elya Gruner. For the rest of the novel, the setting is New York City and the era, the hippie and student movements of the 1960's. In such surroundings, he is a man without a real home. He has lived as a Jew, as an European intellectual, as a victim of the holocaust, and as an American. His mental world may be seen as a metaphoric diaspora in which he attempts to see possible relationships between universal and particular, past and present God and man, in order to find some answers as to how one should live or conversely how one should prepare for death.

Though the novel minimizes external action, and extends internal plot of thought, it is not totally without plot. 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 and his daughter since his arrival in United State is gradually dying of disease.

Yet, these plots are only important as far as they are instrumental in revealing what Sammler tries to articulate throughout the novel. In other words, every element in the novel is employed to let Sammler be explicitly judgmental on his age. This is also true with language. The language of narrative in Mr. Sammler’s Planet abandons sensuousness and detail in favor of generalization and abstraction. As I mentioned earlier, the novel is rich in ideas but poor in the life itself. In fact, the novel, like Sammler himself, has withdrawn from this planet. Consequently, the style is passionless, abstract and dull. The dialogue between Sammler and Dr. Lal is a good case in point.

To read the novel as a resisting reader, we have to see who the narrative centre of the novel is. Once the readers realize the importance of the centre of the narrative, they will recognize the degree to which the story is shaped by the narrator’s gender, race, psychology and culture. In fact, in a resisting reading, readers do not blindly succumb to the story of the book told by one of its characters; rather they will explore how the narrator’s gender, ethnicity, class, and culture come to shape the novel’s dominant paradigm. So it seems impossible to explain the politics of gender in Mr. Sammler’s Planet without examining Sammler himself and the way he dominates the whole narrative.

Mr. Sammler, a seventy- plus Polish Jew, is a keen observer of America in 1960s. In this period, America was in a constant state of chaos. The civil rights movements, student protests, rampant crime and violence, sexual revolution and America’s involvement in an unpopular war were all parts of a national turmoil, which constitute the horrifying surroundings for Bellow’s intellectual male
protagonist. Drawing on these surroundings, the novel succeeds in creating considerable tension in its dialectical approach, its constant clash of ideas; the old versus the new, the conservative versus the radical, the real potency of thought versus the alleged potency of sex:

There was the water—how beautiful, unclean, insidious! and there the bushes and the trees, cover for sexual violence, knife point robberies, slugging, and murders. On the water bridge light and moonlight lay smooth, enjoyable, brilliant. And when we took off from all this and carried human life outward? Mr. Sammler was ready to think it might have a sobering effect on the species, at this moment exceptionally troubled. Violence might subside, exalted ideas might recover importance. Once we were emancipated from telluric conditions. (MSP 145)

As we see in the passage, Sammler thinks that the real potency of thought thrives when only we emancipate ourselves from domination of sexuality, and violence. Without a doubt, the sexuality and violence in the city is overwhelming to him. “How extraordinary! Youth? Together with the idea of sexual potency? All this confused sex excrement-militancy, explosiveness, abusiveness. Tooth-showing, Barbary ape howling” (MSP 37). He sees young people like “young dogs with their first red erections, and pimples sprung to the cheeks from foaming beards” (MSP 37). On the street, he also sees “women with dogs, leashed and unleashed” (MSP 150), dogs always signifying fearful sexuality for Bellow. Indeed, New York of sixties for Sammler is horrifying, crammed with the sexuality and violence. To use Jungian terminology, it can be taken as Sammler’s own shadow.

But, to what extent, can a reader rely on Mr. Sammler’s angle of vision? Is he completely free of sexuality? Is he a saint? Why is sexuality of the young so disgusting to him then? The answer may lie in his withdrawal from the rest of humanity. In many passages, throughout the book, Sammler feels standing apart
from the age. “The fact was that Mr Sammler did feel somehow separated from the rest of his species, if not in some fashion served” (MSP 37). He is a man who has no curiosity to experience what contemporary American world offers as a revolutionary culture. It seems he has discarded from his personality all that longing for a contemporary life in the age. His detachment, his “keeping his own counsel for so long has lead to “mental dry courses in his head, of no interest to anybody else” (MSP 116).

His disinterestedness may be the result of the trauma in his past life. He is a Holocaust survivor. “His life had nearly been taken. He had seen life taken. He had taken it himself” (MSP 116). Though not openly speaking about his traumatic experience, Sammler remains preoccupied with it:

For his part, it happened that Sammler, with his wife and others, on a perfectly clear day, had had to strip naked. Waiting, then to be shot in mass grave Eichmann had testified that he had walked and the fresh blood welling up at his shoes had sickened him. Sammler had already that day been struck in the eye by a gun butt and blinded. In contraction from life, when naked, he already felt himself dead. But some he had failed, unlike the others, to be connected. Comparing the event, as mentally he sometimes did, to a telephone circuit: death had not picked up the receiver to answer his ring. (MSP 111)

Therefore, Mr. Sammler knows life and death. He was beaten, blinded in one eye, put in a line, shot at, and buried in a ditch with the dead body of his wife and with hundreds of other dead and dying Jews. But he survives by a miracle to become a symbol. Indeed, he was reborn to be a seer and a judge. With one eye, he sees things differently. He gains the respect of others. “Mr Sammler had a symbolic character. He personally was a symbol. His friends and family had made him a judge and a priest” (MSP 91).
Thus, Mr. Sammler with his inexhaustible intellectuality and his traumatic experience was reborn to be not only a judge for his friends and family, but also an authoritarian voice in the text itself. To gain the trust of the readers and to lead them to have a reading much in line with the text itself, Mr. Sammler as the narrative centre of the novel, is given a charismatic dimension. This charisma is not just limited to the protagonist of *Mr. Sammler’s Planet*. Bellow’s other central characters are also fascinating. Indeed, in his novels, “the vision of the novel is ultimately that of the central character” (Opdahl 8).

In my reading of *Mr. Sammler’s Planet*, I will make an attempt to destabilize what the text does to give prominence to Sammler, as the novel’s central character and its dominant voice in order to liberate different ways of reading suppressed under the tyranny of charismatic hero. The first thing that a resisting reader can do is to challenge the text’s attempt to present Sammler as a disinterested hero who is just gazing down on the sublunary with one eye, without taking sides. There are many proofs in the text that shows such an attempt:

He wanted, with God, to be free from the bondage of ordinary and the finite. A soul released from Nature, from impressions and from everyday life. [...] A man who has been killed and buried should have no other interest. He should be perfectly disinterested. (MSP 95)

All over the novel, readers are told that Sammler shows little interest to whatever happens around him:

For quite a long time he had felt that he was not necessarily human. Had no great use, during that time, for most creatures. Very little interest in himself. Cold even to the thought of recovery. What was to recover? Little regard for earlier forms of himself. (MSP 95)
Sammler himself says, “The best I have found is to be disinterested. Not as misanthropes dissociate themselves, by judging. But by not judging. By willing as God wills’ (MSP 236). So, the text presents Sammler as a man who is “disaffected” and “his judgment almost blank” (MSP 95). But is Sammler really disinterested? Has he really come close to the point of disinterestedness by not judging? The fact is that all over the novel we see him continually judging. He is not disinterested. He is taking side. He condemns women. He is against the young. He is against rebellious youth culture. In general, he is disgusted by humanity, seeing no honor in this planet. “The place of honor was outside” (MSP 73).

In fact, Sammler is not disinterested. He is a defender of old regime. To be more precise, he is the defender of the old order. Like Herzog, he has problem accommodating to the new age, but unlike Herzog who finds peace in identifying with the father, Sammler himself becomes the father. The interesting point is that in Herzog and in Bellow’s other novels, it is always the son, the burdened son, who struggles to throw off the burden of his own past, which prevents him from becoming part of the humanity. But in Mr. Sammler’s Planet, Sammler is not struggling to cast his past off, rather he is the past itself. He is the voice of the dead, the Fathers. He is directly coming from the grave to reject the children. It is a voice from the dead.

From one point of view, in Bellow’s works, there is always a struggle between the fathers and the sons. This oedipal conflict has always been one of his themes since the beginning, but the important point is how this struggle is resolved. In the following passage, John Clayton shows in Bellow’s fiction a trend in which Bellow resolves the conflict by letting the fathers to gradually get mastery over the sons:

Joseph is fully the rebellious son, threatened by his father with Gehenna (Hell). Asa struggles to keep from becoming his paranoid father. Augie is without father but tries on a number of them.
Tommy by his very moniker denies his identity as his father’s son; his father curses him with death, but at the end a sort of symbolic reconciliation takes place over the coffin. Henderson’s father rejects him as interloper, but Henderson plays violin to reach him, and at the end he himself becomes surrogate father to the orphan boy. Herzog finds peace identifying with his father taking up his father’s gun and sparing the wayward thief of his wife, sparing, in effect, himself. (232)

The position of the father reaches its culmination in Mr. Sammler’s Planet. Sammler once was a man of the world, a fashionable gentleman of Bloomsbury group, a dandy young intellectual, but that young man was buried in that Nazi mass grave in Poland; and the individual who barely survived and came out of the grave was totally a different person. Indeed, young Mr. Sammler was gone, taken away. What remained was uncle Sammler, a wise man coming directly from the grave. Was it survival then? Sammler himself doesn’t think so:

His friends and family had made him a judge and a priest. And what was he a symbol of? He did no even know. Was it because he had survived? He hadn’t even done that, since so much of the earlier person had disappeared. It was not surviving. It was only lasting. He had lasted. (MSP 75) (Italic mine)

Indeed, Sammler himself resolves the oedipal problem within himself by burying his young side and becoming the father. In other words, the young Sammler becomes desexualized to be reborn as the Father. By doing this, he becomes a wise man, a priest who is regarded as having a magic power. “He must have believed that he had some unusual power, magical perhaps to affirm the human bond. What had he done to generate this belief? How had induced it? By coming from the dead, probably” (MSP 219). So the deadness of the text of Mr. Sammler’s Planet can be accounted for in this way. Mr. Sammler is dry, as one
of the angry students interrupts his speech by yelling “what has he got to tell you? His balls are dry. He’s dead. He can’t come” (MSP 36).

Thus, Sammler’s angle of vision as a desexualized father in the novel clashes with the setting of the narrative. As a result, as I mentioned earlier, the fanatical sexuality of the young in the sixties becomes an obsession for Sammler. In a sense, the American society in sixties just acts out what he has repressed within himself. In that case, how can a reader trust the angle of vision of a repressed man? Does the text itself make the reader aware of Sammler’s distorted vision of the age? In some parts of the book, the text has Sammler say, “I am of course deformed. And obsessed” (MSP 230). But the readers are not expected to agree and shift their attention from Sammler due to these words. The fact is that beyond Sammler, there is no one else important enough to replace him. So readers find no space outside the dictatorial, misogynous voice of a character who has buried his young loving, modern sexual self.

To show Sammler’s repressive self, one can find much evidence throughout the text. All over the novel, projecting his repressive self on the women, he becomes obsessive with the sex. He thinks “a sexual madness was overwhelming the Western world” (MSP 54), and holds women responsible for it. “Millions of corrupt ladies corrupt everybody” (MSP 64). This sexual madness affects everyone like a plague. “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).

But what about Sammler himself? Isn’t he affected by the same plague in spite of his repression? In the following passage, there are obviously sexual hints in Sammler’s watching his niece, Angela:

She crossed her legs on a chair too fragile to accommodate such thighs, too straight for her hips. She opened her purse for a cigarette, and Sammler offered a light. She loved his manners. 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 the old hermit. When she became hearty with him and laughed, she turned out to have a big mouth, a large tongue [...] 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. (MSP 58)

The passage is very rich in imagery. It depicts a woman whose sensuality overwhelms Sammler. The words such as *thighs, hips, big mouth, large pale tongue, red lips*, are all highly suggestive, but the interesting point is the gestures. The way Angela behaves is very similar to that of a sexually suggestive woman sitting in a pub and Sammler’s behavior is that of a man who flatters such a woman by offering a light. As a repressed man, Sammler is openly captivated. His imagination is very active about Angela’s body. He listens to Angela’s story of love making with her boyfriend and knows “quite well how her breasts must look” (MSP 58). Though dismayed, he still listens to Angela’s tales of her sexual encounters. “Mr. Sammler was supposed to listen benevolently to all kinds of intimate reports”(MSP 58) Indeed, “the old man knew what Angela did and with whom and how it felt”(MSP 27) As a voyeur, Sammler also stares at the black pickpocket’s sexual organ. He is fascinated by the black pickpocket’s sexuality. The princely black man seems to be acting out as his buried side.

So, Sammler’s repressiveness toward his own sexuality does not make a saint out of him. Rather, he becomes a voyeur, and takes satisfaction in seeing the sexuality of the young and listening to their dirty conversations. In this way, his obsession with the sexuality of the young and its resulting tone in the text fills up the whole space of the novel and does not let the readers to see beyond what Sammler sees and thinks. The first victim of such a repressed mode of narration in *Mr. Sammler’s Planet* is the women.
The text in *Mr.Sammler’s Planet* is limited to Sammler’s misogynous view of women. In reality, the book is to a certain extent a psycho-sexual recording of Western misogyny with Sammler as its classic example. The text provides elaborate accounts of the intellectual age Sammler spans, an account of his privileged, patriarchal upper-class education, and frequent accounts of his pathological fear of women. Sammler associates the wicked sexual craze of the age with the collapse of civilization. “I am not sure that this is the worst of all times, but it is in the air now that things are falling apart, and I am affected by it.” (MSP 244) Indeed, like a prophet of Old Testament, he blames sexual sin as the main cause of collapse of civilization. To what extent Sammler’s sexual repression leads to his apocalyptic view of contemporary world is not examined here. What we examine here is that the decadence of Sammler’s new world is blamed on women, and it is natural for Sammler, as the preserver of civilizations, and deeply grounded in Western patriarchal tradition to become harsh towards women.

Thus, women are reduced in the text to intellectually blurred, sexually degenerated and socially pervert creatures. Sammler’s own daughter, Shula, is shown as a dim-witted person whose foolish deeds cause lots of trouble for old Sammler. In her forties, she is jobless in spite of her education and depends for her living on the charity of Dr.Elya Gruner. “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” (MSP 19).

She is also peculiar in her 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). Indeed, she dresses in a very vulgar way. The puzzle of her appearance is completed when the text unfolds her oddity 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), hence, she puts on a wig which “has mixed yak and baboon
hair and synthetic fiber” (MSP 30). Her house is not better than her appearance. The chaotic state of her house makes Sammler move out to live in Margotte’s apartment.

This is the image of a woman whose father is believed to be the voice of wisdom. Her image suggests sheer stupidity when we see her in sermons and free lectures, which she usually liked to attend. “She with loony, clever, large eyes, the face full of white comments and skin thickened with concentration sat on her rucked up skirt, the shopping bag salvage, loot coupons, and throwaway literature between her knees” (MSP 32). Indeed, her oddity projects a basic personality problem. Apart from her foolishness, however, she is typical as a modern women obsessed with satisfying her numerous needs:

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

The word *all* in the opening sentence clearly shows how ideological Sammler is in his dealing with women. He does not exempt any woman from its misogyny. The stereotypical image he projects of a modern woman is nothing more than a demanding creature who is only obsessed with the satisfaction of her own needs. Sammler worries that these needs may even distract a man from his duties. “If you tried to deal with all these immediate needs you were a lost man” (MSP 30). But it seems only as an excuse for Sammler’s own coldness toward his own daughter. “His lack of strong affection for his devoted daughter is unmistakable” (Guttmann 395). Indeed, Sammler blames modern women’s
demanding nature for his lack of affection towards his only child. But “this coldness to his daughter is quite possibly linked to his almost pathological view of sexuality” (Guttmann 396).

Indeed, in Mr. Sammler’s Planet, Bellow’s attitude towards sexuality becomes unprecedentedly harsh:

Most of Bellow’s earlier novels were peopled by characters affirming the pleasure, if not the values, of sensuality. Augie March had his Thea and his Stella. Moses Herzog had his voluptuous Romana, practiced in the arts and crafts of love: Bellow- has always seemed to share this view of womankind, but Sammler’s attitude toward sex is mainly negative. More often than not, he seems disgusted. (Guttmann 396)

A distinct part of the pain in reading the novel originates from the fact that Bellow’s readers are all invited to follow a moral consciousness whose explicit revulsion from sexuality amounts to his hatred of women. This hatred even comes between him and his daughter, Shula. Her chaotic habits usually send Sammler into fits of rage. So he leaves her alone to live with Margotte Arkin, a niece of his late wife. Nevertheless Shula remains loving and devoted to his father. It is not hard to see this devotion in the following conversation:

‘Well father, how is it going?’

‘What is going?’

‘The work. H.G.Wells’?

‘As usual.’
‘People take up too much of your time. You don’t get enough reading done. I know you have to protect your eyesight. But is it going all right?’

‘Tremendous’

‘I wish you wouldn’t make jokes about it’.

‘Why is it too important for jokes?’

As we see in the passage, Sammler treats coldly his daughter’s concerns about his writing on H.G.Wells. He is even ironical in his answers to Shula’s questions. But she innocently remains devoted and does her best to help him. “Shula had already hired university students to read for him to spare his eyes; she herself had tried it, but her voice made him nod off” (MSP 31). Indeed, Shula believes in her father’s higher activities and wants sometimes to help him in silly ways. For example, she steals a manuscript on space travel, written by an Indian scientist, Dr Lal, just because she thinks her father may need it. To Dr Lal she explains:

still for the sake of science, of science, and for the sake of literature and history, because my father is writing this important history, and you see I help him in his intellectual cultural work. There’s nobody else to do it. I never meant to make trouble. (MSP 166)

However silly, she is affectionate to her father, and her stealing Dr Lal’s manuscript and bringing it to the father is some sort of flattering to her heartless father:

I brought it to you to show my faith in the memoir. I wanted to remind you how important it is. Sometimes you yourself forget. As if H G Wells were nothing so special. Well, maybe not to you, but to great many people, H.G.Wells is still important and very
especial. I’ve been waiting for you to finish, and be reviewed in the papers. I wanted to see my father’s picture in the bookshops, instead of all those foolish faces and unimportant stupid books. (MSP 157)

But her compassion is useless. While she tries to help him in her own way, Sammler interprets her action differently. Analyzing her daughter’s action, he reflects American man’s suspicions about women’s needs to get attentions:

Was it really done to provoke interest? Wasn’t that a familiar stratagem? To him, Sammler remembered, women used sometimes to act insolent to get his attention and say stinging things imagining that it made them fascinating. Was this why Shula had taken the book? Out of female seductiveness? (MSP 166)

Indeed, Sammler suspects that Shula’s stealing the manuscript is a plan to seduce Dr. Lai. “The general idea was to charm and appease this angry Lal” (MSP 165). Thinking over Shula’s deed, Sammler wonders how different the two sexes are. “One species: but the sexes like two different savage tribes. In full paint. Surprising and shocking each other in the bushes” (MSP 166) Indeed, he does not see Shula as his only daughter begging for his fatherly attention and warmth, but as the other gender with which one should be careful. Neither her being as his own only compassionate daughter, nor being a survivor of Nazi occupation, just like Sammler himself, brings kindness to Sammler’s heart towards Shula. His misogyny is the same. Indeed, Sammler’s ideological look at gender issues does not let him see anything beyond sex battle:

He sees the world divided into order, tradition, duty, one hand and selfhood -with accompanying violence, sexuality, and rebellion- on the other. He sees the world braking down, the membrane between civilized and savage, ordered and disordered, tearing. (Clayton 239).
As Clayton points out, Sammler’s world is divided, and in this divided world, chaos, sexuality, violence, savagery, criminality, uncleanness and vulgarity belongs to the new generation, the black and the women, while intellectuality, decency, and nobleness belongs to men. The image of savagery is again repeated when Sammler reacts to Shula’s denying any trouble by her stealing Dr. Lal’s manuscript. “No. Not trouble. Only to dig a pit and cover it with brushwood, and when a man fell into it to lie flat on the ground and converse with him amorously” (MSP 166). The words *dig, pit,* and *cover with brushwood* seem to constitute parts of the broad image of *two sexes as two different savage tribes,* in which, Shula is represented as an amorous pit digger for men, a recurrent feminine stereotype.

Sammler, however, contrasts Shula with Dr Govinda Lal. “This Govinda, this light spry whiskered dark frail, flying sort of man – an intellectual. And in intellectuals she was mad for. They kept the world remarkable beneath that visiting moon. They kindled her womb” (MSP 166). Again the same pattern. Intellectual men, and shallow emulating women. Again and again, in Bellow’s text, intellectual minds only inhabit in male bodies:

Sammler looked at him. An intelligent and sensitive man, this was, with an expressive face. Of course such expressiveness was sometimes a sign of subjectivity and of inward mental habits. Not an outgoing imagination. He was beginning to think, however, that this Lal was like Ussher Arkin, a man who could talk to. (MSP 169)

Then, Govinda Lal is a man whom Sammler can talk to. Indeed, in Bellow’s view, humanity depends on such men. They are *intellects* which endeavor to find integrity amid the dread and chaos of daily, urban modern life. If we accept Bellow’s view on the importance of intellectuality, his denying the life of mind to female characters can amount to his denying the women’s humanity as well.

In *Mr. Sammler’s Planet,* Bellow presents us with a male character, a seeking, dissatisfied intellectual who seems not prepared for a modern existence
that is wild and chaotic. His daily pain is only relieved by a few moments of solace. Most of these moments are when the intellectual hero finds a mind that understands him. One of these minds that give comfort to Sammler is that of Govinda Lal. Before Govinda Lal, the late Arkin, the husband of his niece, again another man with a good subtle brain, was another person Sammler could talk to.

But what sort of man was Arkin? He was an intellectual who knew how to make his wife shut up:

    The late Arkin, generally affectionate and indulgent knew how to make Margotte shut up. He was a tall splendid, half-bald, mustached 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. (MSP 15)

Arkin’s misogyny is also reflected in his insulting his wife. “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 schmaltiz. Cut it, Margotteh!’”(MSP 16). Sammler laments that after Arkin’s death, “that big virile interruption would never be heard again in this cockeyed living room” (MSP 16). Also in their conversation:

    Arkin once said to Uncle Sammler that his wife was a first-class device as long as someone aimed her in right direction. She was a good soul he told him. But the energetic goodness could be tremendously misapplied. Sammler saw this for himself. She couldn’t wash a tomato without getting her sleeves wet. The place was burglarized because she raised the window to admire a sunset. And forget to lock it. (MSP 16)
Though an obvious misogynous, Arkin is a man whom Sammler admires and enjoys talking with. Indeed he is one of the sought-for minds which gives comfort to Sammler. How he does comfort Sammler intellectually with his company is not clear in the text. What the readers see as Arkin in the text is a harsh, insulting man whose art is nothing but insulting his wife or his female students. So, what is the affinity between Sammler and him? Isn’t it that their shared gender ideology leads to their mutual understanding? Ironically, however, the very sexist Arkin is astonished by the presence of sex ideology among his female students: “Now and then, a powerful intelligence, but very angry, very complaining, too much sex-ideology, poor things” (MSP 15).

Unlike Arkin’s conversation, Margotte’s talk is a torture for Sammler. “He couldn’t bring himself to say what he thought. For one thing, she seldom stopped to listen. For another, he doubts that he could make himself clear” (MSP 14). Repeatedly in the text, we see Margotte who tries to engage Sammler in discussion. “Anything fascinating she was prepared to discuss all the day, from every point of view with full German pedantry” (MSP 15). Indeed, the book tries to contrast the minds of Lal and Arkin with that of Margotte to show that Margotte’s was “on theoretical side very tedious and when she settled down to an earnest theme, one was lost” (MSP 15). What will be the feeling of a resisting reader who reads such sentences in the novel? Is she expected not to turn against the text as an obvious misogynous book?

But in a resisting reading, one can understand what exasperates Sammler. “Sammler noticed how Arkin’s 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). Like Shula, Margotte is crazy for intellectuality. Both of them are depicted as yearning but inadequate creatures who just emulate men in their intellectual pursuit. All the same, women are sent to kitchen so as to create a purely masculine air around Sammler’s intellectual talk with Dr Lal, as if intellectuality is utterly a male profession:
'Now Shula, my dear', said Sammler. ‘Margotte needs help in the kitchen. Go and help her.’

‘Oh. Father’. She tried speaking aside in Polish, to tell him she wished to stay.

‘Shula! Go! Go on now- go!

As she obeyed, her cheeks had a hot and bitter look. Before Lal she wanted to show filial submission, but her behind was huffy as she went. (MSP 167)

Indeed, it is shocking, for resisting readers to see the degree to which Shula and Margotte are ready to be treated humiliatingly just to be regarded as intellectual by men. It seems that women characters in the novel admit that intellectuality is a masculine attribute after all.

Sammler’s relationship to his wife, killed and buried in a Polish grave is not clear in the novel. Indeed, his silence about his wife and his lack of affection toward his devoted daughter is undeniable. Other women characters are either shallow like Margotte or nymphomaniaics like his niece, Angela Gruner. Angela “appears in a thick Titanesque rape-of- Europa swirl of thighs, bosom, and underwear, all redolent with the smoldering odor of hormones” (Guttmann 396). Her openness about sexuality shocks Sammler. “‘A Jew brain, a black cock, a Nordic beauty, she had said, is what a woman wants’” (MSP 55). Angela’s sexuality for Sammler is at the core of his hatred of the women. Her sexuality excludes any human feeling. Unlike Madeline who uses sex for power, and unlike Ramona, whose sexual pleasure for Herzog is more than sexual, Angela’s sexuality is the lowest and the most unattractive. Through this vulgar sensuality, Angela tries to tear down ethical principles, violate humanity and defy higher moral values.
Indeed Sammler views her as an infernal sex machine. “The real censure of Angela lies in her unwillingness to see beyond mere sexuality to any other human activity or feeling, even in the face of her father’s death (Anand 94). When 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), Sammler become infuriated:

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)

Portraying a woman like Angela with her debased sexuality, Sammler wants to attack the extreme concern with self which destroys one’s sense of communion with and responsibility toward others. But the basic question is why women should be depicted as the vehicle of the Faustian striving of the self. Indeed Bellow wants to make us believe that this threatening, extravagant selfhood is much more powerful in women. For instance, Angela is just thinking about the share of money she may lose as the result of her dying father’s anger. Indeed, Sammler sees nothing in Angela except an unsatisfied self looking for egotist sexuality. Angela is not alone of course. In Sammler’s view, she is typical of a self glorifying generation whose hunger for the self-gratification annihilates order in the world. As a result, order is one of the important concerns of Sammler:

Mr. Sammler was testy with White Protestant America for not keeping better orders. Cowardly surrender. Not a strong ruling class. Eager in a secret humiliating way to come down and mingle with all minority mobs, and scream against themselves. And the clergy? Beating swords into ploughshares? No, rather converting dog collars into G-strings. But this was neither here nor there. (MSP 86)
Indeed, in *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, Sammler sees a connection between excessive selfhood and lack of order. “These hungry selves walking through the city, patterning themselves on models of rebellion” (Clayton 241) try to rise above the limitations of ordinary life. They “want to be free from the bondage of the ordinary and the finite” (MSP 95). The connection between sexuality and disorder becomes much more evident when we read, “Angela sent money to defense funds for murders and rapists. That was her business of course” (MSP 125).

Sammler’s obsession with the excessive selfhood in new generation is not a problem in itself as far as it does not lead to the misogynous attitude towards women. His revulsion from indulgence in selfhood, however, leads him to perceive some ideal order in which there is no place for sexuality. In other words, the excessive selfhood in the young leads to Sammler’s excessive demand of sexual repression:

> In *Mr. Sammler's planet* the subordination to an order beyond the self is more severe; indeed rigid and repressive. It is not simply a peaceful, ethical, humane life that is being affirmed; it is a life without sexuality, a life that insists on following counteractual obligations, insists on orders. (MSP 242)

Sammler is disgusted with the images of revolutionary and the images of rebellion which are used to ornament the unsatisfied self. What he sees under the names of rebellion and revolution is nothing beyond chaos. He thinks they are just excuses for excesses of individual freedom. Sammler is fearful. He fears frenzy of selfhood. He fears emancipation may lead to absolute chaos.

Besides, it seems rebellion and emancipation threatens the Father within Sammler. In other words, Sammler feels that extravagant selfhood of the new generation no longer leaves the amount of space for patriarchy it used to have. He, of course, denies he favors the old regime, but in practice, “Sammler retreats into a defense of the old regime” (Clayton 245). He treats the young as if they were
spoiled children. His moralizing “humankind had lost its old patience” (MSP 162) is very similar to the complaint of a slow father whose children are too hasty. The word patience is suggestive here. It reminds the resisting reader of the ruling class, teaching the virtues of obedience to the oppressed. Indeed, if we remove the shell of all these moralizing, we may arrive at the core of his teachings: people should embrace old patriarchal order and endure its oppression in return for leading moral life. Patriarchy, however, as a form of oppression, is not immoral in Sammler’s view. In other words, morality in Sammler’s view seems to be limited to sexuality. What’s more, Sammler does not care about ideological implications of his teachings. The logical consequences of his moral positions would naturally results in a political conservatism, so that he is horrified only by breaches with the status quo.

In sum, Mr. Sammler’s Planet is Bellow’s fictional reaction to the sixties. Whether Sammler is only Bellow’s spokesperson or not is not the concern here. What matters in this novel is the politics through which feminity is blamed for corruption, stupidity, and chaos. Indeed, Sammler views the wicked sexual mores of 1960’s and the collapse of modern civilization as the result of corrupt feminity. His disgust of sexuality is also the result of his own psychological repression. Indeed, as a repressed man, Sammler becomes obsessed with sexual vitality of the sixties.

The sexuality of the age seems extremely overpowering for Sammler. Influenced by Schopenhauer he sees ideas the only way to resist sexuality. In his talk with Dr Lal, Sammler tries to explain the duality between Will and Ideas:

On my sixteenth birthday my mother gave me The World as Will and Idea. Naturally it was an agreeable compliment that I could be so serious and deep. Like the great Arthur. So I studied the system, and I still remember it. I learned that only ideas are not overpowered by Will- the cosmic force, the Will, which drives all
things. A blinding power. The inner creative fury of the world. (MSP 167)(Italic mine)

Then, he hesitantly remembers Schopenhauer’s belief that the seat of Will in human beings lies in the organs of sex:

Yes, and come to think of it, according to Schopenhauer, the seat of the Will in human beings is...

‘Where is it?’

‘The organs of sex are the seat of Will’ (MSP 167)

Thus, drawing on Schopenhauer’s ideas, Sammler equates Will with sex. In this he is not entirely accurate, but he manages to launch a binary opposition between ideas and sex. In other words, he translates the word Will into the word sex in Schopenhauer’s statement stating that only ideas are not overpowered by Will. Sammler needs such a binary pattern because he needs to rationalize his reactionary politics in this way.

One may say that Sammler’s politics is not necessarily the politics of the text. But, the reader is given nothing to identify with beyond Sammler. The fact is that the politics of the text cannot be much different from the politics of Sammler, when Bellow gives the readers no way out of Sammler’s polemics. So what of the readers’ response to Artur Sammler, if the politics of Sammler is that of the whole text? It depends on the kind of reader one is, but a resisting reader ought to be able to see that Bellow has created a protagonist whose misogyny has overwhelmed the whole narrative.

More Die of Heartbreak

More Die of Heartbreak opens with Kenneth, the narrator, describing his Uncle, Benn Crader’s obsession with a cartoon. He then tells us about his complex
relationship with his uncle, a world-renowned botanist. He also talks about his father, who is, as he describes, a womanizer. “Dad was a hit with women.” (MDH 24) Indeed, this theme of relationships with women is central throughout the book with Kenneth accepting his problems with women. He also introduces his mother, a woman who allowed her husband to go after women, and only left after realizing that he did not understand what made her happy. While she needed intellectual encouragement of a literary style, her husband bought her materialistic goods to make up for his infidelities. She leaves her married life to work in a refugee camp in an African community.

Kenneth’s main focus, however, is on Benn’s recent sexual history. He introduces him, as a distinguished scientist, who, while admiring the beauty of women is not quite rooted in complicated human society to understand the sexual pretexts he encounters. Indeed, “he represented (seemed to represent) the old innocence of the days before so many inertias were overcome” (MDH 16). Among his sexual encounters is one with a middle-aged neighbor, an attractive professional with a slight drinking problem who asks Benn to help her change a light bulb. Benn pays no attention to her hints until she makes the first move. The next day, Benn expresses regret for the act and tries to avoid her. Benn then attracts the attention of another older woman, Caroline who is manipulative, calculating, and loving at the same time. Benn thinks she is the woman who he can marry. “He had a special weakness for beautiful women, and in Caroline he found one who had been beautiful. He thought he might settle for that” (MDH 80).

As Benn, without informing Kenneth, is dealing with a planned wedding to Caroline, Kenneth is in Seattle to visit her ex-girlfriend, Treckie and work out problems with her about raising their child, now three years old. Treckie, a beautiful petite woman has been seeing another man, a fact evident in her bruises on her legs- love making injuries Kenneth never ever could give her. Discussing this particular fetish with his father, a professional womanizer, Kenneth received
the answer that some smaller women must do it to show they are women, and not just matured girls.

Benn flies to Kyoto at the expense of a lecture series to escape from the wedding to Caroline. He invites Kenneth to accompany him in the journey. The Japanese sense of order and utility appeals to Benn, until his junior colleagues take him to a strip show. The overt sexuality of the show upsets him so severely that he decides to return home immediately. Benn’s next partner is Matilda Layamon, a beautiful, Midwestern daughter who likes to marry a distinguished older man who can calm her wild side. Benn wed her without informing Kenneth, fearing that Kenneth would oppose it as a dangerous and foolish idea.

Benn’s new father in law is a doctor, a stout man in shape with sharp, thin shoulders. He serves the rich, and because of this, has a share in many businesses around the country, an accidental fortune. He is a calculating man and wants to take advantages of Benn’s uncle, Villtizer. Villtizer, as the executor of the will of the Benn’s mother, has earned millions of dollars through buying the Crader’s house for a cheap price and selling it to a company which built a tower there. Due to Villtizer’s influence on the judge, neither Benn nor Kenneth’s mother received their fair shares, and the Doctor hopes that with the help of Matilda; he can exploit the circumstances, so Malitda will have a rich husband. Thus, Benn’s hope to find real love in marriage with a beautiful woman like Matilda ends in being trapped in a scheming family which wants to have just financial gain out of matrimonial relations.

When, Villtizer dies after a quarrel with Kenneth, Benn, feeling guilty and sad, reconsiders the whole marriage arrangement with Matilda. While attending the funeral, he sends his wife ahead to honeymoon, and changes his ticket for Antarctica. He tells this to Kenneth who now lives in Benn’s apartment, and who has recently returned from a successful bid to Treckie to have his daughter for a part of the year. In the end, the novel presents a conversation between the two
professors in which a mutual understanding occurs between them over their grievances.

Misogyny is in the narrative construction of *More Die of Heartbreak*. The narrational structure of the novel, the male consciousness as the center of narrative perception, sympathetic exoneration of misogynistic attitudes, conventional binary gender pattern, turn *More Die of Heartbreak* into a classic misogynous texts. Characteristically, such texts dichotomize men as good, wise, spiritually superior, intellectually capable and sexually potent, and woman as *lack* or *other*. When reading the novel, resisting readers realize the powerful gender ideology in the text. The following passage is typical in this regard. When his uncle, Benn Crader, a learned scholar – again one of Bellow’s educated male characters- confesses his attraction to Malitda Laymon, Kenneth, the narrator, reacts with exasperation:

Carried away by “unreasoning passion or attraction- second definition of infatuation, the first being mad foolish- Benn spoke of his bride as if she were a beloved in a poem by Edgar Allan Poe ‘Thy hyacinth hair, thy classic face.’ First hearing this from him. I lost my bearings altogether. My response was dead silence. I had been away, visiting my parents abroad, and he had taking the advantage of my absence to marry this lady without prior consultation. He damn well knew that he should have discussed it with me. We had that kind of relationship. I never dreamed that he might be so downright flaky. Breaking the news to me, which was like a slap in the face, he moved immediately to disarm me by declaring his love in highfalutin terms- hyacinth hair” and “classic face”! Christ what was I supposed to say! I can’t bear to have this kind of stuff laid on me, and I was sore as hell. (MDH 17)
Thus, *More Die of Heartbreak* sets up its own ideological framework of gender from the very beginning through its misogynist narrator, Kenneth. There is no wonder that Kenneth’s assessment of Benn’s women is so cruel. He wickedly assesses not only Matilda Laymon but also every other woman who enters Benn’s life. He cruelly describes Caroline Bunge as “a big graceful (old style) lady, vampy, rich, ornate, slow-moving, a center-stage personality. Middle aged, she still stood out like a goddess from a Zeigfeld extravaganza, the Venus de Ore type” (MDB 75). He is amused by the way she speaks through her nose, “she spoke through the nose in a way which used to be glamorous- the Jean Arthur style” (MDB 76) He depicts her use of make up as tasteless, and her behavior as predatory.

With the same misogyny, Kenneth describes Della Bedall, another woman who enters Benn’s life for a short while, as an excessive weekend drinker who improperly has sex with Benn. She is also depicted as full of sexual greed, aggression, and shrillness. Kenneth delights in telling how Benn’s flight to Brazil causes Della Bedall to die of heart attack brought on by sexual deprivation. He advises Benn not to take her death seriously, “we are in trouble if we don’t keep these minor absurdities minor” (MDH 87) He playfully sums up her death as that of “a little fat lady who hit the bottle” (MDH 88).

The misogynistic depiction of women reaches its climax in Benn’s father in law, Dr. Layamon’s talk on the contemporary image of the literality of the women. When Dr. Layamon takes Benn through the female surgical wards to inspect the genitals of his elderly female patients, he takes not only Benn, but the readers also in a trip intended to create repulsion in them toward the literal womanliness. Shocked at being exposed to the private parts of elderly female patients, Benn says, “When it becomes a matter of limbs, members and organs, Eros faces annihilations” (MDH 90). Benn is shocked, because his perception of women is a Poe-like idealization of the beloved.
In another passage, we see Benn taken by his junior colleagues to a lewd show in Kyoto, again an occasion to experience the literality of the women. “They wanted to see how the famous American botanist would react to the girls […] a seer in the vegetable kingdom invited to a strip tease” (MDH 106) But they who had taken Benn there to see his reaction were themselves attracted to the girls on the stage, not caring about Benn’s reactions at all:

All these botanists, engineers, inventors of miraculous visual instruments from electron microscopes to equipments that sent back pictures of the moons of Saturn, cared for nothing but these slow openings […] they was no help for it. (MDH 108)

Benn’s reaction was that of disgust, “When people decide to put their ingenuity into any special field, they always go too far. It can be a kind of inferno” (MDH 109). The novel, providing all these images through its misogynist narrator, tries to alienate both Benn and the readers from the idealization of women. In fact, Kenneth needs these images to advance his project to deconstruct the whole concept of women as well as romantic love. On the event of Benn’s second bridegroom flight, on the plane to Tokyo, Kenneth skillfully explains that he (Benn), because of his education and spiritual nature, charms educated women who have a weakness for intellectuality. In a clearly misogynous dialogue, he classifies a group of women who are educated enough to know that they will bore their important men:

A women will look at a fellow like you, I said, and she’ll sense that there is certain value in you. She’ll probably say to herself. There’s a man who’s up to something special. That goes with making your soul, a course of life followed by very few. It produces emanations, and educated women will be especially affected by these emanations. That is why so many Romantics favored peasant women and prostitutes over refined ladies. Well the peasantry is
disappearing and there are very few whores haven’t had a couple of years of college. One more inertia broken up, and the pieces tossed into the cauldron of modern consciousness. What you face, then is a modern woman who are proud of their education and their developed minds but who secretly fear that they haven’t got what it takes to hold the interest of a man who is powerfully energized by an important task... (MDH 93)

Indeed, Kenneth wants to persuade Benn that women on the whole are uneducable and metaphysically deficient, and they cannot live up to the expectations of their parents, especially their mothers. “These girls were so gorgeous, graceful, gifted, trained to expect high results. But where are they? In outer darkness, where their poor hearts are breaking (MDH 93). So the resultant “feminine disappointment and sorrow is very hard on men. They often feel called upon to restore the self-esteem that’s been lost” (MDH 93). In fact, Kenneth tries to elucidate Benn’s mind “about the characteristics of the women who were giving us such trouble” (MDH 92-3)

Within this misogynistic framework, Kenneth turns to Benn’s next women, Matilda Layamon who is educated, intelligent and powerful. He opens the crucial attack on her, and depicts her as a Rappaccini’s daughter who will inevitable bring death to her lover. To counter Benn’s image of Matilda, he maliciously reminds him that Poe’s child lover was under age and retarded, and says that he would prefer to think of Matilda not in terms of Poe’s child-lover but in terms of William Blake’s lines:

‘It’s counterproductive, Benn. Poe in prose was a maniac about women. Besides, that Clemm girl he married never even reached puberty. You ‘re quoting me the wrong author’.

‘Whom would you recommend instead?’
Kenneth hostility towards Matilda may at first seem a personal grudge, due to Kenneth’s attachment to Benn, but it is gradually justified by what the text unfolds about Matilda. Indeed it does not take long that the readers become aware of the destructive nature of Matilda Layamon who gradually assumes the role of a castrator and spreads trouble and unease around her. In fact she is resignified as bitch in the text. Kenneth describes for the readers Matilda’s morning moods as ferocious. “However (for the time being, maybe), her waking was not happy. When she drank her coffee, she was snappish, mores. Her big eyes were still back in the sleep world” (MDH 143). Though, Benn does his best to appease her, she remains angry and dissatisfied:

Ho, ho said Matilda, bitter. She didn’t take Benn’s views seriously. And it’s true that he was trying to coax her into a better temper. He made these efforts in a spirit of pure appeasement. But she hated waking- hated it. (MDH 144)

Thus, by and by, Benn began to discover that “his second wife was a different type, more difficult than the first, more of a torment.” (MDH 17) Benn observes her sharp teeth. “Before she spoke, and her mouth was opening, Benn noticed how sharp her teeth were” (MDH 143). Matilda’s distictively feminine attributes gradually disappear. She is going to display a physical appearance of transvestite male. She takes a demonic shape. “Matilda’s eyes provide Benn with intimidations, not of immortality but of demonic forces” (MDH 234). Once Matilda’s castrating nature is displayed, Kenneth gives a picture of Benn as a Phoenix:

A phoenix who runs after arsonists! was my spontaneous thought. Burnt to the ground, reincarnated from the ashes. And after all, every return of desire is a form of reincarnation. For after desire
Like Bellow’s other novels, intellectual agenda of the male hero is the first cue to his hostilities towards women. Kenneth prefers intellectuality because “Inner communion with the great human reality was my true occupation, after all. It was a field without much competition, so few took it up. I did it out of a conviction that it was the only worthwhile enterprise around (MDH 188). Like every intellectual he wants to make his life a turning point without which “there was no reason for existing” (MDH 188). He cares for this turning point, because it is “the crying need (unconscious of course, as the most crying needs are) of humankind (MDH 188). Indeed, he has chosen his uncle Benn’s inquisitiveness over more attractive life in Paris because he thinks that here in this field human life is making more advances. Kenneth’s weakness for intellectuality is not, however, a bad thing by itself, if it has not been taken too far to be just a male enterprise. The text endorses women as intellectually unproductive. Such a view of female figures is integral to the politics of misogyny in the book which is the basis of Kenneth’s argument to dissuade Benn Crader from the marriage and heterosexual love all over the novel.

Bellow’s plot in More Die of Heartbreak makes it possible for its male characters to express their gender complaints. The center of consciousness located in Kenneth as a bitter misogynist is what that coerces the whole text. This plan not only creates a male narrator but also a sympathetic male reader whose similar experiences bring him much closer to the narrator. “The genre in which Bellow has chosen to explore these gender complaints is suggested by his adaptation of the Gogolian farce ‘The bridegroom’ with its classic misogynist tale of the flight of the bridegroom from entrapment by marriage” (Cronin 478).

The plot and the whole structure in the novel open up the space for Kenneth, the misogynist narrator, to give cruel, arrogant, and taunting images of women. These depictions of women implicate the readers into misogynistic
identifications with the male narrator which hinders the truthful examination of the subject of marriage and love:

In history, the first obstacle, always already there, is in the existence, the production of images, types, coded and suitable ways of behaving, and in society’s identification with a scene in which the roles are fixed so that loves are always initially trapped by the puppets with which they are assumed to merge. (Cixous 113)

Indeed, it is not love or marriage or women’s company that victimize Benn or Kenneth or any other man, but it is these historically constructed gender expectations and ideologies that victimize love itself and produce such massive human misery. Clearly, such ideologies are very strong in shaping gender relationship. They make men suspicious and alienated from women. Kenneth’s father advises him, “We don’t know women, son. Not even after a lifetime of observation, practically research. Science itself is ignorant in this branch of knowledge” (MDH 65) According to Kenneth himself, sex and women are cruel jokes nature has played on otherwise noble male natures, which are usually nurtured in romantic and even chivalric expectations. Within this ideological framework how can one expect to find love in gender relations?

Of course, Bellow is completely aware of the role of gender ideologies in gender relations. But he is not interested in the suffering which women have to endure because of these ideologies. What he is interested in is his intellectual male characters and their struggle to come up with a solution for their masculine problems in modern post World-War (II) America:

It is not women’s gender suffering or feminist readers’ expectations that interests Bellow. He is attempting to measure a set of historically constructed romantic expectations and gender ideologies (male-authored one) on contemporary men living
As mentioned earlier, in my discussion of *Herzog* and *Mr. Sammler’s Planet*, in Saul Bellow’s novels, center of consciousness inhabits in male characters only. In *More Die of Heartbreak* also Kenneth’s account of the events comes to make up the whole narrative. As a result, everything in the novel takes the color of his consciousness. But to what degree Kenneth’s account of heterosexual problems can be trusted as a balanced one? Can we expect him to be unbiased when he is portrayed as a “sexual wraith” (*MDH* 40), a failed intellectual, an inept lover and a disappointing son? The answer is clear. He cannot be reliable. He is “the classic unreliable narrator, encased in several layers of persiflage and irony, whose many masks defy complete identification (Cronin 480).

To understand Kenneth’s unreliability, one has to examine his relations with his father. He has a very complicated relationship with his father. “I resemble him, inevitably, sons are bound to pick up the graces and gestures of the daddies. I was using his conversational tricks and manners before I could know what I was doing” (*MDH* 24). At the same time, he hates his father, “I may appear to poke fun at him” (*MDH* 24). To explain this, he says, “One is forever finding pockets of venom besides one’s best feelings” (*MDF* 24). Though his father has certain magic, he chooses to follow his uncle Benn’s way, but he admits that “it was not a choice entirely of strength” (*MDH* 24). Indeed, in spite of being physically similar to his father he does not enjoy his father’s success with women:

Papa in his heyday was a stutter. He put on the kind of sex display you see in nature films, the courting behavior of turkey cocks or any of the leggier birds. (Storks clatter their beaks to attract the females.) Dad was a hit with women. I, who wasn’t nevertheless, went through the same motion. I shared his keen taste for classy
Not being able to share his father’s success with women, Kenneth shares his taste for dress. Comparing himself with his father, he demonstrates his feeling of inferiority:

I’m somewhat too tall for my character; I haven’t got the sort of character that requires so much height, and this discrepancy has made me a diffident person. Earlier I compared myself to a man-sized monkey wrench - I put up little resistance to fantasy. But very often I’ve been told that I look a lot like the actor John Carradine. In the Westerns, he used to play a consumptive man of breeding. It was believed, in the good old days, that the air of Wyoming or Arizona, if you were from the East, would cure your asthma or TB and make you fit to become President. But skinny Carradine wasn’t meant to live, he was skeleton anyway, and always died in a gunfight. (MDH 25)

Kenneth’s identification with a man-sized monkey wrench or John Carradine as a consumptive man of breeding clearly shows that how strong his feeling of inferiority is. His father calls him “one of those continuing-education types (MDH 41) which cannot be sexually potent. “I suspect that sexually he considered me a kind of wraith. If we were to take off our clothes (I try it mentally), the comparison would be humiliating” (MDH 40). But “the natural desire is for a son who will take up where you left off and advance along the same front” (MDH 40). Indeed, Kenneth feels that he is not a son of such a father. Feeling deficient in sexuality, he turns to intellectuality. “To right the balance, I try to give myself more mental weight, develop feelings which he’s deficient in” (MDH 40).

Thus, we see another reason behind Kenneth’s intellectuality. Indeed, he has to choose between two persons, a father in Paris, “with a world-historical
cock”, or an uncle in America with large mental gifts” (MDH 40). Naturally he chooses uncle Benn, because he cannot be Father. Indeed, his father is the enactment of what he wanted to be but failed. He hates him for his flair on the dance floor, intimate knowledge of the erotic jungle, and sex-intoxication. He was able to do with the ease of a natural winner “the historical thing which millions of sex-intoxicated men were trying to do and botching” (MDH 36).

He envies his father, because, “Dad had all the definition, the finish of a personage; I was still in metamorphosis” (MDH 38). He is jealous of his father because he is, “like a force of nature” (MDH 38). Indeed; the core of Kenneth’s hatred of his father is his success with women. He attacks him fiercely in the following paragraph:

If my father had so much family feeling he wouldn’t have been such a screwer of other men’s wives. And didn’t the wives adopt a similar outlook? The word crisis was everybody’s cover for lasciviousness and libertinage (two little words you seldom see). (MDH 41)

Kenneth’s belief that he is more apt to higher things than in his father’s lasciviousness derives to some extent from compensatory mechanism. Indeed, to balance the inferiority he feels in his rivalry with his father, he wants to develop himself in higher things:

My father is an excellent man, in his way, but I was determined to go beyond him. Made of finer clay, as they used to put it; smarter; in a different league. Where he outclassed me he outclassed me - tennis, (I had no such thing), in sex, in conversation, in looks. But there spheres (and by this I mean higher spheres) where he had no standing, and I was very ahead of him. (MDH 12)
Because he cannot compete with his father, he rejects him. His father is rejected to be substituted with his uncle Benn. Benn is linked to Kenneth in many ways, both being physically graceless and also Russian to some extent. Benn, as the surrogate father, has a Russian face and a body like a Russian church. Both of them are single. Thus, “we were doubly, multiply, interlinked. Neither of us by now had other real friends, and I couldn’t afford to lose him” (MDF 15). But this dependence of Kenneth’s on Benn is continuously threatened through Benn’s endeavor to satisfy his Eros by marriage:

Unfortunately he was not too old for female entanglement [...] in the years before his second marriage he had his hands full, dealing with ladies: flirtations, courtship, longings, obsessions, dissertations, insults, lacerations, sexual bondage—the whole bit from bliss to breakdown. Getting married was supposed to conclude these torments. (MDH 50)

We can see in Kenneth’s responses the degree of his dependence on Benn. Kenneth’s reactions to Benn’s secret marriages are that of an infuriated, possessive child:

I had been away, visiting my parents abroad, and he had taking the advantage of my absence to marry this lady without prior consultation. He damn well knew that he should have discussed it with me. We had that kind of relationship. I never dreamed that he might be so downright flaky. Breaking the news to me, which was like a slap in the face. (MDH 17)

In other passage we have Kenneth saying, “I did not take his marriage well; he should have given me advance notice” (MDH 50). Unlike Benn’s marriages, Kenneth always approves his frequent escape from women via airways.
In an age when you have Eros on one side and Thanatos on the other in a jurisdictional dispute, you may as well pack up and head for the airport rather than stand and wait for the outcome. Better to be in motion? Running to keep the libido active? (MDH 50-1)

Indeed, Kenneth regards himself as a passionate protector of uncle Benn. “It is clear that I watched him closely. I guarded and monitored him, studied his needs; I fended off threats” (MDH 14) Above all, Kenneth is watchful of women who enters his life. As in Saul Bellow’s other works, in More Die of Heartbreak also women are regarded as sources of threats to men. “As uncle’s self-appointed guardian, I, too, had to try to interpret their motives and anticipate their plans” (MDH 188). Reading this sentence a resisting reader can understand how ideological Kenneth is in his attitudes towards women. If we read this sentence out of its context in this book, we may think of it as the remark of a political strategist who wants to fend off the threats of his party’s political enemies. The use of word their clearly shows the stereotypical binary gender pattern in Kenneth’s mind.

Kenneth knows that his excessive attachment to Benn is unusual. “Any way my uncle Benn had become my closest friend, none closer, virtually the only one. In my generation such intimacies within the families are unusual” (MDH 26). He becomes angry when he sees women come in between him and Uncle Benn. He protests as Della Bedall, Caroline Bunge and Matilda Laymon threaten to destroy their joint quest. He also becomes clearly angry with Benn himself, when he finds him engaged more with women rather than him:

He hadn’t yet begun to understand that by marrying into Layamon family he had carried me with him. Through my attachment to Benn I had hoped for an enlargement of personality. We were moving in the opposite direction instead. (MDH 126-27)

He pursues enlargement of personality through his attachment to Benn. He needs this enlargement of mind, because he wants to compensate his shortcomings
in masculine identity. Key to our understanding of this is the fact that his father is a notorious womanizer whose success with women is wonderful. Bellow is obviously making fun of Kenneth, who can scarcely manage to cope with life. Indeed, Kenneth appears to have problem with love, sex, parenting and his daily human relationship. He sees himself skinny, shy, inactive, and academically unmotivated. His ex-girlfriend, Treckie finds his French palate-talent for just intellectual talk. She finds him a man having middle-class sense of responsibility, but little libido insufficient for her erotic desires.

Kenneth’s endeavor to win Treckie comes to nothing. He employs all his charms, affection, and rhetoric to persuade her for a permanent relationship, but she, not feeling ready for responsibility, refuses to marry him. Nevertheless, she allows Kenneth to see her occasionally. During these visits, Kenneth sees, to his horror “her legs disfigured by bruises” and her shins “all black and blue” (MDH 64). She “seems to take pride in these injuries’ (MDH 64). Indeed she is a masochist taking pleasure in being harassed by abusive tough men.

Treckie’s masochism has a number of functions in the novel. It makes it possible for Kenneth to feed his misogyny and share it with the reader. Though not in good terms with his father, he even discusses Treckie’s masochism with him as an expert in women. Although he does not like his father, but to deal with women, as others, men ally and use each other’s experiences. To explain Treckie’s behavior, Kenneth’s father says:

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 his 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 love making is converted into a proclamation. Other men, by the dozen, hear the massage, are affected by her erotic. (MDH 65)

Discussing Treckie’s unusual erotic ways, Kenneth tries to show how far mad sex momentum of the age can go and to what degree it causes damage to healthy heterosexual relations. People in the truck stop cannot take their eyes off the little woman with black eyes because the beaten woman excites them, and the woman takes pleasure of being noticed by men just because she is conscious of her power on men. One remembers the lewd show in Kyoto. “The girls felt the weight of the attention they were getting and seemed to know how much suffering they caused and how shaken their audience was” (MDH 108).

Portraying Treckie as a young working girl, Kenneth tries to give another image of modern women. Emblematic of her own sexually emancipated age, Treckie finds it too confining to be exclusively with Kenneth. So she refuses marrying Kenneth. Instead, she engages herself with abusive and sadistic men who physically hurt her. Oddly enough, Treckie takes pride on showing the bruises left on her body to Kenneth. He notices in her way of looking a gesture to encourage him to ask who did it, but at the same time in the very look there is a challenging sign a question “what are you going to do about it” (MDH 64)

Thus, we see Kenneth helpless. He cannot ask Treckie about the person who has left the bruises on her body. The birth of their daughter does little to their relations. She remained as she was, cheerful but not loving. What Kenneth wants to do is to bring back love and affection to their relations. Kenneth thinks that to this day “he hasn’t shaken off the convection that Treckie and he had matching particles. Ideally suited for a lifetime of intimacy” (MDH 63) Treckie is a woman who sexually appeals to Kenneth:
I was particularly shaken 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 a like a pale aborigine [...] She was everything I had expected. (MDH 63-64)

But Treckie does not show any love or any touching gestures. As an erotic woman, she is presented to enact the unusual woman of her own age, a product of emancipated West. Indeed, from the very beginning, we see her behaving in a way that justifies Kenneth’s misogyny. Her refusal of marrying decent Kenneth, just for the sake of having sex with violent tough guys, shows how she subscribes to literal meaning of sex and heterosexual relations. Her sexuality is not imbued with love. What pleases is “clutching, grabbing, rudeness, needed primitive sexual encounters” (MDH 25) Kenneth thinks that “as the millennium approached its end, this was the true picture of human sexuality” (MDH 73). Does this picture of sexuality have anything to do with pure love which Kenneth and Benn are looking for?

Pure love is overcome by perversity. We become fixated on the sexual members. The angels failing, the physicians take over, as Plato foretold in the Symposium. Love is replaced by Health, and Health is obtained by anatomical means. Freud himself writes the prescription, *penis normalis, dosim*. Then, as pharmacology follows medicine, we shoot ourselves full of drugs, hormones, narcotics, our souls are brutalized, human beings become impervious to all higher impulses, Erotic obsessions, concupiscence, lewdness-the sexual furies-are streaming after us. You have to pity the angels too. By there failure to penetrate our sodden sleep they also degenerate. (MDH 73)
That sexual epidemic has replaced pure life in modern time is blamed on women only in Bellow’s text. Not only Treckie as a young woman, but her mother, Tanya Sterling, a voracious and jealous Aphrodite is plagued with the sexual epidemic of the age. As a middle-aged married, but still gorgeous woman, Tanya tries to tempt Kenneth sexually. Her menacing sexuality becomes bizarre, when she tries to seduce the boyfriend of her own daughter and the father of her grand daughter. Refusing to allow Tanya’s frightening sexuality a free reign, Kenneth contemplates on how “a divine master plan for evolution had miscarried” (MDH 215).

It seems, in the whole text, it is only Kenneth and his uncle Benn that look for a perfect marriage and a pure love relation. But these innocent male characters become confused when they look for happiness through love and women. They often easily enter but hastily retreat out of relationship with women. Each time humiliated, for the women are totally contrary to their expectations. Indeed, Benn’s experiences with the women are frustrated encounters, kinds of tragicomedies, because while sad, their irrationality is in a humorous contrast with Benn’s metaphysical quest for pure love and happiness.

All of these culminate in the narrator’s misogyny which is really overwhelming. His misogyny finds its way even into his Russian class of The Meaning of Love. In this program he tries to give a history of misogynous account of love, the accounts of such commentators as:

Gogol, whose bridegroom-to-be in The Wedding flees out the window before entrapment in marriage: Dostoyevsky, whose ill-starred lovers die unfulfilled: Rozanov, the critic –historian and Christian mystic who envied the Jews their fertility cult because he mistakenly thought their ritual bath to be sources of fertility: Rousseau, who argued human love a necessary social delusion; Yermelov, a childhood acquaintance who believed that, in the
physical body, angelic love becomes mere carnality; Plato, who believed in love between the highest form of expression: Kojeve, his own Russian teacher who taught of the small galleries in the human breast which must be melted; Swedenborg, who believed nature including sexuality, was mere hell; Stendhal, who thought more than one sexual experience was one too many; Freud who believed that heterosexuality is merely overvaluation of the beloved: Blake’s dubious model of gender relations in *Marriage of Heaven and hell* (“Blight wit plagues the marriage hearse”); Poe’s tragic attempt to defy rationalism and the industrial revolution with poetic myths of female perfection: Philip Larkin’s theory of romantic love as a “deep sleep” which blots out reality and Frankling’s cynical old saw that ‘before marriage keep your eyes wide open, after marriage keep’em half closed’.

We see in the above passage a legacy of misogyny which is apparently used to keep off Benn from romantic love. But the fact is that Benn is a fictional character and he is not damaged through these comments. In another words, the ultimate effects are on the readers who are overwhelmed by the misogynous ideas of these highly distinguished thinkers. Indeed, Kenneth tries to manipulate the readers by his account of *The Meaning of Love* in his Russian classes.

Kenneth tries to create a historical background for his outrageous gender ideologies. His ideological vision of heterosexuality is clearly evident in his fearful reaction to Benn’s belief that “through love you penetrate to the essence of a being” (*MDH* 225). He thinks that Benn’s view of love is primitive and preindustrial, as in the world of late capitalist, rationalistic and highly mechanized America, the classic beauties no longer exist, chivalry is gone and romance is a thing of past. What remains, instead, is the tyranny of literal or the biological sex. As a result, no romance and love can be seen in what Kenneth reports on heterosexual relationship. The passage of a lewd show in Kyoto is a good example
of what Kenneth has in his mind of women and love. “All these botanists, engineers, inventors of miraculous visual instruments from electron microscopes to equipments that sent back pictures of the moons of Saturn, cared for nothing but these slow openings (MDH 108).

Entrapped in his ideological vision of women and heterosexual love, Kenneth thinks in a binary thinking pattern which creates two exclusive spheres:

I began to consider that a man might either give women or love what time he had to spare from his major undertakings (for instance, the struggle for existence, or the demands for his profession; also vainglory, fanaticism, power- each person would have a list of his own) or else, released from work, enter a feminine sphere with its particular priorities and directed towards very different purpose. Here is an example everybody will understand. If you weren’t at war like Mark Antony, you were in love like Mark Antony. (MDH 210)

As we see in the last sentence of the passage, the existence of two mutually exclusive spheres is symbolized by war or love. Traditionally, a man in love is not a man of war. This long standing duality exists in Kenneth’s mind with a difference however. In our time, power of body has been replaced by power of mind. This is also found in Freudian teachings who promote the kind of binary thinking which unjustly separates Eros and intellect, body and spirit. Exactly, within this frame of ideology, Dr. Laymon’s condemnation of his own daughter as a rich bitch with bohemian sexual tastes can be understood. Indeed, it endorses the same binary gender pattern. Dr. Laymon identifies her daughter just with the body and Eros. Matilda says, “Daddy is sexually curious about me” (MDH 161) In fact, Matilda is the other not only for Kenneth and Benn but also for her own father.

Kenneth manages to regain his uncle Benn who savagely begins to escape from Matilda. “The beauty which has attracted Benn previously now appears to
endanger his life’s work. Suddenly Matilda’s teeth and shoulders are unsatisfactory” (Cronin 486). Indeed, her distinctively feminine attributes disappear and male physical appearance such as broad shoulders replace. “All he had to do was avoid her shoulders” (MDH 238). To Benn's eyes Matilda is transformed from classic beauty to a physically threatening transvestite male:

Matilda’s eyes provide Benn with intimations, 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, the forehead narrower than ever, and darkened and sharply lined...her teeth looked sharp... (MDH 239-40)

The gradual change in Benn’s feelings about Matilda, from that of idealization to that of distortions of her, shatters his dream of love and family. Indeed his pursuit of a happy loving wife comes to nothing. What leads to this tragic ending? The answer is pretty obvious. It is not difficult to see misogyny creating obvious gender antagonism. Bellow himself cannot be unaware of the ironic gender ideology. He has created Kenneth as an exacting misogynist, tough and unyielding, to display how gender ideologies affect heterosexual relations in our modern societies. No one can deny the role of Kenneth in encouraging Benn’s wrong assessment that he has lost his special power just because of Matilda. Kenneth, himself a failure in his relations with his ex- girlfriend, Treckie, does his best to destroy Benn’s dreams of marrying a classic beauty and enjoying her love. After Kenneth was permanently rejected by Treckie and after Benn’s savage running away from Matilda, life is only possible for them through transformation of the female into cruel jokes that nature has played on innocent and noble male creatures. They cherish their misogyny more than before. Due to their binary thinking pattern, Eros and intellectuality persistently cancel one another in the novel. In the end, Kenneth and Benn bitterly lament the fact that women have failed their masculine romantic expectations.
Although Bellow is very talented in investigating contemporary failure of heterosexual relations, he fails to provide proper illumination of his subject. The problem lies not only in the misogynous narrative strategies in his novels, as I tried to show earlier, but also in the fact that the dominant voice in his text openly invites us to despise women and blame them for the suffering of men. In *More Die of Heartbreak*, we are co-opted to sympathize with Kenneth and blame ungrateful Treckie for rejecting him. We are influenced as readers to admire Benn for his classic view of love and heterosexual relations. We are also pleased with his disgust with the literal view of sex and women. Through our absorption into the male logic of the text, we pass only a light judgment on these misogynous characters, as according to the text, Kenneth and Benn are lovable types after all. This co-option into the logic of patriarchy closes up any prospect of undistorted relation with women.

Bellow’s fictions are usually concerned with the failure of relations among sexes and blames women for such failures through appealing to negative female stereotypes. Among these fictions, *More Die of Heartbreak* is the most pungent one. Behind its comic treatment of gender ideologies, lies a bitter hostility to women which calls upon the readers to sympathize. Indeed, it seems Bellow’s ironic distance with Kenneth is nothing but a strategy to sophisticate the text. In other words, Bellow’s comic treatment of his male character’s gender ideologies does not lead to a serious conclusion in his overall politics of gender. It just adds to his male character’s attractions and charms.

Thus, Bellow’s text is misogynist. It not only fails to elucidate the subject of heterosexual relations but also does wonderfully well in reinscribing the already-established damaging stereotypes. But it seems not just the problem with Bellow’s fiction; it is the problem of the gender in society. After all gender is what is constructed by the dominant elements in culture. Barbara Johnson believes that generally literature cannot do much in investigating sexuality:
If human beings were not divided into two biological sexes, there would be no need for literature. And if literature could truly say what the relations between the sexes are, we would doubtless not need much of it then, either….It is not the life of sexuality that literature cannot capture; it is literature that inhabits the very heart of what makes sexuality problematic…Literature is not only a thwarted investigator but also an incorrigible perpetrator of the problem of sexuality. (13)

Bellow’s text in More Die of Heartbreak does not investigate sexuality and its resulting problems disinterestedly. Rather it acts politically as a constant perpetrator of gender stereotypes. Its ideological implications skillfully conveyed to the readers invoke sympathetic responses. The women readers is forced to witness how objectified women characters become a plaything between male writer, male characters and the male readers. The women readers, themselves, are textually being bullied into sympathetic identification with male characters in the novel. We should not forget that we cannot easily escape from our gender self as male or female readers. In other words, the female readers learn that their ontological status as woman must not be much different from that of female characters in the text. Indeed, she learns that women equal sentiment while men equal mind.

As in all misogynous texts, More Die of Heartbreak makes visible some very obvious antagonism between female readers and male authors. What Bellow writes highlights the conflict between male characters and misrepresented females. In fact, what he tries to convey in his text is nothing but some images of women who are not apt for any human being to identify with. The problem of the intention of the author aside, the effects of Bellow’s text on the women reader must be very important to either a feminist critic or a resisting reader. Indeed, a feminist critic cannot ignore the effects of a powerful text such as More Die of Heartbreak exerting such a power against women. Among critics, Judith Fetterly is very
worried about the female readers being manipulated into a passive recipient of misogyny. “As readers and teachers and scholars, women are taught to think as men, to identify with male point of view, and to accept as normal and legitimate a male system of values, one whose central principal is misogyny”(xx). To elaborate this, another critic says:

As literature is itself a social institution, so, too, reading is highly socialized—or learned activity…we read well, and what we know how to read is to a large extent dependent upon what we have already read (works from which we’ve developed our expectations and learned our interpretive strategies). What we then choose to read—and, by extension teach, and thereby “canonize”- usually follows upon our previous reading. (Kolondy 88-89)

In sum, in More Die of Heartbreak Bellow is trying to reverse the post World War II nihilism which tended to empty things of meaning, and bring back meaning into love and family relations. Saul Bellow’s efforts, in More Die of Heartbreak, to investigate modern failures in heterosexual love and marriages have not come to great results. Of course he has revealed some of subtle and sophisticated obstacles to love and marriage in our modern time, and he has done this in quite amusing and witty ways, but he has still failed to free himself from the very gender ideologies he exploit in his fiction. In fact, bringing back meaning into love and heterosexual relations is not possible by such gender ideologies. I conclude this chapter by what Irigaray says about the hope of bringing love into heterosexual relations:

A genesis of love between the sexes has yet to come about, in either the smallest or largest sense, or in the most intimate or political guise. It is a world to be created or recreated so that man and woman may once more finally live together, meet and sometimes inhabit the same place…As Heidegger, among others has written,
this link must forge an alliance between the divine and the mortal, in which a sexual encounter would be a celebration, and not a disguised or polemic from of the master-slave relationship. (Cornell 145)