

The Collapse of Household and Family As Reflected in the Works of Saul Bellow and Nobuo Kojima

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Contemporary novelists grapple with various problems facing people living in modern society. Saul Bellow, a Jewish-American writer, takes up political, social, racial and various personal issues in his novels. In *Herzog* (1964), one of his best works, Bellow deals with love affairs between men and women, marriage, divorce and family relationships, along with political and social issues.

One year after *Herzog* was published, Nobuo Kojima wrote his work, *Hoyokazoku* [*Embracing Family*] (1965), which deals with the same themes of marriage as are found in *Herzog* but is not so directly involved in social and political issues. Kojima is a Japanese writer who has a keen interest in American literature, especially in Jewish-American writers. The two novels, *Herzog* and *Embracing Family*, share a strong similarity in that the adultery of the hero's wife breaks down the marriage and family life, thus reflecting the change of the relationship of power between men and women in modern society.

In *Herzog*, the traditional family relationship in a Jewish family is juxtaposed as the ideal against the hero's unstable marriage and family life. In contrast, Kojima depicts in *Embracing Family* the cuckold and his collapsing family as an undertone to Japan's modernization and social situation after World War II. The Japanese society had changed markedly from the social order and family system typically represented by many other works such as the well-known *Ie* [*The Family*] by Toson Shimazaki, one of the greatest novelists in the Meiji era.

Herzog is also a story of a cuckold and accordingly one of the main themes of the work is the collapse of the bond of marriage between a man and a woman. Moses Herzog, the hero of this novel, is a university professor in middle life, teaching political philosophy and history of thought. He first married an obedient Jewish woman named Daisy and had a son, but divorced eventually because of his unstable character. Then he kept company with Sono, a young Japanese girl who was living in an apartment house and doing odd jobs in New York, and Madeleine, a beautiful and intelligent Jewish girl studying Slavic. Madeleine was a famous stage director's daughter. Herzog was getting along with these two women at the

same time. He had sexual intimacy with Sono, often visiting her at her department house, when he could feel contentment mentally and physically, but he seemed to hesitate to marry her, being afraid of his parents' objection because she was an Oriental woman. He finally married Madeleine perhaps because she was not only beautiful and intelligent but also of strong character, which seemed to be rather attractive to Herzog, who had somewhat masochistic personality. However, this difference of personality between the two was perhaps a cause of their later misfortune.

After the marriage, according to Madeleine's intention and desire, Herzog was compelled to retire from his position of professorship in the university, to finish his study of romanticism and to buy a large old house in the deserted village of Ludeyville in western Massachusetts. In order to get this house, he had to spend 20,000 dollars, all the money that had been bequeathed to him by his deceased father. Perhaps proud Madeleine hoped that her husband Herzog would become a famous and brilliant scholar praised by many people, not merely inconspicuous professor. He was made to do everything his wife wished. It is very clear to the eye of readers that this was quite an unnatural married life, but it cannot be denied that this type of married life reflects some aspects of real marriage and family life in modern society, where the traditional morals and principles on which the old type of marriage and family life were stably based are nearly completely lost.

Religion, whether Christianity or Judaism, has weakened the influence on the society as a whole that it had before, while recent technological advancement and concentrated political and social powers have driven an ordinary individual man into a trifle being. Women's position, on the other hand, has generally been much stronger in proportion to the collapsing male-dominated society in the aftermath of these social changes. These changing situations are felt as the background of this fiction.

Herzog's married life with Madeleine is juxtaposed in his recollection with his parents' marriage and family life, where his father had a powerful authority as a husband, the central pillar of the family, working hard, getting over hardships and bravely protecting his family in the slum, while his mother was kind at heart, tenderly taking care not only of her husband and children but also of her neighbors and fellow Jewish people faced with difficulties. The family life in his boyhood is depicted as a typical Jewish one, and it was in a sense an ideal family life to Herzog, who has troubles and hardships in his life with Madeleine.

It seems to Herzog that Jewish people in those days had a family life and community life in their true meanings. It can be said that Jewish people, who have lost their home country through their long history of sufferings, have maintained their community in its true sense and have cherished their own country in the bottom of their heart. Ironically enough, it may be said that people living in modern society are losing family identity, community, brotherhood and even their own country, as it were, in their true senses. This may be one of the themes of this fiction and also one of the problems which people in the real world are faced with.

Accordingly Herzog's second marriage with Madeleine comes to a deadlock. He is by nature mentally unstable with masochistic eccentricity, while she is proud, egoistic and paranoiac with a mental trauma from the sexual harassment which she suffered when she was fourteen years old. She recollects her childhood when she is talking with Herzog:

"My childhood was a grotesque nightmare," she went on, "I was bullied, assaulted, ab-ab-ab..." she stammered.

"Abused?"

She nodded. She had told him this before. He could not bring this sexual secret to light.

"It was a grown man," she said. "He paid me to keep it quiet."

"Who was he?"

Her eyes were sullenly full and her pretty mouth desperately vengeful but silent.

"It happens to many, many people," he said. "Can't base a whole life on that. It doesn't mean that much."

"What--a whole year of amnesia not mean much? My fourteenth year is blacked out." (117)

Though she herself had wanted to live in Ludeyville, causing much sacrifice mentally and physically on the part of her husband, she could not bear a monotonous country life. She wanted to leave the house in the country, return to Chicago and resume her study of Slavic language. Herzog could not help following her whimsical feeling and actions. They returned to Chicago, where he also resumed his lectures in the university.

His unhappy married life began to eat his heart little by little, until at last his abnormal behavior came to be clearly noticed by others. He decided, therefore, to go to Europe according to a psychiatrist's advice to take a rest for some time, released from all kinds of work and other burdens.

However, a stroke of bitter fortune awaited him when he returned home from Europe, somewhat recovered from his mental ailment. Madeleine had had intimacy with his close friend, Valentine Gersbach. Some years before, when Herzog became acquainted with Gersbach, he worked for a small broadcasting company in the locality. Herzog soon recognized him to be able and talented in this line of business, and so he kindly recommended Gersbach to a leading broadcasting station in Chicago. Gersbach soon demonstrated his brilliant talent and became famous, a sort of distinguished figure in the large city of Chicago. Madeleine may have been attracted by his fame and vitality, which Herzog did not have. At any rate, both his wife and close friend betrayed him in his bad condition. It was the double and worst betrayal and the bitterest blow to his ailing heart. It was no wonder that Herzog became insane.

In fact Madeleine has taken away everything Herzog had. His fame, money, learning, mental stability and herself have been deprived of him. Herzog recollects her beautiful figure with pangs of regret and yearning:

Was Madeleine really such a great beauty, or did the loss of her make him exaggerate--did it make his suffering more notable? Did it console him that a beautiful woman had dumped him? But she had done it for that loud, flamboyant, ass-clutching brute Gersbach. Nothing can be done about the sexual preferences of woman. That's ancient wisdom. (102)

When he had had nothing to give her any more, she deserted him just as she would throw away her worn-out sandals and ran to Gersbach.

Interestingly enough, just a year after *Herzog* was published, a Japanese novel titled *Embracing Family*, which pursues the same theme as *Herzog*, was written by Nobuo Kojima, a writer and a lecturer of English and American literature teaching at Meiji University for more than thirty years, especially interested in Jewish-American writers.

Though direct or indirect relations of influence between these two works and the two writers are not certain, Nobuo Kojima may have read *Herzog* as well as

Bellow's other works. The characters, stories and themes of the two works are similar in some ways. Just as *Herzog* is regarded as one of Bellow's masterpieces, *Embracing Family* has a comparable reputation in Japan. In 1966, the novel won the first Tanizaki Junichiro Prize, one of the most prestigious literary prize in Japan. It is appraised as a brilliant monumental work in the postwar history of Japanese literature.

Shunsuke Miwa, the protagonist of *Embracing Family*, is a university professor and translator. One day he was informed by the house maid of his wife Tokiko's adultery with George, a young soldier of the American Occupation Army who would often come to see them as a friend and stay with them. The maid told him the detail of their love affair which was made on his daughter's bed in his own house.

Shunsuke became frenzied and tried to accuse his wife and George, but she admitted the affair and dodged his accusation skillfully, telling him that it was not wise for an intellectual man like him who is versed in Western culture and ways of thinking to make much fuss about such a trifle thing as his wife's inconstant love affair.

A few days later, when the three met at a coffee shop, Shunsuke accused George severely, demanding his taking the responsibility for the matter, to which George answered that he was not responsible for the affair done with her consent and that she was so grown-up as to be responsible for her own love affair, adding that he felt responsible only for his own parents and his nation, the United States. Poor Shunsuke could do nothing but desperately and vainly exclaim, "Yankee, go back home! Yankee, go back home!"

Shunsuke is anxious to reconstruct his family, and so he is strangely absorbed in building a modern house in the land he bought. When an air-conditioned gorgeous house, symbolizing modernized family life, is completed at last, his wife Tokiko is found to be suffering from lung cancer.

She has an operation and then is taken to and out of the hospital over again, while his son has an intimate relation with a young maid. Thus there arises discrepancy between the parents and the son. The family goes on breaking down. In the meantime, curiously the couple invite George, Tokiko's lover, to their modern house perhaps to show off their restored relation and a new house symbolizing it.

Against Shunsuke's expectation, however, the new house soon begins to annoy them with some defects, such as rain leakage and the loud noise of the air-conditioner, as if it symbolized the collapse of their married life.

Tokiko is dosed with male hormone as a cure, and as a result she has a heavy beard and strangely a strong sexual desire. On her sickbed they have sexual intercourse according to her own desire. He feels felt as if the part of his body were sticking like a knife into his wife's ailing body. He has a strong guilty feeling, whereas it gives her the greatest pleasure and satisfaction that she has ever had. It signifies that he has never given such satisfaction to her, and he feels more guilty for it, too.

She dies at last. After her death, he wants to marry again to maintain his family and household. He proposes to a nurse and a saleslady in a department store in vain, while his son wants to leave the house to live by himself. The collapse of his family goes on and on against his will.

To return to Bellow for comparison, Herzog's unstable and masochistic personality may be somewhat responsible for the breakdown of his married life. His father severely criticizes his easygoing Americanized way of living from the standpoint of Jewish morality, according to which he cannot be said to have a strong sense of morality only because he has casually intimate relations with several women before and after the divorce from Madeleine.

As for Madeleine, her egoistic and paranoiac personality may be a cause for the collapse of the marriage. However, her 'grotesque nightmare' of sexual harassment at the age of fourteen has left her with a mental trauma, which may be responsible in a sense for her somewhat perverse character. After she has stated her experience of her sexual nightmare, she adds as follows:

"My parents damn destroyed me," she said, "I believe in my Savior, Jesus Christ. I'm not afraid of d-death now, Moses. Pon said we all died and rotted in the grave. Saying that to a girl of six or seven. He ought to be punished for it. But now I'm willing to go on living, and to bring children into the world, provided that I have something to tell them when they ask me about death and grave. But don't expect me to go along in the ordinary loose way--without rules. No! It'll be these rules or nothing."

Moses watched her as through he were submerged, through the vitreous distortion of deep water. (117)

Family has been one of the most important themes of modern Japanese literature since the Meiji era. The problem of family has been dealt with in close relation to freedom and independence of individual members of the family. Most Japanese novelists, except Ogai Mori, have been sharply critical of the Japanese feudalistic family system and sided with a son resistant to the authority of a patriarch. However, family has had the other side. It has had to be protected from being collapsed by Western modernization introduced into Japan since the Meiji Restoration. Japanese writers have been torn in two between fighting the feudal family system and protecting it from modernization. In *Ie [The Family]* by Toson, the intellectual hero's agonies about his family are vividly depicted. (Nishikawa 405)

In examining the problem of family in modern Japan, the historical changes must be taken into consideration. In the feudal society in the Tokugawa period before the Meiji era, family was a unit of strictly classified society based on Confucianism, in which a top priority was given to allegiance to the lord in the country and the father in the family. In the Meiji era, the feudal status system was abolished, and family became a unit supporting the political and moral structure governed by the Emperor. In a sense this meant a thorough penetration of a Confucian patriarchal system into society. It was a society supported by the authority of the Emperor, the father and the eldest son, where a wife's adultery was severely punished while a husband was leniently allowed to keep a concubine. (Nishikawa 408)

On the other hand, however, the newly established family system has been incessantly eroded by the introduction of Western modernization. *Meian [Dark and Darkness]* by Soseki Natume and *Anyakoro [Dark Night Passing]* by Naoya Shiga deal with love between a husband and a wife in relation to the family as a whole. Nobuo Kojima noted in a criticism magazine *Hihyo [Criticism]* (1965, November issue) that he had these two works in mind when he was writing his *Embracing Family*. (Nishikawa 409)

After World War II, reforms were carried out to abolish the pre-war family system. Equality of man and woman was proclaimed. The eldest son inheritance system was abolished. Thus the system was changed formally and legally, but the old form remained in small cities and in the country, and most of all, in the mind of people. For about ten years since the end of the war, social interests and literary

themes were directed at criticizing the remaining old practices, as seen in *Onnasaka* [*The Waiting Years*] by Fumiko Enchi. (Nishikawa 409)

In the 1960s, however, the problem of the Japanese family began to show very different aspects. A western style of nuclear families only with a couple and their children exceeded 50 percent, producing new problems, such as 'children with keys' who were left alone in their house while their parents were working outside the house. Thus, with rapid economic progress, these new type of families which the Japanese people have thought ideal appeared before their eyes as real. It was a realization of their dream, but at the same time it was a great shock to most people, especially to men, because they felt as if they were hermit crabs deprived of their hard shells which restrained their liberty but secured their safety from outer forces. People began to be appalled at the weakness and fragility of an individual without the hard shell of the old family system, and began to think for the first time seriously what family was, what was the family bond which united the family members and how to live as a liberated individual. *Embracing Family* is reflecting the acute social situation in the 1960s. (Nishikawa 410)

Shunsuke, the antagonist of the fiction, is appalled at his wife's adultery and does not know what to do as a husband and a father though he is an intellectual. His effort to restore the family bond results in a comical failure. Society has changed but people's consciousness has not changed. He has lost his authority as a husband and a father as well. Nevertheless, he pursues his ideal image of tender wife and a kind mother who has sustained the old Japanese family system at the bottom. He dreams the restoration of his ideal in his wife while she is alive and in other women whom he wants to remarry after his wife's death.

Another characteristic of this novel is that 'America' directly intervenes in the collapsing family (Nishikawa 411). His wife's intimate relation with George, a soldier of the American Occupation Army, is the direct cause of the collapse of his family. It is an ironical contradiction that he constructs a modern American style house to reconstruct the family and that he does not know how to settle the situation as a scholar of American literature. 'America' in this fiction symbolizes Western modernism and appears to be a destroyer of traditional things Japanese.

Taeko Tomioka, a well-known woman writer, confesses her shock when she first read *Embracing Family* (Ueno 1992: 198). She had an impression that a Japanese wife Tokiko was raped by an American soldier George though it is really a fornication by her consent, because in every war women in the defeated country

used to be raped by men in the winning country. In a sense, it seems to symbolize what the defeat of Japan in the war, the culmination of Western modernization, has brought into Japanese society, especially Japanese men's mental fields.

Chizuko Ueno's view on this point is severer for Japanese men. Japanese women do not think that Japan was defeated. They think that only Japanese men were defeated by America. Furthermore, women are apostates by nature, as Jun Eto says, and easily yield to the stronger. It is evident that the hero's wife Tokiko tried to draw into the interior of her womb modernism named George, an object of her yearning. It is an expression of her desire to possess modernism in herself, and at the same time, it is a ritual to punish herself who can never get to modernism. (Ueno 1992 200)

Taeko Tomioka notes that the wife's extramarital experience is only a symbol which signifies America's intruding into every aspect of Japan, while Ueno stresses the universality of the theme that if Tokiko's partner were not George but a Japanese man, the story would be as natural as it is, because extramarital experiences are so common for Japanese women now. (Ueno 1992 200)

To Shunsuke's reproach that George should be responsible for his infidelity, George replies that he is only responsible for his parents and his nation, the United States of America. Ueno is deeply impressed by these words of George's referring to the nation when they are talking about a personal affair. She feels here a conflict between different cultures. (Ueno 1992 205)

Jun Eto, a well-known Japanese critic, feels the fundamental differences between American and Japanese culture in the growing process of both peoples. He cites a lullaby in a novel by Shotaro Yasuoka, as an example characterizing Japanese culture:

My child, do you remember?
On my back you did slumber,
Without guilt you were crying,
Embraced in my arms shaking.

In spring there were rain-drops
At the edge of the eaves.
In autumn there were dew-drops
In the garden on the leaves.

Do you remember I did pray
For happiness on your way?

He notes that intimate relationship between mother and child symbolized by the above lullaby is the starting point of Japanese culture. He also cites as an indicator of American culture a song of a cowboy quoted in *Childhood and Society* by Erik H. Erikson:

Go slow, little doggies, stop milling around
For I'm tired of your roving all over the ground
There's grass where you're standin'
So feed kind o' slow
And you don't have forever to be on the go,
Move slow, little doggies, move slow.

Hardly has he grown up when the cowboy starts for a new frontier, with his mother's love rejected, independent, looking at this fate of death coming sooner or later. This lonely cowboy is the starting point of American culture. According to Erikson, most American youth have mental traumas, rejected by their mothers. American mothers reject their sons because they know well that their sons will soon have to live alone without any help in a far frontier. A pure image showing their son is a cowboy leading a flock of motherless calves whose fate is being slaughtered on reaching their destination. (Eto 3-4)

The adhesion of mother and children permeates every aspect of Japanese life. A Japanese man pursues his mother's image in his wife after his marriage. This is a common feeling of a person who lives as a settler in an agricultural community. (Eto 7)

In the 1960s, Japan became an advanced industrialized country, with all the society swallowed in the flood of modernization or industrialization. The fear for being left behind alone was the impulse which pushed modernization forward. According to Erikson, the most fundamental feminine fear is the fear of being left behind alone. Evidently *Embracing Family* reflects a sense of fear and uncertainty flowing through the bottom of the social psychology in Japanese society in the 1960s. The change of all the feminine agricultural society to industrial society

exerted the greatest influence on real women. If a woman or a mother has to be left behind only because she is a woman or a mother, she must destroy her own motherhood as nature by herself. The faster the industrialization was, the more thorough was the Japanese women's self-destruction of their motherhood. The only way for women to overcome the fear of being left behind was to destroy themselves just before being left behind. After World War II, especially in the 1960s, the self-destruction had been common under such a psychological mechanism. *Embracing Family* vividly depicts an impulse which cannot be explained well by any idea and any abstraction and which pushes us forward toward industrialization and self-destruction. It also describes the very fact that we are now living in an age of change and loss which we have never experienced before. (Eto 108-113)

According to Eiichiro Ishida, a Japanese anthropologist, the nomadic society which derives originally from Eurasian continent is a paternal society with belief in Heaven as God. On the other hand, the agricultural society is a maternal society believing in the earth as God. (Ishida 142-164)

Transferring from agricultural society to industrial one, Japan has lost its maternal foundation and its women's motherhood. However, such motherhood still remains as an ideal woman image in the consciousness and the subconscious of most Japanese men. Shunsuke, the protagonist of *Embracing Family*, continues to pursue such a maternal image in vain comically and pathetically like a little child seeking after his mother's love.

What is the condition under which a family is a family? Anthropology has endeavored to define it in vain, and it has given up its inter-culture definition because of the diversity of culture. The consciousness which constitutes a family can be called family identity. Just as personal identity has a body as its material foundation, family identity has its material foundations; share of family business, share of a family name, share of a house, share of family property, share of household economy, etc. It is true, however, that those foundations are being lost under various changing social conditions, and so maintaining family identity is very difficult, while new types of families are emerging, such as a homosexual family. Family seems to be breaking down, though not necessarily in one direction. (Ueno 1994 4-41)

Herzog's family has collapsed, and he has returned alone to his old house in Ludeyville like a lonely cowboy riding toward a new frontier. His attitude can be

said to be reflecting American culture, as Jun Eto points out. Shunsuke's family has also collapsed and he wants to remarry, probably seeking after his mother's image in vain in another woman after his adulterous wife's death. His attitude seems to be symbolizing the psychological uncertainty of Japanese people in the 1960s, when the family began to break down. Japanese readers think his behavior very absurd, but they only force a grim smile, realizing the absurdity is their own.

The 1960s in America was a period of great turbulence, as shown by the civil-rights movement. The Establishment was shaken and the traditional values were questioned, while industrialization in society had transformed an individual into a petty being like a single gear in the huge machinery. In this circumstance, Herzog's family collapsed by contrast with the traditional Jewish family. Thus the two anti-heroes, Herzog and Shunsuke, reflect an aspect of alienation in modern civilization, into which the two authors had a penetrating insight.

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