

ทัศนคติของนักเขียนเอก Henry James ต่อการแต่งงาน:
มุมมองจากนวนิยายเรื่อง *The Golden Bowl*
The Great Artist's View on Marriage: Henry James
and *The Golden Bowl*

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บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้วิเคราะห์ทัศนคติของ Henry James นักเขียนเอกชาวอเมริกันต่อชีวิตการแต่งงานที่สะท้อนจากพฤติกรรมของตัวเอก ในนวนิยายเรื่อง *The Golden Bowl* บทนำได้อภิปรายพื้นฐานทางครอบครัว และการดำเนินชีวิตส่วนตัวของ Henry James ที่มีอิทธิพลต่อมุมมองของเขาเกี่ยวกับชีวิตการแต่งงาน และเหตุผลที่แท้จริงที่ทำให้ Henry James ตัดสินใจใช้ชีวิตโสด บทวิเคราะห์ประเด็นหลักในนวนิยายดังกล่าวเน้นพฤติกรรมของตัวเอกชื่อ Maggie Verver และความสัมพันธ์ของเธอกับผู้ที่เกี่ยวข้องที่ตีความพรางด้วยการแต่งงานระหว่าง Maggie กับ Prince และ Adam กับ Charlotte การแต่งงานที่เกิดขึ้นจากแรงจูงใจที่เห็นแก่ตัวของ Maggie ในการใช้เงินเป็นแรงจูงใจที่ส่งผลร้ายทำให้ Prince และ Charlotte ลอบเป็นคู่กันและต้องปกปิดพฤติกรรมดังกล่าวด้วยการโกหกหลอกลวงและเสแสร้ง บทสรุปของนิยายเรื่องนี้ สะท้อนให้เห็นมโนธรรมและสารที่ Henry James ต้องการสื่ออย่างชัดเจนว่า การแต่งงานที่ดี จำเป็นจะต้องอยู่บนพื้นฐานของความรัก ความซื่อสัตย์ ความเสียสละ ความเอื้ออาทรต่อกัน ตลอดจนการเคารพตนเองด้วยการประพฤติปฏิบัติตนอย่างมีคุณธรรม จริยธรรม

คำสำคัญ : Henry James, นักเขียนเอก นวนิยายอเมริกัน, *The Golden Bowl*

Abstract

This paper analyses a great American artist, Henry James, and his views on marriage as reflected in his last major American novel, *The Golden Bowl*. The introduction sets out James' family background suggesting that this impacted on his attitudes to marriage and, indeed, why he remained single. Then the synopsis and analysis of the novel and its main characters, including their relationship with one another that leads to two marriages: one between Maggie and Prince, the other Adam and Charlotte. These arranged marriages derived by Maggie's selfishness and wealth are considered the corruptive forces that proved disastrous as they cause both Prince and Charlotte to commit adultery, deception, and betrayal. The conclusion clearly reflects Henry James' conscience, and his true message that good marriage is based on true love, honesty, selflessness, generosity and moral integrity of the two couples.

Keywords: Henry James, great artist, American novel, *The Golden Bowl*

To live over other people's lives is nothing
unless we live over their perceptions, live over the growth,
the change, the varying intensities of the same-since it was by
these things they themselves lived.

HENRY JAMES

I. Introduction:

James' family background that impacts his views on marriage:

Di Yanni (2000, xi) concludes that the evaluation of literature involves an assessment of aesthetic distinction along with a consideration of a work's social moral, and cultural values. The life of the great artist can provide a solid background for his work. As Henry James has been considered the Father of American Fiction, it is worthwhile to investigate his work that is intertwined with his background. Adorno(1986, 232) evaluates the significant aesthetic value of the work of art as follows:

Aesthetic refraction is as incomplete without the refracted object as imagination is without the imagined object. This has special significance for the problem of the inherent functionality of art. Tied to the real world art adopts the principle of self-preservation of that world turning it into the ideal of self-identical art...the ideal that every work of art spontaneously aims at being identical with itself. Just as in the world outside a fake identity is everywhere forcibly imposed on objects by the insatiable subject. Aesthetic identity is different, however, in one important respect: it is meant to assist the non-identical in its struggle against the repressive identification compulsion that rules the outside world.

In his *Preface to Henry James: A Life*, Leon Edel (1977, Xiii) maintains that Henry James 'possessed the great mind, the profound inward history and a verbal power that places him with the greatest writers of the English language.'

In his book *The Art of Fiction*, (1948, 21) James makes it clear that 'the deepest quality of a work of art will always be the quality of the mind of the producer.' James believes in the art of the novel as a touchstone of truth and a criticism of life. His appeal for a higher moral consciousness has been sophisticatedly portrayed through the major character's conflicts or struggles in his novel. *The Golden Bowl* is James' last major novel.

James' life is an art in itself, maintaining moral integrity and a sense of freedom to lead a fulfilling life. James views marriage as a trap. He is said to have great fear of young women. His negative attitude against women was derived from his parents' relationship with one another. His mother, Mrs. James is considered a keystone of the arch. However, after her death, his father was incapable of going on without her. (cited from *Henry James : A Life*, p.14). Edel(1977,11) interestingly makes a note below to show the personality of Mrs. James:

'to be the 'keystone' of the James family arch required strength and firmness and an ability to control and weather high emotional tempests. This Mary James appears to have been able to do all her life. She was a strong woman, strengthened by the worship of her husband and the love of her sons and daughter, who accepted her not only as their devoted mother but also as the exalted figure of their father's veneration.'

From the above, Mary James is portrayed as a powerful woman who takes control of everything in the family with dignity. For clarity, Edel (1977,12) carries on with a more detail of Mrs. James' photograph that reveals her true nature:

A photograph of Mary James, taken two years before her death when she was seventy, shows a woman in the characteristic pose of resigned elderly maternity: the hands are folded, the lips pursed to a single, hard line .

The nose is prominent, the eyes are keen, the forehead is high. Her countenance suggests a purposeful, strong-willed and determined woman.

William James, Henry James' elder brother additionally explains his mother's role and her devotion to the entire family even after a short recovery from her illness: 'Mother is recovery from one of her indispositions, which she bears like an angel, doing any amount of work at the same time, putting up cornices and raking out the garret-room like a little buffalo.'

It is undeniable to say that because of his mother's role in the family that deprives James' father of his leadership, he has gradually become dependent on her. James was conscious of 'our sense of her gathered life in us and not of her having no other,' (Cited from Edel1977, 13). Henry Junior saw his father as living only by his mother. After his mother's death, the father was incapable of going on without her:

'he passed away and went out, with entire simplicity, promptness and ease for the definite reason that his support had failed.'

James' determination to remain a bachelor:

James' mother has psychologically created a great impact on James' attitude about women. Edel (1977,16) notes that 'fear of women and worship of women dominates his theme:

The love-theme plays itself out in striking fashion as a threat to life itself. In a list of names he set down in his notebooks when he was fifty, James included that of "Ledward," and then, as was often his custom, he improvised several variants, Ledward-Bedward-Dedward-Deadward. This appeared to be a casual rhyming of led-bed-dead .It was in effect, a highly condensed statement of the themes of many of his works. To be led to the marriage bed was to be dead.

It is, therefore, not surprising why James was determined to remain a bachelor. More importantly, he had great fear of women, and he wanted to preserve his independence. Edel (197, 229) maintains that:

James had long ago made up his mind he would not marry. It was not so much a matter of making up his mind, as of following his inclination: given his difficulties with younger women, and his comfortable relationship with elderly widows and old ladies, he saw no reason why he should change his pleasant celibate status for one that might prove a threat to his art and his personal sovereignty. "I am too good a bachelor to spoil," he wrote to Grace Norton. "That sounds conceited – but one may be conceited in self-defence"

Edel also explains that by remaining a bachelor, James could live modestly; instead of having to find a house, or a large apartment, he could for a present remain in his little rooms in Bolton Street... Life was never dull for a bachelor absorbed in his work and in his world as James was.

The above shows James' sensibility to remain single and to absorb in his own constructive pursuit in his creative work. Edel (1977, 198) states that James' tales of the artist-life invariably contain the admonition that marriage could only be a distraction, a form of servitude fatal to art.

This paper, then, intends to investigate James' view of marriage as reflected in his last great novel *The Golden Bowl*. Joseph Warren Beach (1954, 255) distinguishes James' last major novel in his full prime as the literary landmarks for his great achievement. He explains:

It is characteristic of James that his best work of all should have come at the end of his career. Having mastered his technique, having done with experiments, he launches at last upon that series of novels which are but the natural and seemingly unstudied application of his method, and the best demonstration of its possibilities for art.

II. Synopsis and Analysis of *The Golden Bowl*:

The Golden Bowl implicitly demonstrates a daily world problem in very complicated and subtle ways. It deals with passion, money, sex, marriage, betrayal, deception exploitation, treachery, adultery, love, faith and security, yet with an emphasis on the problems of **love and marriage**. In fact, according to Smith (1983,Vii) James wanted to call it "The Marriages," but had already given that name to a short story of 1891."The story portrays how an innocent heroine, Maggie Verver is pursued by evil and yet can magnificently attain higher moral integrity and achieve happiness in the end. This novel is the only one of James' major work that ends happily. Maggie has experienced evil, learned from it and become more mature about life in the real world. James significantly makes use of a golden bowl with its flaw to identify the psychological conflicts involved. The golden bowl then becomes the center of consciousness of the main characters. In so doing, James not only enriches the meaning of the book, but elaborately illustrates his moral consciousness as well.

At the outset, James introduces Prince Amerigo's background. He is handsome, refined, but poor. He belongs to an old and noble Italian family .The Prince actually acquires all the physical charm and dignity. He has a distinctive social position and is very attractive. Amerigo is in love with Charlotte Stant but cannot marry her simply because she is poor. At this stage we immediately see how the young lovers are doomed by their social norm. Due to the poor Prince's pride in maintaining his social integrity, and the wealthy Maggie's ambition to establish a distinguished social situation, they are married. Their marriage practically brings mutual benefits to each of them. However, its outcome is rather destructive. As the story develops, James implicitly illustrates the destructive impact of selfishness. Maggie's love for her father causes her to become manipulative. She makes him marry Charlotte so that he will not feel

isolated and lonely. Her close relationship with her father provides the Prince and Charlotte a great opportunity to seek intimacy and later commit adultery. James precisely wants to show us that these two marriages produced by different selfish motives are destructive. Besides, it is love that is the major force. Actually, James presents two different kinds of love, the sexual and the spiritual one. The Prince's and Charlotte's love can be classified as personal-romantic-sexual love, whereas Adam's and Maggie's love spiritual.

The Prince's adulterous affair with Charlotte can be considered an act of betrayal and deception. However, Maggie's arrangement for Charlotte's marriage can also be considered an act of exploitation. Viewed in this light, no character is perfect. They can even be justified as equally selfish and self-possessed. Therefore, it is striking to see how James subtly penetrates through the power of evil to demonstrate man's moral dilemma in its most sensitive reaches. This can demonstrate the power of evil beyond knowledge, and exploitation can be judged as an evil act although when Maggie exploits Charlotte and makes her marry Adam, she is ignorant of Charlotte's relationship with her husband. Her guilt of leaving her father and her gratitude to him drive her to commit an evil act unconsciously. Similarly, Charlotte, feeling as isolated as Adam, is deprived enough to commit adultery with Amerigo. It is, therefore, paradoxical that evil, in this case, arises from love.

The Golden Bowl also portrays James' preoccupation with wealth as corruptive force. With reference to Dietrichson (1969, 89-90):

When *The Golden Bowl* was written, James must have been fully aware of the great general importance of money in human affairs. Beyond this its general meaning must have been somewhat uncertain and ambiguous: he saw, as demonstrated by the Ververs, how in abundant supply it is the key to absolute freedom and to great power over human lives. Such power might obviously be used for purposes both good and evil.

The Ververs are tremendously wealthy. They are, in fact good and innocent people. Their great ambition is to make the best use of their wealth to acquire the best in the world that interests them, both in art and people. Consequently the Prince and Charlotte become inevitable victims that the Ververs can buy like any objects for their collection. This is evident through Maggie's conversation with the Prince: *The Golden Bowl*, (James, 1983, pp 9-10)

'Has it been his motive in letting me have you?' Yes, my dear, positively - or in a manner,' she said... 'You're at any rate a part of his collection,' she had explained - 'one of the things that can only be over here. You're a rarity, an object of beauty, an object of price. You're not perhaps absolutely unique, but you're so curious and eminent that there are a few others like you - you belong to a class about which everything is known. You're what they call a *morceau de muse*.' 'I see. I have the great sign of it,' he had risked - - 'that I cost a lot of money.

The extract above apparently demonstrates the Ververs's power over the Prince. Their power can be considered as good only when it serves to maintain the Prince's social dignity but can also be viewed as evil when it disregards the Prince as a human being, but an object, or a collection. In relation to this, Charlotte's situation is even worse. Adam marries her not, because he loves her, but because he wants to please his daughter. Maggie wants Adam to get married because she thinks he has missed her so much after her marriage although he denies it as seen below: *The Golden Bowl* p. 128

'You ask me what you've lost,' Maggie continued to explain. 'The not having to take the trouble and to make the fight - - that's what you've lost. The advantage, the happiness of being just as you were - - because I was just as I was - - that's what you miss.

Although the idea of marrying Charlotte is appealing to Mr. Verver, he reminds Maggie that in doing so, they are making use of Charlotte: "If we get her here to improve us don't we too make use of her (*The Golden Bowl* p. 134.)

Although the idea of marrying Charlotte is appealing to Mr. Verver, he openly reminds Maggie that in so doing, they are making use of Charlotte: "If we get her here to improve us, don't we too then make use of her?" (*The Golden Bowl*, 134). Maggie replies, "We do her good, too.... She has a great imagination. She has, in every way, a great attitude. She has above all a great conscience... she has only two pence in the world." (*The Golden Bowl*, p. 134.) Viewed in this light, Adam's marriage is based on a deal, a bargain which makes it look rather debased. Later when Maggie finds out about Charlotte's intimacy with the Prince, she is very upset about it. To solve the problem, Adam, then, takes Charlotte to America. However, it is Maggie who came up with such an idea. Dietrichson (1969, 88) regards the Ververs as rather heartless. He explains that:

A certain heartless materialism is reflected in this attitude, an impression which is strengthened by the smooth and efficient, but cruel manner in which the multi-millionaire asserts the power of his money over Charlotte, forcing her - - though for the noble purpose of saving his daughter's marriage - - to leave England for American City, where she distinctly does not want to be.

Apparently, the Ververs are quite selfish, especially Maggie, who turns out to be the most powerful in the end. The Ververs use wealth to manipulate others, whereas Amerigo and Charlotte are entrapped to become helpless victims by their greed and vanity as the Prince marries Maggie to gain for himself a contact with art and wealth, and a desirable social situation, whereas Charlotte, who also seeks freedom and position to marry Mr. Verver. According to the plot outline, James does not condemn the adulterers as totally wicked sinners. He deliberately employs the situation which makes Charlotte deserve

our pity and sympathy for her true love for the Prince. Through her struggle to meet him, we comprehend how hard it is for her to give him up and how she tries to remain faithful to him as can be reflected in the following scene:

'I(Charlotte) don't care what you make of it, and I don't ask anything whatever of you- - anything but this. I want to have said it- - that's all; I want not to have failed to say it. To see you once and be with you to be as we are now and as we used to be, for one small hour- - or say for two- - that's what I have had for weeks in my head. I mean, of course, to get it before - - what you're going to do. . . I am just saying this. Giving myself, in other words, away- - and perfectly willing to do it for nothing. That's all.

Viewed in light of Charlotte's and the Prince's situation marriage is just a social ritual that does not really mean the couple are truly in love although the two of them can be condemned as immoral. In the Ververs' case marriage is just a means for them to show off their power and wealth to manipulate those considered inferior to them, so they, too, can be condemned as immoral. This situation can subtly convey James' attitude towards marriage, and why he is scared of women as discussed earlier.

The Prince's reply to Charlotte also implies that for some people marriage is just a means to get what they want. This is revealed through the Prince's understanding of Charlotte's situation as he also advises her to marry Mr.Verver.

'Yet, I shall want some day to give you something.'

She wandered ay him. 'What day?'

'The day you marry. For you'll marry. You must- - seriously - - marry.'

Paradoxically, the adulterous affair contributes a great deal to Maggie's moral growth and maturity, which finally brings her happiness. Judith Armstrong (1976, 143-144) concludes:

Henry James stands alone in ascribing a truly redemptive role to adultery. Inspired simultaneously by desperation and integrity, Maggie, in the end, not only wins her husband back again, and commands his admiration and respect, but also leads him to an understanding of her moral sense, which gives birth in him to one of his own. She further touches him to deep love and passion for her showing how ardently these emotions act in her own self, for him. They enter a new, full relationship, based on the three elements James sees as essential to a marriage: aesthetic pleasure, erotic satisfaction and moral sensibility.

By manipulating Amerigo and Charlotte, Maggie also suffers a great deal after she has found out their affairs. However, in the end she has demonstrated her moral strength and great ability to solve the problem, which she is directly involved, and held responsible for. It is true that when Maggie decides to keep Amerigo she is confronted with a dilemma of choices. In order to strengthen her relationship with her husband, Maggie has to make a sacrifice by giving up her father to Charlotte.

Spender (1945, 238) concludes that Maggie lives and saves the situation by the force of her patience, her generosity, and her love. In so doing, James has magnificently presented the psychological ordeal of his characters through the symbolic aspects of the golden bowl. From the very beginning, it is Charlotte who wants to buy a golden bowl as a wedding present to Amerigo and Maggie, but the Prince refuses it because the bowl has its flaw. Nevertheless, Charlotte still admires its beauty and wants to possess it, but cannot afford it. We can see Charlotte's psychological ordeal about her situation, while she exchanges a conversation with the shopkeeper:

'Does one make a present,' she asked, 'of an object that contains, to one's knowledge, a flaw?'

'Well, if one knows of it one has only to mention it. The good faith,' the man smiled, 'is always there.'

'and leave the person to whom one gives the thing, you mean, to discover it?'

'He wouldn't discover it - - if you're speaking of a gentleman.'

'I'm not speaking of anyone in particular,' Charlotte said.

'Well, whoever it might be. He might know - - and he might try. But he wouldn't find.'

She kept an eye on him as if, though unsatisfied, mystified, she yet had a fancy for the bowl, not even if the thing should come to pieces?' And then as he was silent:

'Not even if he should have to say to me, "The Golden Bowl is broken"?'

He was still silent; after which he has the strangest smile.

'Ah ,if anyone should want to smash it - -!'

The conversation between Charlotte and the shopkeeper has a double meaning. Whereas the shop keeper is only talking about the golden bowl, Charlotte is talking about its unmentionable symbolic aspects of her affair with the Prince, and his marriage. The bowl itself as a beautiful work of art may symbolize the Prince and his social status. That is why Charlotte wants to have it, but she lacks means, and this precisely reflects her real situation, as she later says to the shopkeeper, 'Well, for me, only the price. I'm poor, you see - - very poor....I like it,....I want it.' So she can't marry the Prince for the same reason. The Prince refuses to have the bowl as a wedding gift simply because it has a flaw which symbolizes his adulterous affair with Charlotte. For the Prince, Charlotte's offering of the bowl symbolically means to him that she offers herself

as his mistress, which will destroy his marriage or at least he is superstitious about it.

In this respect, Charlotte seems to be truly devoting herself to her passion for the Prince who takes the best of everything and yet remains shrewd even after the truth is revealed. As the story develops, Mrs. Assingham smashes the bowl which symbolically means that it is her subconscious act to deliberately ruin Charlotte to cover up her guilt of having deceived Maggie about the whole affair. Mrs. Assingham is the most wicked character. Outwardly she is seen as righteous, but inwardly she is foul.

All the problems the main characters have been involved ,demonstrates James' insight into the private domestic suffering of Maggie Verver .While the Prince's and Charlotte's adultery demonstrate the destructive passion of lust, which is exceedingly complex, as a reflection of the fundamental clash between the moral code of conduct of the Ververs ,and Amerigo,and Charlotte.

In *The Golden Bowl*, James also seems to emphasize selfishness as the most destructive evil embodied in AdamVerver's dream and vanity. His selfishness fails him as a father and a husband.

Rowe (1976, 208) holds that:

Adam's failure as a father is the original flaw. His judgment violates the variety of human relations for the sake of his ideal vision. Maggie comes to consciousness on her own terms by profaning the sacred ties of filial devotion. In order to save her father from the knowledge that would corrupt his hermetic system of values, she must cut herself off from his authority. Her awareness that Adam needs to be saved defines her distance from him, explaining why Maggie must become an independent source of will and power.

III. Conclusion and Implications

It is precisely love and selfishness that create a vicious circle in *The Golden Bowl*. In the end all the main characters share the guilt for their failure and are willing to renew their marriage. Actually the happy ending refines James' moral sensitivity and his ethical values. Through the struggle of the innocent heroine, we come to recognize James' consistent preoccupation of the great value of a higher moral integrity. His protagonist has come to realize and acquired superior ethical moral beauty as seen through Maggie's achievement at the end of the novel.

Be it realistic or not, Maggie, James' protagonist, has demonstrated James' consistent moral consciousness and the nature of evil his innocent heroine has come across. She has great capacity for love, generosity, honesty and trustworthiness, but she also has her shortcomings. At the beginning, Maggie is unaware of evil of her European adventure, but once she gains her vision of evil, she uses her new insight to restore goodness, or at least keep her marriage from collapsing. Her experience about evil has ironically made her accomplish her womanhood and attain her maturity in the end. Through Maggie's suffering and triumph over it, James explicitly has demonstrated his moral concern for an ethical individual's role in society. And in this aspect, James can be regarded as a philosopher, and his great works have reflected his philosophical aesthetic values that are worthy of our attention. In addition, James sees a good marriage as a union of two people who sacrifice their own free will to care for one another. The implication is clear why he prefers to remain single. That is to maintain his independence to achieve his goal in life to become a great writer.

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