

Love and patience: Destroyer of adultery: A study on Henry James Novel 'The Golden Bowl'

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Abstract

The paper portrays an intense study on marriage and adultery in *The Golden Bowl*. It highlights how marriage is not considered as a solemn relationship but rather as an opportunity for adulterous affair by men and women and also how love and patience of the married ones destroy the same adulterous affair. The paper highlights how the female protagonist Maggie Verver overcomes all the obstacles to prove her real love.

Keywords: adultery, affair, betrayal, familial, real love

Introduction

Adultery is the outgrowth of the loveless relationship between the married ones when they live for the sake of living and not for the marital bliss. It inevitably rears its ugly head when one married partner not only takes the sexual desire of the other for granted but also fails to realize his or her negligence of the other. However, as there is a time for everything, there is a time for sex too. Marital sex does not cause any strained relationship between the married partners who are near and dear to each other. But extramarital relationship becomes the main cause of the strain in the familial and marital relationship.

Adultery is the main issue in the relationship between two married persons, Prince Amerigo, the husband of Maggie Verver and Charlotte Stant, the wife of Adam Verver in Henry James' *The Golden Bowl*. It does not become a scandal but it thrives without much ado because of the want of chances for conjugal relationship between the married partners. Maggie Verver, the wife of Prince, is the one who finds the relationship between her husband and her father's second wife Charlotte, who has been her school mate. However, Maggie brilliantly solves it, without affecting her marital relationship. R. P. Blackmur in his review to Henry James's *The Golden Bowl* has described how the access to adultery is achieved between Prince Amerigo and Charlotte Stant, the former lovers. Prince, after becoming son-in-law to Adam Verver through his marriage with his daughter Maggie, establishes an extramarital relationship with his former lover Charlotte who is a step mother to Maggie and a mother-in-law to him.

The impecunious Italian Prince Amerigo, with mislaid steps in the staircase of his morals, marries Maggie Verver, the daughter of an American millionaire, with morals that shoot to the sky, but maintains his liaison with his common friend, Charlotte Stant. By arrangement, which Maggie thinks she makes, Charlotte is married to her father, the millionaire propriety, Adam Verver. Thus Amerigo's mistress becomes his mother-in-law. (6)

The novel, at foremost describes Prince betraying his wife Maggie through his affair with Charlotte, his quondam lady

love and now the wife of Adam, the father of Maggie. It then charts why the married ones indulge in adultery even after having legitimate life partners. At last, it brings out the outcome of this adulterous affair on the inner frame of Maggie, her reaction to the affair, and her clever way of settling the knot without creating any fuss. In her impasse, she does not act like a woman losing her balance of mind but as a woman of positive attitude; she shows her human grace such as generosity, tactfulness and affection, to keep her husband and his love to herself, integral forever.

Charlotte was a young American woman with a potent individuality. During her visit to Rome, she met an Italian aristocrat Prince who was equally penurious like her. Both Charlotte and the Prince fell in love with each other and had premarital relationship. They decided to enter into marital life, but their pathetic economical status became a stumbling block to their marriage. They knew that money was everything in life. Since they were impecunious, they were certain that, their marital life could never be peaceful. Being functional and worldly-wise, Charlotte and the Prince decided not to get married. They also depart without any regrets, under mutual agreement. They left for the places of their choice, unknown to each other. They did not have any crumb of thought that they would meet each other again. If Charlotte and Prince had been really in love, they should not have separated. But they did, because, their love was not genuine and it was mainly based on the financial status. Being money-minded to the core, their separation did not make them feel bad, at the turn of events, in their love affair. Regarding the relationship between Prince and Charlotte, Dorothy Krook in her article "The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James" has specialized that "the essence of relationship between them [Charlotte and Prince] is just lust rather than love" (qtd.in Keskin 55). Eric Fromm in "The Art of Living" has also stated that "the bond between Prince Amerigo and Charlotte Stant lacks components of [true] love such as care, responsibility, respect and knowledge" (24).

Adam Verver was an American widower living in London, and he had all material retention for his cultured and wealthy life. Money was everything for him and God had blessed him so. However, he lived with an aspiration in life and, that was to get a competent husband for his daughter Maggie who was

“born [and brought up] without the knowledge of what evil was” (46).

As father and daughter, both did not know anything about the world and people in it. They were in their own world without an ado about people outside their world and their ways of life. They loved each other so much and they were always smooth taking care of each other and their necessities. Their love for each other was very demanding in nature:

She [Maggie Verver] had been his [Adam Verver’s] only child—which she was indeed as much as ever; but there were sides on which she had protected him as if she were more than a daughter. She had done for him more than he knew-much, and blissfully, as he always had known (135)

Adam and Maggie never disconnected from each other under any destiny. Being an art collector, Adam adorned himself to acquiring a magnificent art collection for the museum, which he was thinking to build in America.

During his European visit, Adam happened to meet Prince. He found Prince to be a charming and delightful personality. But he learned that Prince had nothing except his aristocratic ancestry to talk about. As he was more interested with Prince’s ancestry and social status, he looked, least bothered about Prince’s present impoverished state. He also found Prince to be a suitable match for his daughter and selected him, without thinking of his background. In his choice of his daughter’s life partner, “Adam Verver is flawed in his ability to distinguish between people as real selves and people as commodified objects and whoever he meets, he used to treat them accordingly” (*Analysis*, Keskin 52).

Maggie as a faithful daughter fell in string with the decision of her father. She began to love Prince sincerely, but she was not sensible that true love had to meet with obstacles on its way to success. It became true even in her association with her married partner, as Shakespeare has said, “The course of true love never did run smooth” (MND. 1.1.134). The main obstacle, which lay in the smooth progress of Maggie’s marital love with Prince, was her old class mate Charlotte and her continuous affair with her husband even after his marriage. The irony was that, it was only her father, who had chosen him, rather bought him. She did not entertain any part in the selection of him. Only after her marriage, she had to exhibit her wifely love to him. Her words of gratitude to her father revealed how much she was emotionally attached to her father and how she respected his selection for herself:

You are at any rate a part of his collection... One of the things that can only be got over here. You’re a rarity, an object of beauty, an object of price. You’re perhaps absolutely unique, but you’re so curious and eminent that there are very few others like you – you belong to a class about which everything is unknown. You’re what they call a *morceau de muse*. (pg. 10)

Prince was not very pleasant at heart because he was after Maggie’s fortune. Otherwise, there would not be any life for him. As he wanted to sense free from his conscience, he met Fanny, the woman, instrumental in arranging his marriage with Maggie. During his meeting, he found Fanny to be disturbed and restless. But he was not aware of the reason.

Fanny disclosed to Prince, the cause of her disturbed look, stating that Charlotte, his former love was in London for Maggie’s marriage. Charlotte was not at home when Prince met Fanny at her house. Accordingly, she informed him, “She [Charlotte] has gone back to her hotel, to bring her things here. I can’t have her alone at a hotel”(1.1.2.19). Prince knew well that Maggie was the school friend of Charlotte and Maggie had written a letter to Charlotte about her marriage with Prince.

Later both Prince and Charlotte met face to face at Fanny’s house just before his wedding. He had strong feeling for her, than his consideration of her as an obstacle to his marriage:

He saw the sleeves of her jacket drawn to her wrists, but he again made out the free arms within them to be of completely rounded, the polished slimness that Florentine sculptors, in the great time, had loved, and of which the apparent firmness is expressed in their old silver and old bronze. He knew her narrow hands, he knew her long fingers, and the shape and colour of her finger-nails, he knew her special beauty of movement and line when she turned her back. (1.1.3. 28)

These were the feelings that shot in his heart on seeing Charlotte, because he could not, but think of his intimacy with her and his meeting at Fanny’s house, which had induced in him a kind of erotic feeling towards her.

Both Prince and Fanny did not know anything about the aspiration of Charlotte attending his marriage. Prince looked disarrayed about Charlotte’s stay even after the marriage. Charlotte alone comprehended what she was up to. She valued her competence and began to display her individuality. She wanted to pursue her life as she liked, without any interference.

Prince was eager to know Charlotte’s future. He could not judge whether she would enter a marital life or she would remain single. If she married a rich man and settle in life, he will be completely free from his past relationship with Charlotte and he could also be happier in his marital life. Hence he asked Charlotte whether she was going to remain single or get married to “some capital fellow... [because] such a marriage will be more favourable to you” (27). As a reply, she familiarized him of her position in life:

To marry whom?... I tried everyone I came across. I did my best. I showed I had come, quite publically, FOR that. Perhaps I showed it too much. At any rate it was no use. I had to recognize it. No one would have me... the position of a single woman to-day is very favourable, you know. (27)

Charlotte stated him that she was prepared to marry provided Prince would arrange for her marriage with anyone whom he liked. Meanwhile she wanted to spend sometime with Prince. They both went to buy a wedding gift for Maggie. She was successful and took Prince with her without any complaint from him.

Charlotte, during the shopping opened her heart to him, revealing the reason of her visit to London. She made him feel tempted when she said that his willingness to go with her for shopping itself showed that it was he, who had still feelings for her. She had no waver in openly putting forth a desire to

have an affair with her quondam lover. She never thought that her affair with Prince would be betrayal of her friend Maggie, whom her lover was going to marry. She was very selfish and her personal benefit was more important than anything else. Prince was shocked and surprised at Charlotte, being very open to have an affair with him before his indented marriage. Her determination to get what she wanted from him startled him. Adam Maillet in his thesis titled "Dark Consciousness: Theory of Mind and Henry James's *The Golden Bowl*" has given a rise to Charlotte's inner self:

Charlotte expends her resources to go after the man she loves, whom she has refused to marry because of his impoverished status. She wants it before his wedding, under the pretext of spending one platonic afternoon shopping for his future wife and with the real intention of complicating his marriage (15).

During the purchase, they exposed their affair to the shop keeper through their conversation in Italian hoping that the shop keeper did not know their language. Charlotte chose a defective golden bowl as a gift to Maggie purposely. It had an intrinsic crack which was symbolical of a crack in the relationship of Maggie and Prince. But Prince declined the gift saying that it should have a flaw, or fear that the shop keeper should not sell it to her cheaply. He also felt that the gift with a flaw would not be a good sign.

After her marriage, Maggie began spending time with her father than with her husband. Their bond became strong, healthy and long day by day. But whenever she was with her husband, she felt her father to be lonely. At time, she felt guilty of having left her father alone. She thought that she should not be a reason for her father's loneliness. To unburden her from this blame, she thought that his marriage with Charlotte would make him a happy man. She thought that her father's second marriage would give him a good companionship. Maggie did not just stop with her thought instead she pursued her father to propose Charlotte and Charlotte quite easily agreed to his proposal after her consultation with her lover Prince. The content behind her acceptance of Adam's proposal was self-concerned, because her marriage to Adam would make her stay closer with her lover. Adam married Charlotte hoping that his daughter would be happier in her marital life. But in doing so, he did not allow the happiness of his wife as important as that of his daughter.

Maggie wished to gift her father on the day of his marriage and she visited the same shop, where Prince and Charlotte went to buy a wedding gift for Maggie. One of the ironies of life was that Maggie heavily paid for the same golden bowl which Prince had rejected and brought it home. The Jewish seller felt guilty for having sold the defect golden bowl for a heavy price. So he met Maggie to repay the excess amount in her home. On seeing the portrait of Prince and Charlotte, he revealed the overheard conversation during their visit to his shop. On hearing about her husband and Charlotte, she felt that her life and happiness was in threat. As she was deeply in love with Prince and faithful to Adam, she determined to silently watch the events till time was ripe to settle the challenge.

Maggie Verver and Adam Verver indirectly allowed their partners to find happiness in extra marital relationship. D. Mark White in his article, "Is Adultery Justified," considers

any extramarital relationship as unjustifiable:

The adultery [between Prince Amerigo and Charlotte Slant, the former lovers] involves the breach of commitment, and as a broken promise made [to Maggie and Adam respectively], it becomes a violation of trust. It also involves deception because the adulterer must sneak around his or her partner's back. As a result of betrayal and lies. Adultery simply hurts the other person, adding personal harm to general wrongfulness. (*Psychology Today*, 3 July 2012)

Maggie guessed something to be fishy in the relationship between her husband and Charlotte. She did not exhibit her suspicion explicitly. She followed a unique method to separate both. She made arrangement in such a way that Charlotte spent time with her and Prince with her father, Adam. She wanted to know whether her suspicion about their relationship was true. Hence, she asked her friend Fanny directly, whether her husband and Charlotte were former lovers. Fanny took the golden bowl and dropped it as an answer to Maggie's question. No sooner did Fanny fragment the bowl, Prince entered and he could not but confirm the truth.

Maggie did not want to act pessimistically. She had taken everything in the relationship positively without any traces of hatred towards those involved:

Any deep-seated passion has its pangs as well as its joys, and that we are made by its aches and its anxieties most richly conscious of it. She had never doubted of the force of the feeling that bound her to her husband; to become aware, almost suddenly, that it had begun to vibrate with a violence that had some of the effect of a strain would, rightly looked at, after all but show that she was, like thousands of women, every day, acting up to the privilege of passion. (247-248)

She could understand that true could never be easily gained and one had to struggle hard for it against all odds.

Charlotte, on the other hand, guessed that Maggie knew their relationship. She made an attempt to confirm with Prince. But Prince told her that Maggie knew nothing about it. But Charlotte felt restless and straight away she asked Maggie whether she had any resentment against her. Maggie, being thoughtful and kind told her a lie that she had no such complaints against her.

Maggie over passed everything and forgave all those who betrayed her. She knew what true love was and how she should act:

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. (1 Cor. 13. 4-8)

Maggie planned to separate Charlotte from Prince without revealing her strategy. She saw her father leave for America with his wife Charlotte and made her love for Prince

overcome all hurdles.

A woman like Maggie can never be seen in real life. She forget everything to keep up her marital happiness. Almost all married women would always be tempted to explicit vengeance on their husbands and on the other women who had been instrumental in making their husbands choose the wrong route of human relationship. But, Maggie stands unique in her attitude and consequent behavior. She is an incarnation of goodness and love.

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