

On Conflicts Between Values and Reality of Strickland in *The Moon And Sixpence*

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William Somerset Maugham is one of the greatest English novelist and playwright at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. One of his most well-know work is his second novel *The Moon And Sixpence*. The paper mainly focuses on the analysis of conflicts the Strickland faced between spiritual pursuit and the realistic conditions. Through the analysis of conflicts of the leading characters, the following conclusions have been reached: In the journey to the moon, although Strickland abandoned the rich material life and his decent work, in the end, he still succeeded in realizing his ideal and endowed life with different colors.

Keywords: *The Moon And Sixpence*, values and reality, the pursuit of life

Introduction

The novel is written primarily from the perspective of the narrator, a young, aspiring writer and playwright in London. Strickland is the main character in *The Moon And Sixpence*, who worked as a stockbroker in London. He lived a happy life there with stable income and respectful social status accompanied by his generous wife and two children. In the eye's of other people he would be content with such pleasures, although they were unchangeable and not challenging at all. But what is unexpected is that he suddenly left London to Paris secretly with no regard of all his comfortable life and family members. At that time people thought he must have been having an affair with another woman, so rumors about him were all around the London. However, finally by "my" visiting to London, I have just found out that he was leaving his family for painting. Although he left to Paris for his pursuit of dream Strickland did not have any basis for painting at all, and all he has was just his love for paint. He was crazy from the eyes of others. And his life in Paris was so poor that he almost died of hunger and he has been sick for several times. His paintings were not good and he was always destroying everything he had. There was nobody appreciated his work except for a bad painter, Stroeve, who helped him a lot both from life and money. Stroeve thought him a genius and tried everything he could to help him. Once Strickland became very ill, it is Stroeve that took him to his house. However, when he recovered, Strickland not only occupied Stroeve's studio but also take his wife, Blanche Stroeve, as a model. Later Blanche fell in love with Strickland but Strickland only painted Blanche to satisfy his desire to create. Blanche Stroeve could not control his love for Strickland, as a result, she could only commit suicide.

Later he wandered on and on until he reached Tahiti, where he married a native girl, Ata. He seemed content to have a native wife and he lived a peaceful and harmonious life there with Ata to continue painting. Unfortunately, he contracted leprosy after a short time period of peaceful life, and he was blind before a year of his death. Ata took care of him until he finished his giant fresco and then he died of disease. After his death, Ata followed his instructions and burned down the room covered with frescoes without leaving anything. That was all Strickland wanted.

The thesis explores the conflicts between values and reality of in *The Moon And Sixpence*, which is closely related to the main character Mrs Strickland, Dirk Stroeve, Blanche Stroeve Strickland and Ata.

The Conflicts of Strickland in *The Moon And Sixpence*

People always say that: “the ideal is great, but the reality is cruel”. These two sentences accurately express people’s common views on ideal and reality. However, during the course of self-shaping, people need to pursue their ideal in life. If there is no ideal, they will become a mediocre person without any specialties. Although to realize the ideal in real life, we always need to go through many hardships and twists and turns, we should know that the contradiction between ideal and reality is absolute and relative unity. In pursuit of the ideal, Strickland could abandon everything and all the feelings of ordinary people completely disappeared from him. Therefore, in the face of the blow to his friend, he remained indifferent. He regarded love as something useless. In his eyes, love is silly. It calls upon the tender weakness in the heart of man, and transforms him into a submissive slave. Strickland is different from what ordinary people values, and has a very different understanding of tribulations. For him, the hardships of life are far less painful than the ravages of his will. He has no regard for comfort. Hunger is not a pain to him, but a simple physical experience. For him, the pursuit of art lays the foundation of all his life.

The Pursuit of Ideal in Strickland

In order to realize one’s ideal, a great painter must exclude all external factors to fill all life with the spirit of art, to create crazily. It needs a lot of courage, because leaving the comfort of life is not easy for everyone. Many people bounce back and forth between art and comfort in search of coexistence. However, the facts have proved that this is a fantasy. It is for this reason that Strickland’s canvases reveal surprising originality and value. Therefore, for the pursuit of material vulgar, art is the spiritual realm that can never be reached. “What he sought in life is reflected in his later paintings, which guides us into a new and strange realm. It was as if the spirit of Strickland had been wandering from body to body, seeking lodgings, and at last, in this distant land it had settled down” (Gu, 2002, p. 38). Mr. Strickland had given up the wealth and comfort of London, and was living alone in Paris. Strickland was satisfied with this life, however the conditions were became worse and worse. When he came to Paris, he did not have enough money to lead a life and he could only spend days with hunger. Such conditions lasted for a rather long time before he could support himself. As the narrator says, “it is the desire for freedom that sustains him, and makes him ignore these conditions” (Maugham, 1981, p. 92). When Strickland was at a loss in Paris, he met the Stroeve. Stroeve and his wife were very important to him by providing him with money and care. Because Strickland was too attached to his dream of painting, he did not want to work to support himself. The Stroeve had helped Strickland a lot in keeping his dream alive. Dirk Stroeve was a very kind-hearted

man, and he was always willing to help others. What's more Stroeve was the first one to think that Strickland was a genius in painting. He respected and adored Strickland very much. In order to give Strickland a secure life, Dirk even took some of Strickland's paintings to a gallery. He assured his boss, "I can give you my word of honor. There is no one painting of whose talent I am convinced" (Maugham, 1981, p. 22). In spite of Dirk's best efforts to help him, Strickland did not seem to appreciate his help. He got all the money back because he thought Dirk was a vulgar dealer, so he took all the paintings from the gallery. He had never regarded Dirk as a benefactor, and he even laughed at him without regret. He regarded Dirk as a wimp and incompetent man that he showed no grateful for him at all. He never treated him like a real friend. On the one hand, he enjoyed the help Stroeve provided to him but on the another hand he looked down upon him. However, although Dirk was angry with his attitude towards him, he still tried his best to help him. When Strickland was ill, he asked him to his house and took care of him patiently. However when Strickland recovered, he forgot all about Dirk's help and generosity. On the contrary Strickland had an affair with Blanche and at last deliberately abandoned her, leading to Blanche's suicide. He seduced her to unleash his desire. When Blanche found her fell in love with Strickland, he rejected her and he felt that love was a burden to him. But even if she died for him, he also remained indifferent to think that it has nothing to do with him. He felt neither guilt and nor regret, but thought women were very stupid.

The Choice of Values and Reality in Strickland

The Moon And Sixpence are often considered metaphorically as "ideal and reality", "art and life". Some people even simplify it as the conflicts between material and spiritual, saying that the moon represents Strickland's pursue of the spiritual ideal, and sixpence represents poor life. The work shows the contradictions an artist faced in the ideal and reality, material and spirit, art and life. As a man we can pursue our own dream but it must take place without harming others interest. The moral responsibility is something we must bear in mind in order to do anything. We should perform an action according to moral principles in a society. However, in the novel *The Moon and Sixpence*, Strickland wants to achieve his own dream but he ignores the interests of others, including his wife, Dirk Stroeve, Blanche and even the whole society.

Conclusion

As I mentioned above, the conflicts of Strickland, the pursue of ideal in Strickland and the choice of values and reality in Strickland provide us with two different ways of living: the one is accepted by most people to compromise with the world and let material interests rule their lives, and the other kind is that man tries to live his own life, to get rid of bondage from life.

In order to pursuit his dream of painting, Strickland suffered from many different kinds of inner conflicts, including the conflicts with his wife, his friend Stroeve, and his lover Ata. He abandoned the traditional ethics of family relationships, friendship and sexual relations. Maugham used Strickland's disharmonious relationships and choice to reflect on man's ethical dilemma and his pursuit of goodness. So how to make a choice between values and reality conditions is a complex thing we need to consider.

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