

Character Analysis on the Three Ladies in The Moon and Sixpence

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Abstract: Maugham is a famous and unique writer in English literature. In his novel *The Moon and Sixpence*, the hero of the novel Strickland met three different female characters in his pursuit of the ideal life, he and the three women had different emotional fetters, but every woman could not escape the abandoned ending. From the images of three entirely different women depicted in his novel, his views on women can be seen -- two-sided and hypocritical. Mrs. Strickland, The image of the devil girl Blanche and the perfect wife Ata had different styles. In the society at that time, women did not have much autonomy, they still depended on men to survive, so women in that society had limitations. By analyzing and interpreting vital female figures in the novel, this paper tries to explore Maugham's intention in portraying female characters and the reasons for portraying the characters. Thus, reflection on the existence of the patriarchal society can be deepened and true equality between the sexes can be pursued.

1. Introduction

Maugham, an Englishman born in France, was a dramatist, novelist and a knight with a doctorate. He swept the century and the world in the early 20th century. After the publication of *The Moon and Sixpence*, its unique style of writing was greatly welcomed by the world. In this novel, Maugham narrates the whole story through the French Impressionist painter Gao Geng, which attracted thousands of readers.

The Moon and Sixpence was one famous work written by William Somerset Maugham in 1919. Its inspiration comes from the life of French post-impressionist painter Gao Geng. The protagonist was initially a very successful securities broker. After middle age, he suddenly responded to his inner call and began to indulge in painting. Give up everything, move to Tahiti in the South Pacific, live with indigenous people, get creative inspiration and create amazing masterpieces[1]. In the novel, Maugham deeply explores the contradiction and interrelatedness between life and art. It emphasizes the contradiction between ideal and reality. The protagonist Strickland's body also reflects the complex human nature, but also reminds those who ignore the ideal for the sake of reality, life needs "six pence", but the same also needs "moon".

2. Three Females in the Moon and Sixpence

Strickland was always a spectator of love. He had been through three relationships in his life, but he had never treated the women as equals.

In the eyes of the world, he was almost crazy to pursue their own ideal world, the woman was his ideal island in the heart of the roadblock. All the women for him, it was only a woman's wishful thinking, was the result of women's nature in the naive stupidity. He found his soul free, but the three women had to sacrifice for him. Mrs. Strickland, because he lost a whole family. She had no support, no family, and had to build a strong heart to face the eyes of outsiders. Blanche had lost her life for him, and Ata had given her all for him.

Ata's behavior was admirable, but it was also sympathetic. She gave everything, while Strickland was concerned only with his own needs. From the beginning to the end, her giving seemed to be her own business. Mrs. Strickland, Blanche, and Ata were three figures that we could find in the real world.

2.1 A Devoted Wife and Mother : Mrs. Strickland

Mrs. Strickland was a representative housewife, a dedicated wife and mother. Mrs. Strickland was not beautiful to the outsider. She was plain compared with others. But Mrs. Strickland was remembered by many as the perfect wife who had good taste and kept everything in good order. Such a good woman had married Mr. Strickland, an honest, dull, ordinary man, and Mrs. Strickland alone had maintained their family and social relations. However, as a result of Mr. Strickland's treachery, everything changed. He left the family, for reasons that were not known at first, and then Mrs. Strickland said that her husband had gone to Paris. Mrs. Strickland's thoughts had been changing since her husband left home.

Helpless but still maintaining a good performance. At first Mrs. Strickland hid herself in her grief, and though she wept bitterly, she was gentle and polite. Even when you are alone at home, dress is still a matter of etiquette. When she received a note from her husband, she decided to do her best to save her family.

Mrs. Strickland was indignant at the cruel words he had left in the note, for he had left the family without a word of explanation or any feeling of regret. She hid from the children the fact that their father had left the family, and Mrs. Strickland then asks the narrator to make her husband back. Mrs. Strickland said that she only wanted her husband back, and that, as a woman with an open heart, she would put the past behind her if he would return.

Since Mr. Strickland had betrayed her, the rumour had been in circulation. This impressed Mrs. Strickland, and cast a shadow of unfaithfulness over their relationship. On the journey in search of Mr. Strickland Mrs. Strickland had provided herself with enough tissues to cry.

Inspire people's sympathy. But from the narrator's point of view, her behavior was somewhat contradictory. When she learned that her husband had left her for painting, not for women, and refused to return to their home, Mrs. Strickland began to change her feeling. She began to hate and curse her husband. She swore that she would never forgive Strickland, and cursed him for having died so tragically without anyone's attention. For such a lovely girl, her vindictiveness was growing. Mrs. Strickland shrugged her shoulders impatiently in spite of all attempts to persuade and comfort her. To gain sympathy Mrs. Strickland hid her pain and pretended to be weak.

Whenever she talked about her husband, her words were filled with sadness. She asks the narrator not to tell the truth if anyone asks about her husband, but to tell that Strickland had eloped with someone else. She tried to keep public opinion on her side. Later, a curious story was told among her friends that Mr. Strickland had taken a fancy to a French dancer and had accompanied her to Paris. The story won her a lot of sympathy and gave her a lot of prestige. Now that she had no money, she resolved to use her mind, and her acquaintance of so many

writers, and decided to study shorthand and typing at once.

Finally, she made it and started her first job. From Maugham's point of view, Mrs. Strickland is a very complex character. She is very kind, but also mixed with a false side. She lives in her own image. Besides, Mrs. Strickland was very vain, and in order to keep up with the fashion she tried to associate with the writers of the world, to be in the driving seat at social events.

In the patriarchal society, the existence of women is limited, and the traditional role of women is bound to change the real self for the family, hypocrisy in the face of society. She has to work hard to maintain her lovely and beautiful image. She can't show her true self, she can only show her false self in disguise. Mrs. Strickland never became very dependent on her husband. When she learned to type, she reflected the self-reliance and courage of women to face life[2]. But in Maugham's writing, Mrs. Strickland refused to divorce out of innate jealousy, gave up her job after receiving an inheritance because a really decent woman should be dependent on others, and always stressed that female are very silly, blindly immersed in the sea of love.

2.2 Narrow-Minded Woman: Blanche

Blanche can be said to be a very brave woman, she dared to fight for her love, unfortunately, she could not get rid of the influence of passion, did not achieve a good ending. When Strickland left his wife and family, and went to Paris alone, he received much help from Stroeve. Blanche and Strickland knew each other. The Stroeve had lived a happy and peaceful life before Strickland appeared. When Strickland arrived, Blanche, at first disgusted with his impoliteness, did not care for him even when he was sick and dying, and did everything she could to prevent him from coming. At last it was Stroeve who persuaded her. Their lives have changed since then.

In the process of taking care of Strickland, Blanche was very considerate, could be called a perfect housewife. In Strickland's presence she showed no aversion to him. Blanche's attitude towards Strickland had changed over the course of the day. She fell in love with Strickland and wanted to be with him so desperately that she became very cold towards her husband, and when Stroeve begged her to stay, she only refused coldly. But Blanche was also very poor. She was once just a maid in a wealthy Roman family, seduced by the family's son, and eventually abandoned. Unfortunately, she became pregnant and tried to end her own life, but she met Stroeve, who stopped her from killing herself and starts a family with her.

This time, she betrayed her husband and wanted to live with Strickland forever. Although Blanche knew that Strickland was not rich, or even very poor, she insisted on living with him, and her love was so strong that she was willing to find work herself to support him. But Blanche's efforts and her ardent love and care did not make much impact on him. He soon became bored and finally abandoned her.

Abandoned by Strickland, Blanche was so desperate that she took her own life, even though her husband, who still loved her, refused to renew their relationship. In Maugham's works, Blanche was just a tool for Strickland to vent his desire, but Blanche chose to end her life because of her obsession with love, which made people feel very sorry.

In Strickland's view, suicide for love was only a foolish thing to do for pity's sake. Blanche was portrayed by Maugham as a narrow-minded, materialistic female. When she confronted with a man, she was attracted to some of the characteristics of a man. So her fate did not deserve people's sympathy[3].

2.3 Simple and Loyal to Love: Ata

The third female character in *The Moon and Sixpence* is named Ata, and she is the last woman in Strickland's life.

It was in Tahiti that Strickland met Ata. Ata and Strickland were so far apart in age that there was a gap of thirty years. Ata is a very simple, and loyal to love girl. No matter what, can get things done very well. This satisfied Strickland with Ata. She took great care of him, did not interfere with his painting, and obeyed her decisions unconditionally.

But at that time, the social status of the Aborigines and the whites was different, the whites had higher status and the Aborigines had lower status. Ata was a socially inferior Aboriginal woman. Being with a white person was a blessing for an Aboriginal person, but for a white person it is a curse. But she was so fond of Strickland that even if she did not expect a big wedding, knowing that she might be beaten by her husband later on, she was willing to go away with him and become his wife.

To others, girls like Ata were just looking for a white man to live with. But from Strickland's point of view, his vision of the perfect wife had a realistic template. Although Ata seems to be the perfect wife in Strickland's mind, in fact, to Strickland, Ata is only an appendage of his life, but he is not love for her. But Ata was so simple and ignorant that she knew nothing of it. For Strickland, on the contrary, she loved him more firmly and more fervently. When Strickland was seriously ill and needed to go into the mountains, Ata followed him steadfastly. After Strickland's death, Ata, in spite of being urged to burn the house she had painted, kept her promise to Strickland.

Ata was more a servant to Strickland than a wife. In this article, Maugham did not express gratitude for the meticulous care of women. Women, on the contrary, seemed to him to be very strange creatures. Even if you treat them casually, as dogs do, they will not show any strong resentment, and will still respect and love their masters like a male slave. This also reflects that when women are in a patriarchal society, their social status is still very low. It is unfair that their love for their families and their husbands is not paid the same respect.

3. Factors Contributing to the Shaping of the Female Image

A thousand readers have a thousand Hamlet in their eyes. The reason why people see things differently is that everyone is affected differently. Influence comes from all sides, including a person's growth environment, family factors, social experience, and various experiences. This chapter will explore the causes of Maugham's female characters in combination with Maugham's personal life experience, social background at that time, and mainstream ideology and culture.

3.1 Impact Coming from Maugham's Family

Maugham once said, what a writer writes depends on who he is, so it is reasonable to know what he has done in his personal history. Therefore, it is necessary for people to explore his attitude towards women in combination with his growing experience and social background.

Maugham lost his mother when he was eight years old. The death of his mother left him with irretrievable pain. Maugham was very short in his childhood and also had a stuttering disease, which made him introverted, sensitive and even withdrawn. Even in school, he was often discriminated against and isolated.

Because of this, he yearns very much for someone to give him care, just like his mother. Therefore, he has been looking for a woman like his mother, kind and warm, understanding and caring. Unfortunately, Maugham did not meet a woman as kind as his mother, as he had hoped. He met a woman, married her, and they had an unhappy marriage. He did not think his wife was a perfect wife, and grew increasingly disgusted with her, choosing to end the relationship in the tenth year of their marriage.

3.2 Social Transition That Maugham Was in

Maugham lived in a special period, which was a transitional period from the traditional period to the modern society. At that time, the status of women began to gradually improve. The society also began to encourage women to actively show themselves and get rid of the label of male subordinate in the patriarchal society. Women also began to actively participate in social activities, self-awareness constantly awakening. Therefore, the cultural color of the transitional period is also fully displayed in Maugham's works. But Maugham was disgusted by this. He believed that women of the present age had not obtained the advantages of their forebears and were not well educated. They were like slaves who had been freed. But at the same time, he is also very eager to have a mature woman like his mother to become his wife. Therefore, in Maugham's works, we can usually see the female figures who are very humble and low status, but very respectful to men, like Ata, who is the perfect wife.

Maugham wrote *The Moon and Sixpence* in 1917. Back then, the status of women was already lower than it is now, and there is a debate about the merits of working women versus stay-at-home moms. At that time, the vast majority of women were ashamed to “earn their own living”, and most people, both men and women, thought that being supported by others was respectable. The shame of a woman earning her own living, no matter what she did, no matter how well she did it, was evident in the book. *I noticed that Mrs. Strickland had forgotten that she had ever done anything so disgraceful as to earn her own living. Like all good women, she sincerely believed that truly respectable women should be supported by others.*

3.3 Cultural Factors Influencing Maugham's Creation

Maugham's literary works were created at a time when society was experiencing severe unrest. At the same time, the European economic crisis and the outbreak of the Second World War, the social situation is very tragic. People generally have a pessimistic psychology, Renaissance and other activities also profoundly reflect the changes of The Times. In the course of social change, people's morality and social culture have undergone great changes. And appeared a large number of irrational philosophy, against secular ethics, social culture and other traditional aesthetic values. Unavoidably, Maugham's thought and creation were infected with the color of this era.

Therefore, it is not accidental that the negation of the external material world, the affirmation of the internal spiritual world, the negation of the social utilitarian value, and the affirmation of the philosophical and aesthetic life have become the basic value orientation of Maugham[4].

4. Maugham's Attitude Towards Women

In *The Moon and Sixpence*, the three female characters all have good qualities, but the experiences and endings of the three women are not happy, which is the inevitable result of women in the male-dominated society. Through the analysis of the woman figures in Maugham's works. And the prevailing attitudes and opinions towards women at that time, the ideal woman should be gentle, considerate and unconditionally obedient to her husband.

The scenes described in the work are dominated by the male protagonist, while the female character is in a subordinate position from the beginning to the end. These female images are permeated with men's subjective consciousness and prejudice[5]. From his traditional wife, to Blanche, who focused on desire, to Ata, who was a considerate mother, Maugham objectively described and evaluated women, expressed his disgust and dissatisfaction, and at the same time, he idealized women and expressed his desire and appeal.

Maugham believed that the real value of life lies in the pursuit of life's detachment, human self-improvement and inner spiritual belonging. The fundamental way to realize this value of life is to rely on intuition to return to the primitive nature that is not polluted by civilization, to realize

the integration of human's spiritual world and nature through art and other ways, and to find oneself in the object -- nature. To this end, the first thing to do is to cast off the shackles of civilization and of man himself. In this sense, Mrs. Strickland and Blanche were both failures, while Ata was the embodiment of primitive nature and human beauty.

5. Conclusion

In *The Moon and Sixpence*, the three women are all excellent in one respect, but their social life is affected by the male-dominated society, which is restricted in one way or another. Therefore, their life is not easy. In the eyes of men, they are more like an accessory than an equal partner, and women are like a nanny in their family life

Through the description of many women in this paper, it can be seen that there is a lot of patriarchal color, and the status of women is always at a very low level. Under the influence of his family factors and patriarchal social thoughts, Maugham created many female images serving men, and held a great prejudice against women. Therefore, the author believes that people should deeply reflect on the unequal gender relations, make efforts to eliminate the bad habits of prejudice against women in the society, and build a social environment of gender equality.

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