

Interpretation of valuable moral concepts in the novel of Somerset Maugham “The Moon and Sixpence”

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Abstract. This article is devoted to the analyses of the valuable and basic concepts of ethics, such as virtue and evil. The essence of these notions is studied by interpretation of examples describing protagonist and round character Charles Strickland of Somerset Maugham’s novel “The Moon and Sixpence”.

Keywords: moral concepts, ethic category, image, protagonist, round character, virtue, evil, embodiment, interpretation.

Introduction. The English writer William Somerset Maugham is known to millions of readers and literary lovers around the world as the author of such memorable literary creations like "Lady Frederick", "Lisa of Lambeth", "Theater", “Of Human Bondage”. Nevertheless, his novel “The Moon and Sixpence” is regarded as a work which is full of contradictions, in view of the fact that moral concepts of virtue and evil are divulged so skillfully that they stir the emotions in the heart of readers, sealing in their memories and encouraging them to constant observation.¹

A writer, who had been thirsty for knowledge since his youth, studied and became a doctor. However, his inexhaustible interest in fiction made him give up his profession and devote himself entirely to literature. Due to his tireless work, Somerset Maugham soon gained popularity. He became one of the most prominent and widely read writers of the twentieth century, for the reason that in his narratives the moral concepts which are eternal for each epoch came to the fore. At this point, it is worth noting that the novel "The Moon and Sixpence” has a special place in his literary activity, as the author himself admitted it as his masterpiece. In the researches of many literary critics, this work has been thoroughly analyzed and its literary value has been proven.

Literature Review. The novel “The Moon and Sixpence” was written in 1919 and was translated into several languages. Its first translation from English into Russian was made by Zinaida Vershinina, and later in 1960 a new translation was published by Natalya Mann. Literary scholars and critics, such as K.N Bugayeva and Nora Gal, have commented on the early translations of the work. Russian literary critic V. Skorodenko conducted a thorough research on the literary analysis of the work conveying its value deep in all aspects. American director Albert Levin made a film

¹ Pulatova S, Vohidova M. Somerset Moemning “Oy va sariq chaqa” asarida san’at yo’lida qilingan qurbomliklar. Ta’lim tarbiya jarayoniga innovatsion yondashuvlar, muammo va yechimlar mavzusidagi ilmiy amaliy konferensiyasi, dekabr, 2021. B-79-84.

based on the novel, starring Herbert Marshall and George Sanders, which became one of the most popular movies at that period, soon John Gardner's opera "The Moon and Sixpence" was created.²

Regrettably, this masterpiece was introduced to Uzbek audience of readers a little later. After the translation it into Uzbek by Rahmatilla Inogamov. Alisher Atabayev, has been working on the analysis of translation, noting some shortcomings in it. However, he emphasized that the translation had been done skillfully, as R. Inogamov maintained a balance between free and accurate translation. Another achievement of the translator is that he preserved the language of the work, Maugham's style of bitter irony. Among current literary critics who are investigating this work we can include Dilfuza Jumayeva who highlighted the "underlined sentences" in the work as well as Shoira Normatova.³

Analysis. The main emphasis in the article is given to the analysis of such categories of ethics as virtue and evil, because from our point of view the title of the book and the moral of the whole novel consolidate these two opposite notions.

Charles Strickland is the protagonist of "The Moon and Sixpence", in order to become an artist, he gave up his family, a well-paid brokerage profession in the stock market, and eventually became a prominent artist, creating unique works of art, but living and dying alone in Tahiti.

The writer has created the character and the image of Strickland so skillfully that he puts a dilemma in front of the readers. Is Strickland a symbol of goodness or evil? Who is he?

Is he a great artist who has overcome many hardships in the path of art and made his dream come true, or is he an irresponsible father who has left his family, and children who has not fulfilled paternity duty? Or is he a traitor who has betrayed his friend who extended a helping hand to him when he was in trouble?

For finding answers to these questions, firstly, we have tried to investigate the criteria of good and evil, which are the basic concepts of ethics.

So, what is virtue? Or what does evil mean?

Virtue is one of the most important categories in ethics. It represents the essence of human activity. It manifests itself as the embodiment of the will of God in the human heart. That is why the trinity of good thoughts, good words, and good deeds occupies a leading position in all the holy books.⁴

² "O'zbekiston adabiyoti va san'ati" gazetasi – 2009-yil 24-soni

³ Shoira Normatova. Jahon adabiyoti jurnali. 2006.

⁴ Sher A. Axloqshunoslik. O'zbekiston faylasuflari milliy jamiyati nashriyoti. Toshkent-2010, -B.247-252.

Virtue is a quality that gives a person the strongest spiritual pleasure, transforms him into a social person and leads to true happiness, it is a high value that leads the individual to perfection. Besides, virtue and its opposite evil are not measured by the usual, everyday criteria of life; they are as comprehensive and social in nature as love. That is why goodness is associated with a moral ideal. Because of this, it embodies principles such as heroism, patriotism, humanity, and courage in practice. Another peculiar aspect of goodness and evil is that this double concept has the property of evaluating human activity. It can be likened to a sacred scale that measures *the greatness and lowliness* of the human child.⁵

In view of the above ethical criteria, we can conclude that Somerset Maugham did not call his work "The Moon and Sixpence" in vain, because the protagonist of the work embodies the qualities of goodness and evil. As a great artist and gifted painter, he is likened to "*the moon*", while as an ordinary human being, he is equated to a man who is worthless as "*a sixpence*" because of the evils he has done to his family and friends.

Discussion. Any literary discussion will certainly not be true without interpretation of the extracts and passages taken from the book where the essence is revealed. Loosely based upon real-life 19th century French Neo-Impressionist artist Paul Gauguin, Strickland is the protagonist of the novel. Following the rough outline of Gauguin's life, Strickland spends most of his existence firmly stuck within middle-class British convention and expectations before suddenly sacrificing everything he has, including family, to pursue an artistic vision which ends in leprosy, blindness, and death in Tahiti. Love for art comes to him when he was 40 years old and to become an artist, he drops everything, he leaves his home, city, family, wife, children and goes to Paris, and despite the fact that he has been preparing for it for a year, he does not warn anyone about it because nothing in the world could stop him from realizing his dream. When a young journalist, at his wife's request, questioned him:

- *Has it occurred to you that your wife is frightfully unhappy?*
- *She'll get over it.*
- *Then, isn't it monstrous to leave her in this fashion, after seventeen years of married life, without a fault to find with her?"*
- *Monstrous. What, then?,- asked Strickland.*
- *How is she going to live?*
- *I've supported her for seventeen years. Why shouldn't she support herself for a change?*
- *Don't you care for her anymore?*
- *Not a bit, - he replied.*⁶

⁵ Sharipov A. Professional etika va etiket. Buxoro-2018, -B.25-30.

⁶ Maugham S. The Moon and Sixpence. Pegasus-2010.

He responded insensitively to all the questions asked by the journalist. He did not feel any guilt towards his family and did not think that his actions were wrong. Even when it came to his children, he did not change his mind saying that:

"They've had a good many years of comfort. It's much more than the majority of children have. I liked them all right when they were kids, but now they're growing up I haven't got any particular feeling for them." [4]

The young journalist was surprised by these answers, but Strickland was completely calm. He was no longer interested in anything; he was as calm as if he had sacrificed everything, as if he had nothing to lose. He turns his back on cyborg society and chooses a simple real life. He compares himself to a man who has fallen into a river: it does not matter if he swims well or badly, it doesn't matter if he gets out of the water. But everything was not as easy as it seemed to him, because he faced obstacles in the way to make dreams come true. There were many people at that time that mocked his works and called them nonsense. However, there were those who could understand the real art. Among them was his friend Dirk Stroeve. Dirk is kind of a dork, but an affable one. (In fact, he may be good-natured to a fault.) Though possessed of absolutely not remarkable artistic talent himself, he is nonetheless capable of being among the first to recognize that Strickland is a revolutionary genius likely to attain great fame and in the novel this idea is expressed in the following way:

"I tell you he has genius. I'm convinced of it. In a hundred years, if you and I are remembered at all, it will be because we knew Charles Strickland." ⁷

Strickland does not seek fame or fortune by exhibiting his pictures. He even calls it *"childish stupidity."* For Strickland, it does not matter if his paintings were good or bad, the most important thing for him is *"to draw what I want to see"*. In fact, it was this desire that led him from a life in London to a life in poverty in Paris. He did not sell his paintings and he tried other ways to survive. His clothes were very old and worn out. He worked very hard and did not want to get help from anyone, so he spent a lot of time solving some technical problems solved by the previous generations.

He got married, but not for his lust and desires, but for his interests in art. He had relationships with Dirk Stroeve's wife Blanche only for having her as a model for his paintings as he did not have money to pay for a model for posing in his pictures. He betrayed his only friend who gave him a helping hand by cheating on him with his wife. The relationship becomes only slightly more prickly, surprisingly, when Strickland seduces his wife Blanche away from Dirk, only to abandon her as well, leading to her suicide.

Strickland uses people only for realizing his dreams and ambitions; he never thinks how he can hurt them. Even if he finds a good job, he will quit when he has enough money for paints. The end of his life ends tragically. However, *"Strickland's tragedy is not just in his cruelty and hatred. His greatest tragedy was when he did not know that he was creating for humanity, when he did not want to know"* as Skorodenko said.⁸ Even when he finds out about his illness, he does not change

⁷ Maugham S. The Moon and Sixpence. Pegasus-2010.

⁸ <https://ru.m.wikipedia.org>

his views, but becomes more interested in art. Towards the end of his life, he painted his imaginations on the walls of his house in Tahiti. In the last days of his life, only Dr. Coutras visited him. It is Dr. Coutras who provides the pertinent information about the horrific final days of Strickland which almost succeeds in raising his story to the level of tragedy. Only the doctor has seen the masterpiece the human being can ever create and in the following extract, we can see the surprise and admire of the doctor towards the great creations of Strickland:

*"I scarcely know. It was strange and fantastic. It was a vision of the beginnings of the world, the Garden of Eden, with Adam and Eve .It was a hymn to the beauty of the human form, male and female, and the praise of Nature, sublime, indifferent, lovely, and cruel. It gave you an awful sense of the infinity of space and of the endlessness of time."*⁹

Strickland created such a wonder. Ultimately, however, this elevation does not quite succeed for a reason that even the narrator is willing to openly admit: "*Strickland was an odious man*".¹⁰

Conclusion. Somerset Maugham does not give the final opinion in the novel. It refers to the reader's perception. He does not describe Strickland as a positive or negative hero. Maugham simply describes his life, his hardships and sacrifices in the path of art. He abandons his motherland, family, relatives, wife, children, work, lavish life, financial prosperity for the sake of art. He created the universe and was able to see its beauty, and then at the end of his life, because of his pride and arrogance, he ruined everything by asking his wife to burn the house on the walls of which were painted his last masterpiece.

The image of the protagonist of the novel has two features that reflect the opposite concepts of morality. One is a genius who gave up everything in the way of art, a great artist, and the other is a father who is far from humanity, indifferent to the fate of his children and family, who betrays his friend, who does not know goodness.

In our opinion, the moral of the literary work is that at any time, the noblest feature of mankind - humanity should prevail in society and human dignity should be highly evaluated. Spiritual essence of everyone should be alluring and if he does not have goodness, he will remain a symbol of evil despite being a great genius. As we said at the beginning, a person must follow the trinity of a good thought, a good word, and a good deed. No matter who he is, he must do good deeds and strive for virtue.

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⁹ Maugham S. The Moon and Sixpence. Pegasus-2010.

¹⁰ <https://www.gradesaver.com/the-moon-and-sixpence/study-guide/character-list>

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