



THEME OF FORSAKING ALL ELSE FOR A CAUSE IN SOMERSET MAUGHAM'S

THE MOON AND SIXPENCE

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Abstract

William Somerset Maugham was one of the most creative, resourceful, and admired writers of the twentieth century. During a career that lasted sixty-five years, he published twenty novels, twenty-six plays, seven books of essays, three travel books, and more than 110 short stories, as well as commentaries, chronicles, and periodical contributions. While critical opinion has long been mixed, reviews and analyses of Maugham's work include thousands of articles and many book-length studies. Continued interest in Maugham is evident from the publication of several biographies, memoirs, bibliographies, and even encyclopaedias. It is also reflected in the acquisition by several prominent university libraries of rare collections of Maugham's writings and material related to his life and toil.

Key Words: Somerset Maugham, The Moon and Sixpence, Theme of Forsaking

Maugham's short stories are a major module of his legacy of fiction. Such stories were among his earliest writings and led in 1899 to his first published collection, *Orientations*. After 1920, each of Maugham's short stories classically was published in a British or American periodical as well as in a book-length collection. Since 1951, comprehensive collections of ninety-one of these stories have been republished in multi-volume sets that are considered to be definitive compilations. An additional twenty-one stories were republished after his death.





The novel *The Moon and Sixpence* was published in 1919. This novel is based closely on the life of the French painter Paul Gauguin. It deals with the theme of art and ideal approach to art. The novelist expresses his ideals and attitude to art through the main character of this novel.

Various characters in this novel *The Moon and Sixpence* decide that there is something that is worth and giving up everything else. The protagonist Charles Strickland is the primary example of this idea. He cares only about painting and everything else is just a distraction. He does not mind living in dire poverty, with practically no food, as long as he can paint and he cares nothing for relationships with other people, either.

As Strickland is so single-minded, he seems cruel in his total lack of care for the feelings of those around him, and he also does not care what they think of his paintings. Even when he is dying, Strickland does not care, as long as he can keep painting.

Basically Charles is a conventional stockbroker. One day suddenly, he abandons his wife and children for Paris, to live his life as a painter. While meeting Strickland at Paris the narrator gets shocked and surprised. Contrary to expectation it is a dingy affair in a back street. He is alone in his musty room, unshaved and dressed in all but rags. Strickland is utterly unfeeling about the fate of his wife and children. He does not care for what people may think of him. He has no objection to her divorcing him and making a better marriage.

It does not matter if the world appreciates his art or not. He has got to paint even as a drowning man has to breathe. There is no question of his returning to his wife. The narrator calls him a cad but is impressed by his one-pointed earnestness. His admission for Strickland increases when the latter bluntly refuses the solicitation of charming girl in the restaurant.

This victory of art, however, is achieved at the tremendous cost, personal and social. Personally, Strickland goes through the misery of a martyr. In Paris he lives in the most dingy rooms and goes without food for days together. As a down-and-out in Marseilles, he lives the life of a street dog.

Not only Strickland sacrifices himself, he does not hesitate to sacrifice others also. He expresses not a single word of regret or apology for having so unceremoniously deserted his family. Dirk, who hero-worships him, does so much for him and rescues him from the jaws of death when he falls critically ill. Strickland repays Dirk not only by snubbing him but also by depriving him of his studio and wife. Again, having used Blanche, his wife, to work off his sporadic lust and to paint a nude of her, he drops all interest in her and walks away.





The women in the story also exhibit the quality of forsaking everything else for a cause, but for them it is love. Blanche is willing to leave her comfortable apartment and husband to live in a disgusting attic, with no food or money, just to be with Strickland. When this fails to work, she throws her life away by taking poison.

Once, Blanche has been a governess in the house of a roman prince. The son of the house seduces her but when the scandal is discovered she is ruthlessly cast into the street. Dirk Strove, who is making money if not name as a painter, takes his pity on her and offers her his hand in marriage. She gratefully accepts him.

Daily intimacy with the sick man, Strickland, moves her profoundly. Nursing him, washing his limbs, stroking his fingers and composing him to sleep, she finds herself in the cruel grip of appetite. Hate of Strickland glides into a flame of desire. She is terrified of him yet cannot resist him. When he takes her, she shivers and yields.

She becomes an indifferent to Dirk's feelings. After knowing the matter Dirk politely orders Strickland out of the studio, she declares that she too is going with him. She turns a deaf ear to all Dirks' passionate pleas when Strickland has not got a penny. She bluntly replies that she will find a way to earn money for him. Dirk thinks of horrible possibilities and announces that rather than let her suffer privations, he himself will clear out of the studio leaving them half his cash, but Blanche does not protest.

But as the months pass, she finds Strickland is not a person with whom integration is possible. He uses her wonderful body to paint a marvellous nude of her. But once the picture is done he loses interest on her. She is dismayed at his aloofness. He is treating her not as an individual but as an instrument of pleasure. She tries to bind him to herself with comfort. She prepares dishes she thinks he likes. She pursues him with attentions and rouses his dormant passions. But the chains she forges only succeed in arousing his instinct of distraction. In her blindness of heart, she expects a love that her reason tells her is impossible.

The balloon bursts. There is a row between them one night. As he has already warned her, he curtly walks away. Blanche finds that her instinctual passion has boomeranged on her. With characteristic discipline she puts everything in the flat in its proper place and then swallows oxalic acid. Life has no more purpose or meaning for this gambler in love.

Ata's devotion is greater than Blanche's. when Strickland learns that he has leprosy, he plans to leave his family behind, and go off and die Ata insists that she will kill herself if he leaves,





and is willing to face the stigma of a leper in order to stay with him. After witnessing his masterpiece, she is willing to burn that hut in order to comply with his wishes.

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