

Mrs. Strickland's Personality in William Somerset Maugham's *The Moon and Sixpence*—from the Perspective of Feminist Criticism

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Abstract

The Moon and Sixpence is one of the representative works by the British writer Maugham. The novel vividly portrays several well-defined female characters, with particular attention given to Mrs. Strickland. The purpose of this article is to analyze the personality of Mrs. Strickland from a feminist perspective and explore the causes behind these traits. It aims to aid readers to understand women's survival tactics in the patriarchal society of the 1920s, contemplate the challenges faced by women in their work and family lives in nowadays, and reflect upon the state of gender equality in society and personal life. The main findings may be summarized that: Mrs. Strickland is a capable, shrewd, and empathetic woman, yet patriarchal traditions and conservative beliefs simultaneously influenced her, resulting in her internal conflicts and ambivalent opinions, while the formation of her personality is caused not only by Maugham's own belief and deliberate portrayal of women but also by the limitations of the era. In a traditional patriarchal society, not only were women's living spaces constricted and dominated by males, but they also deliberately underestimated their own status and abilities. Although some women owned talent and capability, their development was restricted if society did not provide them with opportunities to highlight their strengths. Women in nowadays must change their mindset to believe in themselves and work hard to prove their capability and independence. Meanwhile the society need to supply females with better living space and more opportunities for them to display their talents.

Keywords: personality, feminist, Maugham, Mrs. Strickland, women

1. Introduction

Maugham is an exceptional realist writer in the realm of literature, and *The Moon and Sixpence* (Maugham, 1972) is one of his noteworthy novels. The narrative revolves around Strickland, a former London stockbroker who makes the daring decision to abandon a comfortable and admired family life in pursuit of art. His journey takes him from Paris to the South Pacific Island of Tahiti. Through Strickland's life, Maugham explores the intricate connection between life and art. Strickland dedicates himself entirely to painting, becoming the epitome of the artist in the minds of many idealists.

In *The Second Sex* (1971), Simone de Beauvoir astutely argues that women are defined and subjugated by men, who hold power and dominance in various spheres of life. Men are seen as the subjects, the absolute, while women are relegated to the position of "the other," solely based on their gender. This societal structure places men at the forefront, whether it be within the family, society, or even the country, due to their perceived strength and authority. Simone de Beauvoir's analysis in *The Second Sex* (1971) sheds light on the societal dynamics where women are subjugated by men.

An exploration of Mrs. Strickland's personality in *The Moon and Sixpence* (Maugham, 1972) from a feminist standpoint reveals the significant literary and societal implications of the female characters, promoting readers to gain a clearer understanding of the living conditions, personality traits, and challenges faced by women in the 1920s, and to boost contemplation about the pressures and difficulties faced by contemporary women in society and family, with the hope of contributing in a modest way to the advancement of the women's liberation movement.

2. Literature Review

Feminist criticism is developed on the foundation of the feminist movement, incorporating the strengths of various critical approaches, making its theoretical framework complex (Zhao, 2022). Its research background can be traced back to the 1960s and 1970s, aiming to focus on women as the subject of literary research, and conducting literary criticism on the portrayal of women's images in texts, female authors' creations, and female readers' interpretations (Liu, 2017).

From a developmental perspective, feminist literary criticism has undergone three distinct stages. The first stage occurred from the late 1960s to the mid-1970s, primarily focusing on the "misogyny" phenomenon in literature, where male-dominated culture distorted and degraded female characters in literary works. The second stage spanned from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, with a primary emphasis on using feminist perspectives to analyze classic literary works by female authors, engaging in in-depth critiques of linguistic and literary aspects. The third stage, which began after the mid-1980s, involved reexamining and reflecting on some fundamental concepts and connotations of literary research, moving beyond the confines of literature itself, and forming a diverse and interdisciplinary feminist cultural theoretical framework that transcends gender boundaries (Zhao, 2022).

Scholars have extensively examined *The Moon and Sixpence* (Maugham, 1972) from various perspectives, including theme, artistic characteristics, symbolism, and feminism. Regarding the theme, studies have focused on concepts such as self-realization and the conflict between reality and ideal (Zhang, 2019; Zhou, 2023). In terms of artistic characteristics, attention has been given to language usage, narrative techniques, and character analysis, particularly focusing on the personality of Strickland (Muraoka, 2017; Wright, 2019; Ma, 2022; Zhang, 2023). Symbolism in the novel, such as the interpretation of the symbol's "moon" and "sixpence," has been thoroughly explored by researchers (Guo, 2016; Zhang, 2017). Additionally, feminist criticism has been employed to analyze the portrayal of female characters and reveal the underlying prejudice against women in the novel (Liu, 2017). Other perspectives, including romanticism, structuralism, psychology, modernism, existentialism, and philosophy, have also been applied to the study of *The Moon and Sixpence* (Maugham, 1972) by various researchers (Yang, 2016).

Although there have been lots of studies on *The Moon and Sixpence* (Maugham, 1972), most of these lack depth, especially those from a feminist perspective. Many articles merely supply general comparisons among the three female characters related to Strickland, but there is a scarcity of specific analysis, particularly concerning Mrs. Strickland. This research aims to fill this gap and supply a dedicated analysis of Mrs. Strickland's personality and the underlying causes of these character traits.

3. Methodology

In this study, the researchers will primarily employ textual analysis method as the research method, combining personal perspectives with the gathered materials. It is important to note that feminist theories will be extensively used in this study.

Originating in Europe during the last century, feminism encompasses various theories that focus on gender inequality within society, where one gender is oppressed by another (Liu, 2017). Feminism occupies a marginalized space both within patriarchal society and within academic circles. However, in recent years, feminist theory has gained significant prominence in modern literature criticism (Zhao, 2022). The rise of feminism aims to advocate for women's legal rights and challenges the traditional binary classification of gender.

As has been said in the last section, the feminism movement can be divided into three stages (Liu, 2017). The first stage of the feminism movement focused on issues like women's rights in marriage, property, and later suffrage. The second wave of feminism movement aimed to address social, political, and cultural inequalities faced by women. It sought to deconstruct the binary classification and drop gender differences (Zhao, 2022). During the second wave, the most renowned scholar is Simone de Beauvoir. In *The Second Sex* (1971), Beauvoir argues that women are defined and differentiated in relation to men, while men are not defined in relation to women. Men are considered the subject, the absolute, while women are seen as the "other." Beauvoir (1971) sees that women are often passive and secondary to men in their relationships, existing as objects in the patriarchal society. Throughout history, men have dominated while women have been perpetually serving them, relegated to the role of accessories. However, Beauvoir (1971) emphasizes that despite societal beliefs, women should value themselves and evaluate their worth based on their own existence as women, asserting their own intrinsic value.

The emergence of the third wave of feminism movement brings about a fresh interpretation of gender and sexuality (Liu, 2017). This movement challenges the notion of female heterosexuality and strives to represent not only white women but also women of color. Judith Butler, in her work *Gender Trouble* (1990), argues that gender is not an

inherent choice but rather a social construct imposed upon individuals. Gender performance plays a significant role in shaping gender identity. Butler (1990) suggests that the division of human bodies into male and female is primarily driven by the economic needs of heterosexuality and reinforces a naturalistic perspective on the institution of heterosexuality. She (1990) further criticizes the attempt to define women as a discrete group, as it perpetuates a binary view of gender, reinforcing the division between men and women (Liu, 2017).

Feminism challenges the unfair treatment of women within patriarchal societies where men hold primary power and occupy dominant roles in social relationships (Li, 2018). Women are viewed as “The Others” while men “The Self,” which associated with an egocentric ideology prevalent in western societies. “The Self” is considered more advanced, civilized, and superior, while “The Others” are viewed as different or inferior (Zhao, 2022). In the context of gender discrimination, women are dependent on powerful individuals, typically men, for a better life (Zhao, 2022).

Limited by the times he lived, Maugham depicted female images typical in patriarchal society, like Mrs. Strickland in *The Moon and Sixpence* (Maugham, 1972). He crafts his novel according to his own vision, portraying female characters with unique features. Consequently, the author of this thesis intends to examine the novel through a feminist lens and analyze Mrs. Strickland’s personality by applying feminist theories. Through the analysis of Mrs. Strickland’s character and the reasons for the formation of these characteristics, to understand the living state of women in the 1920s, readers can not only have a more comprehensive and profound understanding of Maugham’s novels, but also amplify women’s voices, shed light on gender equality issues, and encourage critical reflection on societal norms and biases.

4. Discussion and Findings

Considering the prevailing male dominance during Maugham’s time, the portrayal of Mrs. Strickland in *The Moon and Sixpence* (Maugham, 1972) is inevitably influenced by the patriarchal society of the 1920s (Zhao, 2022). As a woman living in a society that marginalized and oppressed females as “The Others,” Mrs. Strickland inevitably internalizes some outdated and conservative beliefs. However, keen readers can discern certain qualities in Mrs. Strickland that resonate with those of modern women. Therefore, in this section, the author aims to analyze Mrs. Strickland’s personality, exploring these qualities and the causes that contribute to them by employing feminist theory.

4.1 *The Multi-Faced Mrs. Strickland*

The female characters in *The Moon and Sixpence* (Maugham, 1972) are brought to life with detail and vividness, and among them, the portrayal of Mrs. Strickland stands out. Her capability, shrewdness, independence, conservatism, empathy, and ambivalence leave a lasting impact on the readers.

4.1.1 The Capable Mrs. Strickland

Mrs. Strickland’s capability is evident in various aspects of her character. In the patriarchal society of Maugham’s era, women were primarily expected to excel in housekeeping skills (Li, 2018). Thus, in contrast to Mr. Strickland’s harshness and selfishness, Maugham crafts the character of Mrs. Strickland as an almost perfect wife, catering to the societal norms of that period. In the novel, Mrs. Strickland is depicted as a woman who effortlessly devotes herself to managing her household, aligning with the prevailing societal expectations at the time. Maugham provides a vivid description of Mrs. Strickland’s home as follows:

There was another thing I liked in Mrs. Strickland. She managed her surroundings with elegance. Her flat was always neat and cheerful, gay with flowers, and the chintzes in the drawing-room, notwithstanding their severe design, were bright and pretty. The meals in the artistic little dining-room were pleasant; the table looked nice, the two maids were trim and comely, the food was well cooked. It was impossible not to see that Mrs. Strickland was an excellent housekeeper (Maugham, 1972).

From the texts above, it is clear that the narrator holds Mrs. Strickland’s housekeeping abilities in high regard. The orderly and cheerful ambiance of the drawing room, the delightful meals, the meticulously prepared food, and the well-groomed and pleasant maids all testify to the fact that Mrs. Strickland must have invested considerable time and effort in managing the household tasks. Her deep affection for her husband and children is clear in the care she lavishes on supporting a neat and comfortable home for them. Maugham further highlights Mrs. Strickland’s refined taste by skillfully describing her dining room:

The dining-room was in the good taste of the period. It was very severe. There was a high dado of white wood and a green paper on which were etchings by Whistler in neat black frames. The green curtains with their peacock design, hung in straight lines, and the green carpet, in the pattern of which pale rabbits frolicked among leafy trees, suggested the influence of William Morris. There was blue delf on the chimney-piece (Maugham, 1972).

Mrs. Strickland's refined taste in household arrangements is apparent in the carefully curated dining room. The choice of wallpaper, curtains, and carpet all exude elegance and delicacy, reflecting the owner's sophisticated sensibility. Moreover, beyond her skill in domestic decoration, Mrs. Strickland is depicted as an exemplary mother. Pictures of her son and daughter portray the son as "clean, healthy" with a "charming character," and the daughter with a "kindly expression and sedate, untroubled eyes." When the narrator meets them in person, he finds the children even more appealing than their photographs had suggested, describing them as "extraordinarily nice, healthy young children." Their sound physical health and positive characters indicate that Mrs. Strickland must be patient and gentle in caring for her children, providing them with a nurturing environment for growth and education. Maugham further underscores the close bond between the siblings by describing the way they enjoy each other's company and amuse themselves together:

I was perhaps a little lonely. and it was with a touch of envy that I thought of the pleasant family life of which I had had a glimpse. They seemed devoted to one another. They had little private jokes of their own which, unintelligible to the outsider, amused them enormously (Maugham, 1972).

Mrs. Strickland's interactions with her children reveal a harmonious relationship, indicating a loving family environment fostered by a caring and tolerant mother with a stable personality (Liu, 2017). The author even envisions their continued happiness decades later if the family maintains this mode of living. Undoubtedly, they represent an ordinary and content family, highlighting Mrs. Strickland's capabilities as a wife and mother.

Additionally, Mrs. Strickland's qualities as a good mother are further evident in her courageous assumption of responsibility for raising the two children after her husband's departure. She does not succumb to pain and despair or make excuses for herself; instead, she swiftly regains composure and assumes her role, dutifully taking on the responsibilities she should bear.

From her efficient management of household tasks, dedication to educating her children, swift recovery, and ability to secure a job to support the family after her husband's departure, it becomes apparent that Mrs. Strickland is a highly capable woman.

4.1.2 The Shrewd Mrs. Strickland

Mrs. Strickland's shrewdness is evident in her swift adaptation to the situation after her husband leaves home (Wu, 2017). Initially shocked and distressed by the sudden turn of events, she quickly comes to terms with reality and bravely takes on the responsibility of providing for her family. Though uncertain about how to make a living at first, she leverages her connections with numerous writers, displaying her shrewdness. Additionally, she skillfully appeals to people's sympathy for the destitute to seek help and attract customers, exemplifying her astuteness. This can be observed in the following sentences from the novel:

WHAT followed showed that Mrs. Strickland was a woman of character. Whatever anguish she suffered she concealed. She saw shrewdly that the world is quickly bored by the recital of misfortune, and willingly avoids the sight of distress. Whenever she went out and compassion for her misadventure made her friends eager to entertain her-she bore a demeanor that was perfect (Maugham, 1972).

With her shrewdness, Mrs. Strickland successfully establishes her own business and gains a reputation for precision and efficiency. As time passes, Maugham observes that not only does her appearance change with age, becoming older, thinner, and more lined, but her character also evolves.

Employing her shrewdness, she acquires an office and thrives financially. Though she doesn't do much typing herself, she spends her time overseeing the work of four girls. Later, she even volunteers to support Strickland financially. Maugham depicts her life as happy and financially comfortable: "But I knew it was not kindness that prompted the offer. It is not true that suffering ennoble the character, happiness does that sometimes, but suffering, for the most part, makes men petty and vindictive" (Maugham, 1972).

Mrs. Strickland's shrewdness allows her to adapt to changing circumstances and assume her responsibilities with composure, even in the face of unexpected disasters. This aligns with modern society's expectations for women, where love is seen as a luxury rather than a necessity in life. Being in love is undoubtedly wonderful, but one can still lead a fulfilling life without it.

Mrs. Strickland's shrewdness may also be illustrated in the details when she pleads with the author to go to Paris to see her husband.

Now that I was free from the spectacle of Mrs. Strickland's distress I could consider the matter more calmly. I was puzzled by the contradictions that I saw in her behavior. She was very unhappy, but to excite my sympathy she was able to make a show of her unhappiness. It was evident that she had been prepared to weep, for she had provided

herself with a sufficiency of handkerchiefs; I admired her forethought, but in retrospect it made her tears perhaps less moving (Maugham, 1972).

Mrs. Strickland cleverly manipulates situations to achieve her goals. When her brother-in-law volunteers to go to Paris to check on her husband's condition, she believes the author is a better choice and intends to use his compassion to her advantage. To ensure her success, she deliberately prepares handkerchiefs and exaggerates her misery before the author's arrival. This demonstrates her shrewdness and ambition, setting her apart from the innocent women of her time.

From her resourceful use of her social circles and people's compassion for her successful management of the typing shop, Mrs. Strickland's shrewdness is evident. It indicates that women can earn a living and achieving success in their careers if given equal opportunities in society.

Mrs. Strickland serves as a representative of women in Maugham's era, often confined to the unnoticed sphere of home. Despite not pursuing a career out of ambition, she accomplishes more than many men could in that patriarchal society. If Mrs. Strickland were to live in modern times, regardless of her profession, she would undoubtedly be a brilliant and successful woman due to her hardworking, shrewd, and capable nature.

4.1.3 The Social and Empathetic Mrs. Strickland

Mrs. Strickland is deeply enamored with socializing among people of letters to the extent that the narrator mistakes her for a writer upon their first meeting. The host introduces her as someone who "gives luncheon-parties." Maugham suggests that her attraction to writers is due to her affinity for their company, as explained in the following words:

She had a real passion for reading (rare in her kind, who for the most part are more interested in the author than in his book, in the painter than in his pictures), and she invented a world of the imagination in which she lived with a freedom she never acquired in the world of every day. When she came to know writers it was like adventuring upon a stage which till then she had only known from the other side of the footlights. She saw them dramatically, and really seemed herself to live a larger life because she entertained them and visited them in their fastnesses. She accepted the rules with which they played the game of life as valid for them, but never for a moment thought of regulating her own conduct in accordance with them. Their moral eccentricities, like their oddities of dress, their wild theories and paradoxes, were an entertainment which amused her, but had not the slightest influence on her convictions (Maugham, 1972).

Mrs. Strickland's admiration for writers and their lifestyle is notable, despite lacking literary talents herself. Being in their company makes her feel a sense of belonging, broadening, and elevating her life. Despite her family's financial constraints, she gladly hosts and entertains the literati, finding joy and comfort in their conversations and presence. Her love for giving luncheon parties stems from genuine willingness and happiness, not from any utilitarian purpose. Maugham portrays her as harmless and kind-hearted in her interactions with the literati, showing no expectation of anything in return for her hospitality.

While some critics may view her entertainment of the literati as driven by vanity, the present author disagrees. Mrs. Strickland's passion for socializing and her friendships with many literati benefit her business at the typing shop, providing financial support after her husband abandons her. Her pursuit of her own interests and hobbies is an expression of self-consciousness and independence, uncommon for women of her time.

Moreover, Mrs. Strickland demonstrates empathy in her communication with others, displaying kindness and consideration. Her rapport with the author is marked by mutual fondness. Maugham depicts their relationship as follows:

DURING the summer I met Mrs. Strickland frequently. I went now and then to pleasant little luncheons at her flat, and to rather more formidable tea-parties. We took a fancy to one another. I was very young, and perhaps she liked the idea of guiding my virgin steps on the hard road of letters; while for me it was pleasant to have someone I could go to with my small troubles, certain of an attentive ear and reasonable counsel. Mrs. Strickland had the gift of sympathy (Maugham, 1972).

Mrs. Strickland is depicted by Maugham as a woman with an attentive ear and reasonable counsel, making her a sympathetic, hospitable, and helpful person to be around. The narrator, being shy, often finds himself in awkward situations at parties, and Mrs. Strickland comes to his rescue multiple times, easing his embarrassment with her clever remarks. Her considerate and empathetic nature shines through when the narrator visits her after learning about her husband's abandonment. Despite his shyness, Mrs. Strickland engages him in conversation, making him feel at ease in her company. This portrayal reveals her cleverness, empathy, and thoughtfulness.

Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1971) argues that women are often relegated to passive roles and treated as secondary figures in patriarchal societies. However, Mrs. Strickland defies this notion by actively caring for others, including her husband, children, and friends, and gaining popularity through her genuine concern for them. It is the patriarchal society that assigns women the role of "The Other," but, women are not always the receivers; they can be givers too. Women's power and contributions in society and life should be highly valued and acknowledged.

4.1.4 The Conservative Mrs. Strickland

Despite Mrs. Strickland's capabilities, shrewdness, sociability, and empathy, she exhibits a conservative and traditional mindset, which becomes evident from various instances throughout the novel. Before her husband's departure, Mrs. Strickland shows no inclination towards working independently to support herself or her family, a perspective that contrasts modern beliefs. Mrs. Strickland firmly adheres to the traditional notion of husbands working outside the home while wives take care of children and household responsibilities. The idea of seeking employment outside the home never occurs to her. "She had the true instinct of the nice woman that it is only really decent for her to live on other people's money" (Maugham, 1972). Despite running the typing shop to support her family after her husband's departure, she views it as a necessity and an obligation rather than a choice. Once she achieves success and financial stability through the business, particularly after inheriting property from her sister and brother-in-law, she promptly sells the typing shop and stops working.

Despite the remarkable success of her typing business, Mrs. Strickland does not take pride in her exceptional management abilities; instead, she feels ashamed of it, as implied by the following passage:

She was making money. But she could not get over the idea that to earn her living was undignified, and she was inclined to remind you that she was a lady by birth. She could not help bringing into her conversation the names of people she knew, which would satisfy you that she had not sunk into the social scale. She was a little ashamed of her courage and business capacity but delighted that she was going to dine the next night with a K.C. who lived in South Kensington (Maugham, 1972).

In the context of modern society, being independent and capable of sustaining oneself is considered a source of pride and dignity for an individual. However, Mrs. Strickland's perspective diverges from this notion, as she sees it as a shame for a woman to support herself financially, believing it is more appropriate for women to rely on others for their livelihood. This outlook is also evident in her plans for her daughter's future, which are significantly influenced by the norms of patriarchal society. The narrator, in depicting Mrs. Strickland's decisions, even uses the term "chilled" to express his surprise and amazement at her arrangements for her daughter's future life:

I suppose I said a very stupid thing.

"Is she going into your business?" I asked.

"Oh no; I wouldn't let her do that," Mrs. Strickland answered. "She's so pretty. I'm sure she'll marry well."

"I should have thought it would be a help to you."

"Several people have suggested that she should go on the stage, but of course I couldn't consent to that. I know all the chief dramatists, and I could get her a part tomorrow, but I shouldn't like her to mix with all sorts of people."

I was a little chilled by Mrs. Strickland's exclusiveness (Maugham, 1972).

The conversation between Mrs. Strickland and the narrator clearly reveals that she conforms to the standards set for women in patriarchal society. Furthermore, she expects her daughter to follow the same path, reinforcing the belief that women should rely on others for their well-being. Even the narrator, who receives help from the patriarchal system, was taken aback by her views. This shows that Mrs. Strickland is deeply conservative, traditional, and unyielding, holding firm to her belief in women's financial dependence on others. She does not recognize the true value of women and still regards them as subordinate to men.

In Judith Butler's book *Gender Trouble* (1990), she argues that gender is not an inherent characteristic but rather a social construct imposed on individuals. According to Butler, one's performance and expression of gender significantly influence their gender identity. In the case of Mrs. Strickland, her conservatism is a product of her upbringing and societal conditioning. Over time, she internalized this belief and accepted it as the norm. She is so entrenched in this mindset that she unwittingly becomes a staunch defender of it, even though it perpetuates gender inequality and restricts women's opportunities.

4.1.5 The Ambivalent Mrs. Strickland

Mrs. Strickland's ambivalence manifests itself in many aspects, especially in her attitude to her husband.

Undoubtedly, she loves him at least before he abandons her, which may be found from the way she mentions her husband to the author:

“Yes; I think they are more like me than their father.”

“Why have you never let me meet him?” I asked.

“Would you like to?”

She smiled, her smile was really very sweet, and she blushed a little; it was singular that a woman of that age should flush so readily. Perhaps her naïveté was her greatest charm.

“You know, he’s not at all literary,” she said. “He’s a perfect philistine.”

She said this, not disparagingly, but affectionately rather, as though, by acknowledging the worst about him, she wished to protect him from the aspersions of her friends.

“He’s on the Stock Exchange, and he’s a typical broker. I think he’d bore you to death.”

“Does he bore you?” I asked.

“You see, I happen to be his wife. I’m very fond of him” (Maugham, 1972).

When Mrs. Strickland talks about her husband, she shows signs of affection as she “blushed a little,” indicating a deep and genuine love for her husband. She protects him by acknowledging his weaknesses first, out of consideration for the author’s judgment and to shield her husband from criticism. This displays her thoughtfulness and protective nature. She even directly expresses that she is “fond of” her husband, highlighting his significance in her life.

However, as the saying goes, “the deeper the love, the stronger the hate.” When she learns that her husband will not return from Paris, all her love turns into hatred. She even wishes for him to suffer in misery. The narrator is surprised to see her vengeful feelings:

“If you want to divorce him, he’s quite willing to do whatever is necessary to make it possible.”

“Why should I give him his freedom?”

“I don’t think he wants it. He merely thought it might be more convenient to you.”

Mrs. Strickland shrugged her shoulders impatiently. I think I was a little disappointed in her. I expected then people to be more of a piece than I do now, and I was distressed to find so much vindictiveness in so charming a creature. I did not realise how motley are the qualities that go to make up a human being. Now I am well aware that pettiness and grandeur, malice and charity, hatred and love, can find place side by side in the same human heart (Maugham, 1972).

From the above words, it becomes clear to readers that Mrs. Strickland harbors strong feelings of anger and hatred towards her husband. The reason for her resistance to divorce is rooted in her desire to deny him the freedom he looks for after abandoning her and their children. His departure has caused her immense mental and physical pain, making it impossible for her to forgive him and move on.

As Maugham portrays in the novel, Mrs. Strickland’s emotions toward her husband are deeply ambivalent, where love and hatred coexist in her mind. This sentiment is clear in the following conversation between the author and Mrs. Strickland:

“Do you ever hear of your husband?”

“No; I haven’t heard a word. He may be dead for all I know.”

“I may run across him in Paris. Would you like me to let you know about him?”

She hesitated a minute.

“If he’s in any real want I’m prepared to help him a little. I’d send you a certain sum of money, and you could give it him gradually, as he needed it” (Maugham, 1972).

From the sentence “he may be dead as I know,” readers can discern that Mrs. Strickland still harbors hatred towards her husband. However, when she contemplates his potential poverty, she also feels inclined to provide him with financial help, which reveals the contradiction in her emotions towards her husband.

Mrs. Strickland’s ambivalence is further clear in her attitude towards her business. On the one hand, she begins her business with enthusiasm and proves excellent management skills, leading to its success. On the other hand, she feels a sense of shame of her competence in her work, as if engaging in it is morally wrong. She even prevents her

daughter from aiding in the business, insisting she wait for marriage.

Simone de Beauvoir (1971) highlights the historical dominance of men and the perpetual subservience of women, relegating them to mere appendages. However, Beauvoir emphasizes the significance of women recognizing their worth and valuing themselves based on their unique existence, regardless of societal beliefs. In contrast, Mrs. Strickland, though capable of financial independence, feels ashamed of this autonomy. Despite her ability to support herself and her family, she chooses idleness and lacks the courage to acknowledge her worth and fight for independence. She stays trapped in traditional customs and patriarchal doctrines, showing no consciousness of asserting herself or seeking independence.

4.2 *The Causes for Mrs. Strickland's Personality*

Undoubtedly, people's character is significantly influenced by their life experiences and the surrounding environment. In the case of Mrs. Strickland, her personality can be attributed, in large part, to the impact of the patriarchal society (Liu, 2017). Therefore, it is essential to analyze Mrs. Strickland's personality by considering both the societal influences and Maugham's personal belief of women.

4.2.1 The Patriarchal Society

Simone de Beauvoir's influential work, *The Second Sex* (1971), emphasizes that women are not inherently defined but shaped by societal norms. Throughout history, patriarchal and phallogocentric forces have controlled women, compelling them to internalize and conform to male-dominated power dynamics. This conformity restricts their freedom of expression and action, which is clear in Mrs. Strickland's case as well. The prevailing patriarchal norms and societal expectations suppress her confidence and independence, making her afraid to embrace her capabilities and pursue her own value.

In Mrs. Strickland's era, societal beliefs dictated that a woman's most respectable life was to rely on others and create a harmonious family. Despite her later success in the typing business, she feels ashamed to acknowledge her achievement, as her conservative opinions are heavily influenced by the prevailing doctrines of her time and her ambivalent attitude towards her business.

As discussed in the earlier section, Mrs. Strickland deeply loves her husband. However, his departure shatters her idyllic life and happy family. Consequently, she harbors intense hatred towards him for abandoning her and tarnishing her dignity. The loss of her decency and superiority devastates her self-esteem, making it difficult for her to forgive him. Her ambivalence towards her husband arises from the conflict between her love for him and the immense humiliation and loss of reputation caused by his departure. To protect her public image, she even fabricates a rumor about him leaving for Paris with another woman. Thus, her attitude towards her husband is marked by complexity and ambivalence.

4.2.2 Maugham's Personal Experience

It is often claimed that writers create their characters according to their perception or images in their real life. A person's mindset is heavily shaped by their life experiences, education, and living environment (Liu, 2017). Maugham's individual experiences with women, including his beloved mother, mistress, and wife, had a profound impact on his perceptions and misunderstandings about women in general (Zhao, 2022).

The death of Maugham's mother due to tuberculosis left Maugham devoid of maternal love from an early age, causing him immense pain and regret throughout his life. As he grew older, he fell in love with an actress named Ethelwyn Sylvia Jones, known as Sue Jones. Despite Sue's involvement with other men, Maugham remained infatuated with her and proposed marriage, only to be rejected as she married someone else. Later, he met Syrie Wellcome, his wife, who excelled in interior design with her iconic all-white decor style. Although they had a daughter, their marriage did not endure.

The pain and regret left by the three most important women in Maugham's life far outweighed the happiness and joy. This significantly influenced Maugham's feeling of women and the portrayal of female characters in his works. The female characters in his works are mostly not depicted in a positive light and often have various flaws, which is particularly clear in the character of Mrs. Strickland. For instance, Mrs. Strickland's character was portrayed based on both Maugham's mother and wife. His mother was known for her socializing and hosting parties (Raphael, 1976). Meanwhile, Syrie, his wife, displayed competence and shrewdness in her successful decorating business (Raphael, 1976). Consequently, Syrie served as the prototype for Mrs. Strickland's astuteness and competence.

The personality of Mrs. Strickland is thus a blend of his mother's conservatism and empathy, and Syrie's capability, shrewdness, and ambivalence. Drawing inspiration from these women, Maugham crafted the character of Mrs.

Strickland. Maugham's admiration for certain qualities in them coexisted with his dislike for other traits, which influenced his portrayals of females in his works, often making them less impressive and charming.

5. Conclusion

Both Beauvoir (1971) and Butler (1990) emphasize the societal construction of gender and the impact of patriarchal systems on women's perceptions. They argue that women are not inherently inferior but have been shaped by societal norms and power dynamics that perpetuate gender inequality. In Maugham's novel, *The Moon and Sixpence* (1972), the personality of Mrs. Strickland is a multifaceted portrayal of a woman, displaying her capabilities, shrewdness, empathy, conservatism, and ambivalence. Mrs. Strickland's personality is heavily influenced by the patriarchal environment of Maugham's era and Maugham's personal views on women. While she exhibits traits that align with modern women, her conservatism and ambivalence still reflect the impact of a patriarchal society.

As social and cultural progresses continue, female issues and gender equality are bound to receive increasing attention. Consequently, women are no longer relegated to a secondary position, and society is recognizing their equality with men. The long-held aspiration for women to have equal rights and status as men is steadily becoming a reality.

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