

Analysis of Strickland's Destroying His Last Work in The Moon and Sixpence

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Abstract

Based on the novel, this thesis evolves the topic why Charles Strickland burned his masterpiece which declares the dream fulfillment to analyze the plot itself, reason. The understanding range covers the whole story rather than the passage describing the painting ruin. Then it focuses on causes of behavior in two aspects: writing device and protagonist characteristics. In the novel, Expression technique of symbolism implies special meanings of "last work" and "burning". It is emphasized that personalities of serenity and loftiness on the character. At last, according to Strickland's decision and its influences, this text offers suggestions for people in contemporary society.

Keywords

Ideality; Expression Technique; Characteristics.

1. Introduction

Admittedly, Charles Strickland is obsessed with painting and art. As he hopes, a complete and remarkable masterpiece is finished. Loaded with persistent efforts and countless hardship, his work, also the only dream is achieved. So why he determines to burn it after he dies? There is no explanation in the novel. The doubt appears in some reviews and different versions of it, and all of them also have no answer for it. The thesis presents ideas and viewpoints for the question from three angles including plot, writing technique, and characters to indicate unstated contents to dig out significance we can learn from the plot. On the basis of exploration, it provides proposals for readers.

2. Organization of the Text

2.1. Relevant Plot

According to the context, "Yes; for I knew that here was a work of genius, and I did not think we had the right to deprive the world of it. But Ata would not listen to me. She had promised" (2016: 568), Strickland paints on inside walls of the house, which carries an amazing masterpiece. Ata keeps her promise for Strickland after he dies for leprosy. There is no evidence for Strickland's being and what he has done. The fire takes away everything related to his work, leaving nothing for the world. Page Numbers

2.2. Expression Technique

Symbolism is one of the typical features in writing technique of the novel. Not obviously, symbolism is presented in dialogue passages relevant to painting destroying. Connotations on the behavior matters and constitute the reason of it. Both the last work and its destroying have their implication, respectively.

2.2.1. Strickland's Last Work

The "moon" in novel title symbolizes ideality, and the last work refers to the realize of dream. When Strickland decided to abandon all the thing, he was 40, while he regards it was high time

to begin. Before that he had begun to paint a bit. In fact, he wanted to be a painter since he was little. Knowing “there was no money in art”, he aims to pursue “moon” and gains it at last, casting aside all about “sixpence” as his life has gone its half. The painting marks the accomplishment of his travel to chase “moon”.

As is said in the novel, “I think Strickland knew it was a masterpiece. He had achieved what he wanted. His life was complete. He had made a world and saw that it was good. Then, in pride and contempt, he destroyed it” (2016: 567), Nothing except art completes Strickland’s life. Creating a painting is what he longs for the whole life. The masterpiece achieved signifies that the ideality is fulfilled.

2.2.2. The Behavior of Burning

For Strickland, the burning means utter isolation from disgusting reality represented by “sixpence”. He has finished an awesome work, so the painting is not meaningful any more. After his passing away, it will be appreciated and commented on by people. In a sense, like his work, he comes back into society and trapped in secularity which he abominates. In order to prevent it, he decides to burn the house to cut off the way from the outside to his inner world. Then, only in this way, he makes ideality a pure one without any stain from the mortal life.

2.3. Character Building

For a character, it is not expected to be divided into only two parts, black or white ones. During the whole process, complex personalities complete the protagonist, while the majority of prominent ones in Strickland are reflected on what he does for art. Two or more

2.3.1. Mentality of Serenity

It is mentioned that “There is a description to Strickland from Ata, “Ata told me that he never complained of his fate, he never lost courage. To the end his mind remained serene and undisturbed” (2016: 567).

Sheer will and tranquil mind with simplicity counts a lot in his characteristics. To some extent, physically, Strickland secludes from mundane society, while his mind completely breaks away from it. Therefore, instead of coexisting with bustle and hustle, his serenity extremely fights off all relevant to secularity.

2.3.2. Soul of Nobility

Strickland painted in Paris while he saw no romance there. People around him strive for fame and fortune. “I” thinks they had no effect on his own character. As a hermit, he shows no care for material world due to his enriched spirit.

Dr. Coutras was seized by an overwhelming sensation as he stared at the painted walls, “It was tremendous, sensual, passionate; and yet there was something horrible there, too, something which made him afraid” (2016: 416).

It penetrates the beautiful and horrible mystery of nature. Anyone exposed to it will feel its strong desire and passion from painter. Any detail in it reflects unique insight and view to the world where tends to be think superficially by common man.

3. Literature References

3.1. An Existentialist Interpretation of Strickland’s Journey of Self-realization

Lei Zhu and Donger Yang attempted to interpret Strickland’s journey of self-realization from the perspective of existentialism: his self-loss in his boring marriage life and empty spiritual world reflects the existentialist view that “the world is absurd; life is painful” and “existence precedes essence”; his self-exploration in alienating himself from others and pursuing his dream reflects “free choice”, “alienation” and “responsibility” of existentialism; his self-realization by reestablishing a harmonious family and accomplishing his final painting not only

reflects the “freedom of choice” but also indicates that “existence precedes essence”. This paper also points out that Strickland’s self-realization still has some limitation: even if Strickland finally realizes himself by going through the three periods, he actually fails to obtain true freedom because he has ignored the importance of responsibility. However, it is a lack of clarity in defining “responsibility” and enlightenment for readers to behave in reality.

3.2. Influence of Education and Training on Important Innovations

Guangze Zhou analyzes it from three aspects: the contradiction and complexity of humanity, the exploration of human nature from the perspective of existentialism, and the self-redemption and sublimation of human nature. It has a tendency to excavate the soul of the novel from a deeper level. But the study is unable to make a powerful persuasion due to notable methodological weakness.

4. Conclusion

The decision deserves to be accepted and understood. For Strickland, the masterpiece itself values little while great mind shapes his immortality. In current life, when it comes to the border between “moon” and “sixpence”, there is no standard one. Rationally, we need to bring both into equilibrium. It all depends on individual details.

Acknowledgements

I would also like to thank my professor, Lily Li, for her valuable guidance throughout my studies. You provided me with the tools that I needed to choose the right direction and successfully complete my thesis.

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