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THE COMMONALITY BETWEEN MAUGHAM AND GAUGUIN: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN A LITERARY CHARACTER AND A REAL PERSON

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Abstract

This article provides a comprehensive scholarly analysis of the artistic and biographical parallels between the novel *The Moon and Sixpence* by Somerset Maugham and the life of the French post-impressionist painter Paul Gauguin. The study focuses on the similarities and differences between the fictional character Charles Strickland and Gauguin’s personality, as well as on the process of artistic transformation. The article examines how real-life material is transformed in the creation of a literary character and enriched through the author’s aesthetic vision and philosophical concepts. It also analyzes the artist’s alienation from society, aspiration for inner freedom, and psychological suffering from the perspective of existentialism. The study concludes that the character of Strickland, although based on a real prototype, is elevated to the level of a universal philosophical model.

Keywords: Maugham, Gauguin, Strickland, literary character, prototype, existentialism, art, individualism, biographical method.

Introduction

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the problems of human individuality, inner life, and the relationship between the individual and society became central



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in literature and art. During this period, writers increasingly turned to real-life figures and events, reinterpreting them in new artistic forms. In particular, the inner drama of the artist, alienation from society, and the struggle for creative freedom emerged as dominant themes.

Western literature and art were deeply influenced by ideas such as the conflict between genius and society, escape from civilization, and primitivism. While impressionism and post-impressionism introduced new directions in visual art, literature developed psychological and realistic novels that explored personal freedom, creative sacrifice, and cultural identity.

Paul Gauguin, a prominent representative of post-impressionism, rejected bourgeois society and left Europe for the Polynesian islands, particularly Tahiti, where he idealized local culture and primitive life. His work *Noa Noa*, letters, and paintings represent a vivid example of the “genius versus society” theme in art history.

Somerset William Maugham, an English writer, dramatist, and traveler, transformed Gauguin’s life into a literary form in his novel *The Moon and Sixpence* (1919). The novel is a roman-à-clef, based on real events but developed into an independent philosophical narrative. Maugham’s journey to the South Seas (1916–1917) allowed him to explore Gauguin’s life firsthand and draw inspiration from his artistic legacy.

Thus, the novel is not merely a retelling of Gauguin’s biography but a profound philosophical exploration of freedom, creativity, and the meaning of existence. The relevance of this topic has increased in the context of globalization, where modern individuals, under the pressure of civilization, seek authenticity and a return to nature.



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The aim of this study is to identify the commonalities between Maugham and Gauguin, analyze the formation of the Strickland character, and reveal the essence of artistic transformation.

Methods

The research employs a комплекс (comprehensive) methodological approach combining several analytical methods.

The comparative-analytical method is used to examine similarities and differences between Strickland and Gauguin in terms of life choices, worldview, and creative development.

The biographical method allows for an in-depth study of Gauguin's life, including his transition to art, his Tahitian period, and his psychological experiences, thus identifying the real foundations of the literary character.

The content analysis method is applied to key episodes, dialogues, and artistic devices in the novel, with particular attention to passages that reveal Strickland's personality.

Additionally, a literary-philosophical approach is employed, drawing on theories of existentialism, individualism, and the philosophy of art.

Results

The findings reveal significant commonalities between Maugham and Gauguin across three main dimensions: biographical, philosophical, and artistic.

First, biographical parallels demonstrate striking similarities. Gauguin abandoned his banking career and family in 1883 to pursue art, while Strickland similarly rejects bourgeois life in London and moves to Paris and later Tahiti. Both figures experience isolation, illness, and eventual death in remote environments.



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Second, philosophical commonalities highlight a shared critique of Western civilization as artificial and superficial. Gauguin's writings and artistic vision idealize primitive life, while Maugham intensifies this idea through Strickland's character, emphasizing the opposition between material values and artistic pursuit.

Third, artistic parallels are evident in descriptive techniques. Maugham's literary imagery reflects the visual qualities of Gauguin's paintings, particularly in the depiction of Tahitian life. Strickland's fresco symbolically parallels Gauguin's philosophical works.

Despite these similarities, differences exist: Gauguin expresses himself through visual art, while Maugham relies on narrative structure and psychological analysis. In both cases, suffering, isolation, and internal conflict are central, elevating both figures to the level of existential heroes.

Discussion

The results indicate that Somerset William Maugham does not simply replicate Gauguin's biography but transforms it into a philosophical and literary construct. This process reflects intermedial interaction between literature and visual art. Strickland is portrayed as even more radical and emotionally detached than Gauguin, raising the question: Is a genius beyond moral responsibility? This aligns with existentialist philosophy, emphasizing the complexity of freedom and individual choice.

From a postcolonial perspective, particularly in light of Edward Said's concept of Orientalism, both Maugham and Gauguin exhibit elements of exoticism. However, this idealization serves not merely as romanticization but as a critique of Western civilization.



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In the context of Uzbek literary studies, this theme resonates with the “individual versus society” conflict found in the works of Abdulla Qodiriy, Cho‘lpon, and G‘afur G‘ulom.

The analysis further shows that both Gauguin and Strickland view art not as a profession but as the ultimate meaning of life, often achieved through suffering and sacrifice.

Conclusion

The study demonstrates that the character of Strickland, created by Somerset William Maugham, although inspired by Paul Gauguin, possesses independent artistic and philosophical value. Maugham transforms real-life material into a universal literary model that explores freedom, individuality, and creative suffering. The parallels between the two figures highlight the deep interconnection between literature and art. This commonality reflects the modern individual’s existential crisis in the context of globalization and remains highly relevant today. The study contributes to understanding the transformation of real individuals into literary characters and provides a methodological foundation for future research. Ultimately, the legacy of Maugham and Gauguin continues to hold enduring significance in both world literature and art.

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