

Man and the Absolute

The Moon and Sixpence

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Men are at the same time villains and saints; their acts are at once beautiful and despicable. We love and hate at the same time. — Virginia Woolf, *The Common Reader: First Series*

Infinity yawns both at the top and bottom of the stratified hierarchies of existence and the dichotomy of self-assertive wholeness and self-transcending partness is present on every level, from the trivial to the cosmic. — Arthur Koestler, *Janus: A summing Up* psyche and matter are two different aspects of one and the same thing. — Carl Gustav Jung, *On the Nature of the Psyche*

Will, as the thing-in-itself, is the foundation of all being; it is part and parcel of every creature, and the perennial element in everything....in so far we are akin to everything – so far, that is, as everything is filled to overflowing with will. — Arthur Schopenhauer, *Essays from the Parerga and Paralipomena*

John Brophy's Maugham is intent on "giving the public what it wants" (10). Similarly Paul's Maugham is given to exploiting "current mythology". His first supporting example is Maugham's Gauguin novel *The Moon and Sixpence* (1919). For "Gauguin, along with Rimbaud, is the chief incarnation of the modern myth of the artist" (158). Curtis, however, accounts for Maugham's interest in Gauguin as the "most celebrated exponent" of "the gospel of self-fulfillment" (*The Pattern of Maugham* 99). Be that as it may, Maugham's preoccupation with Gauguin predates even his acquaintance with Roderick O'Connor in Paris in 1905. Of this irascible Irish painter whom he tried to cultivate, he says that "[he had spent some months in Brittany with Gauguin, painting, I, already greatly interested in that mysterious, talented man, would have liked to learn from O'Connor what he could tell me about him]" (*Purely for My*

Pleasure 7-8) . So intense is his curiosity that he starts gathering all available information about Gauguin, and reads his only published biography at the time. He nurses the idea of writing a novel about him “for over ten years”. He travels in 1916 to Tahiti, where Gauguin spent his last years to complete his preparation for his fictional project. “At last, “Maugham confesses, “I found myself ready to write the novel I had so long contemplated.” (Preface, *The Moon and Sixpence* vii) But even before he starts penning the long-planned novel, he has already profiled in *Of Human Bondage* (1915) the French rebel. Clutton thus describes to Philip the Post-impressionist French painter without naming him, of course;

D’ you remember my telling you about that chap I met in Brittany? I saw him the other day here. He’s just off to Tahiti. He was broke to the world. He was a *brasseur d’affaires*, a stockbroker I suppose you call it in English; and he has a wife and family, and he was earning a large income. He chucked it all to become a painter. He just went off and settled down in Brittany and began to paint. He hadn’t got any money and did the next best thing to starving. (*OHB* 370)

Mann seizes on this to claim, somewhat extravagantly, that “[o]n one page in ‘Of Human Bondage’[Maugham] tells the whole story of ‘The Moon and Sixpence’” (33). The very fact that *Of Human Bondage* contains in embryo its successor argues that, far from milking the mood of the moment, Maugham unfolds his evolving vision in his thematically interrelated novels.

The documents which support this contention are Maugham’s private letters in which he presents himself as a programmatic writer. To begin with, he confides to his literary agent in the 1920s that “I have got all my work planned out for the next ten years” (quoted in Towne, “Mr. W. Somerset Maugham at Home” 9). He then details, in his letter of 23 October, 1927, to his French admirer Monsieur Dottin his writing programme for the next ten years. (Maugham’s letters located in the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center). Last of all, he divulges in 1929, at the request of an unknown research student, his cherished goal: “My aim in the rest of my work is to round off and complete my production so that my writings and my life together

shall form a finished, symmetrical and as it were coherent structure” (Maugham’s letter to Elizabeth Douglas quoted in Morgan 346). Such strict adherence on Maugham’s part to a preconceived design precludes any kind of commercialism. On the contrary, it relates his works organically as a member of a series.

This is precisely how two such consecutive novels as *Of Human Bondage* and *The Moon and Sixpence* connect. Philip the lover and Clutton the artist in the former and their counterparts Blanche and Strickland in the latter all function as the vehicles of Maughamian absolute of the collective unconscious. As *OHB* privileges life over art, so Philip over Strickland. If “Clutton had no gift of expression in words” (*OHB* 346), “Strickland was not a fluent talker” ((MS 54) either. Clutton holds that “a good painter had two chief objects to paint namely, man and the intention of his soul”(OHB346). Similarly one has “to guess the intention of [Strickland’s]one paints is that one can’t help it” (*OHB* 367) . Animated by the same conviction, Strickland asserts that “I’ve got to paint. I can’t help myself”(MS 52). It follows therefore that *The Moon and the Sixpence* is above all a logical sequel to *Of Human Bondage*. A fortuitous link between the two novels develops from Maugham’s choice, as the title for *The Moon and the Sixpence*, of the phrase that the Times Literary Supplement reviewer uses about Philip: “...he was no busy yearning for the moon that he never saw the sixpence at his feet: (reproduced in Curtis and Whitehead, *W. Somerset Maugham* 124).

The extent to which Strickland represents Gauguin needs to be probed, for the difference between them is a significant as the similarity. As a flourishing stockbroker, Gauguin used to attend the art exhibitions and collect impressionist paintings. Before turning into a full-time artist, he trained with Pissaro. Most of all , he was never averse to either showing or selling his pictures. On the contrary, though the stockbroker Strickland scorns the very idea of using his paintings for any extra-aesthetic purpose. And then Gauguin was far more flamboyant and self-indulgent than Strickland. “Gauguin and his wife”, claims Cordel, “never ceased to write to each other” (88). On the other hand , Strickland breaks off at one fell swoop all relations with his family. Outweighing all, however, are the differences in the cause and manner of their deaths. Ravaged by drugs , drink and syphilis, Gauguin died a simple syncope of the heart” (Cordel 90): “he dies alone and uncared for (Newmeyer124). In stark contrast, Strickland does of leprosy, nursed by his devoted

native wife Ata. That is not all: Gauguin preserved his masterpiece for posterity; Strickland orders his to be destroyed after his death. Maugham's inadequate knowledge alone cannot plausibly explain so radical a difference between the avowed original and his fictional counterpart. Maugham just stops short of confessing that he has not strictly followed his model:

Many years ago I wrote a novel called *The Moon and the Sixpence*. In that I took a famous painter, Paul Gauguin, and, using the novelist's privilege, devised a number of incidents to illustrate the character I created on the suggestions afforded me by the scanty facts I knew about the French artist. (*The Razor's Edge*1)

The fact that Maugham is using Gauguin to body forth Schopenhauer's theory of a creative genius. He is therefore more faithful to the German philosopher than to the French painter.

Strickland's stellar role in the novel has naturally led most of the critics such as Brander (66-67), Curtis (*The Pattern* 98) and Hastings (246) to identify the nature of genius as the book's governing theme. Differing only marginally, Burt focuses on "the relationship between an artist's life and his or her art" (99). Loss on "the artist and his place in society and the sources of the artist's creativity" (*W. Somerset Maugham* 37). Calder, however, reads the book as a straight artist novel (Maugham and the Quest 131-151). These are weighty issues to be discussed below. A few minor issues can be disposed of straight away. Lieban contends that "the central character in *The Moon and Sixpence* is not Strickland, but the narrator" (331). To acknowledge the narrator's due importance is not to accept the suggested role reversal, which runs counter to the whole tenor of the novel. Moreover it does positive violence to the novel's title, which fits not the practical narrator but the visionary protagonist. To be fair to him, the I-narrator gives what Edel requires a modern biographer to give: his "vision of his subject"(83) Macey's thesis that "*The Moon and Sixpence* is a story about story-telling "(62) directly conflicts with Maugham's idea of "a good novel", based on a "broadly human" theme of "enduring interest", having a universal appeal (*Ten Novels* 14).

The fact that the story of the Stroeves occupies almost half of the novel bother a number of critics. Cordell for one speculates "whether the novelist may have distended [the Stroeves']

dreary misadventures because Strickland's own story is hardly sufficient for a full-sized novel" (85). Similarly Brigod Brophy and her co-authors object to the "inordinate amount of attention given to those shoddily cardboard characters, Dick and Blanche Stroeves"(126). On the contrary Calder holds that Maugham explores "the problem of the artist and morality" through the story of Strickland's relations with Dirk and Blanche Strove." He also touches on the theme of "sex and the artist" (*Maugham and the Quest* 140 and 142). The narrator himself emphasizes that "the aesthetic sense" is akin to the sexual instinct and shares its barbarity" (*MS* 2). That he later explicitly identifies art and sex underlines the centrality of the issue: "I suppose the art is a manifestation of the sexual instinct. It is the same emotion which is excited in the human heart by the sight of a lovely woman, the bay of Naples under the yellow moon , and the *Entombment of Titian*"(*MS* 179). Maugham has Captain Brunot echo the narrator's thesis by way of reinforcing it: "Do you know how men can be obsessed by love that they are deaf and blind to everything else in the world? They are as little their own masters as the slaves chained to the benches of a galley. The passion that held Strickland to in bondage was no less tyrannical than love" (*MS* 225).

Strickland and Blanche act out their reiterate identity between art and love. What one does for art, the other does for love? However he may hate "the normal release of sex" because of its brutality "by comparison with the satisfaction of artistic creation" (*MS* 179). Strickland does burp at one point of time with the desire for Blanche as she does for him. As his mistress, she brings him down to the level of a common mortal. However, she inspires him as his model to the supreme act of creation. She is therefore in no sense superfluous to the novel.

As to deciding on a character's relevance, so in identifying the novel's theme and genre, the narrator's declared objective cannot be altogether ignored. After asserting Strickland's "authentic" "greatness" and his universally accredited "genius", he concentrates on the artist's extraordinary personality. "To my mind the most interesting thing in art", he affirms, "is the personality of the artist, and if that is singular, I am willing to excuse a thousand faults." (*MS* 1). Maugham holds elsewhere that "the creative instinct" must combine with "personality" to produce a worthy work of art (*Ten Novels and Their Authors* 326). For the artist's singular "personality", combines with his personal stance on life, leavens the already exhausted subjects

(*A Traveller in Romance* 94). After all, an artist's "uniqueness" (*Selected Prefaces in Romance* 53) ultimately decides his merit. Which is why the most insignificant of Strickland's works bears the stamp of his "strange tormented and complex" personality, "which has excited so curious an interest in his life and character" (*MS* 2). In his social discourse, so runs the narrator's self-justifying argument, a man consciously projects his preferred self-image, but only unconsciously betrays his essential self. Conversely "in his book or his picture the real man delivers himself "defenseless" (*MS* 168). Of course, the explorer has to delve beneath the "decorous sentiments and normal emotions" (*MS* 177) to get at the truth. However penetrating, an artist's biography with lopsided attention to his personality to the relative neglect of his art, demands a more convincing explanation.

The fact is that Maugham is using the word "personality" in Schopenhauer's extended sense of it. This is how Schopenhauer elucidates it: "What a man is; that is to say, personality, in the widest sense of the word; under which are included health, strength, beauty, temperament, moral character, intelligence and education" ("The division of Subject" 11, "The Wisdom of Life", *Essays*). This definition fully justifies the narrator's emphasis on Strickland's emphasis on Strickland's "greatness" as "authentic" because the artist's personality is its exclusive source. It also relates Strickland and Stroeve as the representatives of two such discrete constituents of personality as "intelligence" and "moral character" respectively. As for its phenomenal importance, a man's "individuality", Schopenhauer explains, "accompanies him always and everywhere, and gives its colour to all his experiences" ("Personality" 20, "The Wisdom of Life" *Essays*). An absolute value attaches only to a constant such as "the possession of a great heart or a great head" (Position"99, "The Wisdom of Life" *Essays*). The constancy of Strickland's personality contrasts with the inconstancy of Amy's position and of Captain Brunot's possession. Strickland's desertion costs Amy her position as a literary hostess. Similarly the failure of Captain Brunot's attorney unsettles his possession (*MS* 226). This indicates how Schopenhauer's definition of personality and character, especially his differentiation between intellectual and moral excellence bears on the novel's thematic dialectic.

At this point, the relations between Maugham's absolute and Schopenhauer's "will" need to be clarified. Maugham's absolute is primordial energy, working in man through the collective unconscious. Universal, eternal, metaphysical and unconscious, Schopenhauer's "will" is much the same as Maugham's absolute, purges of its contradictions. As the contents of the "will" or the collective unconscious, "the inclinations, passions, emotions, character, show themselves as that which is unalterable in consciousness". On the contrary, the intellect is the function of the mutable physical brain. Moreover it continues to assimilate material from the outside and to add to its insight and knowledge. Consequently "the intellect itself rises and sinks with both rise and decline of the organism." (*The World as Will and Representation II*: 224). Accordingly Strickland with his mutable intellectual and Stroeve with his immutable moral qualities engage in a network of multidimensional relationship. Stroeve is thus as much indispensable to the novel's thematic design as Blanche. Scott-Kilvert's rough-and-ready specification of Stroeve's "main function in the plot is to testify to Strickland's artistic greatness on the one hand and his extraordinary inhumanity on the other" (6).

So vital is the role of the narrator in this novel that he demands to be discussed first. Maugham has written novels both in the first and in the third person. He has, however, a reasoned preference for the first-person narrator. Of its two principal kinds, one is the protagonist – narrator, the hero himself narrates his own story; in the other kind, an observer or a marginally involved character assumes narrative responsibility. The protagonist-narrator almost neutralizes, on Maugham's view, the gain in authenticity and immediacy of the first-person narrative. First he cannot directly refer to any of his admirable qualities without seeming self-conceited. Second he portrays himself only from the inside, but the others from the outside as well. He appears in consequence indeterminate and passive compared with those around him. On the contrary, the witness-narrator is relatively free from all these disadvantages. Naturally Maugham considers his deployment as the most convenient and effective way in which a novel can be written:

In this variety, the author tells the story himself, but he is not the hero and it is not his story that he tells. He is a character in it, and is more or less closely connected with the persons who take part in it.

His role is not to determine the action, but to be the confidant, the mediator, the observer of those who do take part in it. (*Ten Novels* 13)

The very opening sentence of *The Moon and Six pence* identifies its narrator as a witness: “I confess that when first I made acquaintance with Charles Strickland I never for a moment discerned that there was in him anything out of the ordinary” (*MS* 1). *Cakes and Ale* and *The Razor’s Edge* to testify to Maugham’s fondness for the witness-narrator, whose special features merit some discussion.

The first-person narrator of either variety “belongs to the represented reality, the fictional world in which the characters live” (Stanzel70). Himself a fictional creature, he relates to the characters with a kind of ease and intimacy that conduces to his narrative’s likeliness. Accordingly, the I-narrator of *The Moon and Sixpence* is on intimate terms with all the four principal characters. As a twenty-three-year old sensational debutante novelist, he attracts the attention of Amy Strickland, a lionizing literary hostess. As a regular at her party, he scrapes an acquaintance with Strickland, her stockbroker husband. On the other hand, a long-time friend of the Dutch painter Dirk Stroeve, he comes to know through him his English wife Blanche. He is thus so placed as to be able to report on the characters first-hand. As an embodied self, he is, however, tied down to a specific place and time. His physicality is the inescapable price for “the powerful circumstantiality of eye-witness narration” (Scholes and Kellog 259). It is to obviate this constraint that he moves over to Paris to cover Strickland’s stay there. He, however, does not trail the painter to Tahiti. Instead he draws upon the secondary narrator’s information about the hero’s last years. This permissible device to overcome the partialness of his direct knowledge requires the proffered information to be corroborated. While recounting the story to their shared life in the Marseilles underworld, Captain Nicholas quotes Strickland’s reiterative phrases “Go to hell.” This serves so much as Strickland’s identity tags that the narrator regards “Captain Nicholas as a trustworthy witness” (*MS* 190). Tiare’s story of how she married Strickland to his native wife Ata gains credence from her reference to the hero’s characteristic gesture: “he pulled

his great red beard and smiled” (*MS* 215). Similarly Captain Brunot’s testimony rings authentic as he alludes to Strickland’s own passion for chess.

The forty-three-year old narrator writes with the full knowledge of the completed story, and therefore from a retrospective perspective. In consequence, the present and future of the “I’s” experiencing self are the past of his narrating self. This gives the latter a kind of temporal omniscience, and makes room for anachrony. When the “I” narrates the present, his two selves as experiencer and narrator tend to merge; when the past, they tend to diverge. There is thus “a natural dualism in the figure of the narrator: he both narrates and experiences, he is both old and young; it is certainly a case of identical persons, and yet they are not the same person” (Romberg 36). That the I-narrator incarnates permanence and change, sameness and difference becomes all the more explicit in his recollection, triggered by his visit to Amy Strickland after a gap of more than twenty years. He both observes the present and remembers the past simultaneously:

Mrs Strickland had moved with the times. Gone were the Morris papers and gone the severe cretonnes, gone were the Arundel prints that had adorned the walls of her drawing-room in Ashley Gardens: the room blazed with fantastic colour, and I wondered if she knew that those varied hues, which fashion had imposed upon her, were due to the dreams of a poor painter in a South Sea Island. (*MS* 248)

As memory juxtaposes the past and the present, the narrator’s past and his present self-coexist at the moment of recollection. This memory situation is philosophically pregnant. “the claim of the memory situation” explains Campbell, “a claim in the absence of which the situation ceases to be one of memory at all, is that the remembering subject and the remembered subject are somehow the same being in experiences that are different both temporally and qualitatively” (74-75). The paradoxical relations between the “I’s” two selves as experiencer and narrator are analogous to similar relations between man’s empirical ego, personal to him, and his universal self, common to all as the collective unconscious or the absolute.

The sole justification for his biography of Strickland, claims the narrator, is the satisfaction of his creative urge. This disinterestedness on his part aligns him with his subject. Maugham, however, uses the witness-narrator to serve a delicate novelistic purpose. He drafts him to meet the challenge posed by Strickland as an extraordinary hero. It is by befriending and disarming the reader that the narrator can make him swallow Strickland's otherwise incredible and revolting story. The witness-narrator's special position enables him to arrest the reader's attention and suspend his disbelief. For "[T]he narrator and the reader are united in their common interest in the persons of the story, their characters, motives and conduct; and the narrator begets in the reader the same sort of familiarity with the creatures of his invention as he has himself" (*Ten Novels* 13). As the exclusive reflector of the protagonist and as the transitional agent between him and the reader, the narrator is becomingly understanding, sensitive and catholic. Because of his broad-mindedness, Burt regards him as "undogmatic, objective, cynical, and somewhat amoral" (99). All in all, the narrator is a typical Maugham persona.

In keeping with the novel's structural principle of counterpoint, the arty Amy precedes in the sequence of action the artist Strickland. Miss Waterford, an acerbic novelist, introduces her to the young narrator as a literary hostess. Struck by his thirty-seven-year-old new acquaintance's simplicity and unaffectedness, he is, however, dismayed at the incongruity between her role and her taste. The décor of her dining-room with its Whistler etchings and The Morris curtains is too conventional to do her any credit: "At that time there must have been five hundred dining-rooms in London decorated in exactly the same manner. It was chaste, artistic, and dull" (*MS* 16). She considers writers amusing and wonderful, and so hosts tea-parties for them. She is also snobbish enough to want "to be in the movement" and "to make herself a position in the world of art and letters" (*MS* 16 and 23). Since it is the spirit of escapism and romanticism, persistent in her since her girlhood days, that prompts her to rub shoulders with the writers, their ideas and morals do not impact her. Conforming as she does to Schopenhauer's definition of a "dilettante", she pursues the arts only with a part of her being so that so does not lose "all interest in everything else" ("Personality" 37-38, "The Wisdom of Life", *Essays*).

Strickland's leaving his family in the lurch puts on trial Amy's love both for him and for the arts. Her anguished query of the narrator whether people are talking about her "domestic calamity" betrays her concern for other people's opinion. When the narrator meets her next at her request, he finds her dressed as a bereaved woman in the customary black. He notes that "notwithstanding a real emotion she was able to dress the part she had to play according to her notions of seemliness" (*MS* 35). A self-styled connoisseur that she is, she would be less discomfited if her husband runs away for love than for art. Fortunately for her, a rumour about Strickland's elopement is doing the rounds at the time. The narrator's generalization is equally valid in the present as in Abraham's case "Whenever a man does anything unexpected, his fellows ascribe it to the most discreditable motives" (*MS* 208). Anyway the message Amy sends through the narrator to the fugitive in Paris is that she will never divorce him, and that if he returns, his escapade will be hushed up. Her anxiety about "gossip" makes the narrator realize how great the role is played in women's life by the opinion of others. "It throws a shadow of insincerity," he concludes, "over their most deeply felt emotions." (*MS* 39).

As her dilettantism, so Amy's "great susceptibility to other people's opinion" traces to Schopenhauer . He attributes this pathetic dependence for one's happiness on other's opinion to "vanity and pretension" (Position" 52 and 56, "The Wisdom of Life", *Essays*). She is obtuse enough not have learned from the frivolity, backbiting and malice of the guests at her parties how worthless is others' opinion. As if to prove the narrator true that convention stifles candour, the socially mediated Amy decides to weep to evoke his sympathy. Her coming, equipped with a generous supply of handkerchiefs, underlines her design. Astute enough to see through her stratagem, he keeps on wondering whether she wants her husband back for love , or for fear of scandal or for soothing her "wounded vanity" (*MS* 41)

The narrator's discovery that Strickland has left home not to wallow in love but to slog away at art leaves Amy without any face-saver. She is astonished that the one whom she once mocked out of painting practices for being a ridiculous dauber would now challenge her verdict and spurn her patronage too. If he had eloped, she could have blamed his seducer. But his decision to leave home in order to become an artist is a deliberate affront to her as a spotter and

sponsor of the budding artists. This blow to her vanity ignites her violent anger: “It was anger that had seized Mrs Strickland, and her pallor was the pallor of a cold and sudden rage’ (MS 65). The narrator articulates her unuttered position: “Do you mean that you could have forgiven him if h’d left you for a woman, but not if he’s left you for an idea? You think you’re match for the one, but against the other you’re helpless?” (MS 65)? Strickland has caused the vain Amy a “sense of bitter humiliation”, which in turn rouses her unquenchable “vindictiveness”. She turns in a trice from an affectionate lover into an insensate hater. She packs all her virtues into her curse on him: “I should like him to die miserable, poor, and starving, without a friend. I hope he’ll rot with some loathsome disease. I’ve done with him” (MS 66).

James calls both falling in and out of love a “conversion”. He traces it to “a latent process of unconscious preparation often preceding a sudden awakening to the fact that mischief is irretrievably done” (*The Varieties of Religious Experience* 176). All the five major characters in the novel such as Amy, Strickland, Ata, Blanche and Stroeve are in Jame’s terms sudden converts. The same explanation must hold good for all the cases. The narrator conceives man as a motley: “[P]ettiness and grandeur, malice and charity, hatred and love, can find places side by side in the same human heart” (MS 66). Man’s normal social self is the conscious self. Unusual circumstances generate overwhelming emotion and passion, leading the unconscious to invade the conscious. The transposed psychic constituents result in a reconstituted personality and a spiritual rebirth or conversion. So the narrator concludes that “[t]he soul lives unstably in the body, and is capable of mysterious transformations” (MS 66-67).

So long as Amy remains self-composed, she shows in action her introjected social self. But once she is possessed by an overmastering emotion or passion, she lays bare her essential self, establishing thereby that “the idea of authenticity readily attaches itself to instinct” (Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* 143). After her crisis is over, she reverts to her usual pragmatic self. She deliberately spreads the lie that Strickland has eloped with a French dancer. The narrator alone can spill the beans: she secures his connivance. A reputed victim of male treachery, she attracts both sympathy and prestige, which she puts to good use in her calling as a typist. To overcome the stigma attaching to a businesswoman, she recalls her gentle birth, drops names, and

speaks of her celebrity host. But her refusal to allow her daughter to become an actress on the grounds of theatre's mixed lot exposes once again her artistic pretensions.

The narrator knows all about Amy's persistent animus against her recalcitrant husband. Nevertheless, as a sixty-year-old widow, she insinuates to Strickland's prospective American biographer (that too in the narrator's presence) that "her relations with her husband had always been perfect" (MS249). As rootless as the society whose creation she is. "Mrs. Strickland had moved with the times" (MS 248). Actually speaking, she has merged herself into society, and has thereby achieved what Huxley calls "horizontal self-transcendence". If she plays to the hilt the role of "the wife of a genius", that is because Strickland happens to be the craze of the moment. A one-time literary hostess, she is not one to let go an opportunity to shine in reflected glory. An other-directed "vaniteux", she prefigures in many respects her namesake in *Cakes and Ale*.

It is Miss Waterford who first labels Strickland to the narrator as "dull". Not content with that, she further elaborates that "[h]e's not in the least interested in literature or the arts" (MS 17). Amy too tells the narrator that her husband is "a perfect philistine". Her further addition that "[h]e doesn't pretend to be a genius" (MS 19-20) reads like an unintentional irony. The narrator on his part begins by observing Strickland's physical appearance: "He was a man of forty, not good-looking, and not yet ugly, for his features were rather good; but they were all a little larger than life-size, and the effect was ungainly". Judging by his "commonplace" look and by his obvious lack of "social gifts", he too concludes that "he was just a good, dull, honest, plain man....He was null" (MS 23). Evidently Maugham's strategy all through the novel is to present Strickland from multiple points of view. So far the narrator has found the Strickland's totally engulfed by their social roles, devoid of any singularity to lift them out of the ruck. The subsequent upheaval shows up the discrepancy between appearance and reality.

The real Strickland is a reckless risk-taker, who throws up financial security and domestic happiness all for art. His instantaneous transformation from a sedate stockbroker into a frenzied painter is the most dramatic and the most controversial. Whitehead shrewdly remarks that the narrator's long dialogue with Strickland in a Paris café is "of crucial importance in establishing

[his] credibility”, “for it is in this scene that for the first time Strickland is presented directly to the reader” (*Maugham: A Reappraisal* 82). As Amy’s emissary, the narrator stands, initially in any case, for social conventions and for codes of duty and honour. The very fact that Strickland cadges a meal from him as a return for his family’s hospitality shows that he has already junked the values of polite society. In keeping with his solemn mission, the narrator begins the interview on a serious note. In contrast, Strickland assumes a vein of gaiety and mockery. In answer to the narrator’s query, he flatly denies having any more love for his wife and children. He has neither any qualms of conscience nor any sense of shame for leaving them to fend for themselves. His open defiance of society contrasts with Amy’s total capitulation to it. “The strongest man in the world,” it is claimed, “is the man who stands alone” (Ibsen 255). Strickland is that strong, free man. All that he has done so far is at the dictates of his genius. Self-contained as they are, geniuses “do not show”, holds Schopenhauer, “that warm and unlimited interest in friends, family, and the community in general.” Rather a genius withdraws into a private retreat of his own in order “to develop and mature his intellectual faculties” and “to be himself” (“Personality” 38-39, “The Wisdom of Life,” *Essays*). This through desocialization is a prerequisite for being an artist. So even Eliot insists that the Arts “require that a man be not a member of a family or of a caste or of a party or of a coterie, but simply and solely himself” (*The Sacred Wood* 32).

The narrator’s very sensible question what certainly Strickland has of his creative talent, and what chance of success as a late-starter at forty, elicits from him. A repetitive assertion with a gradually mounting passion in contrast to his erstwhile flippancy: “I tell you I’ve got to paint; I can’t help myself. When a man falls into the water it doesn’t matter how he swims, well or badly: he’s got to get out or else he’ll drown “. Strickland’s borrowed words from Conrad’s *Lord Jim* do not at all whittle away his utter sense of desperation. The intensity of his emotion completely dissolves the narrator’s scepticism. Instead he

Seemed to feel in him some vehement power that was struggling within him; it gave me the sensation of something very strong, overmastering, that held him, as it were , against his will, I could not understand. He seemed really to be possessed of a devil.... (MS 52-53).

The narrator identifies the power within Strickland as “the creative instinct” and his transformation as “conversion (MS 57). It is Amy who first thinks of Strickland as a transformed man, but transformed by the sexual instinct: “I don’t know who this woman is who’s got hold of him, but she’s made him into another man” (MS 38). What confutes this assumption is Strickland’s contemptuous rejection, in the narrator’s presence, of the proffered favours of a lascivious French prostitute. Anyway in order to mitigate the enormity of his action, the narrator presents Strickland to Amy as the victim of an inexorable power: “he seems to me to be possessed by some power which is using him for its own ends and in whose hold he is as helpless as a fly in a spider’s web.” (MS 66).

Significantly the narrator envisages love as the exact counterpart of art, as overwhelming, as depersonalizing as the other: “Love is absorbing: it takes the lover out of himself; [...]. It makes a man a little more than himself, and at the same time a little less. He ceases to be himself. He is no longer an individual, but a thing, an instrument to some purpose foreign to his ego” (MS 128). Art and love, the creative and the sexual instinct, stand for the collective unconscious itself. The collective unconscious, an impersonal, irresistible force, uses the artists and lovers as the medium for its self-manifestation. Maugham has already worked out this metaphysic of art and love in *Of Human Bondage* 374 and 437) Speaking out of his personal experience Philip characterizes the collective unconscious as “some power alien to and yet within himself” (OHB589). Maugham’s theory of the artist enjoys the support of psychology and philosophy. “Art is a kind of innate drive,” theorizes Jung, “that seizes a human being and makes him its instrument. The artist is not a person endowed with free will who seeks his own ends, but one who allows art to realize its purposes through him” (*Modern Man in Search of a Soul*195). Reduced to its essentials, [a]rt is”, according to Maritain, “*a habitus*, a ‘state of possession’, an inner strength developed in man” (35).

A conversion is effected, on James’s view, by a change in the convert’s “habitual centre of his personal energy”. A sudden conversion is precipitation by the incursion of the unconscious into the conscious (*The Varieties* 193 and 232). The convert feels himself at the disposal of a higher power and also a “state of assurance”. The change of question is so momentous as to reconstitute the converts entire being and to reorient his whole outlook. After an appraisal of all

pros and cons, the narrator concludes that there is in Strickland's soul a deep-rooted instinct of creation, overlaid by the circumstances of his life, which nevertheless grows relentlessly, until "at last it took possession of his whole being and forced him irresistibly to action" (MS 57). As James, so the narrator makes no distinction between a religious and a secular conversion. On the contrary, he analogies Strickland's conversion with its religious form: "[...] the spirit of God has seized men, powerful and rich, pursuing them with stubborn vigilance till at last conquered, they have abandoned the joy of the world and the love of women for the painful austerities of the cloister" (MS 57). The Mother Superior in the succeeding *The Painted Veil* illustrates this kind of divine seizure. In order to emphasize the religious character of Strickland's conversion, the narrator attributes to him "the directness of the fanatic and the ferocity of the apostle" (MS 58). They point to the single-mindedness and zeal of the recent convert to art.

The novel's second narrative block in Paris is more than a bridge between the first in London and the third in Tahiti. Most of the important issues figure in this thematically pivotal section. Strickland is flanked here on one side by Dirk Stroeve, his antitheses as man and artist, and on the other by Blanche Stroeve, his affinity as a person. The narrator portrays Stroeve by directly defining his character traits. This born "buffoon" (MS 71) is a thoroughly bad artist. His "genuine enthusiasm for the commonplace indicates his lack of a personal vision. Devoid of objectivity, he paints the obviously picturesque and the typically romantic subjects. A commercial painter, he preens himself on bringing romance to his patrons' houses. Such is his ingrained romantic idealism that he contributes to stick to his preformed vision of Italy, and totally disregards the actual one before him. The narrator stresses his incapacity to face up the stark reality: "It was an ideal that he painted — a poor one, common, and shop-soiled, but still it was an ideal; and it gave his character a definite charm" (MS72). It is his goodwill that makes him accommodating to his customers, and breeds his escapism. That is why goodwill is not, explains Schopenhauer, an artist's asset: "In *morality* the *good will* is everything, but in art it is nothing; for, as the word (Kunst) already indicates, *ability* (Konnen) alone is of any consequence" (WWR I : 384)

Stroeve's "good-nature" (MS 73) makes him a commonplace artist, but a rare human being. His colleagues exploit his generosity, but deride his credulity. The deep import of this

benefactor-compeers both abuse his beneficiary syndrome will be explained in the context of a more telling example below. Stroeve's ungrateful compeers both abuse his openhandedness and wound him constantly. The narrator says of him that "[n]ature had made him a butt, but had denied him insensibility" (*MS* 73). However he may suffer at the hands of his tormentors, he continues to consort with them without becoming angry and vindictive. The narrator merely asserts that "his good-nature was such that he could not bear malice" (*MS* 73). Schopenhauer, however, offers a more elaborate, a more persuasive interpretation of goodness. Since "goodness of heart identifies all beings with its own nature", it is as indulgent towards others as towards itself. Instead of getting provoked at others' sneers at his physical or mental defects, a good man blames himself for occasioning them. He is rather inclined to treat his sneers "in the kindest manner, confidently hoping that they will return from their error in his regard, and will recognize themselves also in him" (*WWR* II 232). Innately good as he is, the more Stroeve is harmed, the more forgiving and magnanimous he becomes.

The man and the artist in Stroeve are one, but not the artist and the critic. An indifferent artist, he is, however, a very discerning, knowledgeable and catholic critic. He can appreciate the old masters as warmly as the moderns. Due to lack of intuitive knowledge, he fails as an artist. Conversely his discursive knowledge stands him in good stead as a critic. The irony is that his equal admiration for all artists argues his lack of a strong personal point of view, the prerequisite of artistic success. His critical generosity is another manifestation of his selflessness. The paradox is that what precisely makes him a bad artist also makes him a good critic and a good man. Stroeve's role as Blanche's husband brings out once again his romantic – idealist self. With a flourish, he declares to the narrator that "I've seen all the most beautiful women in the world; I've never seen anyone more beautiful than Madam Dirk Stroeve". As before he has remarked on Stroeve's romantic images of sordid objects, so now the narrator coolly notes that "[s]he was not the ravishing creature that his love-sick fancy saw" (*MS* 76). Dirk's putting Blanche "on a pedestal" and worshipping her "with such an honest idolatry" embarrass rather than flatter the sensible wife. Her mysterious reserve contrasts with her husband's effusiveness. Stroeve's adoration impacts as much on her as on him. The beloved goes up in his estimation: he himself goes down. He makes it abundantly clear to the narrator that his persistent self-disparagement

predates Blanch's entanglement with Strickland: "I couldn't expect her to love me as I loved her. I'm a buffoon. I'm not the sort of man that women love. I've always known that" (*MS* 122). For all his extravagant love, she cannot have "ever really cared for her husband". His burning passion and their cohabitation may have at best elicited her affection, which is "a passive feeling" "defenseless against passion" (*MS* 125). The narrator drops a hint to the effect that Blanch's affection may have masked an actual aversion to her husband. He thus generalizes that love-obsessed men "are not very interesting": even women, with whom the subject [love] is of paramount interest, have a contempt for them" (*MS* 178). Tiare Johnson is, for example, so exasperated by her complaisant second husband that she finally divorces him. Admiration and self-depreciation are dialectically related: "There seem to be two primary emotions essentially involved in the complex state provoked by the contemplation of the admired object, namely, wonder and negative self-feeling or the emotion of submission" (McDougall, *An Introduction to Social Psychology* 111).

With his intense love, his eagerness to show and sell his pictures, his hunger for praise, his critical acuteness neutralized by his creative obtuseness and above all his creative stagnation. Stroeve is the exact opposite of Strickland. The narrator cites him as the supreme example of a good man but a bad artist:

I discovered that in Paris he had been painting just the same stale, obviously picturesque things that he had painted for years in Rome. It was all false, insincere, shoddy; and yet no one was more honest, sincere, and frank than Dirk Stroeve. Who could resolve the contradiction? (*MS* 77-78)

What is obvious is that an artist's historical and his creative self are discontinuous. And sincerity in art is an achieved aesthetic effect, attained not so much by emotional honesty as by technical dexterity. The opposite proposition of a bad man but a good artist is exemplified by Strickland. Stroeve's praise for Strickland the artist and Blanche's dispraise for Strickland the man accord with Maugham's perspectivism. And set the stage ready for his appearance in person in the novel's second part. Apparently Blanche turns hostile towards Strickland after he borrows money

from Stroeve, but refuses to comment on his pictures. The man who has ceased to be a social being in order to be himself cannot be expected to praise even his lender's indifferent pictures, and thereby compromise his own artistic integrity. Stroeve on his part goes on hailing his insulter as a great genius, reluctant to show and sell his pictures. Exasperated at Blanche's indiscriminate running down of both Strickland the man and the artist, Stroeve holds forth on the creation and appreciation of beauty:

Beauty is something wonderful and strange that the artist fashions out of the chaos of the world in the torment of his soul....To recognize it you must repeat the adventure of the artist. It is a melody that he sings to you, and to hear it again in your own heart you want knowledge, sensitiveness and imagination. (*MS 80*)

Stroeve's sensitive explanation of how an artist creates beauty applies more to Strickland than to himself. He pleads for the consumer's empathy with the creator in order to appreciate artistic beauty. Murdoch offers further reasons:

A great artist is, in respect of his work, a good man, and in the true sense a free man. The consumer of art has an analogous task to its producer: to be disciplined enough to see as much reality in the work as the artist has succeeded in putting into it, and not to 'use it as magic'. The appreciation of beauty in art or nature is not only (for all its difficulties) the easiest available spiritual exercise; it is also a completely adequate entry into (and not just analogy of) the good life, since it is checking of selfishness in the interest of seeing the real. (*The Sovereignty of Good 63*)

Koestler encapsulates the whole argument in a pithy sentence: "Art is a school of self-transcendence" (*Janus 76*).

When the narrator sees Strickland in Paris for the second time after a gap of five years, he is struck by his emaciated body, his unkempt appearance and his worn-out clothes—all testifying

to his extreme poverty. For all that, his refusal to sell his pictures, sacred to him as a means of self-realization, and his settled indifference to money and fame reaffirm once again his self-sufficiency and his artistic integrity. At this stage, the narrator's mode of understanding the protagonist and his relations with him need to be briefly analyzed. "Our understanding of others, as of ourselves, hinges", contends Chatterjee, "on the connection between inner states and their corresponding types of expression, a connection which we experience in ourselves at first hand" (116). Though the narrator and Strickland sit on a number of occasions face to face, their communication is hindered by the painter's inarticulacy, rooted in his intuitiveness. So the narrator is reduced to piecing together his interlocutor's hackneyed phrases, slang, vague unfinished gestures, and taking note of the tone of his voice and the look in his eyes. From these external signs, he re-creates, in terms of his own self-knowledge, his subject's inner life and the state of his mind. The relationship between them is that between two mutually implicated, evolving selves. Unlike the hero-worshipping Stroeve, the narrator meets Strickland on his own terms, and decides on his stance to suit the need of the moment. Sensing that a too obvious curiosity will put his subject's back up, he pretends total indifference. As expected, Strickland becomes more than usually communicative. What we learn is that after conquering the world, Strickland has now set himself to conquering the flesh. Hence his strenuous exercise in extreme privation and asceticism. Though a "sensual man", he grows so indifferent "to sensual things" that "he lived a life wholly of the spirit." (*MS* 85-86).

The odd jobs that Strickland does to eke out a living vary from house-painting to pimping. But they do not impact in any way on his single-minded pursuit of art. The narrator gets once again "the impression of man possessed". Strickland is intent only on satisfying his creative instinct, on getting on to his canvas his obsessive vision. This exercise alone occupies all his interest, leaving him totally indifferent to the end product, whose absolute uselessness is the patent of its nobility. He lives so much abstracted from the world around him that "[h]e lived in a dream, and the reality meant nothing to him" (*MS* 87). This complete separation between the man and the artist in Strickland is quite in line with Schopenhauer's dictum that "a man endowed with great mental gifts leads, apart from the individual life common to all, a second life, purely of the

intellect”, and that “soon comes to look upon this second life, as the chief mode of existence” (“On Genius”⁸⁴, “The Art of Literature”, *Essays*).

Strickland will metamorphose into an exclusively spiritual being, and so will consummate his artistic potential in his provisioned hillside cottage in Tahiti: “Sometimes I’ve thought of an island lost in a boundless sea, where I could live in some hidden valley, among strange trees, in silence. There I think I could find what I want” (*MS* 88). Because of that haunting vision, he is set against all sensual indulgence including love. As he argues, “[l]ife isn’t long enough for love and art”(MS90). Since man is a flesh-spirit composite, the narrator tells him that as a spiritual being he may scale the empyrean height. But his starved flesh must plunge him into the depth of sensuality. Thus purged and purified,

You feel like a disembodied spirit, immaterial; and seem to be able to touch beauty as though it were a palpable thing; and you feel an intimate communion with the breeze, and with the trees breaking onto leaf, and with the iridescence of the river. You feel like God. (*MS* 90-91)

A great mind is invariably accompanied by violent emotions and passions. Virtue inheres in controlling the recalcitrant unconscious. The narrator has acted before as the analyst of Amy’s soul; he now plays the same role vis a vis Strickland. The twofold significance of his analysis is that it prognosticates both the leprosy-stricken spiritual Strickland and the artful seducer of Blanche.

The differentia of a genius is, on Schopenhauer’s view, the eye. “Since genius consists in the perception of ideas”, he argues “it is only the eye which is any real evidence of genius.” And the mark of “the contemplative gaze” (“Genius and Virtue” 76, “On the Art of Controversy”, *Essays*) is its steadiness and vividness. Strickland’s eloquently expressive eyes compensate for his natural taciturnity. On being amused, his ‘eyes twinkled” (*MS* 46) As the narrator harangues him on behalf of his wife, “his eyes kept that mocking smile which made all I said seem rather foolish”(MS 49). But when he asks him whether he is not taking a big risk as a belated student of art, “[h]is eyes had something strange in them”(MS 52). Though he gazes “with a curious

abstraction” at his opponent in chess, he rests his “eyes” on Stroeve with “a malicious expression”(MS 82)in them. At the very moment when he denies with his lips ever having seen the narrator in his life, there is a “gleam of recognition in his eyes”(MS 83). When “[h]e glanced at [the narrator] once or twice “, “for the most” he “seemed occupied with his own thoughts”(MS 83). He seeks in his mind’s eye his longed –for island, and “his eyes shone strangely” (MS 88). On one occasion, he breaks into “a slow smile, starting and sometimes ending in the eyes”(MS 89). Refusing him a loan, the narrator perceives “a gleam of anger in his eyes” (MS 94). What perhaps is the supreme example of nonverbal communication in the novel is Strickland and Blanche meeting each other’s gaze. The narrator catches them in the act:

Once I saw that his eyes were fixed on Blanche Stroeve, and there was in them a curious irony. Feeling their gaze, she raised her own, and for a moment they stared at one another. I could not quite understand her expression. Her eyes had in them a strange perplexity, and perhaps – but why? Alarm. In a moment Strickland looked away and idly surveyed the ceiling, but she continued to stare at him, and now her look was quite inexplicable. (MS 110)

The narrator retrospectively explains that “she was growing dimly conscious of a feeling in her heart and alarmed her” (MS 122). The rarity of the episode lies in that Blanche and Strickland plunge into a whirlpool of lust without ever having wasting a single word on it. A fair indication of Strickland’s polarity, perfectly matched by Blanche’s, is that “there was aloofness in his eyes and sensuality in his mouth” (MS 126).

Maugham repeatedly uses misfortune and illness to expose the inadequacy of Strickland’s brand of individualism. The solitary painter’s serious illness makes him dependent on his well-wishers’ sympathy. So large-hearted is Stroeve that he completely forgets Strickland’s gratuitous insults and wounds to him. Given as he is to knowing the other by analogy with himself, “he ascribed his own emotions to [Strickland]”(MS 98). He cannot bear the thought of Strickland’s spending Christmas alone. Discovering that the object of his concern is seriously ill and unattended, he decides at once to install him in his own house. But Blanche strongly opposes his

plan because she both hates and fears Strickland. The narrator feels “that she was possessed by some shapeless dread which robbed her of all self-control”(MS 106). As Strove attributes his own sentimentality to Strickland, so Blanche projects onto him her own sensuality. She is as much scared of her own apprehends that: “[s]omething terrible will happen to us” if Strickland to stay with them. The incredulous Stroeve asks. “Because we do a good action”(MS 106)? This is Maugham’s way of presenting the inseparability of good and evil. Huxley’s rhetorical question, “How can we have the good without the evil” (*The Devils of Loudun* 374) captures the essence of the Janus-faced reality.

The normally uxorious Stroeve turns at least for once a determined benefactor. In a bid to crush his wife’s spirited resistance, he reminds her to of her own past: “Haven’t you been in bitter distress once when a helping hand was held out to you? You know how much it means. Wouldn’t you like to do someone a good turn when you have the chance” (MS 107)? The narrator has seen in the past Amy’s boiling anger, generated by her wounded vanity, showing through her body. He does the same now in the spectacle of the devastated Blanche:

She started a little, and gave her husband a long look....A faint colour came into her cheeks, and then her face became white...more then white, ghastly: you felt that the blood had shrunk away from the whole surface of the body; and even her Hands were pale. A shiver passed through her. (MS 107).

It is Strickland who sheds light on the incident Stroeve refers to here. By way of explaining why the Stroeves were not, and could never have been happy, he tells the narrator the story of their marriage. Impregnated and deserted by her roman seducer, Blanche was about to commit suicide when Stroeve rescued and married her. Strickland’s reason why Blanche betrays her savior is that “[a] woman can forgive a man for the harm he does her [...], but she can never forgive him for the sacrifice he makes on her account” (MS 162). There is a large grain of truth in Strickland’s cynical observation. Nietzsche for one suggests why the beneficiary is maliciously disposed towards the benefactor: “Great indebtedness does not make men grateful, but vengeful, and if a little charity is not forgotten, it turns into a gnawing worm” (*The Portable Nietzsche* 201).

Aristotle offers a reasoned explanation of what is called the benefactor-beneficiary syndrome. A benefactor's consciousness of having done a fine thing inclines him to be pleased with the beneficiary. But "the latter", argues Aristotle, "cannot feel that there is anything noble in his relation to his benefactor. At most it is profitable is contemplated with less pleasure and affection than what is noble" (*The Ethics of Aristotle* 272-273). Dirk's reminder of his crucial assistance to her especially in the presence of her narrator, makes Blanche feel both humiliated and vindictive. Significantly Strickland suggests that in Blanche's surrender to him there was a sense of triumph over Dirk (*MS* 177). Good and evil are interwoven indeed.

When she starts nursing him, blanche continues to hate Strickland as before, but something so long dormant, begins to surge up unawares. The narrator very acutely observes that "Blanche Stroeve's violent dislike of Strickland had in it from the beginning a vague element of sexual attraction" (*MS* 125). With his strong build, his 'wild and uncouth' appearance and "the impression of untamed passion", he excites her own unsatisfied sensuality. Her nurse's "daily intimacy" and direct physical contact with him fans her smouldering desire into a burning flame. Her lust becomes so frenzied that she openly tells her husband that "I love Strickland" (*MS* 117). Strickland himself warns her that his own infatuation may not last long. But so prodigious is her own passion that she throws a devoted and affluent husband over for a down-and-out lover of uncertain temper for whose sake, if need be, she is quite willing to prostitute (*MS* 120). (The Mildred Griffiths affair in *Of Human Bondage* anticipates the Blanche-Strickland affair.) The narrator quite justly portrays Blanche as hating and desiring Strickland at the same time. As a matter of fact, she becomes a puppet of the sexual instinct as Strickland has already become a puppet of the creative instinct. Accordingly the narrator stresses her transformation from an individual woman into the incarnation of desire itself:

Blanche Stroeve was in the cruel grip of appetite. Perhaps she hated Strickland still, but she hungered for him, and everything that made up her life till then became of no account. She ceased to be a woman, complex, kind and petulant, considerate and thoughtless; she was a maenad. She was desire. (*MS* 126-127) Blanche and Catalina , the heroine of Maugham's last novel , are sisters under the skin. For

Catalina too undergoes a desire-triggered ecstasy: [...] [Catalina's face] was a mask of desire. She was breathless with lust for the male. She was like one possessed. There was something not quite human about her, something even slightly horrible, but so powerful that it was terrifying. It was sex, nothing but sex, violent and irresistible sex in its awful nakedness. (*Catalina* 186)

Like Maugham, Huxley too counts lust as a trigger for ecstasy. He argues that “[l]ike intoxication, elementary sexuality, indulged in for its own sake and divorced from love, was once a god, worshipped not only as the principle of fecundity, but as a manifestation of the radical Otherness immanent in every human being.” (*The Devils of Loudun* 363). Lust or pure desire merges the empirical ego into the sensual part of the collective unconscious, and so effects self-transcendence. Accordingly Blanche exemplifies what has been called diabolic or infernal ecstasy. Proud and passionate, unscrupulous and uncompromising, self-respecting and self-assertive, Blanche fails to have a grip on the self-willed Strickland. As an abandoned wife, Amy declares that “I can’t live without [Strickland]. I’d sooner kill myself” (*MS* 40). To evoke the deserting Blanche’s pity, Stroeve confesses to her that “I can’t live without you. I shall kill myself.” (*MS* 119). Even the docile Ata asserts to Strickland that “[i]f thou leaves me I shall hang myself on the tree that is behind the house” (*MS* 233). But it is only Blanche, a deserted mistress, who, unable to live life on her own terms, spurns it as a cheat without any fuss. She is the only character in the novel strong and dignified enough to come closest to being Strickland’s soul mate.

Maugham elaborately prepares for Strickland’s eventual seduction of Blanche. First the narrator describes the convalescent painter in terms of paired opposites such as “his sensuality [was] curiously spiritual.” He then conflates Strickland’s primitiveness with the “forces of nature” and the “devil” within him with “a primitive force that existed before good and ill” (*MS* 111). This is Maugham’s way of suggesting that the collective unconscious and nature are the same amoral absolute. The timing of Strickland’s backslide is very significant. Creative inspiration “takes possession of [a genius] only periodically” (*WWR* I; 188). During the slack

such as Strickland's spell of recuperation, a genius declines from a self-possessed intellectual into a common sensual mortal, vulnerable to ordinary temptations and passions.

Strickland's assertion that "[l]ife is not long enough for love and art" (MS 90) is almost an axiom. Of the given quantum of his vital energy, the more an artist squanders in life, the less he has for art and vice versa. This being the case, "the artist is destroyed as artist because of his submission to love" (Beebe 18). Unlike Stroeve, Strickland lacks a lover's tenderness and sentimentality, his emotional attachment to and solicitude for the love object. A woman for him is no more than an instrument for satisfying his sexual needs. He is honest with himself when he says that "I know lust. That's normal and healthy. Love is a disease" (MS 164). Lust is an indiscriminate, satiable physical desire; love is highly discriminating emotional ties with a particular person. What then Strickland develops for Blanche is not love but lust, a reaction against his ascetic excesses. Naturally the narrator portrays Strickland as sex-starved:

His life was strangely divorced from material things, and it was as though his body at times wreaked a fearful revenge on his spirit. The satyr in him suddenly took possession and he was powerless in the grip of an instinct which had all the strength of the primitive forces of nature. It was an obsession so complete that there was no room in his soul for prudence or gratitude. (MS 163).

What Maugham just adumbrates here, Schopenhauer asserts: "the force working and operating in nature is identical with the *will* in ourselves" (WWR II : 591) Now to return to Strickland. What is said here of the libidinous painter is equally true of the lustful Blanche. An ascetic's resurgent sensuality, a beneficiary's malice towards the benefactor, an artist's interest in his favourite model: all these factors combine to make Blanche Strickland's target: "She had a wonderful body, and I wanted to paint a nude" (MS 164). What, however, literally pushes him into her arms is sheer vindictiveness born of wounded vanity. He is not exactly flattered to know that "[s]he couldn't bear the sight of me" (MS 163). He settles his score with Blanche by reducing her to his mistress. After he finishes his picture, he has no more use for her. Even when he seduces her, he never ceases to be an artist. For "[i]t is all up with the artist as soon as he becomes a man and

begins to feel”(Mann, *Death in Venice* 152). What Strickland’s affair dramatizes is the total divorce between his intellectual and his moral qualities. “Men of genius and intellectual” have insists Schopenhauer, ‘more mind than character’. And so “they are often, from a moral point of view, weak and contemptible creatures as well” (“Genius and Virtue” 74, “On the Art of controversy”, *Essays*). Their saving grace is that, with their noble thoughts, they are theoretical rather than practicing moralists.

Strickland’s desertion of Blanche, who slakes his lust and serves his art, is an obvious example of an unmitigated evil. There is, however, another side to it. While engaged in the creation of the nude, Strickland experiences ecstasy, which dissolves his empirical ego into his universal self, his collective unconscious b. the narrow stresses the ecstatic Strickland’s self-transcendence; “Strickland had burst the bonds that hitherto had held him. He had found, not himself, as the phrase goes, but a new soul with unsuspected powers” (*MS* 154). James explains ecstasy as the “invasive alterations of consciousness as results of the tension of subliminal memories reaching the bursting-point” (*The Varieties* 231). Maugham’s language has a faint echo of James’s. Anyway Strickland’s creative self is not his personal ego but his universal self. Maritain makes the point explicit when he observes that “poetic activity is, of itself, disinterested. It engages the human Self in its deepest recesses, but in no way for the sake of the ego” (107). The spiritually reborn Strickland, like El Greco and unlike Stroeve, simplifies his object in order to make it expressive of his vision. He does not flinch from painting the flesh and exploring sensuality, but gives it a touch of the “miraculous”. His handling of “spirituality”, however, “led the imagination along unsuspected ways, and suggested dim, empty spaces, lit only by the eternal stars, where the soul, all naked adventured fearful to the discovery of new mysteries” (*MS* 154). It recalls El Greco’s mystical picture in *Of Human Bondage*: “It was a mystical city in which the imagination faltered like one who steps out of light into darkness; the soul walked naked to and fro, knowing the unknowable, and conscious strangely of experience, intimate but inexpressible of the absolute” (*OHB* 670). Like mysticism, Strickland with his equal emphasis on sensuality and spirituality, encompasses the whole range of human experience. Murdoch very aptly remarks that “[a]rt accepts and enjoys the ambiguity of the whole man, and great artists can seem to ‘use’ their own vices for creative purposes without apparent damage to their art” (*The Fire and the Sun*

82). Strickland's nude of blanche is his first masterpiece, achieved at the cost of her life. This reaffirms the inseparability of good and evil.

Morally Stroeve is at the opposite pole from Strickland. The idea he lives by is that "our true self exists not only in our own person, in this particular phenomenon, but in everything that lives"(WWR I : 373). In order to nurse the ailing Strickland, he gives up his own work. To buy him delicacies, he squanders his money. To keep the convalescent in good humour, he plays the fool. In return for all these, he gets a libre or a sneer. That is not all. Strickland starts working at Stroeve's suggestion, in his host's studio, but ultimately turns him out. When Blanche is about to leave with Strickland, he gives her his own home and half of his savings so that she is not at all inconvenienced. His saintly capacity for limitless generosity is coupled with a total lack of vanity, dignity and manly spirit. He takes to waylaying and badgering the estranged Blanche only to be slapped in the face. For all that, he keeps himself ready to rush to her rescue. The narrator stresses the contrast between the sublime mind and his ridiculous body: "Dirk Stroeve had the passion of Romeo in the body of Sir Toby Blanche. He had a sweet and generous nature, and yet was always blundering; a real feeling for what was commonplace; a peculiar delicacy of sentiment and gross manners" (MS 131-132). Cursed with no many antinomies, he is ill-equipped to confront "the perplexing callousness of the universe" (MS 132). His only weapon against all odds is his never-failing goodness, which is brought out all the more gloriously by Blanche's botched suicide. Even though she is fighting for her life, she refuses to see him. Despite all her cruelty and treachery, the message he sends her through the narrator, the very reverse of Amy's to Strickland, is that "if at any time you want him he will be grateful for the opportunity of being of service to you. He has no ill-feeling towards you on account of anything that has happened. His love for you is unaltered." (MS 137). Of this kind of absolutely disinterested goodness, Murdoch says, "Mystics of all kinds have usually known this and have attempted by extremities of language to portray the nakedness and aloneness of Good, its absolute for-nothingness" (*The Sovereignty of Good* 90.)

Stroeve is also a selfless votary of beauty. On returning home straight from Blanch'e funeral, he chances upon Strickland's nude of her. What with the shock at her pathetic death and hate for Strickland as its cause, he is at the moment too upset to respond to a work of art.

Naturally he mistakes the Blanche of the nude as his wife, and reacts accordingly. Purely personal emotions drive him to behave as a heart-broken husband and as a determined revenger: “Stroeve’s head swam. It was Blanche. Grief and jealousy and rage seized him, and he cried out hoarsely; he was inarticulate; he clenched his fists and raised them threateningly at an invisible enemy. He screamed at the top of his voice. He was beside himself” (*MS* 153). Precisely at the moment when he is all poised to destroy the nude and avenge himself on his rival, he realizes in a flash that it is a superb work of art. He miraculously transforms from an emotionally involved sufferer into a detached spectator:

[...]I had my arm all ready for the blow, when suddenly I seemed to see it,...The picture. It was a work of art. I couldn’t touch it. I was afraid.....It was a great, a wonderful picture. I was seized with awe. I had nearly committed a dreadful crime. I moved a little to see it better, and my foot knocked against the scraper. I shuddered.
(*MS* 153-154)

Schopenhauer explains that an aesthetic object is unrelated to any practical interests on the grounds that “it is nothing actual but a mere picture or image” (*WWR* II: 370). Ortega y Gasset illustrates the same thesis in more concrete terms:

In order to enjoy Titian’s portrait of Charles the Fifth on horseback we must forget that this is Charles the Fifth in person and see instead a portrait—that is, an image, a fiction. The portrayed person and his portrait are two entirely different things; we are interested in either one or the other. In the first case we “live” with Charles the Fifth, in the second we look at an object of art. (10-11)

Stroeve makes the narrator feel the difference between the values in life and in art “it was though I were suddenly transported into a world in which the values were changed” (*MS* 154). For Wilde “emotion for the sake of emotion is the aim of life” (*The Works of Oscar Wilde* 881-882). Stroeve’s response to the nude culminates in his beauty-induced ecstasy as a counterpoint to

Blanche's sex-induced ecstasy. He struggles to express his unprecedented mystical experience in everyday language:

He was like the mystic seeking to describe the ineffableStroeve, the unconquerable buffoon, had a love and understanding of beauty which were honest and sincere as was his own sincere and honest soul. It meant to him what God means to the believer, and when he saw it he was afraid. (*MS* 154-155)

That beauty should occasion Stroeve's mystical experience is not all surprising, for Maugham equates beauty with ecstasy:

The impact of beauty is to make you feel greater than you are, so that for a moment you seem to walk on air; and the exhilaration and the release are such that nothing in the world matters any more. You are wrenched out of yourself into a world of pure spirit. It is like falling in love. It is falling in love. It is an ecstasy matching the ecstasy of the mystic. (*The Vagrant Mood* 80)

In Blanche's downward and Stroeve's upward self-transcendence, body and mind function as the two mediums of the immanent-transcendent absolute.

So impregnable is Stroeve's goodness that he seeks out Strickland, the wrecker of his love and of his life. He invites the painter to accompany him to his home so that he could benefit by his parents' humility and simplicity. This supreme instance of Stroeve's selflessness leaves even the normally level-headed narrator "dumb-founded. I could only look at Stroeve is stupid amazement" (*MS* 155). Stroeve also shares with Strickland the wisdom he has learnt from life. He exalts the beauty of quietness and humility. Himself a victim of fate, he is all for resignation. His reference to the mystery of human origins and of human destiny recalls the title of Gauguin's masterpiece. He believes with Schopenhauer and Gauguin in the world's cruelty. That Schopenhauer is the inspiration for the good but grotesque Stroeve is evident from what he says about pure goodness:

Even the most limited understanding and grotesque ugliness, whenever extraordinary goodness of heart has proclaimed itself as

their accompaniment, become transfigured, as it were, enwrapped in rays of a beauty of a more exalted kind, since now a wisdom speaks out of them in whose presence all other wisdom must be reduced to silence. For goodness of heart is a transcendent quality; it belongs to an order of things reaching beyond this life, and is incommensurable with any other perfection. (*WWR II*: 232)

Maugham himself celebrates pure goodness in equality exalted terms: "Fiction has never enriched the world with a more delightful character than Aloyashs Karamzov.... He has the rarest quality in the world, and the most beautiful, goodness, a native, simple goodness which makes all the gifts of the intellect a little trivial" (*A Writer's Notebook* 141-142).

It is not for nothing that the narrator thinks that "Stroeve was sublime" (*MS* 109). Actually Stroeve embodies Schopenhauer's idea of ethical sublimity. An ethically sublime character is never motivated by an egoistic consideration as he is always guided by dispassionate knowledge. Objective in his outlook, he considers his fellowmen as they are in themselves. He is free from vindictiveness, jealousy and sexual desire. What lifts him above his fellows is that "he will look less at his own individual lot than at the lot of rather as a knower than as a sufferer" (*WWR I*: 207). No wonder, even at the nadir of his misfortune, instead of becoming self-pitying, Stroeve thinks of mankind as such.

Strickland's pictures, the surest clue to his essential self, bring out the contrast between the ignorant "I" as a participant and the enlightened "I" as the narrator. At first sight, he could discern neither the beauty nor the originality of Strickland's paintings. Through subsequent familiarity, he has come close to penetrating into their significance. Their distinctive features are the "simplification" and lop-sidedness of the painted objects and the large size of the portraits. One possible explanation is that Strickland plucks his subject from the stream of the world, makes the infinitesimal part into a self-contained whole, and strips it of the accidentals to change the particular into the universal. He deviates from the original in order to make the chosen subject emblematic of his personal vision. And his personal vision inheres in seeing "some spiritual meaning in material things" (*MS* 171). Bell very pertinently points out that

Where the modern term 'spirit' generally implies a transcendent supernatural dimension, mythic consciousness appears not to have known for our long-standing dichotomy of spiritual and material [.....] Primitive man apparently felt in all aspects of the natural world, [.....], the manifestation of a will and a mentality somehow comparable to his own. (9)

It is worth recalling in this context that the narrator perceives in Strickland "something primitive. He seemed to partake of those obscure forces of nature which the Greeks personified in shapes part human and part beast, the satyr and the faun" (*MS* 111). Like his prototype Gauguin, Strickland regresses at this stage to the primitive state of mind. Anyway the narrator delves beneath the artist's colours and forms to realize that he is intent on expressing not only some state of his own soul but also the soul of the universe: "It was as though he had become aware of the soul of the universe and were compelled to express it" (*MS* 172). This is an implicit statement of the novel's mystical theme. Maugham has chosen an artist for this articulation simply because the artist and the mystic engage in the same mission:

The function of the poet who, for Rimbaud, is identical with the seer (...), is to discover himself, the real self-dormant below on the busy ego. This is the classic doctrine of alchemy, the search of the *lapis*: as it is also the central doctrine of Hinduism, the search for the *atman* or transcendental self. This 'self' Rimbaud appears to identify with 'universal mind' (...) which throws out its ideas 'naturally', that is in accordance with Nature with which it seems to be identical. (Zaehner, *Mysticism* 63)

Unsurprisingly the image that the narrator forms of Strickland from his puzzling pictures is that of a relentless quester for an elusive object: "I see you as the eternal pilgrim to some shrine that perhaps does not exist. I do not know to what inscrutable Nirvana you aim. Do you know yourself?" (*MS* 173) The Parisian section of the novel marks the end of the narrator's direct encounter with Strickland on this note of interrogation.

With the oscillation between the sensual and the spiritual pole behind him, Strickland emerges in Tahiti as a steady spiritualist. As a starter, the narrator visits Tahiti nine years after Strickland's death. He therefore meets the protagonist not in the flesh, but as a spirit in the form of memory of his Tahitian inmates and acquaintances. He skillfully juxtaposes these reminiscences of the man and the artist, which add up to a perspectivist image. He also significantly remarks that "[i]t is as though in this far country [Strickland's] spirit, that had wandered disembodied, seeking a tenement, at last was able to clothe itself in flesh. To use a hackneyed phrase, he found himself" (MS 182). Since Maugham does not believe in the religious idea of the spirit as a divine spark embedded in man, in all probability his "spirit" refers to the spiritual aspect of the collective unconscious, a widely acknowledged source of creativity. After Strickland's stormy affair with Blanche, the narrator discerns in him "a fiery, tortured spirit, aiming at something greater than could be conceived by anything that was bound up with the flesh" (MS 167). This probably prefigures the leprous, spiritual Strickland at his creative best. In any case, Tahiti sees a physically satisfied, spiritually composed Strickland, perfectly attuned to beauty and nature.

While still in Paris, Strickland had, in a state of ecstasy, a prevision of his dreamt-of paradise where he could achieve his culmination (MS 88). The narrator's description of Tahiti as "a lofty green island, with deep folds of darker green, in which you divine silent valleys" (MS 184) squares with the first part of Strickland's vision of the rest of which applies to Ata's secluded hillside cottages: "[T]he place where Strickland lives had the beauty of the Garden of Eden. ... a corner hidden away from all the world, with the blue sky overhead and the rich, luxuriant trees" (MS 220). What is still more intriguing is that on sighting Tahiti, he has a strange sense of *déjà vu* "I knew right away that there was the place I'd been looking for all my life. Then we came near, and I seemed to recognize it. Sometimes when I walk about it all seems familiar. I could swear I've lived here before" (MS 206). Instead of dismissing Strickland's queer feeling as a mere whim, the narrator generalizes about the spiritual misfits. They are driven by "some deep-rooted atavism" to "search for something permanent" or for their spiritual home. He then cites the example of Abraham, a brilliant medical student with a bright future. He has a feeling of *déjà vu* on reaching Alexandria where he settles down for the rest of his life. This stay-

at-home Englander decides by instinct alone: “It wasn’t I that acted, but something stronger within me. I thought I would go to a little Greek hotel, while I looked about, and I felt I knew where to find one. And do you know, I walked straight there, and when I saw it I recognized it at once” (*MS* 209). Obviously it is another manifestation of the collective unconscious. The novel derives its thematic coherence from its systematic demonstration of the absolute’s realization of itself through man and Nature.

A measure of Maugham’s preoccupation with *déjà vu* is that he recurs to it both before and after this novel. The *déjà vu* experience of Mackenzie, the protagonist of *The Explorer* (1907), hints at its origins and at its implications as well:

As sometimes a man comes upon a new place which seems extraordinarily familiar, so that he is almost convinced that in a past state he has known it intimately, Alec suddenly found himself at home in the immense distances of Africa. ... And though he had looked upon romance with scorn of his Scottish common sense, an irresistible desire of the romantic surged upon him, like the waves of some unknown, mystical sea. (*The Explorer* 36)

Fittingly it is the Vedantist Frith in *The Narrow Corner* (1932) who adduces his own experience of *déjà vu* as a confirmation of “the doctrine of transmigration”:

Sometimes I’ve asked myself if perhaps the spark that issued from the fire and formed the spirit of Camoens is not the self-same spark that now forms mine. So often when I’m reading ‘The Lusiads’ I come across a line that I seem to remember so distinctly that I don’t believe I’m reading it for the first time. (*The Narrow Corner* 165)

By equating *déjà vu* with ecstasy, Maugham impliedly claims it as a mystical experience: “I do not know that [ecstasy] is more mysterious than that condition, which the psychologists have not yet explained, when you have a strong feeling that you have at some past time been through an experience that you are in the act of undergoing” (*The Summing Up* 160). James, however, is categorical about the mystical status of the *déjà vu* phenomenon:

A more profound step forward on the mystical ladder is found in an extremely frequent phenomenon, that sudden feeling, namely, which sometimes sweeps over us, of having “been here before”, as if at some indefinite past time, in just this place, with just these people, we were already saying just these things. (*The Varieties* 374)

Precognition, premonition, presentiment or even mind-reading are *déjà vu* in reverse. Perhaps Maugham has used them in the present novel more liberally than in others. To begin with an instance of anticipation: Amy makes up her mind to accept Strickland “a week before he proposed to her” (*MS* 37). And her curse that Strickland will “rot with some loathsome disease” (*MS* 66) proves prophetic. Blanche’s premonition that Strickland will cause them some disaster (*MS* 106) proves literally true. The narrator admits in retrospect that “she had foreseen disaster” (*MS* 125). Interestingly it is the naïve Stroeve who discovers Blanche’s love for Strickland before she herself does (*MS* 122). He also foresees “some terrible catastrophe” (*MS* 135) befalling the estranged Blanche, who eventually commits suicide. Last of all, the narrator’s foreseeing for Strickland “an end of torture and despair” (*MS* 111) suggests Maugham’s deliberate use of the parapsychological phenomena.

All parapsychological phenomena may be subsumed under the blanket term “extrasensory perception”, and traced to their common source along with mysticism. A real pioneer, Schopenhauer holds that the “unconscious part, [...], is common life of all. By means of it they can even communicate in exceptional cases” such as dream, mesmerism, etc. In all these instances of action at a distance, “the will, proceeding indeed from the individual, nevertheless performs in its metaphysical capacity as the omnipotent substratum of the whole of nature” (*WWR* II 326). Contemporary parapsychologists just rehash Schopenhauer’s thesis. Koestler for one accepts the collective unconscious or its analogues as the individual mind’s source of information and its medium of communication as well. He further identifies this “subterranean pool” as the fount of mysticism: “The dominant concept is Unity in Diversity — all is one and one is all. It echoes through the writings of Christian mystics, and is the keynote in Buddhism and Taoism” (*The Roots of Coincidence* 108). Huxley too uses a slightly different vocabulary to

restate practically the same old thesis: “At its fringes this subconscious self-overlaps and merges with not-self, with the psychic medium in which all selves bathe and through which they can directly communicate with one another and with Cosmic Mind” (*The Devils of Loudun* 203).

Humanity’s oneness and communicativeness on the unconscious plane, however, contrast with its aloneness and uncommunicativeness on the conscious plane. “Each one of us”, the narrator emphasizes, “is alone in the world. He is shut in a tower of brass, and can communicate with his fellows only by signs, and the signs have no common value, so that their sense is vague and uncertain” (*MS* 171-172). Maugham thus captures the antinomy inherent in the human condition.

The decks are now cleared for focusing on the narrator’s interviews with his secondaries. The first of them whom the narrator meets in Tahiti, and who enlightens him about Strickland’s stay in Marseilles, after his departure from Paris, is Captain Nichols. The Captain’s story is an example of what Rimmon-Kenan calls an analysis which is “a narration of a story-event at a point in the text after later events have been told. The narration returns, as it were, to a past point in the story” (46). Now to return to Nichols. An intrepid sea Captain, Nichols is totally under the thumb of his domineering wife, which, in the narrator’s words, is “a very pretty example of the triumph of spirit over matter” (*MS* 189). This unhappy man’s “dyspepsia” (*MS* 187) is due to the effect of his troubled mind on his body. Huxley explains the phenomenon thus:

In certain persons symptoms of dyspepsia make their appearance when the conscious mind is troubled by such negative emotions as fear, envy, anger or hatred. These emotions are directed towards events or persons in the outer environment; but in some way or other they adversely affect the physiological intelligence and this derangement results, among other things, in ‘nervous indigestion’.

(*The Perennial Philosophy* 39)

The leprosy-stricken Strickland asserts the victory of spirit over body and negates the mind-body interaction.

Strickland’s life in Marseilles, where he comes to know Captain Nichols, pushes the mortification of his flesh and the process of his desocialization to their term. Eating in a poor

house, sleeping in a night shelter for the tramps, he sheds the last vestiges of his middle-class gentility. From the Captain's description of the pair's shared vagabondage, the narrator receives "the impression of a life intense and brutal, savage, multi-coloured, and vivacious" (MS 191). Refusal of the charities to help them any more forces the duo in the clutches of Tough Bill. This ruthless master of a sailors' boarding-house shelters the stranded mariners in return for their first month's salary. The job opportunities that come the duo's way do not suit them. After being turned out, they subsist on starvation diet and sleep rough. The Captain observes that no adversity could spoil Strickland's natural ebullience. The narrator knows of Strickland's imperturbability. But he is not sure "whether this was due to equanimity of soul or to contradictoriness" (MS 194). The pair finally drift to another shelter for the international hobos: "They belonged to all the countries in the world, but this was no bar to good-fellowship; for they felt themselves freemen of a country whose frontiers include them all, the great country of Cockaine" (MS 195). Unlike the sheltered Stroeve, Strickland explores life far beyond the pale. The fierce fight with the pugnacious Tough Bill drags him down to the bedrock of raw instinct. On top of this, his sight of the Marseilles brothels gives him a glimpse of a hitherto unknown aspect of reality: "Here all the decencies of civilization are swept away and you feel that men are face to face with a somber reality" (MS 197).

Maugham's dialectical life vision prompts him to juxtapose opposites of all kinds. The benign primitivism of Tahiti throws into bold relief the brutal primitivism of Marseille's urban underworld. The narrator's second Tahitian informant is a Jewish trader called Cohen. He employs Strickland as the overseer of his plantation because he is a painter, though a bad one. When he saves enough money to buy paints and canvas, Strickland gets away into the bush. As broke as ever, he borrows two hundred francs from Cohen, and gives him a nonrepresentational picture of his plantation. Because of its strangeness, the Cohens stow it in the attic. After Strickland's death, the picture fetches thirty thousand francs, and the painter is hailed as a genius. Evidently a genius belongs to posterity.

Tiare Johnson, the owner of the hotel where the narrator puts up, is the diametrical opposite of Tough Bill. The narrator says of her that "the great good-nature of her face" expresses her innate "kindliness" (MS 204). Hospitality is such a passion with her that she is

willing to feed any one on the island and for free. Naturally she goes out of her way to help poor Strickland, who cannot resist the pull of the bush. Actually she marries him to a native girl named Ata. Ata feels drawn to him, and owns a bit of property and a house in Taravo, “right away in a fold of the mountain” (*MS* 212). She can therefore meet both his physical and his financial needs. For a change, Strickland is considerate enough to consult Ata’s willingness. Anyway Strickland’s marriage to Ata silences his care and desire, and enables him to live in a free air that a genius needs. It is now that “the bonds of matter are cast aside, and the pure spirit — the pure, knowing subject — remains” (Schopenhauer, “Genius and Virtue”, 80, “On the Art of Controversy”, *Essays*).

A guest at Strickland’s unusual wedding and a visitor to his hillside home, Captain Brunot describes to the narrator the enthralling beauty of the painter’s surroundings. In his words, “the place where Strickland lived had the beauty of the Garden of Eden”. It was “a corner hidden away from all the world, with the blue sky overhead and the rich luxuriant trees. It was a feast of colour.” Strickland’s having “gone native with a vengeance” (*MS* 220-221) is the logical culmination of his steady descent to his instinctual self. Bell remarks of “modern primitivism” as such that it is part of a general concern “with the subconscious mind and anti-rational modes of understanding” (71). Now to revert to Captain Brunot, He is the only Tahitian Frenchman to sympathize with Strickland and admire his art. Though he buys his pictures out of compassion, he gradually wakes up to their intrinsic merit. Though a contemporary, the Captain is Strickland’s “first admirer in the islands” (*MS* 221). Appreciative of both created and natural beauty, the Captain becomes ecstatic in describing the night scene at Strickland’s forest house:

But here there was not a sound, and the air was scented with the white flowers of the night. It was a night so beautiful that your soul seemed hardly able to bear the prison of the body. You felt that it was ready to be wafted away on the immaterial air, and death bore all the aspect of a beloved friend. (*MS* 222)

This description coupled with that of Strickland’s place quoted above, comes very close to representing Schopenhauer’s idea of the sublime:

Such surroundings [as described above] are as it were a summons to seriousness, to contemplation, with complete emancipation from all willing and its cravings; but it is just this that gives to such a scene of mere solitude and profound peace a touch of the sublime.

(*WWR I*: 203)

Himself an artist in life and a devotee of beauty, the Captain describes Strickland in terms similar to the narrator's: "He was eternally a pilgrim haunted by a divine nostalgia, and the demon within him was ruthless" (*MS 225*). In Maugham's scheme of things, both man and the absolute/nature are equally antinomic. The Captain focuses only on the positive aspects of nature.

Dr. Coutras, another Tahitian Frenchman, is the last to share with the narrator his impressions of Strickland as patient and painter. When the doctor visits Strickland, then known as "the Red one" because of his red beard, and diagnoses him with leprosy, the patient is simply incredulous though his "lion-face" is the unmistakable symptom. Evidently total is the insulation of Strickland's mind from his body. He presses the doctor as "the bearer of important tidings" to accept the proffered picture. Significantly at this point in the narrative, both Strickland and Ata revert to biblical English, suggesting thereby that they are latter-day Adam and Eve. So profound is Ata's love for the critically ailing Strickland that she threatens to commit suicide if he deserts her. Lust transmutes Blanche; love Ata: "She was no longer the meek, soft, native girl, but a determined woman. She was extraordinarily transformed" (*MS 234*). Ata's reason for sticking to her man is that of the first woman: "Thou art my man and I am thy woman. She was extraordinarily transformed" (*MS 234*). Spiritual passion makes her as desperate as sexual passion Blanche. Nothing else but the warm tears of the habitually unfeeling Strickland can adequately acknowledge Ata's sublimity. Though antipathetic to him for being a wastrel, Dr. Coutras cannot repress "an unwilling admiration for the stoical courage which enabled [Strickland] to bear perhaps the most dreadful of human afflictions" (*MS 235*). The leprous Strickland comes very close to representing the Schopenhauerian genius. What is noumenal and abiding in man and so free "from all pain and fatality", on Schopenhauer's view, "is the intelligence". Accordingly "[t]he man who is more intelligence than will, is thereby delivered, in respect of the greatest part of him, from nothingness and death; and such a man is in his nature a

genius” (Genius and Virtue” 73, “On the Art of Controversy”, *Essays*). What is more, an affliction tests the mettle of a genius, brings out the best in him, and raises him above the common herd. (Schopenhauer treats “intelligence” here as noumenal, but he considers “intellect” as physical and phenomenal in *WWR II*: 224). Be that as it may, Dr. Coutras distils his professional experience into a generalization that counters Captain Brunot’s rhapsody over nature: “Life is hard, and Nature takes sometimes a terrible delight in torturing her children” (*MS* 235). The Captain and the doctor capture between them the opposite aspects of the absolute.

As he trudges through the thick forest two years later to Ata’s house, Dr. Coutras has the impression of an encroaching “primeval forest” and of an “abode of pain”. Busy as he is “painting the walls of the house”, Strickland refuses to see him. The voice in which he utters his refusal has “become hoarse and indistinct” (*MS* 237), an indication of the spread of the disease to his vocal cords. As the doctor cannot recognize Strickland’s voice, so the narrator and Stroeve could not recognize Blanche’s voice in which she conveyed her refusal to see Stroeve (*MS* 142). Deserted by relatives, ostracized by her neighbours, Ata lives alone with the dying Strickland and her surviving child. In response to the doctor’s commiseration, “she smiled, and there was in her eyes a look of superhuman love. Dr. Coutras was startled by it, and amazed. And he was awed” (*MS* 237). Ata along with Stroeve, the two characters overflowing with loving-kindness, illustrates Schopenhauer’s idea of ethical sublimity. By contrast with the civilized Amy’s vindictiveness and Blanche’s selfishness, the primitive Ata’s selflessness shines all the more brightly. Once again it is Schopenhauer who has the answer to this paradox:

[...] in all that concerns the *will* alone, which includes friendship, enmity, honesty, falseness, and treachery, they are quite homogenous, formed of the same clay, and neither mind nor culture makes any difference to this; in fact, in this respect, the uncultured man often puts the scholar to shame, and the sailor the courtier. (*WWR II*: 231)

After another two years or so, Ata sends a message to Dr. Coutras, telling him that Strickland is dying. As he enters Ata’s room unannounced and unescorted, it takes him a little bit of time to realize that what he sees is the mural of “a great primeval forest and of naked people

walking beneath the trees”. He has the unprecedented feeling of being present at the creation of the world. Strickland has embodied the ubiquitous polarity he has plumbed in himself, in man and in the absolute in his masterpiece that holds the doctor spellbound:

It was tremendous, sensual, and passionate; and yet there was something horrible there too, something which made him afraid. It was the work of a man who had delved into the hidden depths of nature and had discovered secrets which were beautiful and fearful too. It was the work of a man who knew things which it is unholy for men to know. There was something primeval there and terrible.
(*MS* 239-240)

Strickland’s primitivism has enabled him to recapture primordial reality at the beginning of time. The doctor who once dismissed the painter as a good-for-nothing is now compelled to salute him as a “genius”. Ata tells him that the dead painter has been blind for nearly a year.

Dr. Coutras tries to convey to the narrator his impressions of Strickland’s extraordinary mural. He talks of the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve (modeled on Strickland and Ata), of “Nature, sublime, indifferent, lovely, and cruel” (Captain Brunot and the doctor himself are witness to this duality of Nature or the absolute), of nude men and women partaking at once of earth and heaven (represented by the diabolic Blanche and the divine Stroeve). Strickland presents “man in the nakedness of his primeval instincts” (*MS* 242) because these instincts form the substratum of human reality. In order to make his point that one expects to be impressed by Michael Angelo, an acknowledged genius, but not by Strickland, an unknown quantity, he speaks of his feeling on visiting the Sistine Chapel in Rome: “There too I was awed by the greatness of the man who had painted that ceiling. It was genius, and it was stupendous and overwhelming. I felt small and insignificant” (*MS* 242). Maugham is articulating here through the doctor Schopenhauer’s idea of “the mathematical sublime”. Explaining why it can be evoked “by a very high and large dome, like that of St’ Peter’s in Rome or St. Paul’s in London”, Schopenhauer says that

The feeling of the sublime arises here through our being aware of the vanishing nothingness of our own body in the presence of a

greatness which itself, on the other hand, resides only in our representation, and of which we, as knowing subject, are the supporter. Therefore, here as everywhere, it arises through the contrast between the insignificance and dependence of ourselves as individuals, as phenomena of will, and the consciousness of ourselves as pure subject of knowing. (WWR I: 206)

Strickland's gift to Dr. Coutras is a fruit-piece, which testifies to his dialectical vision. Like his other pictures, his painted fruit juxtapose all opposites. They are "like the fruit on the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil" and are "terrible with the possibilities of the Unknown" (MS 246). The calm sublimity of Michael Angelo's pictures all the more emphasizes the troubling beauty of Strickland's masterpiece, destroyed at his fiat. Maugham believes like his mentor Schopenhauer that an artist creates only to satisfy his creative urge: "He has already had his reward in the satisfaction of his creative instinct" (*The Summing Up* 110). Blind Strickland, looking at his mural, must have felt that he has accomplished his life's mission, which is to achieve self-realization through creation. Ata tells the doctor that he "never complained of his fate, he never lost courage. To the end his mind remained serene and undisturbed" (MS 243). It does signal the victory of spirit over flesh. It also does something more. It shows him as a Schopenhauerian genius, who "remains untouched by the fate that overtakes him personally, so long as it does not disturb him in his work. It is thus a life which raises a man and sets him above fate and its changes" ("On Genius" 84, "The Art of Literature", *Essays*). At his death, Strickland is like a mystic, a conqueror of the flesh and of the personal ego. He dies as an explorer of the universe and of the universal self. Through the interwoven themes of love and art, the novel actually delves into the nature of man and of the absolute, and into the relations between them. Which is why, it is as much a metaphysical-mystical novel as *Of Human Bondage*.

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