

The Carnival of Dionysus—An Interpretation Over “Life” in Maugham’s Novels

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Abstract

William Somerset Maugham has long been a world-renowned story-teller. His novels are flat in language but attractive in plots. Humorous plots are scattered in his works, in which characters are labeled as worldly or even mediocre. It is these seemingly vulgar people that nonetheless help interpret profound meaning of life. Moreover, these individuals strike readers as creative, treacherous and adventurous, and on top of that, they voice themselves through Dionysus spirit, which is worth thinking in depth over humanity. Based on *The Moon and Sixpence* and *Of Human Bondage*, this essay explores Dionysus spirit in their heroes whilst discussing their lives’ meaning. The former, Strickland, creates aestheticism, revives and masters his own life rather than becomes a pure idealist. Philip Carey, the latter, as a lonely pilgrim, unleashes authentic desires, anesthetizes pains through Dionysus carnival, creating vigorous life. Instead of unleashing one’s brutal nature, this spirit enhances his life as a way to enrich his life.

Keywords

Dionysus carnival; Maugham’s novels; the interpretation over life; Pilgrim.

1. Dionysus Carnival and Maugham’s Work

In his novel "*Of Human Bondage*", Maugham believes that the ideal life the protagonist Philip expects symbolizes the "moon", while his environment is real world, which symbolizes "sixpence". This provides inspiration for the creation of his next novel. This novel is thus called "*The Moon and Sixpence*". As a stock exchange broker, Strickland has a stable career and a happy family. He and his wife have a son and a daughter. The wife is not considered a beautiful woman, but her loyalty and perseverance to her husband suffice to support the happiness of the family. But life is always dramatic. One day, the agent, who seems to be possessed by a demon, abandons his wife and son, runs away from home, and heads for Paris alone to pursue his dream of painting. He leaves only a farewell letter with only a few lines, which is heartless and inexplicable, before leaving.

Strickland and Philip Carey, the protagonist of "*Of Human Bondage*," are two types of people carved out of the same mold. Their attitudes towards life are strikingly similar. They do not compromise with the secular world, they have independent thinking, and their pursuit of what they love is like an unbridled horse running wild without any obstacles. While the difference between them is that the former brings his zealous pursuit for art to the extreme, his life reborn. The latter's artistic ideal is aborted, and he hobbles his way till the end of his life. They both have common direction but quite different endings. It can be seen that the experience of the latter features most ordinary people, while the experience of the former is out of the blue. The reason is that Strickland's understanding of art is a far cry from that of Philip. Strickland integrates art into his soul—art for art's sake—so that he can completely insulate himself from outside interference; while Philip studies art for the sake of life. He is always full of curiosity about things around, and constantly trying and adventuring. It is the time to change paths when there is a loss of hope. However, there are similarities in their understanding of life, where they

both advocate the use of pain to "stimulate" life. In the painful odyssey, Strickland and Philip reach the same goal through different routes. They deciphered the meaning of life-creating value from nothingness.

For years Strickland lived a normal life. The stable living state should not have been broken, but in his mind, a seemingly comfortable and stable life is a depreciation of life. Mechanical work, unchanging trivial affairs, and noisy social activities dilute the joy of life in real world. He feels that everything is so monotonous, and even jeopardize the height and depth of his life. He put it this way: "As long as there is change in my life—change and unforeseen excitement, I am ready for rocky cliffs and reef-strewn beaches" (Maughan, *The Moon and Sixpence*, 33) Strickland has strong eagerness to find this unforeseen stimulus and to achieve it through painting. In fact, his doubts about secular life are in their embryo in early life. "Perhaps it is only a queer notion of mine (and it haunted me even in those days), and I always feel that in the way most people go through life, something is missing." (Maughan, *The Moon and Sixpence*, 32) When doubts simmer over time and dissatisfaction finally bursts, parting ways is doomed to be the corollary. The ideal of painting filled the vacancy in his life and also helped him complete the stimulation of life. In those days away from home, Strickland is impoverished and desolate, whilst being burdened with secular moral oppression. All his actions and thoughts are regarded as contrary to normality. So much so that most readers think that Strickland is ruthless, selfish, ungrateful and against human nature. He satisfies his wish, at the cost of his family. It is true that on the way of chasing his dream, he also paid a heavy price. He dies on a foreign land, his painting burned along with his life. However, Strickland's embarrassing dream-chasing process is also a state of "Carnival" of Dionysus. After being intoxicated by Dionysus, he is reborn.

2. Dionysus Carnival and Artistic Rebirth

The intoxication of Dionysus fully refreshes Strickland's life. In the Dionysus sacrifice in ancient Greek mythology, the chorus dance in order to worship Dionysus, the god of wine. This song and dance is called "Ode to Dionysus". The word "Tragedy" is derived from the ancient Greek Tragodie or Tragodia. Tragos (goat) plus Ode (song) means "song of the goat" - a song sung by the satyrs, a follower of Bacchus. [See Hong Peiqi, Hong Ye, *Greek Mythology: Dionysus*, Yilin Publishing House, 2013.] In this sense, the other side of tragedy is the singing and dancing carnival. In other words, even if it is tragedy, one would like to be intoxicated in it and dissolve in wild singing and dancing. When someone is immersed in Dionysian ecstasy, their tragedy can become a spring of strength and life. Maughan gives Strickland a strong vitality. In the days after he leaves home, he is penniless, destitute, and hungry. Living in a filthy environment, he suffers from mental torture, disease, and nearly joins the choir invisible. However, Strickland's "tragedy" is essentially based on the principle of happiness. Aristotle believes that the essence and function of tragedy lies in the catharsis of pity and fear, which releases strong emotions and purifies the spirit. This process of purifying the mind is closely related to desire. Lacan proposed that the subject of desire revealed by psychoanalysis can help us re-understand Aristotle's purification theory. From this perspective, the satisfaction of desires purifies the spirit. Has Strickland's spirit been purified? The answer is yes. In order for the spirit to be thoroughly purified, there must be a dual confrontation between the internal spirit and the external environment. When external disturbances are removed, the soul becomes pure. Somerset Maughan's novels are full of this binary confrontation. In "*The Moon and Sixpence*", Strickland rebels against the real world in pursuit of beauty, [see Qin Hong's *Removing the Veil of Color - A Research of Maughan's Writing*, People's Publishing House, 2016.] Thus the soul is purified. As mentioned previously, the reason why Dionysian intoxication can stimulate vitality is because people fully release their inner desires. At this point, the long-term suppressed pain is transformed into joy. This transformation is the pursuit of beauty.

I set off with the hope of finding beauty and romance, being glad that the sea separated me from tormenting troubles, so I found beauty and romance. But I also found something I didn't expect—a new My self. I had been living with people who value civilization since I left St Thomas' Hospital. I began to realize that there is nothing more important in the world than art. I searched for a meaning in the universe, and the only meaning I could find was the beauty in people everywhere. (Maugham, 2018: 130)

During those days when he was living in Paris, Strickland is poor, often intermittent, and on the verge of starving to death. Although Stroeve saves him from dropping into the abyss, Strickland does not need such favors, which are far from the beauty of life in his mind. In front of art, hunger and death seem insignificant. In Maugham's works, his vitality and desire are inseparable. He once said bluntly, it's really annoying that I can't restrain my desire; it imprisons my spirit. I hope one day I can work freely without being dominated by desire. I only know desire. This is normal and healthy. Strickland is fascinated by the catharsis of desire, which includes Komoidia elements. At first, the Dionysian priests in ancient Greece turned desire into joy. In every Dionysus festival, people wearing sheepskins and sheepskins would come to the suburbs in groups, dancing and singing. Later, this tradition evolved into a fixed tradition, thereby developing into a form of art—comedy. The ancient Greek comedy, like the ancient Greek tragedy, originated from the carnival singing and dancing and folk farce in the sacrifice of Dionysus. The original meaning of the ancient Greek comedy (Komoidia) is "song of the carnival procession". [See Hong Peiqi and Hong Ye, *Greek Mythology: Dionysus*, 2013, 12.] In the ancient Greek world, Dionysus sacrifices were purely for the entertainment of the lower-class people, but the upper-class nobles regarded them as a waste, because the citizens of the upper-class society abided by good virtues, and regarded the Olympia Games, polytheism and other activities as gods and took pride in them, which is a symbol of glory and identity. Ordinary people in the city ran in the opposite direction. Since this group was outside of the upper class, they naturally didn't need to pay too much attention to integrity. What they believe in was also driven by human nature. His desperation to release his desire is actually a parody of Dionysian carnival. Desire is not the same as evil, it is just what human nature makes it so. On the contrary, the anti-human concept of abstinence has been criticized. Nietzsche criticized asceticism, pointing out it curbs desire, thus annihilating life. He once wrote:

Pleasure is the sense of power evoked at slight resistance: for in all organisms there is continually the overcoming of innumerable obstacles—this sense of triumph is conscious as a sense of totality, as pleasure, "freedom." On the contrary, if there are serious obstacles, the sense of power cannot be activated. (Nietzsche, 2014: 237) [For details, see Nietzsche's *Complete Works of Nietzsche* (Volume Twelfth) - *Posthumous Manuscripts 1885-1887*", translated by Sun Zhouxing, Commercial Press, 2010, p. 237.]

Nietzsche's "pleasure" arouses moderately explains Strickland's state of mind. The thrill of unleashed desire breeds a sense of power. Nietzsche called it "the will to power". Pleasure is a sense of power, which can only be aroused if it takes small obstacles and displeasure as its premise. (Nietzsche, *The Complete Works of Nietzsche*, 237) He believes that to stimulate life, hindrance is necessary. Desires accumulate strength under the suppression of counterforces and finally burst out. This is the power of life. It is true that before living in Paris, Strickland's unhappiness is suppressed for a long time. On the surface, it is calm, but in fact it is undercurrent. It is not until the moment of explosion that the meaning of his life is given.

Tahiti's life sublimates Strickland's life. From Paris to Tahiti, he is far away from his homeland, becoming an outcast of civilized society, wandering in an ideal kingdom isolated from the real society - a secluded place away from the hustle and bustle. Tahiti is where his dream finally comes true. In this country full of freedom and tranquility, Strickland unswervingly explores his inner aspirations and his efforts bear fruit at the last moment of his life. In this sense, Strickland's life is sublimated by the opposition and balance between the tangible world

centered on materialism and the intangible world centered on fancy. The former offers him the uproar of feasts, the latter gave him a shelter of sacred tranquility. As a trekking pilgrim, Strickland's ideal is to find a refuge for the soul, not just to pursue the achievement of painting. The art of painting is tangible. When one becomes famous, one enjoys a high reputation, then decadence follows one after another. The pursuit of the soul is invisible, however, for it is endless and can even be pursued even when in the other side of world. What is important is that Strickland's pursuit of "beauty" and "desire" has deep cultural roots and logical line in Greek mythology. The greatest feature of the ancient Greek gods is that they combine the identity of gods with humans. These gods are no more noble than humans, and sometimes even more ridiculous and perverted than humans. They are not as morally perfect as the ancient Chinese gods, who created the norms of ethical education for the Chinese. The Greek gods have the same emotions and desires as humans. They are both ordinary and great, noble and depraved. God is the idealized state of human beings, in other words, the existence of God is another state of human life. [Zhao Lin, *The Tradition and Evolution of Western Culture*, 2021, 16.] God lives a sensual life devoured by desire, and in this respect, is more aesthetic than human beings. Just as the Greek gods are obsessed with desire and sensual life, all kinds of characters exemplified by Strickland also pursue the spiritual world beyond utilitarianism. The real value of this pure life of the soul, or the radiance of life ignited by desire, is that undoubtedly it is not branded with ethics and morality. "The relentless pursuit of the ideal of beauty, the aristocratic democratic spirit, and the impulse to self-denial and transcend reality driven by a certain metaphysical essence (oracle, fate, destiny, etc.) The three basic cultural characteristics constitute the fundamental spirit of Western culture," (Zhao Lin, *Tradition and Evolution of Western Culture* 26) "The basic characteristics of this 'transcendent romantic spirit' are the transcending over the real world and the persistent pursuit for the better world. (26) In this sense, each individual has unconsciously created the meaning of his own life, but he does not know that he is "creating". In the process of creating meaning, there is always a belief that can be called "romantic power" that sustains every life.

With the power of romance, Strickland created the meaning of life and activated his own life. In this process, he publicizes that the most precious value of life lies in the fact that a clean soul is freed from the body of secular morality. Only by breaking away from the shackles of morality can a person be integrated with Dionysus, the god of wine, to interpret the truest life beyond the mundane.

In this sense, Strickland cannot be regarded as an immoral villain, but as a Dionysian pilgrim. The pilgrimage to Dionysus must be unfettered. Strickland is not so much pursuing something impractical as pursuing freedom, so to speak. "Perhaps the writer, in creating a villain, is actually satisfying a deep-seated instinct in him. In civilized society, the manners force the instinct to hide underneath the subconsciousness. A satisfaction which he obtains is a pleasure of freedom and liberation." (Maugham, *The Moon and Sixpence*, 191) For many years, he has traveled long distances and suffered torture in pursuit of the voice in the depths of his soul, praying for a peaceful habitat away from the hustle and bustle of civilized society. He finally makes it. As he said: "Sometimes I think of a small island surrounded by a boundless sea. I can be in a secluded valley on the island, surrounded by unknown trees. I am silent and at ease. I want to live there. I think in such a place, I can find what I need." He finally finds this pure land. On the island of Tahiti, he lives with an indigenous girl named Aita. The two have a close relationship and give birth to a son. The three years of life on the island becomes the real value of his life. Driven by his burning desire, he keeps on creating beautiful paintings. Over the course of his suffering from leprosy, only his wife Ata accompanies Strickland until the end of his life. This extraordinary painter creates a kingdom about beauty and desire, and sent his soul into the other world, where his soul is purified and his life stimulated. Except for the pursuit of beauty, everything became unimportant. Even if he dies in a foreign land, he will be worthwhile

by "creating a new world". According to his wishes, Aita destroys the painting after his death, and her heart also gains peace. It is not so much the death and destruction of the painting as the re-creation of life, because his soul has been injected into the painting.

The "spirit of creation" is not only illustrated through the carnival of Dionysus, but taking desire to a new level - the superhuman pilgrimage of constant creation.

3. Dionysian Carnival and Solitary Pilgrimage

Strickland brought his soul to life by creating the land of desire. Life itself has an ending, but on the other hand, it is endless. It is the individual Dionysian spirit and creative spirit that make the extension of life possible. If the destination of life is to turn into dust, it loses its meaning in form. However, the intangible life, or the "logos" of life, always influences the life value. The tangible life is like a tragicomedy actor in front of the stage, and the intangible life is like the invisible "fate" behind the stage. The Logos of life exists with creativity and Dionysian power as the driving force. In this sense, the creative spirit is rooted in the spirit of Dionysus, and life has different values because of the power of Dionysus.

Like Strickland, Philip Carey in *"Of Human Bondage"* is a creator, creating a world where desire runs wild and life burns unquenchably. Why is the power of creation so important that it is the driving force behind life's value? As mentioned above, the form of life is meaningless, but the creative life is meaningful. Nietzsche said in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, "The highest evil is the highest good: and this highest good is creativity.—" (Nietzsche, 78) In other words, every tangible life is rooted in the spirit of Dionysus, without which any life will become water without a source, and a tree without roots. With this spirit, a unique survival philosophy or survival mode has been formed, and we act and think in accordance with this mode. A series of "elements" are created from this pattern. It is these successive elements that make up the meaning of life. In this sense, the spirit of Dionysus is innate, escorted by the spirit of creation, and the two spirits work together to maximize the value of life. For the development of individuals, this is an unbreakable law. "He who must be a creator of good and evil: indeed, he must first be a destroyer, destroying values." (Nietzsche, 78) Nietzsche believes that today the value of life is no longer worthy of belief, it has fallen irretrievably, and there is nothing to hold on to anymore, so a "reevaluation" is proposed. In other words, values that are once regarded as standards are now outdated. The idea of destruction is rooted in the hearts of Strickland and Philip. Facing the decadent moral shackles, they destroy vigorously, and then create boldly. More importantly, the creation of the lonely never ceases. When the old morality is crumbling, the lonely pilgrim makes it collapse with the power of Dionysus, so a new world supported by the spirit of doubt is built on the ruins of the old morality. What the pilgrims create is the "Dionysian life values" in the context of the new world.

The fate of the pilgrims a tragic atmosphere Dionysus's life value. As a pilgrim, he firmly upholds his belief, goes on ascetic journeys alone, and finally arrives at the ideal pure land. The pilgrimage road is doomed to be full of dangers, and the pilgrims themselves almost run into stumbling blocks everywhere. However, this cannot be explained by tragedy, but by tragedy philosophy. As the mouthpiece of Maugham's philosophy, Philip first acts as a pilgrim, and secondly as a lonely hero. Philip's pilgrimage begins with his doubts about God and his rebellion against his surroundings. At the beginning of the novel, a lonely image appears in front of readers. Although he is not as miserable and desolate as the lower-class people in Dickens's novels, the plot at the beginning of the story has already doomed little Philip to a gloomy fate for the rest of his life. His parents pass away prematurely, and he has to depend on others, which was undoubtedly a kind of fear for him when he is young. God has given him a deformed body - with a handicap in his feet, which worsens the situation. The lack of spiritual support and physical disabilities mean that what Philip will face is a wilderness full of thorns. "As an orphan

and the disabled, Philip is destined to be the weak by nature." (Qin Hong, *Research on Maugham's Creation*, 60) Sure enough, in Philip's early years, he is always surrounded by isolation, ridicule, bullying and other shadows, so that this eventually lead to a sensitive personality.

However, is Philip really a weakling? Judging from his mental journey, this may not be the case. Rather than being labeled as weak, Philip's can be explained from multiple dimensions. The first is his doubts about faith. Little Philip lives with his uncle and aunt since he is a child. Since he, young and ignorant, lives in a devout Christian family, he gradually accepts the belief in God's salvation instilled in him by his uncle. Unable to bear the shame of being crippled and disabled, Philip decides to turn to God to redeem his disability. Philip makes a final struggle before casting doubt on the power of God:

He put all the energies into prayer, without being troubled by doubts at all, and had complete confidence in the word of God. The night before he went back to school, he went upstairs to sleep shivering with excitement... but Philip's little room was freezing and his fingers were numb with the cold. He managed to untie his collar. The teeth chattered constantly. It occurred to Philip suddenly that he must do something extraordinary to attract God's attention. So he turned up the rug in front of the bed so that he could kneel on the bare floor; then it occurred to him that the pajamas he was wearing were too soft and might displease the Creator, so he took off the pajamas altogether, praying naked...he knew his foot was healed. Finally he made up his mind and touched the ground with the toes of his right foot. Then he reached out and touched. Just as Mary Ann entered the dining-room to pray, Philip limped downstairs and sat down at the table to eat. (Maugham, 2020: 61)

Philip still fails to obtain God's salvation in the end. Although the collapse of the faith also causes his inner panic, he still take a breakthrough step, breaking with God and establishing a new faith. This act is self-centered and based on the Dionysian spirit. In this sense, Philip's self-belief is more radical, which becomes his sharp weapon to doubt everything. In the 17th century, rationalism swept the whole England. Scientists and philosophers focus their research on the laws of nature and the inner nature of man independent of God's will. Reason becomes the basis for doubting everything, but the existence of the ego cannot be doubted, so Descartes would make such an assertion as "I think, therefore I am". If even the existence of the self is doubted, it means that the history of mankind is a complete farce. The notion of "doubting everything but myself" leads to a tendency towards self-belief, which explains the rationality of belief. The reason why faith is rooted in the heart and will not fail for a long time is because it constitutes the rational support for individuals to criticize others. "Faith is another component of human spiritual structure that is different from rationality and sensibility. It is by no means just a byproduct of ignorance in an age of underdeveloped science, or the result of some kind of coercion, as some people understand." (Zhao Lin, *Tradition and Evolution of Western Culture*, 185) A specific belief is doubtful, but belief itself is not. It is not a subjective product but an immutable internal spiritual function.

The second dimension is Philip's innate adventurous spirit, which provides the underlying logic for his Dionysian carnival. Maugham's lonely fate has taken root since he is a child, but the lonely years do not destroy him; instead, it helps cultivate his character and courage to explore. *Of Human Bondage* describes Philip's adventurous temperament more than once. "He feels that the world he is about to step into is full of disappointment, hesitation, danger and darkness. But the more this is the case, the more he is eager to find out." (Maugham, *The Moon and Sixpence*, 161) As mentioned above, to create, You must first dare to destroy. Creation is impossible without the urge to take risks. Maugham's experience has always been inseparable from the adventurous mentality. When introducing his reading life, Maugham mentioned: "Because I am too curious, I don't have much time to think about what I have read. I can't wait to finish a book so that I can start writing another book." It is always an adventure." (Maugham, *The Moon and*

Sixpence, 87) From the details of Maugham's life, it is not difficult to see that his everlasting thirst for knowledge and novelty pushed him to continue to explore. The desire of dissatisfaction with what he has now constitutes the spiritual basis of his life. Nietzsche also believes that the dedication of the greatest is risk, danger, and death gamble. (Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 77) In this sense, the spirit of adventure is the core of Nietzsche's philosophy as well as the soul of Philip Dionysus' carnival.

The third dimension is the release of Philip's Dionysian power. Dionysian carnival needs to be based on the spirit of adventure. As mentioned above, Philip subtly develops a spirit of doubt and rebellion in the process of growing up, and the final outbreak of rebellion comes from persistent spiritual depression. In the first stage of Philip's growth, his humanity was suppressed for a long time. Because he lived under the same roof as his uncle, his freedom of thought and action is suppressed, and traditional morality deeply showed anti-human violence, which also constitutes why Philip tries his best to smash the barriers in front of him at the beginning of the second stage. After the repression of thought, the repression of sex follows. He feels a distorted emotion from Miss Wilkinson, which greatly affects Philip's subsequent emotional cognition, and more importantly, deep down he forms a paradoxical emotion of desire and hatred for women. Philip's sexual repression begins at an early age. The lack of maternal love in childhood partly causes Philip's sexual repression. Due to the lack of proper maternal love, he cannot experience the transition from maternal love to sexual love, cannot truly understand love, and thus cannot maturely deal with the trivial matters of love. The bleak childhood life makes him sensitive and suspicious, which prevents him from his freely expressing feelings and enjoying them. The only way out is to stay away from them. [See Li Jian, 1993, (02): 112-115.] The psychology of lack of love causes Philip to go to extreme, and his long-suppressed love desire pours on Mildred like water overflowing from a tank.

From another perspective, the relationship between Philip and Mildred is the catharsis of his Dionysian spirit. In *Of Human Bondage*, the waitress Mildred has a low social status and speaks vulgar words. When the two meet for the first time, Mildred makes a bad impression on Philip. There are many reasons for Maugham's portrayal of Mildred's ugly image, two of which are the most striking. First, Maugham himself has a subtle attitude towards women. Qin Hong wrote in *Picking the Colored Veil: Maugham's Creation Research*, "Generally speaking, he hates and despises women, but occasionally he will describe some female images that meet his standards." [Qin Hong, 2016, p. 142.] The female images in his works can be divided into two categories—repulsive and pleasing. Mildred certainly falls into the latter category. Second, according to Maugham's brother Harry, Mildred's prototype is not a girl. [See Li Jian, 1993, (02): 112-115.] This shows that Maugham, as a homosexual, does not intend to beautify Mildred's image. The image of Mildred represents strong feelings, [See Li Jian, 1993, (02): 112-115.] More precisely, the image of Mildred represents Philip's strong feelings. The novel largely describes the love entanglement between Philip and Mildred, and more about Philip's deep love and capriciousness. From Maugham's brushworks, it can be seen that Mildred just takes Philip as an emotional tool to maintain her dignity, and at the same time release her lust. This love has no practical significance for Philip. He cannot ignore Mildred, let alone forget her. He has been deceived, satirized, and insulted by this girl many times, yet his fascination with her has not diminished but increased, which is incomprehensible to ordinary people. Maugham's homosexuality has been criticized, and even he himself felt his abnormality. He said: "I tried to convince myself that I was three-quarters normal and only one-fourth abnormal, but in fact it was the opposite." [Calder Robert, Wille, *the Life of W. Somerset Maugham*, 1989, 37.] In a sense, Maugham embodies this abnormal use of the relationship between Philip and Mildred. Philip is fooled and enchanted by her again and again. He has deeply-rooted hatred to her on the one hand, and the lingering love on the one hand. This almost abnormal paradox can be viewed under Dionysian aesthetics.

If Philip's emotional experience is a complete farce, the life revealed by Maugham will lose its meaning. But the opposite is actually true. This seemingly "farce" entanglement is reflecting Philip's pursuit of pain in order to complete the pilgrimage of self-transcendence, which is precisely a meaning of Dionysus spirit. In the sense of life philosophy, to reach the end of all roads, the painful torture is the only way to go. In the sense of Dionysian aesthetics, suffering is the soul of all things. Nietzsche clearly pointed out in the section *The High Man of Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, "I think you have not suffered enough! For you suffer for yourselves, and you have not suffered for the world." (Nietzsche, 204) In other words, suffering is created, or sought and pursued by oneself. The difference between the people on the high place and Zarathustra lies in this sentence, which is the essence of the spirit of Zarathustra. Zarathustra also injected the power of Dionysus into his heart, turning pain into the source of all joy. Although for the Chinese nation that strives for harmony and unity, philosophers such as Rousseau and Nietzsche whose madness pain and purgatory inside them is an incomprehensible morbid psychology, but this inner conflict constitutes a distinctive feature of Western culture. On the one hand, they have beautiful ideals in their hearts, and on the other hand, they cannot get rid of a sense of sin as well as painful self-examination deep down. Philip's mental torture can be said to be his own fault. Driven by nature, he can hardly restrain the instinctive impulse. Like a wild horse, once the desire is released, he is bound to be difficult to stop. It should be noted that Philip repeatedly accepts her after being deceived by Mildred, in that he still cannot fundamentally get rid of the manipulation of sexual desire in human nature. The release of desire is followed by suffering. Desire can only choose to commit itself to pain when being unable to overcome it. Therefore, the dual integrity of desire and pain also shows that Philip's Dionysian spirit at this time is a painful carnival-like purgatory. This explains a phenomenon of the Dionysian spirit, that is, pain stimulates pleasure, sorrow in the chest bursts out from cry, a cry of terror sounds in bliss, or an eager cry voiced for an irreparable loss. In Dionysus's Dithyrambus, man is stimulated by something. They raise their symbolic powers to such an extent that some feeling that they never have before is eager to vent. This is a kind of destruction of the maya veil—Oneness of God (das Einssein). According to Nietzsche, "Pain is joy." (Nietzsche, 230) Turning pain into eternal joy is the foothold of Nietzsche's thought. Therefore, Philip's Dionysian carnival represents the purgatory of pain, his ending being Joy. Dionysus, the god of wine, used the power of wine to anesthetize himself. The emotional dispute between Philip and Mildred is the climax of the novel, Maugham therefore spends a lot of effort describing any details, even trivial descriptions that have nothing to do with the theme. All of these perfectly describe Philip's exuberant vitality. When Philip gets rid of Mildred completely, he already possesses what Nietzsche called "Superman" quality. He surpasses pain and enhances vitality at the same time. This is arguably bright side. It is precisely because of Philip's Dionysian carnival that he successfully passes through the purgatory of lust, thus gaining a strong vitality and ascending to the paradise of "Superman". In the same way, Philip relies on the power of Dionysus to anesthetize himself with suffering, so that he can fight against pain ecstatically. Unlike Apollo, who represents solemnity and reason, Dionysus, the god of wine, symbolizes life, nature and will. Although the imitation and worship of Dionysus breed pain, the other side of pain is the rewriting and washing of life, which it is also the transcendence of nothingness. Most scholars regard Philip as a pessimist, or even a loser. Instead, the image of Philip's Dionysian carnival reflects the primitive life impulse of human beings, through which we can experience the true appearance of life. Therefore, instead of appearing as a weak person, Philip presents as a tragic hero. Just like Aristotle said in *The Poetics*, "Comedy tends to represent people who are worse than they are today, and tragedy favors people who are better than they are today. (Aristotle, *Poetics*, 38) This is one of the reasons why tragedy is often more powerful than drama.

4. Conclusion

Maugham also lives in an era when the masses suffer from spiritual crisis, which triggers the eternal question of human beings—what is the meaning of life? Somerset Maugham has already given the answer that the meaning of life lies in creating meaning from nihilism. Strickland chooses the path of art, and after his death, he realizes his ideal and the rebirth of his life. Philip anesthetizes himself through pain. It is also a key node for the enhancement of vitality when in the state of self-loss. Philip and Strickland both go through the purgatory of pain, thereby activating life. The former is spiritually joyful, while the latter is painful, but they arrive at the end of the pilgrimage through different routes. Although Greek mythology has been buried under the dust of history, its life, also like a carnival of Dionysus, can be rewritten. It portrays the beauty and ugliness of modern human nature, and constantly brings inspiration and thinking that can discover the inner voice for the new characters. The author believes that the Dionysian carnival cannot be narrowly understood as the venting of barbaric desires, it is the expression of the true inner voice of human beings, instead.

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