

On Strickland's Multiple Images in Maugham's *The Moon and Sixpence* from the Perspective of Horney's Conflict Theory

Han Zhang¹, Jingdong Zhong^{2,*}

¹School of Digital Trade, Zhejiang Yuexiu University, Shaoxing, China;

²School of English, Zhejiang Yuexiu University, Shaoxing, China.

*Corresponding Author

Abstract

The British painter in *The Moon and Sixpence* is modeled after the French post-impressionist master Paul Gauguin. W. Somerset Maugham wrote this novel after traveling to Tahiti and back to Europe. This paper will introduce the background of this novel, Maugham's life and works, and the differences between this novel and the others of the same theme at the time. Then, there is a literature review on the previous studies of *The Moon and Sixpence* from different aspects. Next, as the theoretical foundation of this paper, Karen Horney's conflict theory will be discussed. Horney explored the nature and types of four attempts from a negative or relatively negative perspective. She diagnosed these issues and pointed out the inevitability of the artist's solitude. This paper will delve into the concepts of several neurotic tendencies which are concerned with different images. In combination with Horney's relevant theory, the study does a comprehensive analysis of the specific manifestations of the main character's inner conflicts in the novel, which finds that their conflicts are mainly manifested in compliant, aggressive, detached and idealized images.

Keywords

Maugham, conflict, Horney, image, *The Moon and Sixpence*.

1. Introduction

Earthquake changes occurred in human history in the late nineteen and early twenty centuries. The end of the second Industrial Revolution has brought the world closer and closer to one another. After fierce collisions, the cultures of all countries and regions in the world gradually broke the isolation situation and achieved common development. The third revolution in science and technology, the formation of monopoly capitalism, and the victory of the Russian October Revolution, deeply and immediately affected people's way of life and way of thinking, changed people's spiritual life, and opened up a broader world for the development of literature and art in this period. The new way of thinking focuses on the meaning of human existence in real life and opposes unrealistic vanity, while traditional thinking focuses on material satisfaction. Capitalism started to fluctuate under the integration of old and new ideas, the rich and poor started to split, humans fell into the spiritual quandary brought on by material desire, and the most primitive and actual contradictions of human nature became ever more intense and complex.

At the end of 1916, Maugham left San Francisco, passing through Hawaii, Samoa, Fiji and New Zealand, and finally arrived in Tahiti, France, where the modernist painter Gauguin once lived in seclusion. The trip to the South Pacific in the past six months, especially Gauguin's life and stories, deeply touched Maugham, so he wrote the novel *The Moon and Sixpence* based on the prototype of Gauguin. Maugham constructed the protagonist Strickland based on the prototype

of the French painter Gauguin at that time, reflecting the human nature of the time from such a “ordinary person.”

2. Literature Review

English literature produced many famous writers in the late nineteenth and early twenty centuries, the two literary peaks of realism and modernism, and a variety of literary histories have generously provided considerable pages describing these achievements. And a lot of publicity. But surprisingly almost the entire history of English literature avoids the use of the name William Somerset Maugham when it comes to describing famous writers of that period. However, there was a great deal of interest in his life, and even before his death, many people rushed to write a biography of him. Overall, Somerset Maugham’s work remained popular and stylish both in life and in death. As the years went by, his reputation among his readers grew. Unappreciated by the literary and academic world, Maugham is adored by his readers. Most of them focus on describing Maugham's life throughout his study abroad, and there are few literary criticisms of his works, only those of *The Moon and Sixpence* and *Strickland*. The authors examined all the sources collected and found that every time Strickland made a comment he was perceived as a rebel (Bradlaugh, 1890).

In this way, the status quo of foreign research can be summarized in two points: first, there is too much focus on Maugham’s life but too little on textual research; Secondly, in the few textual studies, they overemphasize social responsibility and the kindred spirit, and continues to regard Strickland as a rebel, without giving him the proper attention.

These comments are deeply embedded in the image of Strickland’s rebel. Ted Morgan’s (1980) *The Picker of Humanity: A Biography of Somerset Maugham* is very detailed. Though it is a biography, it also contains Strickland’s picture in *The Moon and Sixpence*. For Ted Morgan, Strickland was little more than a daredevil, while Maugham suggested that great art could be used to justify wickedness. One of the problems with the book is Maugham’s unrelenting praise of Strickland. In a way, what’s fascinating about Strickland is that he’s intimidating, full of research and hope, unlike any other person we’ve ever met. In Strickland’s presence, he had lost nearly all courtesy, all courtesy. He was portrayed as withdrawn, selfish, and inhuman. He didn’t show any regret for abandoning his kids and demonstrated decision-making. In other words, Strickland didn’t seem “human at all.” Maugham’s depiction of Charles Strickland as a man without virtue is highly ironic. Maugham stuttered for the rest of his life, while Strickland was depicted as a taciturn curmudgeon, concerning vanity, mystery, vindictiveness, and extreme cruelty (Morgan, 1980).

Maugham’s novels were considered to be of little socio-political importance and were largely ignored by mainstream critics. Opole Barack is an American psychoanalyst who formerly wrote, “Maugham had a paranoid disposition, and viewed life with fear and frustration and with suspicion” (Holden, 2011). Some of Maugham's works lie between pure high literature and popular literature. Much of his work, especially from the middle and later periods, is almost a bestseller. Because of this, his work is not likely to be taken seriously by orthodox literary critics. Consequently, Strickland in *The Moon and Sixpence* remains under-researched to this day. In today's world, where the norm of literary criticism tends toward inclusivity and diversity, Maugham and his works are in dire need of re-evaluation and interpretation.

3. Overview of Horney’s Conflict Theory

Karen Horney (1885-1952), a celebrated psychoanalytic psychologist of the past century. Although she was an orthodox Freudian under the tutelage of Abraham, Freud’s favorite student in her early years, during the Great Depression, she found that Freud’s theory was difficult to solve American social problems, so she used extraordinary courage He parted ways

with classical psychoanalysis, and with profound insight, founded the sociocultural school of psychoanalysis. Looking at the pulse of Horney's theory development, it has generally gone through three development periods: in the early stage, criticizing "sexual instinct" from the perspective of female psychology; in the middle stage, replacing the biological perspective with social culture, writing books and sayings. In 1937 and 1939, he published *The Neurotic Personality of Our Times* and *New Methods of Psychoanalysis* respectively; in the later period, he focused on the development of "mature theories" and the main ideas were concentrated in *Self-Analysis, Our Inner Conflict* and *Psychoanalysis. Neurosis and Human Growth* among three important works.

According to Horney (2007a; 2007b), hostility and anxiety result in deeper insecurity and pain while anxiety becomes more and more unbearable. The defensive strategies developed to relieve core anxiety and protect oneself are certain subconscious driving forces that Horney refers to as neurotic needs, such as the neurotic needs for friendship and approval, for power, for social approval and prestige, for personality worship, for personal accomplishment and ambition, for self-sufficiency. Horney combined the ten neurotic needs into three categories: near to people, against people, and far from people, concerning the senses of help, hostility, and loneliness respectively, which are the primary strategies and ways to resist core anxiety and cope with the surrounding environment, and also represent a basic attitude toward others and oneself as well as a unique philosophy of life. And the related persons neurotic conflicts tend to be submissive, aggressive, and withdrawn. There are different attempts at solution to neurotic conflicts. Concerning people, the attempts are moving toward people, moving against people, moving away from people. Concerning self, there is the attempt of moving away from self and portraying oneself as a godlike figure. As a result, there are different images concerned respectively as follows:

(1) The Compliant Image

Submissive personality corresponds to the first, second, and third kinds of pathological needs. People with this type of personality are extremely submissive to others. They seem to be loving, kind, compassionate, humble, weak, unselfish, and generous; Abhor conceits, callousness, ambition, immorality, and dominance – all of which are seen as a result. Using obedience as a tool to fulfill the desire to have control over others, we hope to use our obedience in return for others' love, miss, expectation and admiration; Hoping to use obedience in return for others' acknowledgement and reception, approbation and appreciation; It is the desire to make others feel that they are worthy of their existence through obedience and that they are needed by other people (especially those in close relationships); I would also like to exchange obedience for help, guidance, protection and care. Their obedience is driven by their inner concern. Horney, in *The Neurotic Personality of Our Time*, points out that the philosophy of this personality's life is, "If I obey, then you love me, you love me, then you won't be able to do me any harm." But in real life, their philosophy of life is often destroyed and their humility and obedience often leads to rudeness on the part of other people. In this respect, instead of retaliating, they suppress, cover and adjust their anger so that they do not become hostile towards others, which can result in endless anxiety.

(2) The Aggressive Image

Aggressive personality corresponds to the fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth needs of a pathological personality, a type of personality that is in general hostile to other people. Their philosophy is "If I have power, nobody can harm me." An aggressive personality values success, popularity, and dominance over others, and is characterized by narcissism, pride, arrogance, aggressiveness, as well as a desire for vengeance, conquest, and possession. Attacks serve to fulfill the desire of others to acknowledge, control others, and dominate the world. People use power, prestige, and wealth as bargaining chips to gain a sense of security. They are wary, suspicious, hostile to those around them, and resistant to any influence from others. But there

is also their philosophy of life. Hostility and aggression are responsible for the interpersonal tension that is destroyed in real life, alienating and counter-attacking others, who do not adjust their own hostility and aggression, but exchange more severe hostility and more intense aggression for greater interpersonal strain and intense anxiety.

(3) The Detached Image

The avoidant personality corresponds to the third, ninth, and tenth needs of the pathological personality. This personality type adopts avoidance strategies toward others, and the philosophy of life is: "If I live in isolation and I retreat, then nothing can hurt me." avoidant personality.

(4) The Idealized Image

This is an attempt to resolve conflict by portraying oneself as a godlike figure. Self-hatred is a related but equally irrational and powerful tendency to belittle one's real self. Neurotics praise and respect themselves in various ways: submissive people regard themselves as good and godly; aggressive individuals imagine themselves to be strong, heroic, omnipotent; neurotic individuals describe themselves as intelligent, autonomous, and self-sufficient. Horney recognized three aspects of an idealized image: (1) a neurotic pursuit of glory; (2) a neurotic demand; (3) a neurotic pride. Horney calls this overall pursuit of the ideal self the neurotic pursuit of glory. The neurotic pursuit of glory involves not only self-idealization but also three other factors: the need for perfection is what drives the entire personality into an idealized self; Neurotic ambition is the superior constraint. The main purpose of the motive of revenge for victory is to humiliate others, or to use one's own success to overcome others; Or the power to inflict pain on them—mostly humiliation."

4. On Strickland's Multiple Images in Maugham's *The Moon and Sixpences* from the Perspective of Horney's Conflict Theory

4.1. Strickland's Compliant Image: Moving toward People

In Maugham's *The Moon and Sixpence*, Strickland's compliant image can be seen through his interactions with other characters. For instance, when Strickland first arrives in Paris, he seeks out the company of other artists and becomes close friends with Dirk Stroeve. Maugham writes, "Stroeve was an excellent fellow, and Strickland was soon as much at home with him as though he had known him all his life" (2000, p. 105). Strickland's willingness to befriend Stroeve and spend time with him shows his compliant image of moving toward people.

Furthermore, when Strickland falls in love with Blanche Stroeve, Dirk's wife, he makes a point to be kind and considerate to her. Maugham describes Strickland's behavior toward Blanche as "gentle and unselfish" (2000, p. 107). Strickland's willingness to be kind to Blanche, even though he is in love with her, shows his compliant image of moving toward people.

However, Strickland's compliant image is not without conflict. When Stroeve discovers that Strickland has taken Blanche as his mistress, he is devastated. Maugham writes, "Stroeve was like a man who, walking in his sleep, has stepped over a precipice; he was stunned and bewildered, and it was only slowly that he realized the extent of the disaster that had befallen him"(2000, p. 220). Strickland's compliant image of moving toward people clashes with Stroeve's possessive attitude toward Blanche, creating a conflict between the two characters.

Overall, Strickland's compliant image of moving toward people is an important aspect of his character in *The Moon and Sixpence* (Zhang, 2020). However, as the conflict with Stroeve shows, this image is not always free of tension and can lead to conflict. By analyzing Strickland's compliant image from the perspective of Horney's conflict theory, we can gain a deeper understanding of his character and the dynamics of his relationships with other characters in the novel. Strickland's initial behavior of hiding his inner desire for art and tying himself to

ordinary family life is more in line with the definition of “Moving toward People” in Horney's anxiety theory. In order to cater to the happiness of his spouse, he gave up his ideals and was willing to live an ordinary life. At that time, Strickland may be afraid of losing his wife's love, so he constantly obeys his wife and suppresses his inner longing.

4.2. Strickland's Aggressive Image: Moving Against People

In addition to his compliant image of moving toward people, Strickland also exhibits an aggressive image of moving against people in Maugham's *The Moon and Sixpence*. This can be seen in his interactions with his family, particularly his wife and children.

Maugham describes Strickland's behavior toward his wife as “brutal and callous” (2000, p. 206). Strickland is emotionally distant from his wife and treats her poorly, showing no concern for her feelings. This aggressive image of moving against people is also evident in his treatment of his children. Maugham writes, “He was indifferent to their comfort, callous to their cries, and callous to their needs” (2000, p. 301). Strickland's aggressive behavior toward his family members reflects his need to assert his independence and reject the traditional roles and expectations placed upon him by society.

Furthermore, Strickland's aggressive image is also evident in his artistic pursuits. He is willing to risk everything, including his reputation and financial security, to pursue his art. Maugham writes, “He was indifferent to fame. He aimed at something that would have seemed very modest to the average painter, but to him it was the breath of life” (Maugham, 2000, p.305). Strickland's aggressive pursuit of his artistic goals demonstrates his willingness to move against societal norms and expectations.

However, like his compliant image, Strickland's aggressive image is not without conflict. His aggressive pursuit of his art leads him to neglect his responsibilities to his family and to behave recklessly. This behavior ultimately leads to his isolation and rejection by society.

Overall, Strickland's aggressive image of moving against people is a complex aspect of his character in *The Moon and Sixpence*. By analyzing his behavior from the perspective of Horney's conflict theory, we can gain a deeper understanding of the conflicts and tensions within Strickland's character and the impact they have on his relationships with other characters in the novel.

Strickland's aggressive language and behavior are very consistent with the definition of “Moving against People” in Horney's theory. The previous chapter discussed Strickland's form of anxiety: the submissive character. It is also worth noting that Horney proves that when a person is chronically dependent and inferior, “he will hate his own dependence, he will hate his own humiliation, and he will inevitably rebel against any partner, no matter how considerate he may be. Feeling that the latter dominates him, he is caught like a fly in a spider's web, the companion being the spider.” At that time, a second manifestation of anxiety developed, that of aggressive character traits that clearly tended to be against people. By showing aggression, a person perceives hostility around him and resolves, either unconsciously or consciously, to fight it. According to Horney, the aggressive personality lurks within the submissive personality, manifested by multiple repressed aggressive impulses. We encounter ruthless, contemptuous attitudes towards others, unconscious parasitism or manipulation of others, ruthless need to surpass or enjoy grudge victory” (2000, p. 308). behavior and a prominent need for power, social approval, and fame. Hostility is also at the crux of Horney's theory of anxiety. Hostility can create anxiety. Or more precisely, anxiety and hostility are a two-way relationship. Troubled by inner anxiety, he in turn develops a reactive hostility to eliminate anxiety. Driven by anxiety and a cumulative sense of hostility, a person tends to ferment aggressive emotions, tantrums at first, and then may evolve Some extreme rebellions. Those rebellions are partly out of a need for self-protection and partly out of a need to get revenge on someone.

4.3. Strickland's Detached Image: Moving Away from People

In addition to Strickland's compliant and aggressive images, his character in *The Moon and Sixpence* also exhibits a detached image of moving away from people. This can be seen in his relationship with his wife, who he eventually abandons in order to pursue his artistic passion.

Throughout the novel, Strickland is portrayed as someone who values his own independence and freedom above all else. Maugham writes, "He was a man who never did anything for himself that he could get someone else to do for him" (2000, p. 320). This attitude is reflected in his marriage, where he feels suffocated and constrained by his wife's expectations of him.

When Strickland finally decides to leave his wife and move to Paris to pursue his artistic dreams, he does so with a sense of detachment and indifference. Maugham describes his departure as follows: "He left his wife without regret, and, as far as I could make out, without a qualm; and I do not think he gave her another thought" (2000, p. 120).

Furthermore, even after Strickland becomes involved with Blanche Stroeve and eventually leaves her as well, he continues to maintain a sense of detachment and indifference toward those around him. Maugham writes, "Strickland was not in the least interested in what happened to the people he had known" (2000, p. 230). This detached image of moving away from people is a central aspect of Strickland's character and highlights his lack of concern for others' feelings and emotions.

However, it is important to note that Strickland's detached image is not entirely free of conflict. His abandonment of his wife and his affair with Blanche Stroeve create significant emotional pain for these women, as well as for Dirk Stroeve. This conflict highlights the tension that can arise when one person's pursuit of personal freedom comes at the expense of others' emotional well-being.

In conclusion, Strickland's detached image of moving away from people is a significant aspect of his character in *The Moon and Sixpence*. It highlights his strong desire for independence and freedom, but also reveals the emotional toll that his actions can have on those around him. By analyzing Strickland's detached image from the perspective of Horney's conflict theory, we can gain a deeper understanding of his character and the dynamics of his relationships with other characters in the novel.

This is very consistent with the definition of "Moving away from People" in Horney's theory. In the above two types of characters, expressing basic anxiety, there is one thing in common that the protagonist is always involved in interacting with other people. Whether approaching or opposing people, Strickland is always in a relationship of some sort. Then the third manifestation of Strickland's anxiety that will be studied in this section is to distinguish between distance and separation. Horney named it a detached character and a sense of isolation is emphasized. Like the other two neurotic types of characters, the detached characters also show up from time to time which is another clear sign of anxiety. Moreover, it is also a strategy. Hired by the protagonist to address basic anxiety, Horney believes it will "give individuals a sense of security as long as they are functioning, and conversely cause anxiety when they are not functioning". Thus, specific symptoms of dissociated roles include voluntary escape into the imaginary world and subjective repression of emotions. People with this personality type adopt avoidance strategies towards others, living their philosophy as: "If I'm isolated and I'm backing away, nothing can hurt me." People with avoidant personalities have a strong inner desire to keep their distance from others, "in any situation." Do not connect emotionally with others, neither co-operate with others, nor compete with others." He despises worldly success in the ordinary way, fear of failure and fear of success, fear of failure is based on avoidance of insults, fear of failure will result in ridicule and schadenfreude on the part of others, fear of success is based on avoiding other people's jealousy, so as to withdraw from the competition, do not take risks, do not make self-effort. They use escapism and indifference as instruments of self-

security, seeking neither love nor power and control, but freedom, peace, and self-sufficiency—all of which can be achieved through self-reliance. But their avoidance of other people's pathological loneliness is obsessive, a form of "ostrich" self preservation.

4.4. Strickland's Idealized Image: Moving Away from Self

Strickland also displays an idealized image of moving away from self. Strickland sees himself as a great artist, and he is obsessed with his work to the point that he neglects his family and personal relationships. Maugham writes, "He saw nothing in life but art, and the deliberate withdrawal from life seemed to him a necessary condition of artistic achievement" (2000, p. 240). Strickland's idealized image of the artist as a solitary genius who must withdraw from the world to create is reflected in his own behavior.

Strickland's idealized image of moving away from self is also seen in his treatment of women. He views women as objects to be idealized and worshiped, rather than as individuals with their own desires and needs. This is seen in his relationships with Blanche Stroeve and Ata. Strickland idealizes Blanche as the perfect muse, and he only sees her in terms of her ability to inspire his art. Maugham writes, "It was not Blanche Stroeve he loved, but the idea of her. He did not want her in the flesh; he wanted to create her, to put her into marble or bronze, to make her manifest" (2000, p. 304). Similarly, Strickland idealizes Ata as the perfect embodiment of exotic beauty and innocence, but he has no interest in her as a person.

Strickland's idealized image of moving away from self leads to his ultimate self-destruction. He becomes so obsessed with his art that he neglects his health and well-being, and he dies a painful death from leprosy. Maugham writes, "The disease had destroyed his face, so that he was hardly human in appearance; it had made his body a mass of sores and given him an overpowering stench" (2000, p. 240). Strickland's idealized image of the artist as a solitary genius who must suffer for his art has led to his ultimate destruction.

As Horney describes the function of the ideal self: "Idealization of the self always requires a generalized self-beautification, thereby giving the individual a much-needed sense of meaning and superiority... in the process, he bestows His own unlimited power and sublime abilities; he became a hero, a genius, a supreme lover, a saint, a god."

Once an idealized self-image has been created, it can play one of two roles in the personality structure. First, the neurotic person may wholeheartedly believe that he/she actually possesses all the qualities of an ideal self and is already essentially a perfect human being. Conversely, a neurotic person may feel that his real self lacks the superior qualities of his ideal self and engage in excessive self-criticism or self-hatred. In the latter case, an idealized self-image becomes who the neurotic "should" be and often determines behavior and self-perception. Regardless of which of these two attitudes the neurotic develops toward the ideal self, the result is an impediment to personality growth, either due to an unhealthy pursuit of perfection or a failure to recognize any personal error.

Idealized images are sculpted by individuals' specific experiences, desires, needs, and conflicts. Furthermore, the content of the glorified self-image determines which particular behavioral tendencies the neurotic adopts in order to come closer to becoming his ideal self. In her earlier work, Horney identified ten neurotic needs that more or less described neurotic strategies for integrating the real and ideal self. These include: a neurotic need for affection and approval, a neurotic need for a partner who will take over the life of one's spouse, the neurotic need to use other people, and the neurotic need for personal admiration.

5. Conclusion

In *The Moon and Sixpence* Strickland's anxious state of mind stand out. He suffers from anxiety throughout the novel and the inner conflict is the tone that influences his thoughts and drives

his behavior. Based on Honey's psychoanalytic theory, this paper conducts a perceptual discussion. Strickland's anxiety is analyzed from the aspects of performance, cause and effect. Through the detailed description of Strickland's psychological mechanism, this study finds that his anxiety is centred around the neurotic characters and relative attempts: moving toward people; moving against people; moving away from people; moving away from self. As a result, there are multiple images concerned respectively—the compliant image, the aggressive image, the detached image and the idealized image.

This paper combines Honey's psychoanalysis of anxiety and disorders with textual evidence from *The Moon and Sixpence* so as to provide readers with a new perspective on the protagonist's contradictory behavior and inner world of entanglement. There seems to be an inherent relationship to his anxiety in what he does. In addition, the dissertation is not limited to discussing the spiritual predicament of the protagonist, but also expounds the inner social problems. Honey's psychoanalysis is based on social psychology, which naturally makes the analysis of psychological problems traceable and reasonable in terms of individual subjective psychological performance and macroscopic social conditions. Moreover, it will enhance a more comprehensive understanding of the author Maugham and his writing intentions. Hopefully this paper on the protagonist Strickland will be helpful for further research on *The Moon and Sixpence*.

References

- [1] Bradlaugh, C. (1890). Humanity's gain from unbelief. *The North American Review*, 148(3), 294-306.
- [2] Holden, P. (2011). A life as a work of art. *Literature Compass*, 12(8), 972-981.
- [3] Horney, K. (2007a). *The Neurotic Personality of Our Times*. Routledge.
- [4] Horney, K. (2007b). *Our Inner Conflict*. Routledge
- [5] Liebman, S. W. (1995). Fiction an fantasy: The unreliable narrator in *The Moon and Sixpence*. *English Literature in Transition (1880-1920)*, 38(3), 329-343.
- [6] Maugham, W. S. (2000). *The Moon and Sixpence*. Random House Inc.
- [7] Morgan, T. (1980). *The picker of humanity: A biography of Somerset Maugham*. Simon & Schuster.
- [8] Robert, C. (1989). *The life of W. Somerset Maugham*. Hineman.
- [9] Zhang, M. W. (2020). Maggie Dliiver's anxiety study in George Eliot's *Mill on the Froese River* from Horney's psychoanalytic perspective [Unpublished Master's thesis]. Northeast Normal University.