

SOMERSET MAUGHAM'S ARTISTIC SKILLS OF CHARACTERIZATION: PSYCHOLOGICAL DEPTH AND MORAL AMBIGUITY IN HIS NOVELS

Zebiniso Nigmatullayeva Akbarovna

Asia International University

zebiniso.n.a@mail.ru

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Annotation. This article explores the artistic skills of W. Somerset Maugham in creating rich, multi-dimensional characters within his narratives. Maugham's approach to characterization is notable for its psychological depth, realism, and acute observation of moral ambiguity, which together create a compelling exploration of the human condition.

By examining his structural techniques across seminal novels—including *Of Human Bondage*, *The Painted Veil*, *The Moon and Sixpence*, and *The Razor's Edge*—this study illustrates how Maugham crafts protagonists who transcend simple literary archetypes. His characters are presented as intricate individuals whose internal conflicts, flaws, and existential journeys resonate with readers. The article highlights how Maugham utilizes sharp dialogue, physical symbolism, and shifting social environments to expose the complex motivations and vulnerabilities governing human behavior.

Key words: Characterization, psychological depth, realism, moral ambiguity, dialogue, isolation, human condition, narrative technique, literary legacy.

Аннотация. В данной статье исследуется художественное мастерство У. Сомерсета Моэма в создании ярких, многомерных персонажей. Подход Моэма к характеристике отличается глубоким психологизмом, реализмом и тонким анализом моральной неоднозначности, что в совокупности представляет собой убедительное исследование человеческой природы.

На примере анализа его ключевых романов («Бремя страстей человеческих», «Узорный покров», «Луна и грош», «Острые бритвы») в статье демонстрируется, как писатель создает персонажей, выходящих за рамки простых литературных архетипов. Персонажи Моэма предстают как сложные личности, чьи внутренние конфликты, недостатки и экзистенциальные поиски находят глубокий отклик у читателя. Рассматривается, как автор использует емкий диалог, физический символизм и смену социальной среды для раскрытия скрытых мотивов и уязвимостей человеческого поведения.

Ключевые слова: Характеристика, психологическая глубина, реализм, моральная неоднозначность, диалог, изоляция, человеческое состояние, повествовательная техника, литературное наследие.

Annotatsiya. Mazkur maqolada taniqli ingliz adibi Uilyam Somerset Moemning o'z asarlarida ko'p o'lchamli, serqirra va yorqin qahramonlar obrazini yaratishdagi yuksak badiiy mahorati tadqiq etiladi. Moemning xarakter yaratishga bo'lgan yondashuvi chuqur psixologizm, realizm va ma'naviy ziddiyatlarni (moral ambiguity) o'tkir kuzatish qobiliyati bilan ajralib turadi, bular esa inson tabiati manzarasini teran ochib berishga xizmat qiladi.

Yozuvchining “Inson qulligi”, “Bo'yalgan parda”, “Oy va sariq chaqa” hamda “Tig' uchi” kabi yirik romanlari misolida qahramonlarning oddiy syujet vositasi emas, balki murakkab ziddiyatlar, ichki kechinmalar va ekzistensial izlanishlar egasi ekanligi ko'rsatib berilgan. Maqolada Moem

qahramonlar nutqi (dialog), jismoniy simvolizm va ijtimoiy muhit o'zgarishidan foydalanib, inson xulq-atvorini boshqaradigan yashirin motivlar va zaifliklarni qanday ochib berishi tahlil qilinadi.

Kalit so'zlar: Xarakterlash, psixologik teranlik, realizm, ma'naviy ziddiyat, dialog, izolyatsiya, inson holati, hikoya qilish texnikasi, adabiy meros.

Introduction

W. Somerset Maugham remains one of the most widely read and enduring satirists and novelists of 20th-century English literature. Renowned for his lucid prose style and unblinking clinical observation of human behavior, Maugham's true genius lies in his artistic skill in crafting authentic characters. His narratives do not merely offer engaging plots; they serve as psychological landscapes where the complexities of human nature are dissected under a magnifying glass.

Maugham's characters are never purely heroic or entirely villainous. Instead, they occupy a realistic middle ground, wrestling with conflicting desires, societal constraints, and internal contradictions. Through a brilliant integration of autobiographical realism, sharp irony, and empathetic detachment, Maugham creates figures that capture the messy realities of identity, morality, and individual freedom. This article aims to analyze the narrative and stylistic techniques Maugham employs to construct these multi-dimensional characters, demonstrating how his approach elevates the thematic depth of modern realistic fiction.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, analytical approach grounded in literary criticism, structural analysis, and psychological character evaluation. The framework is divided into five interrelated dimensions:

- **Textual and Stylistic Analysis:** A close reading of core text segments from Maugham's major novels to isolate his methods of direct and indirect characterization, focusing on physical descriptions, speech patterns, and recurring behavioral motifs.
- **Thematic Integration:** Evaluating how Maugham uses his characters as conduits for primary themes, specifically the search for spiritual or existential liberty, the toxicity of infatuation, and the constraints of bourgeois social norms.
- **Psychological and Psychoanalytic Framing:** Applying psychological concepts—such as the conflict between the ego and self-destructive impulses, and the manifestation of trauma through physical or emotional withdrawal—to decode his protagonists' choices.
- **Comparative Character Assessment:** Placing Maugham's realistic, un-idealized character models alongside the romanticized types found in late Victorian fiction and the fragmented subjectivities of early modernist writers.
- **Critical Synthesis:** Merging textual evidence with historical and contemporary scholarly criticism to establish a definitive perspective on Maugham's structural contribution to the art of the novel.

Key Pillars of Maugham's Characterization

To fully appreciate Maugham's artistic execution, it is helpful to outline the structural techniques that define his approach to character development.

- **Flawed Realism:** Avoiding the trap of idealization, Maugham roots his characters in everyday human frailty. Vanity, selfishness, jealousy, and vulnerability are displayed openly alongside virtue.
- **Physicality and Somatic Symbolism:** External traits or physical imperfections frequently mirror a character's internal landscape or psychological limitations (e.g., Philip Carey's clubfoot).

- **The Mask of Social Satire:** Maugham excels at showing the tension between the polite, superficial persona a character presents to society and their raw, chaotic subconscious drives.
- **Atmospheric and Geographical Dislocation:** Moving characters out of their familiar Western environments (sending them to the South Seas, China, or rural ashrams) stripping away their societal armor to reveal their true, untamed selves.
- **Moral Ambiguity:** Maugham frequently explores characters who break traditional moral codes yet achieve a strange kind of personal authenticity or spiritual liberation through their transgression.

Discussion

Maugham's mastery of character creation is driven by his profound comprehension of human psychology and interpersonal dynamics. Rather than forcing characters to fit a neat, predetermined moral narrative, Maugham allows their human inconsistencies to dictate the trajectory of the plot.

Novel	Central Character	Primary Character Trait / Flaw	Mechanism of Character Evolution
<i>Of Human Bondage</i> (1915)	Philip Carey	Hypersensitivity; crippling emotional vulnerability	Self-acceptance achieved through suffering, romantic disillusionment, and embracing ordinary life.
<i>The Painted Veil</i> (1925)	Kitty Fane	Superficial vanity; moral blindness	Forced geographical exile into a cholera epidemic, sparking profound spiritual awakening and self-reliance.
<i>The Moon and Sixpence</i> (1919)	Charles Strickland	Monomaniacal obsession; absolute lack of empathy	The total destruction of his social and moral identity to achieve pure, uncompromised artistic expression.
<i>The Razor's Edge</i> (1944)	Larry Darrell	Existential restlessness; detachment from materialism	A deliberate rejection of Western bourgeois success in favor of Eastern mysticism and inner peace.

The Psychological Anatomy of Vulnerability: *Of Human Bondage*

In his masterpiece, *Of Human Bondage*, the protagonist Philip Carey serves as a profound study in psychological realism. Philip is burdened with a clubfoot—a physical deformity that Maugham uses as a brilliant somatic metaphor for Philip's deep-seated insecurity, hypersensitivity, and social alienation.

Philip's artistic skill development is marked by a series of illusions and painful disillusionments. His toxic, irrational infatuation with the cold, vulgar waitress Mildred Rogers is not painted as a romantic tragedy, but as a clinical study in emotional masochism. Maugham demonstrates that human beings are frequently prisoners of their own irrational passions. By charting Philip's slow, agonizing liberation from his obsessions, Maugham constructs a character whose final embrace of an ordinary life feels triumphant precisely because it is born out of unvarnished suffering and genuine self-knowledge.

Moral Ambiguity and the Destruction of Bourgeois Ideals: *The Moon and Sixpence*

In *The Moon and Sixpence*, inspired by the life of painter Paul Gauguin, Maugham explores characterization through a lens of terrifying **moral ambiguity**. Charles Strickland is a middle-aged, unremarkable London stockbroker who suddenly abandons his wife, children, and comfortable social standing without a shred of remorse. He does not leave for another woman or out of conventional malice; he is driven by an elemental, demonic urge to paint.

"Strickland was an odious man, but I still think he was a great one. He was single-hearted in his aim, and to achieve it he was willing to sacrifice not only himself—many do that—but others. He had a vision."

— W. Somerset Maugham, *The Moon and Sixpence*

Maugham's artistic brilliance here lies in his refusal to soften Strickland's monstrous nature. Strickland is cruel, completely indifferent to human suffering, and devoid of basic empathy. Yet, Maugham forces the reader to admire his absolute authenticity and his complete freedom from the hypocritical trammels of society. Through Strickland, Maugham challenges conventional definitions of morality, suggesting that the birth of transcendent art sometimes requires the total annihilation of conventional human decency.

Dislocation and Spiritual Metamorphosis: *The Painted Veil* and *The Razor's Edge*

Maugham frequently utilizes geographic dislocation as a catalyst for character evolution. In *The Painted Veil*, Kitty Fane is initially introduced as a shallow, vain, and flirtatious product of Edwardian high society. Her evolution begins only when her betrayed husband, Walter, forces her into the heart of a deadly cholera epidemic in rural China.

The harsh reality of death strips away Kitty's superficial social mask. Maugham avoids a sentimental transformation; Kitty does not become a saintly figure overnight. Instead, through her exposure to the selflessness of French nuns and the devastating loss around her, she develops a gritty, hard-won resilience and an understanding of personal responsibility. She evolves from a dependent, weak-willed girl into a woman demanding her own emotional and intellectual independence.

Similarly, in *The Razor's Edge*, Larry Darrell undergoes a radical transformation following the trauma of witnessing death in World War I. While his fiancée Isabel represents the static, material desires of Western society, Larry becomes a wanderer seeking higher truths. Maugham uses Larry as a philosophical foil to highlight the superficiality of the American upper class, crafting a character whose quiet serenity stands in sharp contrast to the chaotic, tragic downfalls of those around him.

Conclusion

In conclusion, W. Somerset Maugham's artistic skills in character creation remain a foundational cornerstone of 20th-century realistic literature. His characters endure because they are anchored in psychological depth, uncompromised realism, and a nuanced understanding of moral ambiguity. By carefully balancing sharp, revealing dialogue with somatic symbolism and geographical journeys, Maugham moves far beyond flat character archetypes.

His protagonists are ultimately defined by their struggles against internal and external bonds, offering readers a timeless, clear-eyed mirror into the strengths and weaknesses of the human condition. As literary scholarship continues to reassess the modern novel, Maugham's intricate, deeply human portraits stand out as enduring testaments to the complex art of storytelling.

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