

An Exploration of Philip's Upbringing in Of Human Bondage

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Abstract

Of Human Bondage is a growing-type novel, which tells the story of the complete life process of the protagonist Philip from childhood to marriage, finding freedom in the shackles of family, love, friendship, campus, art and ideals. His upbringing was full of struggles. The physical defects, the loss of parents from childhood, the road to study is bumpy, and the face of many difficulties in love. Every step of his life is a testament to his freedom from bondage. This paper mainly interprets Philip's growth experience from the perspective of Erikson's personality development theory and analyzes how he continues to mature psychologically and emotionally, and finally obtains inner freedom and peace, as well as the personality characteristics presented in different life stages. At the same time, combined with the literary classic of the theme of growth, this paper discusses the profound enlightenment about human nature, growth and the meaning of life shown in the novel, which provides guidance and thinking for us when facing the difficulties of life.

Keywords

Growing Up; Philip; Bondage; Erickson's Theory Of Stages Of Psychosocial Development

1. Introduction

William Somerset Maugham (1874–1965) was a renowned realist writer in 20th-century British literature. He was a British novelist and playwright. His representative works include the play *The Circle*, the novels *Of Human Bondage* and *The Moon and Sixpence*, as well as short story collections such as *The Trembling of a Leaf* and *Ah King*.

Maugham's personal experiences had a profound influence on his writing. He was a man of a unique character. At the age of eight, he lost his mother to illness. He suffered from a congenital stammer and was raised by his uncle. Forced to become independent from a young age, he made a living by writing plays and novels. From a familial perspective, his life was far from happy. His physical condition and perhaps a deep-seated sense of inferiority gave him a powerful drive—a stronger desire to express himself and to compensate through writing. The lack of maternal love in his

early years made it difficult for him to express affection. He was awkward and extremely uncomfortable with friendliness and warmth from others, especially physical contact. However, this emotional restraint also sharpened his sensitivity to human interaction. Maugham observed people and their behaviors with remarkable insight. A great writer is often a great observer, and Maugham excelled at viewing life from the sidelines, keenly capturing the traits of individuals and the essence of events. In 1890, he studied at the University of Heidelberg, where he immersed himself in the works of Balzac, Flaubert, and Maupassant. These writers deeply shaped his creative style, imbuing it with clarity, detachment, and a calm optimism. Their influence left a lasting mark on his later literary career.

Of Human Bondage, published in 1915, is one of Maugham's most significant novels and a cornerstone of his literary career. Strongly autobiographical in nature, the novel is inspired by Maugham's own life experiences. It tells the story of Philip Carey, the protagonist, from his lonely childhood—after the death of his parents and being raised by his uncle—to his journey of self-discovery and quest for freedom, as he seeks to break free from the “bondage” that holds him back. Philip's physical disability—a clubfoot—intensifies his sense of inferiority and serves as the first of many chains he must confront on his path to growth. The novel chronicles his emotional and intellectual struggles through art, medicine, love, and human relationships. It delves deeply into the conflict between the human desire for freedom and the many forms of bondage imposed by society, emotional entanglements, economic pressures, and inner self-doubt. And its captivating plot and elegant prose not only portray a man's journey from confusion to self-realization, but also explore the deeper meaning and value of life. Through Philip's story, Maugham uses a realist narrative style to depict human suffering, hope, and struggle, conveying his philosophical reflections on existence: that true freedom lies in accepting the nature of life, transcending superficial desires, and seeking inner peace.

2. Related Conception and Theory

As one of the literary themes, growth has a very important position in the history of Chinese and foreign literature. The Bildungsroman we often see is called Bildungsroman in German and Initiation story in English. Initiation comes from humanology, which means that after experiencing various trials and tempering of life, Adolescence acquires the ability to cope with society, life experience and confidence to survive, and thus enters another new stage of life -- adulthood. Bildungsroman is different from children's literature and are also different from young adult literature. Bildungsroman are a part of young adult literature, but the scope of young adult literature is much larger than Bildungsroman. From the physiological and psychological point of view, a person's age is directly proportional to his growth index, but “growth” is not only a matter of a person's physiological maturity, it involves an individual's thinking about nature, society, life and self. What is a Bildungsroman?

Simply put, it is a novel that depicts the growth and experience of a character. Through the narration of the growth experience of a certain person or several people, it shows the change course of the character's thought and psychology from childish to mature. It also needs to be interpreted from different theoretical perspectives to help us better understand the significance of Bildungsroman.

2.1. Bildungsroman

The theoretical basis of Bildungsroman comes from a variety of literary, philosophical, psychological and cultural traditions. Here are some of the main sources of theories.

First included in German Idealism and Romanticism are: Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe is generally regarded as the father of the Bildungsroman. His novels emphasize self-growth through experience, self-reflection and integration into society. G. W. F. Hegel's philosophy of history and theory of self-consciousness fit in with the structure of the bildungsroman, which describes a process from alienation to self-growth and realization. Wilhelm Dilthey connected Bildungsroman with the development of history and culture, and believed that it was the embodiment of humanistic ideals.

Secondly, the Realism and the Novel Form include: Mikhail Bakhtin's *The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism*, which points out that Bildungsroman should be distinguished from other types of novels, emphasizing the changes of the protagonist in the passage of time; Georg Lukács explores how Bildungsroman expresses the strained relationship between individuals and society, and reflects the broader social and historical changes.

Then in Psychoanalysis and Developmental Psychology include: The concepts of identity, subconsciousness and repression proposed by Sigmund Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) have influenced the psychological interpretation of bildungsroman. Carl Jung's concept of "individuation" is actually a process of self-realization, which is closely related to the growing journey of the hero in the Bildungsroman. Erickson's psychosocial development theory, especially its discussion of identity crisis, fits in well with the concern of individual growth in bildungsroman.

Finally, Poststructuralist and Feminist Critiques question the linear growth mode and stable subjectivity of traditional bildungsromans, emphasizing the rupture and discontinuity of identity. Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault reveal the precariousness of growing up, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar criticize traditional Bildungsroman for ignoring female growth or limiting it to socially defined roles, Susan Fraiman explores alternative paths for female protagonists. The postcolonial perspective significantly questioned the Eurocentric concept of bildungsromans. Frantz Fanon explored the identity conflict between colonizers and the colonized, while Edward Said challenged the way Western cultural narratives constructed identities. Postcolonial authors reinterpreted the traditional framework of bildung by highlighting themes of identity fragmentation and resistance against colonial history, thereby undermining

established narratives.

2.2. Erikson's Theory of Stages of Personality Development

Erikson's theory of stages of personality development provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how individuals grow and adapt throughout life. The theory divides human development into eight stages, each characterized by a specific psychosocial crisis that shapes personality.

Trust vs. Mistrust (Infancy): Establishing trust through consistent care is fundamental (Erikson, 2021, p. 54).

Autonomy vs. Shame/Doubt (Early Childhood): Building autonomy through exploration and encouragement (Erikson, 2021, p. 66).

Initiative vs. Guilt (Preschool): Developing initiative through creativity and responsibility (Erikson, 2021, p. 78).

Industry vs. Inferiority (School Age): Mastering skills to build competence and confidence (Erikson, 2021, p. 89).

Identity vs. Role Confusion (Adolescence): Defining personal identity and life goals (Erikson, 2021, p. 98).

Intimacy vs. Isolation (Young Adulthood): Forming deep, meaningful relationships (Erikson, 2021, p. 107).

Generativity vs. Stagnation (Middle Adulthood): Contributing to society through work and family (Erikson, 2021, p. 109).

Integrity vs. Despair (Old Age): Reflecting on life with a sense of fulfillment or regret (Erikson, 2021, p. 110).

These eight stages are determined by heredity and each stage will encounter a crisis, only when the crisis is solved can we smoothly enter the next stage, and the smooth development of each stage will obtain certain personal characteristics. In terms of crisis handling, Erikson believes that the solution to the crisis is not necessarily entirely positive or negative, and the solution of the crisis contains both negative and positive factors. Only when the proportion of positive factors is greater than that of negative factors can the crisis be said to be solved (Erickson, 2021, p. 113).

1). Industry vs. Inferiority: In Erick Erickson's Identity and the Cycle of Life, the chapter "Low Self-esteem and Diligence" deeply explores the core psychosocial conflict experienced by school-age children - diligence versus low self-esteem. This stage is an important turning point for children to move out of the home, into school and into the wider society, where they begin to acquire skills through study and practice and strive to meet the expectations of society. If their efforts are seen and their talents recognized, they will gain a deep sense of accomplishment and build confidence to face the challenges ahead. This joy of recognition is not only the driving force for their growth, but also the cornerstone that shapes their positive outlook on life. However, if their efforts are ignored, they frequently fail, or they are frustrated by harsh criticism and unfair comparison, they are prone to low

self-esteem, start to doubt their own abilities, and even believe that they are not as good as others. At this critical stage of development, school plays a crucial role - not only as a place where knowledge and skills are transferred, but also as a stage where children learn to cooperate, build confidence, and experience healthy competition. However, if the education system is too rigid, focusing only on standardized grades and ignoring the needs of individual children, some children may feel neglected and even develop lasting psychological insecurity. This period is significant for personality development, encouraging and nurturing children's abilities not only to shape their positive outlook on life, but also to help them build a sense of self-worth. Conversely, the sense of inferiority that was not overcome in childhood may evolve into confusion of identity in the future, and even affect self-esteem in adulthood, making them less confident in society (Erikson, 2021, pp. 89-97).

Erikson stressed that families and society should give children enough support and encouragement, provide them with just the right challenges, and avoid over-protection or excessive pressure. Only in the continuous trial and adjustment, the child can gradually recognize their strengths and find a balance between reality and expectation. This is not only about the shaping of a child's self-confidence, but also affects how they view the world in the future, how they integrate into society, how they bravely embrace their own light, and finally become a person with a firm heart and full of hope. Avoid combining SI and CGS units, such as current in amperes and magnetic field in oersteds. This often leads to confusion because equations do not balance dimensionally. If you must use mixed units, clearly state the units for each quantity that you use in an equation.

2). Identity vs. Role Confusion: In Erickson's Identity and the Life Cycle, the chapter "Identity and Role Confusion" explores the core psychosocial conflict that adolescents encounter during their development - identity and role confusion. This stage occurs during adolescence and is a critical period for the formation of adolescent personality. During this period, young people tend to mature physically, gradually begin to shift from dependence on family to independent life and strive to find their own position and goals in the psychological and social environment. The development of identity depends on the integration of an adolescent's sense of self, values and social roles. By experimenting with different roles, interests, and options, teens gradually determine who they are, what they aspire to be, and how they will fit into society. But if adolescents fail to integrate this well during this challenging process, they may fall into character chaos, characterized by a loss of confidence in themselves and a sense of confusion about the future (Erickson, 2021, pp. 98-105).

Erikson also emphasized the key role of sociocultural factors in identity formation. A positive environment can provide a safe space for teenagers to explore and experiment, be more inclusive to teenagers, and make them more comfortable with failure and find their own difference. On the contrary, strict family environment or unreasonable social expectations will limit the development of adolescents, and

more seriously, lead to abnormal development of adolescents (Erikson, 2021, p. 99). In addition, successfully shaping an identity does not mean solving all the challenges, it is laying the foundation for later life stages. The unresolved identity crises of adolescence don't go away; they persist into adulthood and create new ones, especially when it comes to managing intimate relationships, career choices, and establishing life goals. Erickson emphasized that the exploratory phase of adolescence is crucial for healthy development. Society and families must provide enough tolerance and support to allow individuals the freedom to experiment and ultimately align their direction and goals with their true selves. Establishing a coherent identity not only affects an individual's emotional stability, but also determines how an individual integrates into society and shapes their development trajectory (Erickson, 2021, pp. 102-103)..

3).Intimacy vs. Isolation: According to Erickson's Identity and the Cycle of Life, early adulthood (between the ages of 20 and 40) is seen as a critical stage in the core psychosocial conflict of "intimacy and isolation." In this period, the individual enters a new chapter of life, eager to establish deep and sincere human relationships, seeking a sense of belonging in the close emotional connection, while trying to avoid being consumed by loneliness. This intimacy is not limited to love, but also includes deep trust and emotional support with family, friends and colleagues. Erickson emphasizes that only by successfully establishing a clear identity in the previous stage can individuals truly open themselves up to a stable and committed relationship. Those who have a clear sense of self are more likely to find emotional resonance in intimate relationships, and are brave enough to love, trust, and take responsibility (Erikson, 2021, pp. 106-108). People with a vague identity may choose to escape for fear of losing themselves or exposing their vulnerability, gradually building a high wall of self-isolation, and eventually struggling in loneliness and alienation. This stage not only determines whether a person can enjoy deep emotional connections but also affects how they will find true belonging and meaning in society in the future.

Erickson further pointed out that the core of intimate relationships is the harmonious coexistence of emotional depth and personal independence. In a healthy and strong relationship, individuals are able to be closely connected to others, sharing warmth and support, while maintaining their own uniqueness and not being consumed by emotional bondage. True intimacy not only brings deep psychological comfort and a strong sense of belonging, but also becomes the most solid reliance in the face of life storms, making people more courageous to meet challenges and embrace the unknown. However, if such a deep emotional connection cannot be established, individuals will often fall into inner loneliness and helplessness, gradually distancing themselves from others, and even estranging the whole society. This emotional alienation may cause them to choose to close themselves off, in the name of independence, in fact, to build an impenetrable mental wall, and eventually fall

into a situation of isolation. In this state, people not only lose the warmth and support from the outside world, but also may invisibly cut off the deep connection with their own emotions, and it is difficult to truly feel the fullness and meaning of life (Erikson, 2021, p. 106).

In addition, Erickson emphasizes that the quality of intimate relationships at this stage of life is critical to a person's psychological growth. Building deep relationships requires constant companionship and genuine communication. But intimacy isn't always smooth sailing, and it inevitably comes with risks-rejection, disappointment, betrayal. Nor should we see these as obstacles to intimacy, but as catalysts for emotional growth. Only after the collision and repair of the soul can an individual truly understand the true meaning of intimacy, learn to find a balance between trust and hurt, and forge a mature soul in fragility and tenacity. It is these experiences that bring people closer together and enable them to build a richer and stronger self in loving and being loved.

For those who have difficulty forming close relationships, emotional alienation often follows and fear grows in the heart. They may crave warmth but hold back from taking the step of connecting for fear of getting hurt. The fear of failure, the fear of rejection, the fear that the commitment will end in nothing, this deep-rooted fear, they instinctively avoid the deeper emotional interweaving. Long-term defense makes it difficult for them to trust others, and even resist emotional connection, and eventually fall into a vicious circle of self-closure. In constantly avoiding interaction with the world, they not only lose the opportunity to empathize with others, but also make loneliness a chain that is hard to break (Erikson, 2021, p. 107).

At this stage, the successful resolution of the "intimacy versus loneliness" conflict not only sets the individual up for a good foundation for their future life, but also opens a new chapter in their emotional and social journey. Those who are able to form and maintain deep and meaningful close relationships tend to derive more satisfaction from those relationships, a satisfaction that not only warms their hearts, but also causes them to show more resiliency, responsibility, and emotional intelligence when interacting with others. Therefore, this stage is not only an important turning point in the psychological growth of individuals, but also a crucial moment. It not only promotes individuals in the process of achieving goals, can be more naturally integrated into society, assume social responsibility, have a strong psychological construction and courage.

3. Philip's Upbringing in *Of Human Bondage*

3.1. Industry vs. Inferiority in Philip's Upbringing

The Roots of Inferiority: Physical Disability and Social Rejection

Philip's childhood was heavily influenced by his clubfoot, a physical disability that set him apart from others and subjected him to constant ridicule. In Erikson's framework, childhood is a time to develop a sense of competence through societal

and familial support. However, Philip's physical condition became a psychological burden due to the relentless teasing he endured at boarding school. His peers labeled him a "clubfoot" and excluded him from activities like sports, intensifying his sense of isolation (Wu, 2020, p. 55) As Maugham describes:

He stood still as much as he could, with his club-foot behind the other, so that it should not attract notice, and he was constantly on the look out for any reference to it. Because he could not join in the games which other boys played, their life remained strange to him; he only interested himself from the outside in their doings; and it seemed to him that there was a barrier between them and him. Sometimes they seemed to think that it was his fault if he could not play football, and he was unable to make them understand. He was left a good deal to himself. He had been inclined to talkativeness, but gradually he became silent. He began to think of the difference between himself and others. (Maugham, 2007, p. 52)

This relentless mockery made Philip acutely aware of his differences, creating a cycle of shame and self-doubt. His inability to participate in popular activities further alienated him, leading him to internalize his disability as a symbol of inadequacy.

Lack of Emotional Support in the Family Environment

Philip's growth environment was lacking in the necessary emotional support, which had a negative impact on his mental health. After his parents' death, he was sent to live with his uncle. His uncle was a cold and strict minister who regarded Philip as a burden. Although his aunt provided basic material needs, she was extremely lacking in emotional care. This emotional void further intensified Philip's feelings of being neglected and isolated, as Maugham (2007, p. 9) writes: "Mr. Carey had no great ease in expressing himself. When the news came that his sister-in-law was dying, he set off at once for London, but on the way thought of nothing but the disturbance in his life that would be caused if her death forced him to undertake the care of her son." Mr. Carey also said to Philip's: "It costs too much money, Philip. Your father didn't leave very much, and I don't know what's become of it. You must look at every penny you spend" (Maugham, 2007, p. 10).

In Erikson's view, caregivers play a critical role in fostering confidence by validating a child's efforts and guiding them through challenges. However, Philip's guardians focused more on his limitations than his potential, reinforcing his feelings of inadequacy and making it harder for him to trust others or develop a sense of self-worth (Erikson, 2021, pp. 92-93).

Attempts at Industry and Failures

Even in the face of numerous difficulties, Philip still sought spiritual solace and self-growth through intellectual activities, among which reading held a particularly important position. Books opened a door to a new world for him, allowing him to temporarily escape the pain of reality and enter an ideal space filled with imagination and companionship. Maugham vividly described this:

Insensibly he formed the most delightful habit in the world, the habit of reading: he

did not know that thus he was providing himself with a refuge from all the distress of life; he did not know either that he was creating for himself an unreal world which would make the real world of every day a source of bitter disappointment. (Maugham, 2007, p. 40)

However, although learning brought him moments of peace, his efforts often failed to receive the recognition they deserved. At school, the attention of teachers and students was more focused on his physical disability rather than his academic talents, which led to his abilities being overlooked for a long time (Cao, 2021, p. 136). The lack of external recognition gradually made him realize that his pursuit of knowledge seemed to have little effect, and he began to understand that knowledge alone could not make up for the deep sense of social isolation he felt.

The physical defects, social exclusion, emotional neglect, and repeated failures in his career that Philip experienced during his childhood had a profound impact on his personality development. According to Erikson's theory, if a child fails to successfully cope with the challenges of the "industry vs. inferiority" stage, their sense of self-confidence and competence may be damaged. For Philip, these early hardships not only shaped a lasting sense of insecurity but also deepened his lack of trust in others, which persisted into adulthood. He constantly sought self-worth but often ended in disappointment. These childhood traumas form the core theme of *Of Human Bondage*—Philip spent his entire life seeking the meaning of life and trying to break through his own limitations (Cao, 2021, p. 137).

3.2. Identity vs. Role Confusion in Philip's Upbringing

Erik Erikson, in *Identity and the Life Cycle*, points out that the core task of adolescence is to form a clear identity, and unresolved identity crises lead to uncertainty about the future. Philip's youth in *Of Human Bondage* is a typical example of this exploration and conflict over identity. In terms of career direction, emotional relationships, and self-worth, Philip experiences a severe identity crisis, constantly trying and failing. This developmental process aligns closely with Erikson's theory (Erikson, 2021, p. 100).

Regarding career direction, Philip initially hopes to establish his identity through art. He abandons traditional career plans and enrolls in an art school in Paris, but soon realizes his talent is limited, which leads to deep frustration and confusion.

Philip was not satisfied with his portrait, and at the end of a sitting he nearly always scraped out what he had done. It was all very well to aim at the intention of the soul: who could tell what that was when people seemed a mass of contradictions?

"If I thought I wasn't going to be really good, I'd rather give up painting," said Philip. "I don't see any use in being a second-rate painter." (Maugham, 2007, pp. 278-279).

This passage clearly shows Philip's doubt about his own abilities. He had hoped to express himself through art but ultimately realized that this path was not viable.

This failure not only leads to a loss of direction but also makes him question his worth, directly relating to Erikson's concept of the confusion that follows a failed "role experiment"

Philip's struggle when shifting to medicine further illustrates his identity crisis. He did not actively choose this path but was forced to change direction due to financial pressures and life circumstances. As Maugham writes:

He had thought much of what Foinet said to him, but he was still so undecided that he did not wish to speak of the future. There would be something fine in giving up art because he was convinced that he could not excel. (Maugham, 2007, pp. 304-305)

The word "undecided" is key here, indicating that Philip did not have a clear goal but was pushed forward by life. This passive choice is a manifestation of identity confusion, as Philip did not form an autonomous career identity through exploration but succumbed to the pressures of reality. This aligns with Erikson's notion of "failure to integrate the self."

In terms of emotional relationships, Philip's complex interaction with Mildred further demonstrates his identity crisis. He tries to find a sense of belonging through this relationship but is repeatedly hurt. As the text states:

Philip did not surrender himself willingly to the passion that consumed him. He knew that all things human are transitory and therefore that it must cease one day or another. He looked forward to that day with eager longing. Love was like a parasite in his heart, nourishing a hateful existence on his life's blood; it absorbed his existence so intensely that he could take pleasure in nothing else. (Maugham, 2007, p. 356)

This passage reflects Philip's contradictory feelings: he knows the relationship cannot bring him satisfaction but is still obsessed with it. This emotional attachment shows he is seeking external support to fill the emptiness inside, rather than achieving psychological balance through self-identity.

Within Erikson's theoretical framework, the formation of identity requires sufficient exploration and external support (Erikson, 2021, p. 99). Philip's eventual growth confirms this. After multiple failures and pains, he ultimately finds a pragmatic path in medicine and accepts the ordinariness of life. Maugham concludes: The simplest pattern, that in which a man was born, worked, married, had children, and died, was likewise the most perfect.

This indicates that after a long period of exploration, Philip finally accepts the essence of life and completes the shift from an identity crisis to identity formation.

Through the in-depth analysis of the original text, we can deeply feel the high agreement between Philip's growth trajectory and Erikson's identity theory. In his youth, he explored and struggled many times on the road of art and medicine, full of contradictions and struggles, and finally, he chose to embrace an ordinary life. This journey deeply shows the transformation from identity confusion to

self-unification, like a long and complex inner battle, which gradually leads him to spiritual belonging and clarity. Overall, Philip's experience deeply reveals the difficulty and complexity of identity construction, which is not a quick process, but a process full of changes and ups and downs. This process requires continuous efforts and exploration of individuals, but also inseparable from the active support and guidance of the social environment, to finally complete. Every step of effort, every struggle, are quietly shaping his unique identity, and gradually let him find his own direction.

3.3. Intimacy vs. Isolation in Philip's Upbringing

In Erikson's theory, the stage of "Intimacy vs. Isolation" corresponds to early adulthood, where individuals face the task of forming meaningful relationships while balancing personal independence (Erikson, 2021, p. 106). In *Of Human Bondage*, Philip's experiences in his middle years reflect this conflict, particularly as he struggles with emotional connection and the pursuit of intimacy, as well as the resulting isolation when his attempts at relationships fail.

Philip's journey demonstrates his repeated failures in forming deep and mutually fulfilling relationships. His tumultuous relationship with Mildred exemplifies his longing for intimacy but also highlights his inability to achieve it due to poor compatibility and emotional imbalance. Philip's attachment to Mildred is one-sided, marked by infatuation rather than genuine connection.

Philip acknowledged that from her point of view it would have been madness to marry him: only love could have made such poverty bearable, and she did not love him. It was no fault of hers; it was a fact that must be accepted like any other. (Maugham, 2007, p. 367).

This passage illustrates that although Philip has already realized Mildred's inability to maintain a healthy relationship, he still longs to build an intimate connection with her. His dependence on her does not stem from mutual love, but rather from his inner desire to overcome loneliness and fill an emotional void. However, this dependency only makes him feel even more isolated, and with Mildred repeatedly using and abandoning him, his emotional suffering is further intensified.

Philip's initiation of extensive social interactions also highlights his struggle between intimacy and isolation. For instance, his friendship with Thorpe Athelny offers a glimpse into the possibility of emotional connection. Athelny provides Philip with support and guidance, helping him regain emotional stability after setbacks. This companionship reflects Erikson's theory that intimacy can be fostered through mutual understanding and support, and does not necessarily have to stem from romantic involvement.

Philip's attempts to navigate intimate relationships also intersect with his career and self-worth. His choice to pursue medicine is partly driven by practical concerns, but it also symbolizes his attempt to integrate into society and find a purpose that

can provide him with a sense of belonging. Through his professional role, Philip begins to experience a form of intimacy by serving others and contributing to their well-being. Maugham (2007, p. 557) captures this shift: “He had found a certain satisfaction in the work he was doing. He was conscious that the life he led was humble, but he was convinced that it was useful.”

Despite some of Philip’s personal and professional achievements, his middle life was still deeply clouded by loneliness. This sense of loneliness is not accidental, but stems from his long-standing lack of intimacy. Philip’s persistent failure to establish a stable, comforting intimacy reveals his powerlessness and limitations in the face of the conflict between intimacy and loneliness. His relationship with his partner, while barely viable, lacks passion and deep emotional connection. This emotional alienation made him come to see marriage as a heavy duty rather than a spiritual comfort. Gradually, marriage is no longer an emotional sustment, but a response to social expectations, and this helplessness and loss makes Philip more clearly feel his defects and difficulties in intimate relationships. Just as Maugham described:

Perhaps her senses had run away with her just as his had, and, treating what had occurred as an accident due to unusual circumstances, it might be that she had decided to put the matter out of her mind. It was ascribing to her a power of thought and a mature wisdom which fitted neither with her age nor with her character. But he realized that he knew nothing of her. There had been in her always something enigmatic” (Maugham, 2007, p. 714).

This description not only reflects Philip’s clear understanding of the essence of marriage but also exposes his powerlessness in intimate relationships. Clearly, this state of disconnection between responsibility and emotion indicates that Philip has not yet fully overcome the core challenges of the intimate relationship stage.

In the professional world, however, Philip presents a completely different side. Through unrelenting effort, Philip gradually finds a clear purpose, which injects extraordinary meaning into his life. His professional achievements not only won the respect and recognition of others but also allowed him to make up for the gaps and deficiencies in intimate relationships to a certain extent, bringing a certain psychological balance. Yet, despite the sense of accomplishment that external acclaim provided him, combined with Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development, Philip struggled to make deep emotional connections. According to this theory, the key to truly resolving the conflict between intimacy and loneliness is to establish a stable and deep emotional bond. Despite Philip’s impeccable career, his emotional world remained lonely, and the lack of intimacy left him feeling empty and struggling deep inside. Professional success cannot fill the gap in his inner desire for intimate connection, and his emotional development is therefore extremely unbalanced.

Philip’s middle age experience in *Of Human Bondage* is highly consistent with Erikson’s theory of social psychological development, and deeply reveals a person’s

s complex psychological state struggling between the desire for intimacy and loneliness. His repeated failures in love stand in stark contrast to his brilliant success in business. This contrast not only highlights the loneliness and confusion in his heart, but also exposes the profound contradiction between his emotional pursuit and self-identity. Although the outside world continues to give him professional recognition and glory, his inner intimate needs can not be satisfied, and the unsolved emotional emptiness makes his life full of pain and helplessness. Undoubtedly, this emotional imbalance is his deepest dilemma in the process of growing up, and it also allows readers to see the struggles and contradictions experienced by individuals on the road of pursuing self and belonging.

Philip's experience is a poignant reminder that while one may not fully achieve the intimacy one desires, one can still find meaning and belonging in other areas of life. Whether in the full commitment of a career or the nourishment of a sincere friendship, these adaptations demonstrate the remarkable resilience and flexibility of the development of the human psyche. Some people find their self-worth by pursuing career achievements. While others make up for missing intimacy in deep friendships, redefining their own existence. No matter which path is chosen, it shows the tenacious vitality of human beings in the face of loneliness and challenges, as well as the courage and persistence in the unrelenting pursuit of happiness. Philip's experience is a poignant reminder that growth is not a simple straight line, but a tortuous process full of setbacks and choices. Everyone is exploring this journey, and although each person's path is different, they can all find a unique way to inner peace and happiness, to find themselves, to find belonging, and ultimately to their own sunshine.

4. Conclusion

From the age of nine to his marriage at the age of 30, Philip's growth trajectory is like a winding river, vividly demonstrating his profound transformation in psychological maturity and personality development. The journey spans the innocence of childhood, the confusion of adolescence, the struggles of early adulthood, and the deliberation of early adulthood, each of which is closely linked to Erikson's theory of psychosocial development and reflects the multilayered face of human psychological growth. The road of growth is not smooth, the test of reality layer upon layer, so that he groped forward in a challenge. The pull of religious belief made him sometimes firm and sometimes lost; The ebb and flow of emotions beat against his heart, making him struggle between joy and pain; Economic pressure is like a heavy shadow, testing his will and choice. In this environment, Philip constantly struggles with the problem of self-identity and constantly finds his own direction in questions and pursuits. This is not only an increase in age, but also a profound spiritual transformation. The combination of pain and struggle made his life journey challenging but also shaped his richer inner world. On this difficult but profound path, he con-

tinues to explore, trying to reach a deeper meaning of life.

The physical defects, the loss of parents from childhood, the road to study is bumpy, and the face of many difficulties in love. Every step of his life is a testament to his freedom from bondage. This paper mainly interprets Philip's growth experience from the perspective of Erickson's personality development theory and analyzes how he continues to mature psychologically and emotionally, and finally obtains inner freedom and peace, as well as the personality characteristics presented in different life stages. At the same time, combined with the literary classic of the theme of growth, this paper discusses the profound enlightenment about human nature, growth and the meaning of life shown in the novel, which provides guidance and thinking for us when facing the difficulties of life.

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