



CHAPTER II HIS THEMES

W. Somerset Maugham was a prolific author of novels, plays, short stories, travel books, literary and art criticisms, essays and even film scripts. Many of these works, for example, Liza of Lambeth, Of Human Bondage, Cakes and Ale, Christmas Holiday, Catelina, The Circle, Shopboy, For Services Rendered, and First Person Singular dealt with problems of life in England and Europe. But here we are concerned only with those works which deal with the East and the South Sea Islands. These include four novels: The Moon and Sixpence, The Painted Veil, The Narrow Corner, and The Razor's Edge; three books of short stories: The Trembling of a Leaf, The Casuarina Tree and Ah King; two travel books: On a Chinese Screen and The Gentleman in the Parlour; and two plays: East of Suez and The Letter.

Although these books constituted only a small portion of his total output, they were more important than the rest in that they completed the pattern of the life and literary career which the author had designed for himself. Maugham emphasized the importance of the eastern background by choosing titles that suggested an exotic atmosphere, for example: The Casuarina Tree,

"Honolulu" "P. & O.," "Footprints in the Jungle" and East of Suez.³⁶

A. The Novels

The Moon and Sixpence (1919)

This was Maugham's first book with a South Sea Island setting. It was suggested by the life of Paul Gauguin, a famous French Post-impressionist painter, but it was not a biography.

In this novel Maugham was concerned with the position of the artist in society: should an artist be allowed to pursue his ideals or should he conform to the conventions of society?

Charles Strickland's conduct, judged by the standard rules of society, would be disgusting and hateful. But to the author's mind, the artist had the privilege of leading his life as he pleased whereas people in other professions, such as doctors or lawyers, were not free to do so. They were bound by the rules of their occupations and they had to adapt themselves to the set pattern of society. "It is only the artist, and maybe the criminal who can make his own."³⁷

If Strickland had been a stockbroker all his life, he would not have been noticed. It would not have made

any difference whether he had lived or not because life, according to Houban, is meaningless. Strickland became noticed in throwing over his duties, ties, and responsibilities. But he was not completely free. In fact, he was held in bondage by a passion "no less tyrannical than love." He was possessed by a strong desire to paint -- to "create beauty" -- and it made him restless.

It urged him hither and thither. He was eternally a pilgrim, haunted by a divine nostalgia, and the demon within him was ruthless. There are men whose desire for truth is so great that to obtain it they will shatter the very foundation of their world. Of such was Strickland, only beauty with him took the place of truth.³⁰

Strickland could not possibly have lived happily in England or in France because he rebelled against the fixed rules of conduct. In the West, everybody had to behave like everybody else; otherwise he would have been considered a misfit. Strickland, in pursuing beauty, sacrificed everything in life: property, position, family, and friends. To other people, he was insane and detestable. But he did not care what people thought of him so long as he could paint. He lived an idealistic life, not paying too much attention to his physical needs. He never wore clean clothes and even went without food if he had no money. His cruel treatment of Stroeve was unforgivable, and his treatment of Blanche was inhuman. He hated her



because she tried to imprison his spirit with possessive love.

I don't want love. I haven't time for it. It's weakness. I am a man, and sometimes I want a woman. When I've satisfied my passion I'm ready for other things. I can't overcome my desire, but I hate it; it imprisons my spirit; I look forward to the time when I shall be free from all desire and can give myself without hindrance to my work.... I know lust. That's normal and healthy. Love is a disease. Women are the instruments of my pleasure; I have no patience with their claim to be helpmates, partners, companions.³⁹

An artist is not interested in his work after he finishes it. In the same way Strickland did not care much for his paintings. He never exhibited nor did he want to sell them. They were the results of his spiritual vision. He expressed himself by painting and as soon as he finished, he took no more interest in the results. The author's explanation was

He lived in a dream, and the reality meant nothing to him....he worked on a canvas with all the force of his violent personality, oblivious of everything in his effort to get what he saw with the mind's eye; and then, having finished, not the picture perhaps,...but the passion that fired him, he lost all care for it. He was never satisfied with what he had done; it seemed to him of no consequence compared with the vision that obsessed his mind.⁴⁰

It was in Tahiti that Strickland found his peace of mind for a certain period of time. Then leprosy isolated him. Leprosy was the symbol of the loneliness of his soul. His paintings were his attempt to communicate

with the outside world. They were the expression of his vision of life and the universe but nobody understood them. Hougham pointed out that each human being was lonely because of failure of communication. He could not make others understand his innermost thoughts and deepest feelings and therefore remained a stranger to the others.

We are like people living in a country whose language they know so little that, with all manner of beautiful and profound things to say, they are condemned to the banalities of the conversation manual. Their brain is seething with ideas, and they can only tell you that the umbrella of the gardener's aunt is in the house.⁴¹

In the end, Strickland showed his contempt for others' opinions of him and his works by having his masterpieces burnt up.

The Painted Veil (1925)

This novel was laid in Hong-Kong and China. It dealt with the problem of adultery. The title of the book was from a sonnet by Shelley: "Lift not the painted veil which those who live call life." The story was suggested by Dante's lines:

Siena mi fè; disfeccei Maremma:
Salsi colui, che, innanellato pria
Dispicendo m'avea con la sua donna.

"Siena made me, Maremma unmade me: this he knows

who after betrothal espoused me with his ring." In Dante's story a gentleman suspected his wife of adultery but could not kill her because of her powerful family. He took her to an unhealthy country in order that she might be killed by the foul miasmas. However, it took such a long time that, out of impatience, he had her thrown out of a high window.⁴²

Naughton gave the story a Chinese background. His novel was laid in a town named Mei-tan-fu where a cholera epidemic was raging. Walter Fane took Kitty there so that she would die of cholera. Both of them were unhappy: Walter because of his disillusionment and Kitty because of her unrequited love for Charles Townsend. Walter could not forgive her, for he could never forgive himself for still loving her. In such a situation when every day people were dying around them like leaves, they could have compromised so that they could have been less unhappy.

Having more time to think, Kitty came to realize her foolishness in rejecting Walter's great love. She began to appreciate his kindness and tenderness when it was too late. She finally understood how he had suffered because she was suffering from the same cause. Nevertheless, she could not love him but still loved her worthless lover,

even though she despised herself for it.

It was Waddington who tried to help her to learn to forget her own misery and become aware of the suffering of others. Working with the nuns, she found once again her peace of mind. She wanted to find out more about life and God. She told Waddington:

I'm looking for something and I don't quite know what it is. But I know that it's very important for me to know it, and if I did it would make all the difference.⁴³

Maughan, through Waddington, asserted that everybody, in his own way looked for something in life. But none of the ways led them anywhere.

I wonder if it matters that what they have aimed at is illusion. Their lives are in themselves beautiful. I have an idea that the only thing which makes it possible to regard this world we live in without disgust is the beauty which now and then men create out of the chaos. The pictures they paint, the music they compose, the books they write, and the lives they lead. Of all these the richest in beauty is the beautiful life. That is the perfect work of art.⁴⁴

As for Walter, the death of his wife or of himself was the only solution to the torturing situation. Since Kitty did not die, according to the plan, he took his own life. His quoting Goldsmith's Elegy, "The dog it was that died," reflected the irony of the reversed situation. Here, Maughan seemed to support the theory of the survival of the fittest. The man who lived in

dreams found life unbearable when the dreams were shattered and reality was forced upon him. On the other hand, the practical man could adapt himself to any situation and thus survived.

The Narrow Corner (1932)

In this novel laid in the China Seas and the Malay Archipelago, the problem of dreams as opposed to reality was further discussed. Erick Christessen who lived in the dream that Louise was a pure angel woke up to see that she was just a very ordinary girl not different from other girls. It was a shock to him to find out that beautiful, kind, clever Louise who did not seem to know disguise and deceit and was endowed with a "lovely flame-like spirit,"⁴⁵ could betray him with Fred Blake. Unable to face this harsh reality, he committed suicide.

Being a perceptive girl, Louise did not blame herself for causing Erik's death. She expressed her thoughts to Dr. Saunders in these words:

You blame me. Anyone would. I don't blame myself. Erik killed himself because I'd fallen short of the ideal he'd made of me....

If he'd loved me he might have killed me or he might have forgiven me.⁴⁶

She knew that Erik loved her because she was the image of her mother, Catherine. Louise herself was, in fact, a strong-minded girl. She got what she wanted and

never regretted the consequences. She did not want to be just a part of Erik's or Fred's dreams but wanted to follow her own dream. She understood that Erik's death and Fred's rejection of her were not all together disastrous. On the contrary, they were to her advantage. She told Dr. Saunders, "All that's happened is terrible and my heart is heavy, but at the beck of my mind I know that it's given me freedom."⁴⁷

Another theme was the correlation of good and evil. Captain Nichols was apparently a swindler and Fred Blake an innocent young man. Dr. Saunders was the observer of both sides. He noticed the goodness in the younger man but could not help thinking that he was a bit absurd. On the other hand, notwithstanding the wickedness of the old man, he could not help liking him. His philosophy of life was:

Life is short, nature is hostile, and man is ridiculous; but...most misfortunes have their compensations and with a certain humour and a good deal of horse-sense one can make a fairly good job of what is after all a matter of very small consequence.⁴⁸

The other small point that Hougham discussed in this book was the religion of the East. The people in the East seemed to understand the meaning of life and God better than Westerners who still seemed to be groping for a Way of Life.

The Razor's Edge (1944)

This novel was laid in America, Europe and India. It dealt with man's search for God and the meaning of life. The title was quoted from Katha-Upanishad: "The sharp edge of a razor is difficult to pass over: thus the wise say the path to salvation is hard." Larry tried to pass over the razor's edge in order to reach God.

An average, cheerful, intelligent young American before the First World War, Larry returned from it a different person. It was the close encounter with death that set him to thinking seriously about life and God.

I kept on asking myself what life was for. After all it was only by luck that I was alive; I wanted to make something of my life, but I didn't know what. I'd never thought much about God. I began to think about him now. I couldn't understand why there was evil in the world.⁴⁹

Larry first tried to approach God through literature and philosophy. But he was not content with what he found from books. There was no book that could give him a satisfying answer. Therefore, his second approach was by way of manual work. It was not a success either. His last method was travelling. He visited a Benedictine monastery in Alsace. He found the life there peaceful and suitable for him but he could not believe in the God who, according to the monks, "had created the world for his glorification"⁵⁰ and yet expected gratitude from his creatures. To the author, Larry said,

It seemed to me that if an omnipotent creator was not prepared to provide his creatures with the necessities, material and spiritual, of existence he'd have done better not to create them.... I couldn't reconcile myself with that preoccupation with sin... [Father Enshein] thought that hell was the deprivation of God's presence, but if that is such an intolerable punishment that it can justly be called hell, can one conceive that a good God can inflict it? After all, he created men, if he so created them that it was possible for them to sin, it was because he will it.⁵¹

It was by chance that Larry stopped off in India while he was working his way back to America. In Benares, he studied Hinduism and practised meditation. He found the transmigration of souls believable: "The individual soul, co-existent with the universe, has existed from all eternity and owes its nature to some prior existence."⁵² In the end, on a mountain in Travancore, by the manifestation of nature, Larry believed that he found the Absolute or Reality or God.

I [Larry] was ravished with the beauty of the world. I'd never known such exaltation and such a transcendent joy. I had a strange sensation, a tingling that arose in my feet and travelled up to my head, and I felt as though I were suddenly released from my body and as pure spirit partook of a levelness I had never conceived. I had a sense that a knowledge more than human possessed me, so that everything that had been confused was clear and everything that had perplexed me was explained.⁵³

Nevertheless, the thought that he would not be reborn when he "had worked out the karma of [his] present life" discouraged him because he said,

I wanted to live again and again. I was willing to accept every sort of life, no matter what its pain

and sorrow; I felt that only life after life, life after life could satisfy my eagerness, my vigour and my curiosity.⁵⁴

Larry realized that there was no satisfactory solution to the problem of evil. Evil was something "inevitable"; therefore, one had better "make the best of it."⁵⁵ That was why he returned to America and lived the best life he could.

In contrast to Larry and his search for the spiritual world stood Isabel, representative of the material world. Although she loved Larry, she rejected him because he was a failure. Anyway, Gray, when his firm crashed, proved no better than Larry. He would have been an invalid all his life had it not been for Larry's hypnosis treatment. The material world seemed to crash easily and yet it was more highly valued than the spiritual one.

B. The Collections of Short Stories

The Trembling of a Leaf (1921)

This collection of short stories was based on the author's travels to the South Seas in 1916. The new people and the new surroundings excited his imagination and stories came into his mind. He made notes from which two years later he wrote six stories: "Mackintosh," "The Fall of Edward Barnard," "Red," "The Pool," "Honolulu" and "Rain."

In "Mackintosh," hatred is the main theme. It drove

Mackintosh mad. He became restless and exasperated to have to work under Walker whom he detested. Although he tried to control himself, "his hatred grew till it was a monomania."⁵⁶ He was not quite sane in taking satisfaction in watching Walker's meanness, childish vanity, cunning and vulgarity. His desire to kill Walker increased when he saw that Walker treated the natives badly. Finally, he found his way out by using the chief's son's hand to kill Walker.

But as soon as Walker died, he suddenly realized that in spite of many weaknesses, Walker was a far more suitable administrator than he could be. Driven by remorse, Mackintosh committed suicide.

In "The Fall of Edward Bernard," the writer is concerned with how to live a worthwhile life. Should one choose the life in the civilized, material world typified by Chicago or the life in natural, happy surroundings as found in the South Seas? From the point of view of materialists like Boteman and Isabel, Edward had degenerated sadly. Boteman's idea of a decent man was that he had to do his duty, work hard, and meet "all the obligations of his state and station" and "his reward is the consciousness of having achieved what he set out to do."⁵⁷ Edward seemed to have lost his sense of right and wrong in neglecting

his responsibilities and taking a rogue as a good friend.

Maugham had Edward ask:

Is Arnold Jackson a bad man who does good things or a good man who does bad things? It's a difficult question to answer. Perhaps we make too much of the difference between one man and another. Perhaps even the best of us are sinners and the worst of us are saints. Who knows?⁵⁸

Edward told Bateman that he valued "beauty, truth and goodness"⁵⁹ more than wealth and power. These qualities could be found in the South Seas, but not in a busy and rich city like Chicago.

I tremble with fear when I think of the danger I have escaped. I never knew I had a soul till I found it here. If I had remained a rich man I might have lost it for good and all.⁶⁰

In Maugham's opinion, Edward did not fail. On the contrary he succeeded.

In "Red," the author discusses unrequited love. Neilson was madly in love with Sally who never cared for him. The girl had been very much in love with a handsome youth named Red. It had been complete love at first sight for both of them. They had lived happily like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

They seemed to love one another as ... whole-heartedly, as simply and naturally as on that first day on which, meeting, they had recognised that a god was in them.⁶¹

Red was kidnapped and Sally went mad with grief. When finally she was forced to marry Neilson, she still

hoped that Red would return.

He [Neilson] loved not only her beauty, but that dim soul which he divined behind her suffering eyes. He would intoxicate her with his passion. In the end he would make her forget. And in an ecstasy of surrender he fancied himself giving her too the happiness which he had thought never to know again, but had now so miraculously achieved.⁶²

It was a shock to Neilson, a sentimentalist, to find that the man who had prevented him from being happy was an ugly, coarse old skipper. Sally also grew old and fat and Neilson was no longer intoxicated by her. In the end, all three of them met with the real tragedy of love: indifference.

In "The Pool," the theme is unrequited love. Lawson married a beautiful half-caste named Ethel, gave her everything he could and treated her like a white woman. Failing to make her happy in Scotland, he followed her back to Samoa. From then on, he lost control over her. She took a lover. He had to put up with all her native relations crowded into the same house so that he never had privacy. Tormented by the desire to know who Ethel's lover was, he took to drink and beat her when he lost patience. To his humiliation, Lawson, instead of hitting Miller, Ethel's lover, was himself knocked down because Miller was stronger. Seeing that he was "down

and out"⁶³ because his love for Ethel was also gone, he drowned himself in the pool where he first met her.

In "Honolulu," the supernatural is presented. Maugham suggested that it was possible for those who really believed in it. It was inexplicable that Bananas should die because his reflection was broken to pieces. It was even more puzzling that Captain Butler should recover as a result of Bananas' death after he had been given up as a hopeless case by the doctor.

Maugham ends this story on a skeptical note:

...that's not the part that interests me most, whether it's true or not, and what it all means; the part that interests me is that such things should happen to such people. I wonder what there is in that commonplace little man to arouse such a passion in that lovely creature. As I watched her, asleep there, while he was telling the story I had some fantastic idea about the power of love being able to work miracles.⁶⁴

For "that lovely creature" lying there was another girl not the original girl. She had run away with a Chinese cook a year before.

In "Rain," Maugham is concerned with the problem of good and evil. As in "The Fall of Edward Bernard," he asked how we could judge whether a man was good or bad. To him, a person, who, by moral standards, was a good man, was often basically bad and vice versa.

Mr. Davidson, the missionary, should have been

selfless, kind, understanding and tolerant. Outwardly, he seemed to be a typical missionary who was horrified by the evil in other people, and by the natives' natural way of living which to him was primitive and immoral. He would do anything to get rid of "evil" for the sake of God.

As the reader comes to know more about him he finds that the motives of his good deeds were egoistic. He was, at heart, ignorant, vain, dogged, selfish, and narrow-minded. He revealed his cruel and heartless nature in his words: "If [Miss Thompson] fled to the uttermost parts of the earth I should pursue her."⁶⁵

With this revengeful determination, the missionary used his influence to deport Miss Thompson even though he knew that it meant imprisonment or death for her. He misinterpreted his own action in thinking that the girl's soul was saved by his benevolence.

A great mercy has been vouchsafed me. Last night
I was privileged to bring a lost soul to the loving
arms of Jesus.⁶⁶

He was of the opinion that "the punishment of man" was "a sacrifice to God"⁶⁷ and thus Miss Thompson should accept it cheerfully.

Finding out at last that, fundamentally, there was more evil in him than in the prostitute he was trying to redeem, he was so shocked that he committed suicide.

The Casuarina Tree (1926)

Maughan explained that the title was derived from the name of a tropical tree which was transplanted from Australia. It suggested the life of the English people who lived in the East. They were like the Casuarina tree in that they had brought to the natives under their control "tranquillity, justice and welfare,"⁶⁸ and yet they were out of place in these exotic surroundings.

This collection consists of six stories: "Before the Party," "P. & O.," "The Outstation," "The Force of Circumstance," "The Yellow Streak," and "The Letter."

In "Before the Party," the contrast between the life of middle-class society in London and that of the English people in the East is presented. At home in London, the Skinners, a typical middle-class family, had a very conventional life. Therefore, they took trivial things in life seriously: how they should be dressed for parties and what people would have said about them if they had not behaved in accordance with "good form."⁶⁹ They never understood the life of the people far away from home, who had to suffer from loneliness and hardship. It humiliated them to have a drunkard as a son-in-law and a murderer as a daughter. Because of their selfishness, instead of sympathizing with Millicent, they condemned

her for causing them such embarrassment that they would not be able to look their friends in the face. Kathleen exclaimed, "Oh, I think the whole thing is such frightfully bad form."⁷⁰

The other theme is the failure of marriage based not on love but on other considerations. The disastrous incident could not have happened if Millicent had had time to get better acquainted with Harold. Or if she had married because she loved him, things would have gone differently.

In "E. & O.," the supernatural is again discussed. This time it was used to take, not to save, life as in "Honolulu" because it was an instrument of jealousy not of love. The tragic death of Mr. Gallagher, who died because an old Malay woman had cast a spell on him, made Mrs. Hamlyn think of the unhappiness between her and her husband. She realized that her life was too short to make herself miserable by begrudging her husband happiness with the other woman. She forgave him and thus felt exalted because "the future was no longer desolate, but bright with a fair hope."⁷¹

In contrast to Mrs. Hamlyn's higher level of thinking the author exemplified human follies by the discussion among the first-class passengers as to whether, because of Mr. Gallagher's death, they should have a Christmas party or not and if they did, whether they should invite



the second-class passengers. The death of a fellow passenger taught them nothing. They remained trivial.

In "The Outstation," as in "Mackintosh," the theme is hatred. But here it was the snobbish Resident who could not bear his vulgar and uneducated assistant. Although they were the only two white men there, they were not on speaking terms except concerning business.

They fought a grim and silent battle with one another. It was a test of endurance. The months passed, and neither gave sign of weakening. They were like men dwelling in regions of eternal night, and their souls were oppressed with the knowledge that never would the day dawn for them. It looked as though their lives would continue for ever in this dull and hideous monotony of hatred.⁷²

That was why when Cooper was killed by his house boy, Mr. Warburton "felt in himself a sudden glow of exultation. A great burden had been lifted from his shoulders."⁷³ Unlike Mackintosh, Cooper's death made Mr. Warburton's lonely life at the outstation more pleasant.

In "The Force of Circumstance," the author is concerned with the effect of loneliness on a young man when he had to live all alone in a cheerless outstation. Guy, a young man of eighteen, could not stand living such a lonely life. If he had not lived with a Malay girl, he might have taken to drink like Harold in "Before the Party." Doris understood the circumstances and forgave him for living with a Malay girl. Still, she could not

go on living with him as man and wife. Her explanation was:

You belong to them, you don't belong to me. I think perhaps I could have stood it if there'd only been one child, but three; and the boys are quite big boys. For ten years you lived with her.... It's a physical thing, I can't help it, it's stronger than I am. I think of those thin black arms of hers round you and it fills me with a physical nausea. I think of you holding those little black babies in your arms. Oh, it's loathsome. The touch of you is odious to me.⁷⁴

Doris could not have felt the same way if she had not had a prejudice against the natives. Because they were "black," they were not quite human to her and she could not understand how Guy could have lived with a native girl for such a long time.

As soon as Doris returned to England, feeling miserably lonely, Guy let the Malay girl come to live with him again.

In "The Yellow Streak," Maughan presents the problem of a half-caste. Izzart was obsessed with fear that it would be known that he had native blood in his veins. He would have been treated differently if they had known this fact. He tried to gain popularity by being friendly and cheerful and by playing all kinds of games well.

When his boat was overturned by the Bore, he deserted Campion, who was nearly drowned, because he himself was afraid of being drowned. He was shocked to find Campion

alive after the Dore had passed. Fear seized him lest Campion tell on him, for those who had guessed at his being a half-caste, would say that his courage failed because of the native blood in him. He had brooded over this point before the incident:

What difference could it make, that drop of native blood in his veins, and yet because of it they would always be on the watch for the expected failure at the critical moment. Everyone knew that you couldn't rely on Eurasians, sooner or later they would let you down; he knew it too, but now he asked himself whether they didn't fail because failure was expected of them. They were never given a chance, poor devils.⁷⁵

The apprehension got on Izzart's nerves so much that finally he confessed to Campion that he had refused to help him. It was too late for Izzart to find out that Campion had suspected nothing. Nor did Campion blame Izzart because he himself had also been overwhelmed with fear. Izzart would not have felt ashamed of his cowardly behaviour had he had no complex about his being a half-caste.

"The Letter" is a murder mystery. Mrs. Leslie Croable killed Geoffrey Hammond in self-defence. She won everybody's sympathy because of Hammond's bad reputation with women and because of his living with a Chinese woman. Here the author seemed to point out the prejudice of the Westerners in the East. Nobody suspected Leslie of shooting Hammond for other reasons. But for the letter she had sent to

Hammond, the nature of his death and the love affair between them would have remained a secret. The enormous sum of money Mr. Crosbie had to pay for the letter aroused his suspicions. Then, when he read the letter he knew that Hammond had in fact, been his wife's lover. Consequently, the happy marriage of the Crosbies came to an abrupt end.

Ah King (1933)

This last book of short stories with "exotic"⁷⁶ background was named after the Chinese servant who accompanied the author on his travels through Borneo, Indo-China and Siam. He was a perfect servant but Maugham never thought that he had any feeling for him as, according to his own confession, Maugham "had never thought of him as a human being."⁷⁷ Maugham was touched to see Ah King cry when it came time for them to separate. Therefore, he gave the servant's name to this book of six stories invented during the journey: "Footprints in the Jungle," "The Door of Opportunity," "The Vessel of Wrath," "The Book-bag," "The Back of Beyond," and "Neil MacAdam."

In "Footprints in the Jungle," the author is concerned with premeditated murder. Although Gaze surmised that Cartwright killed Bronson in the jungle, he did not have enough evidence to accuse him of murder. The Cartwrights, in the course of time, forgot that once their passion had

driven them to kill the innocent Bronson cold-bloodedly.

Gaze's explanation was:

Human memory is astonishingly short and if you [Maughan] want my professional opinion I don't mind telling you that I don't believe remorse for a crime ever sits very heavily on a man when he's absolutely sure he'll never be found out.⁷⁸

Maughan pointed out that the Cartwrights were pleasant people who were popular at the club and Mrs. Cartwright, who had probably planned the murder, was "a thoroughly good sort and a very amusing woman."⁷⁹ He expressed his ideas through Gaze:

A perfectly decent fellow may be driven by circumstances to commit a crime and if he's found out he's punished; but he may very well remain a perfectly decent fellow. Of course society punishes him if he breaks its laws, and it's quite right, but it's not always his actions that indicate the essential man....it's not what people do that really matters, it's what they are.⁸⁰

In "The Door of Opportunity," Maughan is concerned with conceit. Alban was weak and cowardly but he managed to cover up his weaknesses with pretence. He knew that he was better educated and more intelligent than others and that he had a better opportunity to rise to the highest position in the colony. He could not resist the temptation to show off his better social background, his intellectual interests, his skill at tennis, and his superiority to them in every way. His pretence went so far that he almost convinced himself that he was the superman he pretended to be.

Finally his true self was revealed when he refused to go to attack the Chinese rioters until he got more forces. He thought that nobody would guess the real motive for his not attacking the rioters. He pretended not to mind when the others laughed at him because he felt contempt for them. He went to the club although he knew that he was being talked about. It was the people at the club who were embarrassed to see him still putting on airs.

He realized that he could not pretend any longer when Anne, before leaving him, pointed out that his pretentiousness, his self-complacency, and his shamelessness had killed her love for him. Maugham showed his contempt for the likes of Alban in the last scene when he tried to move Anne by crying.

In "The Vessel of Wrath," the problem of good and evil is again discussed. Ginger Ted, a drunkard who always made trouble when drunk, and who had a bad reputation with women, was considered a very bad man in the community. In contrast to him, Miss Jones, an admirable, "resourceful and competent"⁸¹ lady missionary, was a model of goodness. Maugham revealed the other side of each of them. Scoundrel though he was, Ginger Ted was innocent and guileless. He was too naive to suspect that Miss Jones tried to trap him and thus fell into the trap easily. On the other hand, Miss Jones was full of vile thoughts when she was with the

three men on the deserted island. She was absolutely sure that Ginger Ted could commit any crime. As a matter of fact, she saw evil in men although she often said that there must have been a spark of good in them. "She'd be as sore as hell,"⁸² as Ginger Ted put it, to learn that the thought of raping her never entered his head. She proved to be very artful in successfully converting Ginger Ted and putting the thought of marriage into his head.

The reader as well as the Contrôleur was shocked to learn that Miss Jones and Ginger Ted were going to the uninhabited island for their honeymoon because

It has very tender recollections for both of us [Miss Jones and Ginger Ted]. It was there that I [Miss Jones] first guessed how fine and good Edward was. It's there I want him to have his reward.⁸³

In "The Book-bag," the author is concerned with incest. Tim and Olive who had been separated when they were young were reunited at the age of seventeen and eighteen respectively. Their childhood affection turned into a passionate love. The circumstances were favourable. Their parents were dead and they had no other relations. Then, when they settled down in the U.S.A., their plantation was far away from curious neighbours. They could live together without being closely observed.

Featherstone, not knowing the fact, fell in love with Olive but she rejected his love saying that she could

not leave Tim. The real reason was disclosed when Tim married Sally during his stay in England. The moment Tim and his bride arrived at the plantation, Olive committed suicide.

Maugham seemed to sympathize with Olive. He did not depict her as a lustful wicked girl. On the contrary, she was very pleasant, charming and intelligent. Her passion for her brother was something inevitable and, in Maugham's opinion, she was not to blame.

In "The Back of Beyond," the problem of unfaithfulness is discussed. Maugham seemed to ask whether a man's honour was more important than his happiness.

George Moon realized when it was too late that he should not have divorced his wife because of her unfaithfulness. She had been a very good wife and in course of time, he could have forgiven her and they would have been very happy. This realization made him advise Saffary to forgive Violet since Saffary himself admitted that Violet was an excellent wife. However, Saffary could not very well forgive Knobby because he had helped Knobby to get the job. As for Violet, she might have been a governess all her life if he had not married her. Moon tried to reason with Saffary:

...one mustn't expect gratitude. It's a thing that no one has a right to. After all, you do good because it gives you pleasure. It's the purest

form of happiness there is. To expect thanks for it is really asking too much. If you get it, well, it's like a bonus on shares on which you've already received a dividend; it's grand but you mustn't look upon it as your due.³⁴

In the end, Saffary was convinced and he forgave his wife.

In "Neil MacAdam," Maugham is concerned with heartlessness. Neil prided himself on his virginity to such an extent that he thought it was more important than a woman's life. He was determined to remain a virgin until he married because he looked upon sexual relations as disgusting. Therefore, he was ashamed when he dreamed of Darya because it showed him that he unconsciously desired her. He was shocked to see Darya, blind with passion, behave shamelessly:

It was all very well for men to make advances, that was what men did, but for women to do so was disgusting. His modesty was outraged. The passion he had seen in her face, and the indelicacy of her gestures, scandalised him.³⁵

His "sense of decency"³⁶ prevented him from submitting to Darya's passion. He persuaded himself to believe that what he did was for the sake of Angus Munro whom he admired very much. He thought that it was all very well for Angus to be rid of such an unfaithful wife who had made him the laughing-stock at the club. He was never concerned with finding out the real reason for his cruelty and his cold-bloodedly murdering the poor girl.

Neil walked with his face stern and set. His conscience was clear. He seemed to bear in his hands the decree of imminent justice. He knew that Darya would never be found.... Neil felt like a surgeon who is forced to perform a dangerous operation without assistance or appliances to save the life of someone he loves. It behoved him to be firm.⁸⁷

C. The Plays

The Letter (1927)

Although Haugham wrote two plays about the East, the play entitled The Letter was adapted from a short story which has been discussed; therefore, here only one play will be considered.

East of Suez (1922)

This play concerns the problem of the half-caste. Haugham seemed to ask the audience whether it was fair to condemn a person simply because he was a half-caste. He pointed out Westerners' prejudices against half-castes. Half-castes were treated badly from the time they were born because in the white man's opinion

Somehow or other they seem to inherit all the bad qualities of the two races from which they spring and none of the good ones.... there are exceptions, but on the whole the Eurasian is vulgar and noisy. He can't tell the truth if he tries.... He's as vain as a peacock. He'll cringe when he's afraid of you and he'll bully when he's not. You can never rely on him. He's crooked from the crown of his German hat to the toes of his American boots.⁸⁸

A far-sighted white man would never marry a half-caste; otherwise he would have no opportunity to rise in his work, and his relation with other white men would be awkward. Consequently, the marriage would turn out to be unsuccessful. The wife could not mix with the white ladies and the husband could not get along well with his wife's relatives.

Life was hard enough for the half-castes who were brought up as natives but it was even harder for those who were brought up as Westerners. The latter group could not mix with the white people because of the native blood in their veins and they could not very well live with the natives because of their vanity. Daisy belonged to this group. She was ashamed of her Chinese mother and treated her like an amah. Yet she was under her mother's influence.

If George had had the courage to marry her, Daisy could have lived a respectable, and happy life. She had to suffer because George had disappointed her. She was the victim of circumstances and should not be blamed for what she had become.

Although Daisy was merciless in plotting to have her husband killed, she was usually a charming, pleasant girl. Here again Maugham pointed out that Daisy was not really wicked but just overwhelmed by her passion for George. She behaved according to her natural instinct because of her Eastern qualities. Maugham seemed to think that the Easterner

was more natural than the Westerner. George, being a typical civilized Westerner, sacrificed his happiness and, in the end, his life for his "honour, and duty, and decency" without which he could not have had "self-respect."⁸⁹

If he had been an Easterner, he would have followed his natural instinct and chosen happiness instead of self-torture. He realized that he was happy with her but he also despised himself for loving her so much that he was even willing to deceive his close friend. He preferred to die rather than live without honour which was his whole life.

Unlike George, Daisy would not commit suicide and she would not even run away from the disaster which would befall her when Harry came home. She stayed and faced her fate. It turned out that Harry was as weak as George. Instead of the expected violent scene, Harry wept and pleaded with her to say that what he had learned from the letters was not true.

In the last scene, Daisy, roared as an English lady, ended up by living as a Chinese. She said to George:

I'll live like a Chinese woman.... I want to get away from all these Europeans. After all, China is the land of my birth and the land of my mother. China is crowding in upon me; I'm sick of these foreign clothes. I have a strange hankering for the ease of the Chinese dress.⁹⁰

D. The Travel Books

On a Chinese Screen (1922)

This is a collection of fifty-eight short sketches made during the author's visit to Hong-Kong and China in 1920. Nearly half of the sketches are of Chinese scenery and people. These flat sketches constitute the background for the sketches of the Westerners which, though pleasant and interesting, do not come alive. The Westerners in these sketches are Government officials, missionaries, sea captains, businessmen and doctors. They are interesting because, in one way or another, they have curious personalities and modes of thought as a result of living for long periods in the East. Laughan expressed his sympathy for these people, who, in spite of their shortcomings, helped to build the British Empire in the East.

The Gentleman in the Parlour (1930)

This travel book is the record of Laughan's journey from Rangoon to Haiphong. But it also gives the reader Laughan's opinions of the way of life, customs and religions of the Easterners and also of the Westerners in the East. Unlike an average travel book, this record includes a charming short story entitled "Princess September." The

stories about the people Maugham met on the way reflect the lonely life of the Westerners in exotic surroundings.

In this travel book, Maugham is revealed to the reader as a tolerant, kindly and sympathetic man who thought that human beings were foolish and their lives were trivial and meaningless.



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