An Evaluation and Interpretation of The Principal Characters In The Novels of W. Somerset Maugham

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AN EVALUATION AND INTERPRETATION OF THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS
IN THE NOVELS OF W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM

being

A thesis presented to the Graduate Faculty
of the Fort Hays Kansas State College in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the Degree of Master of Science

by

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Date July 20, 1956

Approved

Major Professor

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... The writer of this thesis concludes that any attempts made on the part of the reader to conclude anything concerning the characters is not one of the purposes of this study. The study of character development is not an interpretation of the beliefs and personalities of the authors,
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to appraise, or evaluate, the ability of a popular modern writer, W. Somerset Maugham, to develop fictional characters. Some critics of his novels have questioned Maugham's skill of character development, but have stated few reasons for their conclusions. When we consider that Maugham has been, and continues to be, one of the leading popular writers of our time, some conclusions regarding the development of his characters seem in order. This study of character development involves an interpretation of the beliefs and personalities of the types of people presented in his novels. This interpretation is possible only through an understanding of Maugham's attitude toward, and a treatment of, the classes and types of people about whom he writes.

The writer of this thesis realizes that any subject such as this must be somewhat subjective, but he has attempted to make this evaluation consistent with certain accepted principles of literary criticism and practice. First, it is standard practice by novelists to cause their characters to develop, and second, pertaining to the interpretation of characters, it is standard practice by novelists to put some of their personal philosophy into the actions and dialogue of the characters in the stories. Third, almost universally conceded is the fact that a plot in any novel must have a beginning, a middle, and an end, and there must be an organization of incidents that results in
the feeling that the sequence of events is logical and acceptable. As for the characters, their reactions to the events must also seem logical, and they must act in such a way that the reader can ascribe reality to them. These principles are almost essential to give the story plausibility, and, if the story is not convincing, neither are the characters. Fourth, if the author does not achieve a detachment from the narrative, his presence is disconcerting to good logical arrangement because the story will seem forced and unreal. Fifth, at times an author may be too intent on telling a story, or expressing an idea, and slight his development of characters; therefore, there must be a reasonable balance of intensity before the characters come to life. Finally, there must be a suitable setting to form the background for the events and the characters.

The term development of characters means that the reader must know how persons have arrived at certain convictions and why they act as they do. Events of their past lives must be so arranged that the reader can accept their actions and convictions as plausible, and even then, their reactions to only a few situations are hardly sufficient to produce a comprehensive view of their character or personality. The reader must be able to see a certain cause and effect relationship that is reasonable and consistent with events, activities, or background through which the characters move and progress toward a given goal. The use of stock characters, who are types that have been traditionalized by frequent usage in fiction so that they may be recognized with only a few suggestions, is not to be looked upon as a technique of good character development.
The method of research includes the reading of Maugham's twenty-one novels and the noting of critical passages that help to interpret characters. Care has been taken not to lift quotations from their context. Besides his novels, Maugham has written *The Summing Up* which gives most of his opinions on life and literature. This book, together with his *A Writer's Notebook*, and various other writings he has published throughout his career, serves as a basis for understanding Maugham and interpreting his characters. Not only has the writer examined Maugham's own philosophy and works, but he has considered the opinions of critics which has led to the reading of several hundred articles. All available sources have been exhausted and evaluated according to standard rules of research.

It is important to note the limitations of this study. Dealing mainly with characters, the writer has not placed emphasis on Maugham's ability to tell a story that pleases and entertains. Most critics, as well as this writer, agree that Maugham is never dull reading, and that he is a master craftsman in the art of telling an interesting tale. There are more aspects than strong character development to make a story readable. This study deals with one phase only of Maugham's endeavor, and it is not a comprehensive study of him as a dramatist, short story writer, nor even a complete criticism of his ability as a novelist.

To acquaint the reader with W. Somerset Maugham, a short biographical sketch is necessary. The son of Richard Ormond Maugham, solicitor to the British Embassy in France, he was born in Paris, France,
January 25, 1874. Left an orphan at the age of ten, he went to live with an uncle who was vicar of Whitstable. After three years of study at King's School at Canterbury, he studied in France, and in 1891, he went to Heidelberg, Germany, where he attended lectures at the University. In 1892, he entered the medical school of St. Thomas's Hospital in London; he graduated, but after one year of practice he gave up his medical profession to devote his whole time to writing. He has studied art, languages, and philosophy, and was a secret service agent for England in World War I. Widely traveled, he has visited Russia, America, India, and many points in the Orient. At seventy-six, he is still active, but claims he is through writing. Whether this is true or not, only time will tell.

Not only is he known as a novelist, but his plays and short stories have helped to make him an international figure. He wrote his last play in 1933, but has continued to write novels and short stories. Several books of travel and observation have also come from his pen, but in this work they are not considered as novels.

To understand Maugham's characters, it is also necessary to understand his personal philosophy. However, it is a difficult task to place Maugham in any category because he admits that he has not adopted any complete system of philosophy. An eclectic, he has accepted ideas from several fields of thought, and this possibly explains why he is not consistent in his theories. Nevertheless there are various opinions of his that are used relatively consistently throughout his novels and non-fiction writing. The following information is
taken mainly from his *The Summing Up* which is the best source for a complete view of his philosophy.

Of foremost importance perhaps is Maugham's attitude toward God and the Christian religion. This attitude is best expressed in his own words:

... I seemed inevitably drawn to the conception of a creator, and what would create this vast, this stupendous universe but a being all-powerful? But the evil of the world then forces on us the conclusion that this being cannot be all-powerful and all-good. A God who is all-powerful may be justly blamed for the evil of the world and it seems absurd to consider him with admiration or accord him worship. But mind and heart revolt against the conception of a God who is not all-good. We are forced then to accept the supposition of a God who is not all-powerful: such a God contains within himself no explanation of his own existence or of that of the universe he creates.¹

... I cannot penetrate the mystery. I remain an agnostic, and the practical outcome of agnosticism is that you act as though God did not exist.²

Much of his other philosophy stems from his rejection of a deity. Continuing, Maugham says, "There is no reason for life and life has no meaning."³ He adds later, "... it is the need of self-assertion which is in every living thing and which keeps it alive. It is the very essence of man."⁴

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2. Ibid., p. 272.
3. Ibid., p. 276.
4. Ibid., p. 277.
After disposing of God and believing that life has no meaning, Maugham faces his big opponent—free will: ". . . now that I can avoid it no longer I cannot but draw back. I am conscious that here and there I have taken free-will for granted. . . ." Facing the problem, Maugham attempts to explain away free will by a deterministic philosophy by saying:

I do not think it unreasonable to hold the opinion that everything in the universe combines to cause every one of our actions, and this naturally includes all our opinions and desires; but whether an action, once performed, was inevitable from all eternity can only be decided when you have made up your mind whether or not there are events . . . which are not completely determined. . . .

Maugham then discusses how Hume and also the Principle of Indeterminacy cast some doubt on the cause and effect theory, but he concludes by saying, ". . . The plain man is justified in sitting on the fence, but perhaps he is prudent to keep his legs dangling on the side of determinism."7

This presentation of Maugham's philosophy is far too brief, but it does give his principle convictions. Thus, to sum up his convictions, he is an agnostic, because of his inability to account for evil. For Maugham, there is no such thing as abstract morality, and thus no set rules or standards of conduct. Man is a creature of emotions and

5. Ibid., p. 279.  
6. Ibid., pp. 281-282.  
7. Ibid., p. 283.
instincts, and any action is determined by past experiences. For
Maugham there is one value only:

... Goodness is the only value that seems in this
world of appearances to have any claim to be an end in
itself. Virtue is its own reward. ...  

... But goodness is shown in right action and who can
tell in this meaningless world what right action is? ... 8

Leaving himself on a deterministic limb, Maugham does not answer
the proposed question adequately, but murmurs something about each man
acting according to his nature and business.

This writer does not wish to argue with Maugham nor to point
out possible inconsistencies in his philosophy, because that is not
the purpose of this thesis. By this short presentation of his opinions,
the reader may better understand the personality of Maugham and the
characters in his novels. One other means of studying his philosophy
is expressed by Maugham when he writes:

... by studying the characters with which an author has
best succeeded, which he has presented with most sympathy and
understanding, you should be able to get a more complete idea
of his nature than any biography can give you.9

8. Ibid., pp. 307-309.

9. W. Somerset Maugham, A Writer's Notebook (New York:
CHAPTER II

THE EXPERIMENTAL STAGE

Maugham began his writing career with *Liza of Lambeth* (1897),
and though not a long book, it clearly foreshadows his attitude toward
a certain class of people. Concerning his first novel, he explains:

... In *Liza of Lambeth* I described without addition or
exaggeration the people I had met in the out-patients' depart-
ment at the hospital and in the district during my service as
an obstetric clerk. ... My lack of imagination ... obliged
me to set down quite straight-forwardly what I had seen with
my own eyes and heard with my own ears. ... 2

Early in the book, Maugham describes the environment in which his
characters live, and to help set the scene, he writes:

Vere Street, Lambeth, is a short, straight street leading out
of the Westminster Bridge Road; it has forty houses on one side
and forty houses on the other, and these eighty houses are very
much more like one another than ever peas are like peas. ... 3

Using more discretion than some modern writers, Maugham apologizes
for the impossibility of duplicating the exact expressions of the char-
acters, and the reader is left to imagine the baser talk which he assures
us took place.

Maugham could easily have turned his novel into an emotional ap-
peal for social betterment of the slums, but he does not do this. His

1. Throughout this thesis the publication date of Maugham's
novels will be shown by this method.


characters live there, but Maugham does not outwardly accuse the slums as the only cause of their problems. The characters are not necessarily unhappy; they have their own forms of amusement and a moral code. As Maugham stated above, he is merely describing the people and makes little attempt to argue their case against a society that has placed them there.

The story itself is simple. It recounts the last year of life of Lisa Kemp, her falling in love with a married man, their affair, and her dying of a miscarriage. This simple plot serves as a frame in which Maugham portrays the lives and characters of the people living on Lambeth Street.

"... None of the characters are completely odious, none very admirable...." 4 Mrs. Kemp almost becomes a revolting character, but since there is little objection to her actions in the book, the reader is inclined to accept her as a typical character within Maugham's frame of reference. "... Mrs. Kemp rises to monstrous heights when she discusses insurance and respectability and liquor with the midwife beside her dying daughter's bed...." 5 The following illustrates the nature of their conversation:

"You 'ave got 'er insured, Mrs. Kemp?" asked the midwife. ...

"Trust me fur that!" replied the good lady. ... "Why only the other dy I was saying to myself that all that money 'ad

---


5. "The Beginning," The Nation, CXIII (November 9, 1921), 544.
been wisted, but you see it wasn't; yer never know yer luck, you see!"

"Do you deal with Mr. Stearman?" asked Mrs. Hodges.

"No, Mrs. Odges, for undertikin' give me Mr. Footley every time. In the black line 'e's fust an' the rest nowhere!"6

Liza is not dead yet as this conversation continues with a discussion of the merits and demerits of oak or elm coffins. Mrs. Kemp also discusses the trouble they had getting the coffin lid closed on her husband because he died of dropsy and swelled too much. The description of her husband's funeral comes close to being nauseating when she tells how she had to jump on the coffin lid to get it closed. Liza dies, but the reader knows that this death will not greatly alter the lives of any of the characters concerned. However, Maugham does not depict the characters as entirely base and immoral, because they seem to be acting the only way possible, and within the limits of his description they are not to be condemned. He keeps them in character and "... he lets the street and the section and the people tell their own story, illustrate their own morals, show up directly the notions by which they live..."7

The children, the young people, and the old people each are portrayed in their own activities and from this device the reader gets a view of the life an individual would lead in Lambeth Street.

It is important to note that Maugham does not pass adverse judgment on these people. There is a touch of pity and fatalism throughout

the book, but Maugham is careful to point out that these people have the same emotions, such as love, fear, hate, as do those of the upper class. The touch of fatalism and futility in the book caused one critic to remark, "... There is strength in Liza of Lambeth, but it is a brutal and angry book, with its material and the attitude of its author alike repellent to those who believe in life..." The irony and sarcasm directed toward the upper class in later books is noticeably lacking in Liza of Lambeth.

The characters are clearly drawn and are not only the pictures of individual people such as Mrs. Kemp, but "if one sits in the outpatients' waiting room at St. Thomas's he will discover that there are today in Lambeth people very like the Blakestons and Kemps." However, the characters in this book stand still; there are no solutions of conflicts other than those decisions determined by the locality in which the people live. There is no steady progression through a long period of time and no strong center of interest. Maugham only succeeds in creating an atmosphere of static realism peculiar to this section of the city.

His second novel, The Making of a Saint (1898), is an attempt to satirize a particular convention, the idea of sainthood. A historical romance with a fifteenth century setting, it was written by Maugham after he had read an article by Andrew Lang, a contemporary historian.

critic, whose arguments convinced him that a young novelist did not have enough experiences to write on contemporary subjects, and should turn to history for his stories and characters: "... I had written my first novel of what I knew, but now, seduced by this bad advice, set to work on a historical romance. ..." Maugham admits his failure to create characters in this story:

... The historical novel calls surely for a profound experience of men to create living people out of those persons who with different manners and different notions at first sight seem so alien to us; and to recreate the past needs not only a vast knowledge but an effort of imagination that is hardly to be expected in the young. ..." The satire begins immediately when a contemporary family is preparing to publish the letters of an ancestor, the saint in question, and the writer remarks, "... The good old customs of our fathers have fallen into disuse and it is impossible to create a saint for ready money. ..." His ancestor was given the title of Beatus, but was never canonized. The story relates the political intrigue and secret, and not so secret, amours of an Italian soldier of fortune, Filippo Brandolini, who after several disillusions and reverses, seeks refuge as a failure in a Franciscan monastery. The story deals with incidents leading to his retirement and there were "... experiences quite in the vein of Boccaccio that went to the making of anything

11. Ibid., pp. 165-166.
but a saint of Filippo Brandolini."

Rationalizing over his defeats, Filippo shows a tendency toward hedonism as he remarks: "... So many people have told me that they have never regretted their vices, but often their virtues! Life is too short to take things seriously. ..." Filippo retires as a monk, although he previously had said, "I agree with you that one has little respect for the man who turns monk when things go wrong with him." This fact helps to complete the satire. The end of the story is filled with disillusionment and pessimism, and Filippo, though not a pathetic figure, is bitterly unhappy.

The other characters need not be mentioned only to say that a woman, Donna Giulia, is probably the principal cause of his unhappiness. After several affairs, he marries her, but kills a lover in her arms and has her father kill her. There is also a churchman in the book, a Savello, who is a two-faced political representative of the pope. The intrigue, fighting, atrocities, and sarcasm take precedent over the characters in the book. Not one becomes fully developed, but the story remains. The plot itself is based upon the tale of Caterina Sporza and the siege of Forli in Machiavelli's History of Florence. The political intrigue in the town frames the story and these intrigues

15. Ibid., p. 106.
take precedent together with the fighting, atrocities, and sarcasm over the development of the characters. The people, as depicted by Maugham, serve the plot well, but their movements are difficult to follow as individuals, and he succeeds only in creating a somewhat unreal fifteenth-century atmosphere.

After his attempt at a historical novel, Maugham again turns to England for his material, but though he changes his setting and subject matter, his sarcasm is still as strong as ever. The Hero (1901) is a novel that attempts to question the old standards of morality, duty, love, family, and patriotism. There is not an intelligent character in the entire book, and Maugham is content to smash the idols of society one by one.

The story is simple. Jamie Parsons comes home from the Boer War a hero with the Victoria Cross, and finding it difficult to readjust to the static society he left, and after being welcomed as a hero, his name is soon ridiculed. In an attempt to revolt against the old mores of his country community, he fails. Finally, giving in to their demands, he commits suicide rather than go through with a marriage to keep a promise made years before when he went off to war.

Mrs. Parsons, his mother, is a pious woman to whom evil has never offered the smallest attraction, and its existence is merely theoretical to her. Her duty is to God and all other courses of action are non-existent. Mr. Parsons, an old soldier himself, "... never allowed it to slip his memory that even the lowest caste native had
an immortal soul, and before God equal rights with him. . . ."17 This concept causes him to suffer a massacre of his men at the hands of these natives. After his defeat, he was discharged from the service with the words, "You're only fit to be a damned missionary."18 They had tried to shield Jamie from all sin, and proceeded under the assumption that ignorance is virtue. They thought it a safeguard for Jamie's virtues, when he goes to India, to have him become engaged with a sweet, pure English girl, Mary Clibborn.

The vicar of Little Primpton and his wife are absolutely stupid and "did endless good in the most disagreeable manner possible."19 Through these characters, the church is satirized, and Mr. and Mrs. Parsons also show how futile and ignorant it is to lead a life of service to God. Through Mary, the do-good social worker is satirized. Mary said:

"I'm seriously distressed about my girls. They live in nasty little cottages, and eat filthy things; they pass their whole lives under the most disgusting conditions, and yet they're happy. I can't get them to see that they ought to be utterly miserable."20

The iconoclastic actions of the hero take precedence over character development in this story, and no characters can become well-developed under these conditions. Even the hero, interesting,

18. Ibid., p. 17.
19. Ibid., p. 41.
20. Ibid., p. 96.
though only a type, is merely the means by which Maugham calls all of
the simple practices of society into contempt. Cordell says:

... one easily guesses that the young author was more
interested in the hero's iconoclasm than in the characters.
For that reason the book never really becomes alive, for the
characters do not live.\(^{21}\)

The interest of the novel does not always center on Jamie and
the reader is led into digressions to show the type of society that
has outlived its usefulness. The interest is on the society, and only
incidentally with its effect on Jamie. He falls under the attack, but
his suicide to escape marriage is far from arousing pity or understanding,
and as one critic writes, "... the suicide of the hero to escape mar-
riage ... brings the novel to a tragic end which is grotesque rather
than moving."\(^ {22}\)

It must be observed that Maugham shows up his characters in
incidents that portray their types; and in this sense the characters
develop somewhat, but how the characters arrived at their concepts of
life is left to the imagination of the reader. The only explanations
are the references to a static society, which apparently has trained
each of them to be narrow, simple, and almost worthless. Maugham said,
"It was grim and uncompromising, and I should think very dull."\(^ {23}\) The
author had a dull ax to grind. The questionable nature of the Boer War
probably influenced this book, and it may have been a reaction against

\(^{21}\) Cordell, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 77.

\(^{22}\) \textit{Ibid.}, p. 78.

\(^{23}\) Quoted in \textit{Ibid.}, p. 76.
the Kipling heroes and the patriotism arising out of the war. The book has never been reissued.

Continuing to deal with familiar themes, Maugham wrote *Mrs. Craddock* (1902), one of his important character studies which deals with two people who, unsuited temperamentally and in almost every respect, get married. Bertha Ley, falling in love with a young tenant farmer on her estate, throws herself at his feet and marries him. At the center of the story is Bertha’s passionate love for Edward, its change to hate and gradual cooling to resignation and indifference. The novel was rejected by London publishers at first because they feared the frank treatment of sex and feminine psychology. Maugham is reported to have said that it was "a story he saw enacted before his eyes as a young man." 24

Edward and Bertha are both described in detail and the novel is a study of their reactions to one another. Though their first attraction is physical, Maugham makes this attraction plausible; and for a time this physical attraction brings them happiness. But Bertha attempts to lead her own life and runs up against the uncompromising stolidity of her husband. The book describes carefully the transformation from love to hate on the part of Bertha. Edward does not change, however, and becomes a perfect country squire, but as he rises in the esteem of the country side, her affection diminishes. The portrayal of Edward

Craddock is relatively complete and he continues throughout the book as the strong-willed character he is portrayed in the beginning. Edward is patriotic, energetic, a good fellow, virtuous and is probably one of Maugham's happiest characters. Having no doubts and no struggles in conscience, he thinks himself always right and does not give in to the whims and demands of Bertha. Bertha said to Edward, "... I want to be placed above your God and above your honour. The love I want is the love of the man who will lose everything, even his soul, for the sake of a woman." 25

Edward shrugged his shoulders, "I don't know where you'll get that. My idea of love is that it's a very good thing in its place--but there's a limit to everything. There are other things in life." 26

Bertha is a woman of the upper class who is bored living with her Aunt Polly and wants 'to let her hair down'. "... Better ten thousand times, in her opinion was it to be Becky Sharp and a monster of wickedness than Amelia and a monster of stupidity." 27 She sees a chance to free herself by marrying Edward, but it makes her furious when Edward does not make violent love to her. "... Oh, yes, she loved him well, she loved him passionately; but he--he was fond of her, in his placid, calm way; it made her furious to think of it." 28

26. Ibid., p. 177.
27. Ibid., p. 42.
28. Ibid., p. 125.
Even when she almost dies in the birth of a stillborn child, Edward remains relatively unperturbed; "... when the love is at last frozen out completely, she takes a masochistic delight in brooding over his brutishness and stupidity. ..."29 She had expected the moon and received much less, and when she is released from her trials by the death of her husband in a hunting accident, "... her strength fell away, and overcome by her self-pity, she sank to her knees and burst into tears."30 The death of Edward frees her and she is absolutely undisturbed by his death outside of her own pity. The crux of the problem is a French saying by La Rochefoucauld inserted by Maugham, "Between two lovers there is always one who loves and one who lets himself be loved. The one who loves is always wrong."31

Miss Ley is a memorable minor character who serves much the function of the old chorus in dramas. She serves as a relief to so much Victorian activity, at least the Victorian way of life as Maugham portrays it, and her sincerity and worldly wisdom is a contrast to the weakness of Bertha and the narrow-mindedness of Edward. Her character moves through several of Maugham's early books, notably in The Merry-Go-Round.

Within his limited frame Maugham has succeeded in portraying two types of people. He wastes no time in explaining the characters in

29. Cordell, op. cit., p. 81.
31. Ibid., p. 123.
the beginning of the book and, in the remainder, is concerned with a study of these two mismatched personalities and their reactions to their marriage. It is a complete portrayal; "... it is a solid piece of work, filled with no gaps and no slopping-over at the edges..." The book is perhaps the most successful of his earlier novels.

However, both characters are inelastic and act consistently according to their types. Because Maugham emphasizes the detestable qualities of the characters, the novel lacks charm. The greatest weakness from the standpoint of characterization is probably that Maugham describes the actions, and there is not that touch of life that brings the characters to life. "... What the man of science can do he does, faithfully writing out his study of them, but there is not a real characterization in the book."33

Bertha's change to self-pity is a change only, not a development, because her basic character is not changed. The incidents fix the characters well in mind, especially that of Edward, but the incidents only change and the characters do not develop into living individuals. The frame of reference is too limited.

Still in the process of developing his technique, Maugham wrote The Merry-Go-Round (1904) and it merits study for its unusualness of structure and for types of characters. Many germs of his book, Of


Human Bondage, are present as well as other ideas that have been worked into later books. Explaining his experiment, Maugham writes:

... it occurred to me that it [the book] might give a truer picture of life if one could carry on at the same time the various stories, of equal importance, that were enacted during a certain period in different circles. I took a larger number of persons than I had ever sought to cope with before and devised four or five independent stories. They were attached to one another by a very thin thread, an elderly woman who knew at least one person in each group. ... 34

Mary Ley, an elderly spinster, is the mutual acquaintance and through her each story is introduced, carried through, and then the interest changes to another person and another story. All four stories take place at practically the same time and the scenes shift with Miss Ley. In this way, Maugham hoped to give a picture of the diverse elements of life coordinated into one compact picture by the medium of Miss Ley.

One story deals with Basil Kent, a member of higher society, who marries a waitress, Jenny Bush. He loves her when he first meets her, and she becomes his mistress, but he soon tires of her; however, when Jenny becomes pregnant, Basil thinks it is his duty to marry her, and does so. He tries to make a success of the marriage as does Jenny, but her lower position in society and the uncouthness of her family, plus his love for Mrs. Hilda Murry finally drives Jenny to suicide. After she is dead, Basil feels some regret, but he had previously said, "... A man, when he marries a woman like that, thinks he's going to

lift her up to his own station. The fool! It's she who drags him
down to hers."35 That is probably the crux of the difficulty, although
Basil's mother, Lady Vizard, is a lewd socialite whose scandals are
dragged into court. After two years, society has forgotten her sins,
and she has climbed back up the social ladder by two means: philan-
thropy and the Church of Rome. She does not feel she needs conversion
yet, so philanthropy serves her purpose. She does say though, "... and when I grow old, I shall go into the Catholic Church and finish
my days in the odour of sanctity."36 Basil should not have been too
proud of his social position, but he does upbraid his mother. Miss
Ley ventured the assumption that Basil admires his own heroic attitude
more than common sense when he is discussing his coming marriage.

Another story, that of Bella Langton and Herbert Field, is one
with a religious theme. Although he will soon die, Herbert marries
Bella and their short life together is happy and devoted. Herbert
dies trusting in God and happy with his fate. Bella and her father,
Algernon Langton, Dean of Tercanbury, feel sad, but their trust in
God helps them to bear the death.

The next story concerns Frank Hurrell, a doctor and assistant
physician at St. Lukes Hospital. His story is a struggle on the
spiritual plane. Skepticism enters his life, and his story is a
struggle for certainty:

35. William Somerset Maugham, The Merry-Go-Round (London:
William Heineman, 1904), p. 357.

36. Ibid., p. 98.
. . . convinced that the present life was final, he sought to make the completest use of its every moment; and yet it seemed preposterous that so much effort, such vast time and strange concurrence of events, the world and man should tend toward nothing. He could not but think that somewhere a meaning must be discernable. . . . 37

He eventually becomes satisfied with philosophical doubt, and his outlook on life is similar to Maugham's, who probably has endowed this character with some of his own philosophy.

The final tale, an illicit love story, enters with Reggie Barlow-Bassett and Mrs. Paul Castillyon. Reggie is the playboy with few morals who makes his mother believe he is the perfect son. Mrs. Castillyon is the bored wife of a country squire who longs for excitement and finds it with Reggie, but she ultimately reforms somewhat and reconciles herself with her husband. Taking the side of a tenant's daughter who has gotten into child trouble she exclaims against her husband and his socialite mother, "Oh, these virtuous people! . . . They don't know how many temptations we resist for the one we fall to."38

Miss Ley herself is an admirable character, shrewd, witty, and ready to advise all circles of her acquaintances. But the question is whether or not the device of using Miss Ley as the thread to sew the stories together is successful in the creation of reality and characters. It is doubtful. The effort is interesting, but there is no emphasis on any one character or group of characters throughout the book. Maugham admits this failure and writes:

37. Ibid., p. 35.
38. Ibid., p. 283.
... its chief defect was that it lacked the continuous line that directs the reader's interest; the stories were not after all of equal importance and it was tiresome to divert one's attention from one set of people to another. I failed from my ignorance of the very simple device of seeing the diverse events and the characters that took part in them through the eyes of a single person.39

This device that Maugham failed to use was that of writing "he" for "I". Henry James used this device admirably and Maugham does also in some of his later books.

By . . . writing he for I and stepping down from the omniscience of an all-knowing narrator to the imperfect acquaintance of a participator he [Henry James] showed how to give unity and verisimilitude to a story.40

"Curiously enough, The Merry-Go-Round fails to give a correct impression of the multifariousness of life whereas the more artistically unified Of Human Bondage succeeds."41 The book fails to produce reality and characters are shown in so limited a field that there is little chance for development. He studies each character, gives their traits, and describes their reactions to a single incident; that is all.

During this experimental period, Maugham had been writing for the theater, and The Bishop's Apron (1906), a highly humorous novel, was written from a rejected play, Loaves and Fishes. Of the play, Maugham writes:

During the rehearsals of A Man of Honour I had discovered that some scenes of flirtatious badinage in the first act

40. Ibid., p. 170.
41. Cordell, op. cit., p. 83.
were amusing and I decided that I could write a comedy. I made up my mind to write one now. I called it Loaves and Fishes. Its hero was a worldly, ambitious parson and the story dealt with his courtship of a rich widow; his intrigues to get a bishopric and his final capture of a pretty heiress. No manager would consider it; it was thought impossible that a play that held a clergyman up to ridicule would be tolerated. . . .42

The play was produced years later, but in the meantime he had turned it into a novel, using the same plot.

The satire in the book is directed toward the people who, claiming a long list of distinguished ancestors, put on a bold front of respectability. In this case it is the family of Theodore Spratte, a vicar and a widower, who has high hopes of becoming a bishop and tries every avenue of possibility to keep the family name above reproach and to insure himself a bishopric. Maugham humorously portrays him as anything but a pious man; the vicar said, "... Do not seek to avoid pain, but accept it as the surest guide to all that is in you of beauty, of heavenliness and of truth."43 Maugham goes on to explain, "For his own part, when forced to visit his dentist for the extraction of a tooth, he took good care to have gas properly administered."44

Maugham satirizes marriage, the Church of England, the government, the military, as well as the upper-class society. He lightly


44. Ibid., p. 162.
grinds all of these axes and his satire, though never bitter, overshadows all of the characters. Lord Spratte, the elder brother of Theodore, has no illusions of grandeur:

"... I don't want the silly title with its sham coat-of-arms, and its bogus pedigree.... I might have made a fairly good horse-dealer, and if I hadn't brains enough for that I could always have gone into Parliament. I'd have been a capital First Lord of the Admiralty, because I can't tell a man-o'-war from a coal barge, and the mere sight of a briney ocean makes me feel sick...."

Winnie, the Vicar's daughter, longs for freedom from her society, but when she gets a chance to escape by marrying a poor young political radical, Bertram Railing, she does not want to give up the luxuries she enjoys for a life in a district like Lambeth Street portrayed in Liza of Lambeth. The Vicar's sister, Sophia, a spinster, is also a witty individual and "while she knits lets fall... little darts of truth and iconoclasm which graze but do not puncture the bishop's magnificent egotism...."

Maugham merely sketches his characters in this book, and furthermore because of his satire, he does not attain the objectivity essential to good character development. Also, though Canon Spratte keeps the center of the stage, his place is continually challenged by the minor characters, and the result is that there is no strong character. Almost all of them have a sense of humor supplied by Maugham and prompted by him throughout the book. The effect suggests

45. Ibid., p. 126.

46. Cordell, op. cit., p. 85.
farce which is a loose form of comedy in which the elements of humor or wit are exaggerated, rather than true comedy which does not go to such extremes.

In Maugham's next book, *The Explorer* (1907), the principal character is one of the few men in Maugham's books who is almost thoroughly good. This man, Alec MacKenzie, is an early attempt of Maugham to draw a perfectly wholesome, upright character, and this attempt approaches dangerously close to melodramatic triteness. Nevertheless, Maugham keeps Alec in character generally, and the reader gets the desired impression, but not without a touch of cynicism. Contrasted with the spineless upper class in which he is portrayed, he is almost too good to be true. Maugham's idea of a perfect man in fiction is expressed when he wrote, "... Fielding has failed as every novelist since has failed who has attempted to depict a perfectly virtuous man. Experience seems to show that it is impossible not to make him a trifle stupid..."47

The story centers around Lucy Allerton who has taken it upon herself to redeem the family's name after her father has disgraced it with wild spending and shady business deals that finally landed him in prison. She drafts her brother, George, to help her in her plans, and Alec agrees to take him along with him on an empire-building expedition into the hinterland of British East Africa. George proves

a failure and dies in the fighting. Alec has many virtues. As an empire-builder, he adds a large piece of territory to the British Empire and also achieves the original motive of his expedition by stopping the slave trade in this section of Africa. When a cave-in occurs at his mine, he works night and day to help free some trapped men. While in school he found mathematics hard for him and worked ten hours a day for two years at the subject he loathed:

"It wasn't that I cared for mathematics, but it taught me to conquer the one inconvenient word in the English language."

"And what the deuce is that?"

"... The word impossible."48

These citations do not exhaust his virtues, but serve to illustrate the goodness of the man. Maugham said, "... The chief character was suggested by H. M. Stanley whose exploits had long fascinated my young fancy, and the strong silent man, owing to Mr. Kipling's vogue, was then very much in fashion. ..."49

Though not altogether a complete picture, Alec's character stands out because of the other people in the book. Lucy is weak and helpless, George Allerton fails when given the chance to be a man, Bobbie Boulger is a loud-mouthed spineless young social lion. Mrs. Kelsey is a typical party giver who moves with ease in the fickle upper class. Dick Lomas is of better stock, but has a strange outlook on life:


49. Quoted in Cordell, op. cit., p. 86.
"... I think the greatest imposture of Christian times is the sanctification of Labor. ...

... 

"For my part I have neither wife nor child, and I have an income that is more than adequate. Why should I take the bread out of somebody else's mouth. ..."50

... 

To Lucy it was an admirable study, the contrast between the man who threw his whole soul into a certain aim which he pursued with a savage intensity, knowing that the end was a dreadful, lonely death; and the man who was making up his mind deliberately to gather what was beautiful in life, and to cultivate its graces as though it were a flower garden.51

Thus Maugham uses the device of contrast to depict the character of Alec MacKenzie. It is well to notice that many of Maugham's characters do not work for a living and those who are supposed to toil for their livelihood are not portrayed in the process. Thus Maugham leaves out an important phase of human life.

There is an American woman in the story, Mrs. Julia Crowley, who is a lively and witty widow who carries on some highly amusing dialogues with Dick Lomas whom she finally marries. "... She loved a repartee and notwithstanding the consequences could never resist making any that occurred to her. ..."52 As the only really happy people in the book, Dick and Julia serve as a comic relief amid "... blocks of good old melodrama, the agony being piled up by the time-honored device of binding the hero by a solemn promise never to explain


51. Ibid., p. 59.

52. Ibid., p. 261.
the circumstances that make him appear a scoundrel. . . ."53 Maugham wrote the book in one month from a rejected play, and this fact probably accounts for so much dialogue and so little description.

Cordell said of The Explorer, "It is one of two books by Somerset Maugham which should be forgotten."54 The other book is The Magician. This may well be an overstatement because some of the dialogue in The Explorer is excellent and the book is not uninteresting. "The central weakness lies in the hero's high-flown behavior, which even the author could not believe in. . . ."55 Alec is almost too perfect and we are given very little of his development, though his schooling is an exception, but generally the author takes him where he is in his development and brings in incidents to make him prove his worth. He does not develop as a good man, but is good at the first and good at the end of the book; we get the picture of only a few years of his life, not a complete portrayal.

As his apprenticeship comes to an end, Maugham writes his first and last tale of horror, The Magician (1909), and from the standpoint of characters it has nothing to recommend constructively. Maugham said, "... I did not believe a word of it. It was a game I was playing. A book written under these conditions can have no life in

54. Cordell, op. cit., p. 85.
55. Ibid., p. 86.
It is not difficult to agree with Maugham in this case, "... his attempt at a tale of horror is negligible. It is but a stirabout of stock horrors."  

Because the reader's attention is focused on the story, the characters become shadowy and unreal. Only one character, the magician himself, Oliver Haddo, is worth mentioning.

... the eyes of most persons converge when they look at you, but Oliver Haddo's, naturally or by a habit he had acquired for effect, remained parallel. It gave the impression that he looked right through you and saw the wall beyond.

Animals are always afraid of Haddo, and when he comes into a room, dogs growl and sometimes attack him. A master of occult powers, he hypnotizes Margaret Dauncey, the fiancée of a young doctor, Arthur Burdon, and steals her away from her lover. Haddo kills her and uses her blood in a successful experiment to create life. Overcoming a maze of supernatural occurrences, Arthur ultimately kills Haddo to avenge Margaret's death.

Writing of *The Magician*, Richard Cordell says:

... it is readable but only as a curiosity and not as a living story. ... *The Magician* attempts to fuse melodrama, fancy, and realism ... but the elements do not fuse. ... *The Magician* is as jarring among the novels of Somerset

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Maugham as Dracula would be among the collected works of John Galsworthy.59

A popular edition appeared in 1927, though, and this surely was with Maugham’s permission.

The emphasis is on plot and rational causes and not given for the action of the characters. "... By choice of details and epithets to arouse a horror that is akin to nausea is not a sign of power..."60

The only atmosphere surrounding the characters is one of unexplained mystery, and that results in unexplained characters. Margaret cannot help herself after Haddo hypnotizes her; Arthur, although a man of science himself, is helpless against the magic of Haddo. The characters do not develop; they merely move in a supernatural, unreal atmosphere which the reader cannot accept.

From his experimental stage, Maugham moves quickly to some of his best writing, but he has shown in this early period certain attitudes and techniques that are used consistently in his later novels. It becomes apparent that Maugham has a story to tell and has subordinated character development to the plot. Also, his use of satire shows the reader that the author is not entirely content to stay out of the picture though he apparently claims objectivity. Furthermore, Maugham does not give complete pictures of any characters; generally they are typed and then studied as they react in a limited frame of reference.


60. "Current Fiction," The Nation, LXXXVIII (March 1, 1909), 255.
As for his attitude toward certain classes of people, Maugham accepts the lower classes, but those of the upper circles come within range of his knife as he slowly but surely whittles the supports out from under their way of life.

The novels written during this period were exercises whereby he learned his trade. Enjoying huge success as a dramatist, Maugham did not have to depend on his novels for a living, and could afford to experiment with different subjects and techniques. His next book, Of Human Bondage, shows that he learned well by experience.
CHAPTER III

AT THE HEIGHT

Of Human Bondage (1915) is Maugham's greatest work and, when a final evaluation is given of Maugham as a writer, must be of prime consideration. It is almost twice as long as any other novel he has written and shows remarkable workmanship and thought. After the publication of The Magician in 1909, he busied himself with the theater where he was enjoying a great success as a dramatist, and had the pleasure of seeing four of his plays running at the same time in London. But at this time Maugham began to be troubled:

... I was but just firmly established as a popular playwright when I began to be obsessed by the teeming memories of my past life ... it all came back so pressingly, in my sleep, on my walks, when I was rehearsing plays, when I was at a party, it became such a burden to me that I made up my mind that I could only regain my peace by writing it all down in the form of a novel. I knew it would be a long one and I wanted to be undisturbed, so I refused the contracts managers were anxious to give me and temporarily retired from the stage.1

The book is not to be looked on as an autobiography, but as an autobiographical novel:

... fact and fiction are inextricably mingled; the emotions are my own, but not all the incidents are related as they happened and some of them are transferred to my hero not from my own life, but from that of persons with whom I was intimate. ...2

2. Ibid., p. 191.
This perhaps is true, but there is a close parallel between Of Human Bondage and the incidents of Maugham's life described in The Summing Up. The writing of the book was to serve as a sort of catharsis for Maugham and after it was finished, he claimed, "... I found myself free forever from those pains and unhappy recollections. I put into it everything I then knew and having at last finished it prepared to make a fresh start." One critic said, "Of Human Bondage, he told me, is a faithful record of the first thirty years of his life...." The title is taken from part four of Spinoza's Ethics: "Of Human Bondage, or the Strength of the Emotions."

The story is mainly concerned with the spiritual development of Philip Carey and his efforts to find himself and a place in life. In a sense the plot does not have a beginning, middle or end, but "... It is merely a single thread drawn out through a wilderness of adventures...." Philip is the thread and the climax comes when he arrives at a personal philosophy and certain convictions concerning his place in this world. The story concerns Philip as an orphan boy with a club foot and a shy disposition, living with his uncle, Vicar of Blackstable. After a miserable period at King's School in Tercanbury, he goes to Germany to study and is introduced to various philosophies

3. Ibid., p. 192.
and different types of people. Returning to England he works for a while with an accounting firm, but gives this up to go to Paris to study art. While in Paris he comes into contact with a group of art students, painters, and writers, and is impressed with their iconoclasm, and their free, careless, and sordid lives. Knowing that he will never be a great painter, he returns to London to study medicine. This attempt seems to be successful, but it too is almost wrecked by a love affair with Mildred Rogers, and by bad financial management. Ultimately he graduates from medical school and prepares to marry and settle down as a country doctor. Throughout these years, Philip's search for certainty and a workable philosophy of life goes on and his spiritual development is the foremost part of the book.

Philip is the principal character in the novel and many of his experiences are drawn directly from Maugham's life. Maugham lost both parents when he was a small child and spent many unhappy years at a vicarage with his uncle and aunt. As a boy Maugham was shy and sensitive as was Philip Carey and both had a defect. Maugham stammered and Philip had a club foot; the club foot may be emblematical of this speech defect. Philip's religious struggle parallels Maugham's own, and both prayed in an attempt to overcome their defects. Both studied in Germany, and the medical school experiences and study are probably parallel at many points. There was also a period of apprenticeship as a chartered accountant in both lives. Thus in many respects, the life of Philip is the life of Maugham, but not in all.
Philip Carey, left an orphan with the death of his mother in childbirth, goes to live with his uncle and aunt at the vicarage at Blackstable. Shy and sensitive, he soon finds that he can obtain pity from other people, and weeps at his mother's death for the pity he receives. He becomes introspective and while at the vicarage he reads many books and

... 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 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...6

He always says his prayers in a nightshirt even in the winter because his uncle had told him to do so, "... he was beginning to realize that he was the creature of a God who appreciated the discomfort of his worshippers...."7 He goes to school, and there is subjected to torment and torture because of his deformity, and soon realizes that whenever anyone wants to hurt him, they make a reference to his club foot. Once, when he and another boy were caught doing wrong, Philip was glad at the prospect of a whipping to show the other boys he could take it, but after the other boy had been beaten, the master said to Philip, "I'm not going to cane you. You're a new boy, and I can't hit a cripple..."8

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7. Ibid., p. 42.
8. Ibid., p. 51.
Philip gradually learns to control his feelings outwardly, but, "The most lasting bondage in which Philip is held is that of his own temperament, and his temperament is determined largely by the accident of his deformity. . . ."9 His introspection creates a strong feeling of self-pity in which he begins to delight and which is evident through the rest of his life. His wide reading coupled with his natural intelligence enables him to defend himself by saying things which hurt his adversary, but he is immensely unhappy. At one time he prays to God with all his might that his club foot might be healed:

He prayed with all the power in his soul. No doubts assailed him. He was confident in the word of God. And the night before he was to go back to school he went up to bed tremulous with excitement. . . .10

The failure of his prayer leaves a tremendous effect on him. He does not enter the ministry as his uncle wants him to do, because doubt of God has already entered his mind. He goes to Heidelberg to study and as he leaves his old school, his distrust of idealism begins to show itself. "... His school days were over, and he was free; but the wild exultation to which he had looked forward at the moment was not there. . . ."11 While at Heidelberg he meets Weeks, an American who is an agnostic, and others who are members of the Roman Catholic faith

11. Ibid., p. 106.
which Philip had been taught was heretical; but "... he could not
help saying to himself that if he had been born in South Germany he
would certainly have been a Roman Catholic. ..."12 His thoughts
continue on the religious theme and once in a conversation with Weeks,
Philip said:

"I don't see why one should believe in God at all."

The words were no sooner out of his mouth than he realized
that he had ceased to do so. ...

Suddenly he realized that he had lost also that
burden of responsibility which made every action of his life
a matter of urgent consequence. He could breathe more freely
in a lighter air. ... From old habit unconsciously he
thanked God that he no longer believed in Him.13

This is not the end of his spiritual search however. He had
put away his religion but kept the morality of it and, until he could
think this through, he devised a maxim to guide him which proved quite
unsuccessful: "Follow your inclination with due regard to the police-
man round the corner."14 While in Paris he meets Cronshaw who later
gives him a Persian rug with an elaborate weave and tells Philip that
the secret of life is explained in that rug and its pattern. After
consideration the purpose finally comes to Philip:

12. Ibid., p. 137.

13. Ibid., pp. 139-141.

The answer was obvious. Life had no meaning. There was no meaning in life, and man by living served no end. It was immaterial whether he was born or not born, whether he lived or ceased to live. Life was insignificant and death without consequence. Philip exulted, as he had exulted in his boyhood when the weight of a belief in God was lifted from his shoulders: it seemed to him that the last burden of responsibility was taken from him; and for the first time he was utterly free... if life was meaningless, the world was robbed of its cruelty...15

Philip arrives at the conclusion that there is one pattern that is obvious, perfect and beautiful and he ultimately carries this conviction into practice; this pattern is one in which "a man was born, grew to manhood, married, produced children, toiled for his bread, and died..."16 Philip remains an agnostic, but at times has trouble reconciling his agnosticism with his experience and finds it difficult to believe life has no meaning. This is only one phase of Philip's development, but is probably the most important. Through his rejection of God he arrives at his simple pattern of life and frees his conscience. However, there are incidents to show that his conscience is not as free as he supposes and Philip cannot be labeled as an atheist. He is an agnostic, and as Maugham says, "...I no longer believed in God; I still in my bones, believed in the Devil."17 This instinctive belief in the Devil illustrates Maugham's conception of the power of the emotions and instincts in the life of man.

15. Ibid., pp. 657-658.
16. Ibid., p. 659.
Of the minor characters, Mildred Rogers is the most memorable. Entering Philip's life as a vulgar, anemic waitress in a cheap cafe, she leads him through the miseries of unreturned love. She leaves him and runs off with a man whom she later finds is married. Pregnant and somewhat repentant, she returns to Philip, who still loves her and spends his small income for her support and pays for the birth of her child. He enters into self-torture when he gives Mildred and his friend, Griffiths, money to go on a week-end trip. Though he hates to make the offer, the pleasure of self-torture gives him compensation. Mildred finally goes out of his life a diseased prostitute who continues to ply her trade, but she is an integral part of his development. His love for Mildred is made plausible and she "is an amazingly real person."21 "... Mildred, with her insolent pale thin mouth and anaemic skin, has been described somewhere as an implacable pale green worm who crawls through the book. ..."22 Richard Cordell makes a statement that may account for such a strong portrayal of Mildred: "... Of Mildred, one of the most tantalizing and despicable characters in all fiction, one is permitted to say only that she is not altogether a creature of the novelist's fancy. ..."23

The other women in the story have little influence on Philip. His aunt Louise is a pathetic individual who helps him finance his

23. Cordell, op. cit., p. 94.
art studies. She is kind and loves Philip, but when she dies, he is appalled at her waste of life. Fanny Price, an art student in Paris who is in the same class with Philip, is an unclean, starved person who falls victim to her untalented artistic attempts. Her suicide shocks Philip, but leaves no major influence. Norah Nesbitt, unlike Mildred in almost every way, treats Philip kindly and becomes his mistress. He is reasonably happy with her, but Mildred returns and he leaves Norah. Later when Mildred leaves him, Norah is engaged and Philip steps out of the picture. Sally Athelny, different from both Norah and Mildred, is not beautiful nor feminine, but is truthful, kind and dependable. Philip does not love her, but sees his chance to put into practice his simple pattern of life, and she seems calm and composed and willing to marry him. Maugham later wrote concerning this arrangement:

... I sought freedom and thought I could find it in marriage. I conceived these notions when I was still at work on Of Human Bondage, and turning my wishes into fiction, as writers will, towards the end of it I drew a picture of the marriage I should have liked to make. Readers on the whole have found it the least satisfactory part of my book.24

Another character, Philip's uncle, the vicar, is a prototype of most of the clergy in Maugham's stories. Uncle William is a worldly, vain, selfish, and rather shallow-minded person, who is a principal influence on Philip's agnosticism. He does not exactly practice what

he preaches, and when he plays backgammon, his wife "arranged that her husband should win, because he did not like losing."25 The description of his death is pathetic and Philip feels that his uncle as well as his aunt had lived a useless life.

Of the artists and writers Philip met in Paris, Cronshaw stands out. A drunkard, who embarks on philosophical speculations when drunk, he has a heavy influence on Philip. Cronshaw tells Philip that there is no such thing as abstract morality and that any act is the sum total of all past experiences and is inevitable.

"... when an action is performed it is clear that all the forces of the universe from all eternity conspired to cause it, and nothing I could do could have prevented it. It was inevitable. If it was good I can claim no merit; if it was bad I can accept no censure."

"... The terms vice and virtue have no signification for me. . . ."26

This determinism is a major step in helping Philip develop his rules of life.

While in Paris, Philip is exposed to many aesthetic theories but although he tempers his own narrow theories, he does not arrive at a stable theory and the discussions, interesting and varied, on the subject do not seem to greatly influence his development. With the exception of Cronshaw, the lives of the people he meets in Paris


26. Ibid., pp. 256-257.
influence him more than any of their convictions. Cronshaw is the power behind the opinions of Philip's friends, and any dogmatic proclamation by them can be traced back as influenced by this man.

Of Human Bondage is a living book and there is little trouble in accepting Philip as a real character. There is "no doubt about conviction of reality."27 Maugham has used emotions and incidents common to many people, and for this reason many readers associate themselves with Philip Carey. Not that all readers go through such pangs of love, or agnostic convictions as does Philip, because not all are given such a capacity for sensitiveness and suffering. Philip is not Everyman, but is Maugham's Hamlet. Philip's "doubts, his sickly thoughts, his quest for the meaning of life are common to the Hamlets of the world..."28 Basing a guess on the comments of many students, one critic writes, "... such a deep plunge [into human experience] that there are probably few characters in modern English fiction with whom readers more readily identify themselves than with Philip Carey..."29 Not that all share the same experiences and arrive at the same conclusions as Philip, but many enter into the same struggle to find their place and the meaning of life. The book does not introduce us to new areas of awareness, "it merely

fills out... those areas of awareness which we already possess."  

The thesis of the book is probably that of man's bondage to circumstances and his emotions.

... The contrast between the strength of emotion and the unworthiness of its object, which is one of the most painful of human experiences, Maugham here describes in a manner which all who have shared that experience can recognize...  

Although the drama of Philip's struggle is great, the reality of the characters is achieved by also another means. In spite of the fact that the plot rises to no spired climax, there is the feeling of progress, of relentless moving on and development that is absent in many of Maugham's other novels. Philip, moving from one group to another in his search for adjustment, loses contact with this or that person for a time and later sees him again, changed and older. His uncle and aunt, Hayward, Mildred, Cronshaw, are all examples of this. Maugham has achieved the artist's detachment in these changes and focuses the interest on Philip by means of his philosophic reflection upon all these characters. A writer must struggle after expression and often his hand is visible in his work, but "Of Human Bondage is so great a book partly at least because that struggle and that agony [after expression] are so little visible in it... ."  

31. Ibid., p. 8.  
unity to the story and another reason for his reality is that he is presented not only as he appears to himself, but as he appears to other people.

Maugham has succeeded in giving reality to his character and Philip's character is developed mainly along the spiritual line, but there is some question as to whether Maugham succeeded in giving a complete picture of Philip. His life is not a progression from birth to death, but from birth to about thirty years of age. There seems to be no final development of Philip as he struggles for the pattern of life, but his struggles are made amazingly real. Within Maugham's frame of reference--those thirty years--he has succeeded in portraying the development of Philip, but it is not a complete development in that there are certain phases of life Philip cannot reconcile to his materialistic philosophy--goodness, for instance, and in this sense there are a few loose ends. This book comes the closest of any of Maugham's books to a complete development of character, and Maugham would have us believe that Philip's philosophy will bring him satisfaction, and happiness as a by-product, but the last part of the book is largely wish fulfillment and is less convincing than the first. Stephen Vincent Benét sums up the value of the book adequately when he writes, "... he has been able, in his greatest book, to portray human passion, aspiration, and defeat, and to do so without cant or exaggeration. That is a good deal for any writer to have done."33

Maugham, after many years, wrote:

... Though I have not read it since I corrected the proofs during the first World War I am willing enough to agree with common opinion that Of Human Bondage is my best work. It is the kind of book that an author can only write once. After all, he has only one life...

The Moon and Sixpence (1919) is the novel that brought Maugham before the public as a novelist rather than a playwright. The book is one of the most successful he has ever written and continues to have a wide following. In Of Human Bondage, Maugham gives the theme of The Moon and Sixpence: Clutton, one of the minor characters, says:

"Do you remember my telling you about the chap I met in Brittany? I saw him the other day here. He's just off to Tahiti. He was broke to the world. He was a brasseur d'affaires, a stockbroker I suppose you call it in English; and he had a wife and family, and he was earning a large income. He chucked it all to become a painter. He just went off and settled down in Brittany and began to paint. He hadn't got any money and did the next best thing to starving."

"And what about his wife and family?" asked Philip.

"Oh, he dropped them. He left them to starve on their own account." 35

To complete the story, the painter, Charles Strickland, ends up in Tahiti, with a colored mistress, and dies of leprosy. Soon after his death he is recognized as a genius and his paintings are sold for thousands of dollars.


35. Maugham, Of Human Bondage, p. 299.
The book is based closely on the life of Paul Gauguin, the famous French painter. Of course, fact and fiction are intermixed. Maugham said:

"... I wanted to write a book entirely to please myself. ... The book has a disagreeable person, a real blackguard, as the chief character and the sentiments expressed by Strickland are calculated to arouse the hatred or disgust of women. The novel has no sweetness or light. ..."36

This is the first novel Maugham wrote in the first person and the effect is successful. It serves to give a more normal point of view to the strange actions of the characters, as well as tying the story together. The pronoun "I" would have helped The Merry-Go-Round. Of this writing convention, Maugham wrote:

... The advantages of this one [writing convention] is its directness. It makes it possible for the writer to tell no more than he knows. Making no claim to omniscience, he can frankly say when a motive or an occurrence is unknown to him, and thus often gives his story a plausibility that it might otherwise lack. It tends also to put the reader on intimate terms with the author. ..."37

Also Maugham has visited many of the places he speaks of in this novel, and this fact, together with the first person singular, gives a certain reality to the characters and events described in the book.

Strickland's character is presented, to a great extent, by his reactions to the minor characters who though not developed are typed well by Maugham. Dirk Stroeve is a simple-minded Dutchman whom Maugham

36. Quoted in Rascoe, op. cit., p. 72.

portrays as happily married to quiet and apparently happy Blanche. One of the few who knows that Strickland is a great painter, Dirk finds Strickland half-dead and brings him to his own home to nurse him. Strickland repays his kindness by taking his wife and his studio away from him, although Dirk's wife partly went of her own accord. Making a fool of himself, the poor Dutchman tries to get his wife back, but she poisons herself when Strickland leaves her. Dirk returns to his parents in Holland and is out of the story, but Strickland develops because of his contact with the good, simple man. Blanche Stroeve is weak and wicked, but Strickland takes her. He is callous, hardened, and makes no attempt to defend himself. Dirk's story is almost a story within a story, but the interest is still centered on Strickland. Mrs. Strickland, the wife who is left in England, is a social aspirant who is first portrayed as a suffering wife, but soon is shown to be a self-centered upper-class woman whose reactions to her husband's story arouse disgust. She is more worried about gossip than about her husband, and the result is that "it throws a shadow of insecurity over the most deeply felt emotion."38 Also, "... It was evident that she had been prepared to weep, for she had provided herself with a sufficiency of handkerchiefs; I admired her forethought, but in retrospect it made her tears perhaps less moving. ..."39

39. Ibid., p. 58.
Mrs. Strickland could have reconciled herself to her fate if Strickland had run off with a woman, but for him to run off for an ideal is too much for her; she could have gotten much more sympathy otherwise. Through her character we get a picture of the type of life Strickland left, and perhaps why he left it. Tiare, who relates to the writer a chapter of Strickland's life, is almost surrounded and cut off from the rest of the story by her description. Though she does help Strickland settle down with a native mistress, she has no great influence on the story, but yet her personality is described in some detail. An example of her character is as follows:

... Tall and extremely stout, she would have been of imposing presence if the great good-nature of her face had not made it impossible for her to express anything but kindness. Her arms were like legs of mutton... her face, broad and fleshy, gave you an impression of almost indecent nakedness, and vast chin succeeded to vast chin. I do not know how many of them there were. They fell away voluminously into the capaciousness of her bosom... .

......

Age and obesity had made her inapt for love, but she took a keen interest in the amatory affairs of the young. She looked upon venery as the natural occupation for men and women, and was ever ready with precept and example from her own wide experience.41

The life Strickland was leading slowly accumulated into a force that made him break every bond that held him. Why did he leave? The answer is, "I tell you I've got to paint. I can't help myself. When


a man falls into the water it doesn't matter how he swims, well or badly: he's got to get out or else he'll drown."42 Maugham himself is talking to him at the time and to add sincerity to this statement he tells how Strickland sternly rejects the advances of a prostitute which shows that he did not leave for a good time. Sacrificing all for beauty, he had gone through an inward struggle that "... might be the meanly tragic milestones of almost any life humanly compounded of weakness, doubt, desire and ability. ..."43 Maugham convinces us that he is describing a genius.

There are gaps in the characterization, though, caused by the author's admitted detachment. Other than saying that Strickland has to paint, Maugham does not attempt to explain Strickland's conduct; he is content merely to describe, and his descriptions pick up Strickland in various phases of his search for beauty and expression. It is this search that makes Strickland develop to a degree, but there are not enough incidents to give a complete picture. "... He merely observes and from a few scraps of experience pieces together the story, ... The author and reader alike grope for motives. ..."44 The minor characters portray him, but the only motive for his action is his desire for art expression. Yet this motive almost seems sufficient for a moment when we realize that Strickland is a genius,

42. Ibid., p. 71.
44. Cordell, op. cit., p. 112.
and we sympathize with him in his helplessness with this power that drives him. Captain Brunot who tells Maugham of the last few years of Strickland's life says:

... There are men whose desire for truth is so great that to attain it they will shatter the very foundation of their world. Of such was Strickland, only beauty with him took the place of truth. I could only feel for him a profound compassion.45

Maugham tells Strickland, "... I see you as the eternal pilgrim to some shrine that perhaps does not exist..."46 In a sense all men are confronted with this problem. There is probably at least one secret desire that at times makes men want to break away from the daily routine. Maugham in this sense has struck a universal emotion that the reader can share. That is the question of the book. Should one reach for the moon or should he be satisfied with six pence? After seeing Strickland reach for the moon, we might ask if it is worth the cost, but the book does not answer that question. Attempting to break his bonds and become free, Strickland only succeeds in becoming a slave of art. He is not free, some force is urging him on, but what this force is, Maugham does not explain. It is the drive of a primitive man, but "... His primitive man is too much of a brute to be true to nature..."47 This is a weakness in the

46. Ibid., p. 236.
characterization of Strickland; he is almost too cruel and horrible to be accepted. Maugham does not wholly explain him and because of the gaps in characterization, the reader searches in vain for rational causes. However, the use of the first person, strong portrayal of minor characters, and Strickland's reactions to them, and the use of a universal emotion, all serve to give a certain reality to this development of a genius.

In these two books, Of Human Bondage and The Moon and Sixpence, Maugham is at his best, and not only has he told good stories, but he has developed strong characters, not necessarily types. In his supreme achievement, Philip Carey, Maugham has succeeded in developing a well-rounded and important individual whose struggles, passions, and activities are made vividly real. Charles Strickland, though not as complete a portrayal as Philip, becomes distinct and almost alive as Maugham makes a study of a genius.

Maugham never again in his later books rises to such heights as he does in Of Human Bondage, but this is not to say that his ability as a writer has deserted him. As an explanation of his development as a writer, Maugham writes:

... His [a writer's] early works are tentative; [The Experimental Stage] he tries his hand at various subjects and various methods and at the same time develops his character. ... Then, in full possession of his faculties, he produces the best of which he is capable. Since writing is a healthy occupation, he will probably go on living long after he has done this, and since by this time writing will have become an ingrained habit he will doubtless continue to produce works of no great consequence. ... 48

CHAPTER IV

ON THE PLATEAU

With his greatest novel already written, Maugham begins his final period of writing with *The Painted Veil* (1925), his first novel with a completely Oriental setting. The story concerns Kitty who, though not in love with him, marries Walter Fane, a governmental bacteriologist. She goes with him to Hong Kong. There, bored with him and his type of life, she enters into an affair with Charles Townsend, a married man, but is discovered by Walter. As punishment, he makes her go with him into the interior of China where he has volunteered to help fight an epidemic of cholera. She goes, and seems to change her outlook on life as she sees the misery and poverty of the people. She works among the sick, and with Walter’s death returns to Hong Kong supposedly as a changed woman, but immediately picks up where she left off with Charles Townsend. Somewhat ashamed of her weakness, she returns to England and prepares to start a new life with her father who is going to the Bahamas as a government official.

There was some trouble getting the novel published. It first ran serially in a magazine, and the bacteriologist and his wife were named Lane. A Mr. and Mrs. Lane in Hong Kong, sued the magazine and collected two hundred fifty pounds. The name was changed to Fane and an Assistant Colonial Secretary became enraged. "... By this time
the novel had been published, but it was recalled and Hong-Kong was changed to Tching-Yen.\textsuperscript{1}

Kitty, the principal character, beautiful and conceited, "in a panic married Walter Fane\textsuperscript{2} because she was in her middle twenties and her younger sister was soon to be married; ". . . she knew that her mother did not care now whom she married so long as somehow she got her off her hands."\textsuperscript{3} Her's definitely is not a good start toward a happy marriage, and after two years and an affair with Charles Townsend, she exclaims of Walter, ". . . He was dull. Oh, how he'd bored her, bored her, bored her!\textsuperscript{4} Walter discovers her intrigue and gives her the choice of marrying Charles or going with him to possible death. Charles shows his true colors and refuses to marry her, so she goes with Walter. While in the midst of the epidemic, she goes through a spiritual conflict and slowly changes for the better. She is impressed with the beauty of life of a convent and nuns, and greatly admires their performance of duty. Even a sunrise gives her pleasure: ". . . She had never felt so light of heart and it seemed to her as though her body were a shell that lay at her feet and she pure spirit. . . ."\textsuperscript{5} She feels some relief at the death of Walter because she feels she could never have

\textsuperscript{1} Cordell, W. Somerset Maugham, p. 117.
\textsuperscript{2} W. Somerset Maugham, The Painted Veil (New York: George H. Doran Co., [c 1924]), p. 31.
\textsuperscript{3} Ibid., p. 33.
\textsuperscript{4} Ibid., p. 57.
\textsuperscript{5} Ibid., p. 115.
been happy with him. Upon discovering herself pregnant, she had been forced to admit that she did not know whether the child would be his or Townsend's. She returns to Hong Kong "... free from bad love, death, Charles' love, and had confidence in the future."6 but soon she has another affair with Charles. Hoping to make a fresh start, she goes to London, but there is no reason to believe that she will succeed: "... the optimistic yodelling with which she announces her conversion rather suggests an author in search of an ending."7

Walter Fane is not an admirable character and his revenge comes off rather shallow. "... Because he had dressed a doll in gorgeous robes and set her in a sanctuary to worship her, and then discovered that the doll was filled with sawdust he could neither forgive himself nor her. ..."8 Maugham makes him appear stupid and narrow-minded. It is Walter's own self-pity that causes his attempt at revenge. He is tight lipped and shadowy and only a means to carry out the study of a weak woman who has been caught in an adulterous act.

Charles Townsend is selfish, vain, and fearful of his career should a scandal touch him. After discovery, he turns Kitty out in the cold and refuses to help her.

Waddington, a Deputy Commissioner in the interior serves as a relief to all this baseness, but he too is not an admirable character.

6. Ibid., p. 248.


He helps the nuns at times, but delights in making fun of their reasons for performing service. He lives with a native woman and has leanings toward an oriental religion, and as for his attitude toward his native religion, he says, "... No, I'm not a Catholic. I describe myself as a member of the Church of England, which I suppose is an inoffensive way of saying that you don't believe in anything very much..."9

His light remarks and calm attitude make him stand out as a relief to so much misery and selfishness.

The reader is never in doubt about the personalities of the characters because Maugham has typed them well in the beginning, but the reader wants to know what will happen to them. This points to the fact that Maugham is telling a story and that the development of characters is not important. "Perhaps because the author was more concerned with story than character this novel is inferior to Mrs. Craddock, Of Human Bondage, Moon and Sixpence..."10 The plot depends on the enlargement of the consequences of one adulterous act, and these consequences are spun out with small regard to characterization. "... It is an emotional situation scrutinized by the cold light of reason."11 There is a slight development in the character of Kitty when she returns to Hong Kong apparently changed, and her falling

9. Ibid., p. 113.
into her old ways again emphasizes her character to a large degree. The characters, including Kitty, are for the most part trivial and their trials do not arouse pity or sorrow on the part of the reader.

Maugham's next book, *Ashenden: or the British Agent* (1927), is not a novel in the usual sense, but generally is classified as such. "This book is founded on my experiences in the Intelligence Department during the last war [World War I] but rearranged for the purpose of fiction..." The narrative is a collection of incidents of a secret service agent, Ashenden, who is the only unifying agent in the book, and only in this sense can it be called a novel. Each incident has separate characters and of course separate plots. It is a collection of short stories, and six of them are printed in the book of his collected short stories, *East and West*. I now offer to the public a new edition of these stories. They purpose only to offer entertainment, which I still think, impenitently, is the main object of a work of fiction. Apparently, until quite recently, these narratives have been required reading for persons entering the British Intelligence Department, and Dr. Goebbels, speaking over the radio,

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13. This is the date of the first copyright. The edition used by this writer is 1941.


used one of them as a contemporary account of an example of British
cynicism and brutality.17

The stories are not of the highly exaggerated cloak and dagger
type, and Maugham does not strain his characters into feats of daring
and bravery. Ashenden, who no doubt is Maugham, proceeds to do his
duty, sometimes successfully and oftimes clumsily, but there is always
a good story. He meets some interesting characters, but they appear
for so short a time and within such a small frame of reference that
there is little development of characters. Ashenden seems to be more
of an observer than a participant, and serves as a medium to bring out
the plots. There is little beginning and no climax, and the finish is
a resting place, not an end of a story.

... It is more properly an endless chronicle of strange,
vivid people who ... rise out of fancy for a moment of
tangible form, flash strongly their brief second, and fade
back into the dusk of a macabre screen.18

One character, Mr. Harrington, an American business man in Russia
is memorable and would be a strong minor character in a regular novel.
He is humorous, kind, obstinate, and proud of his family at home. He
loses his life in the street fighting of the Russian revolution. Re-
fusing to leave without his laundry, he is killed in the process of
getting it. The book entertains, but from a standpoint of character
development, it has little to offer.

17. Ibid., p. xiii.
(April 21, 1928), 803.
Following *The Painted Veil* and *Ashenden*, Maugham again turned to England for his material, and wrote *Cakes and Ale: or the Skeleton in the Cupboard* (1930). Maugham's cynicism rises to great heights in this book. It, like *The Moon and Sixpence*, is written in the first person, and Willie Ashenden, the narrator of the story, is probably Maugham.

Two purposes are readily apparent in this book. One is to portray the character of Rosie Driffield, and the other is a satire on certain phases of literary life in England. Alroy Kear, and the second Mrs. Edward Driffield are setting the stage to make the late Edward Driffield assured of posterity as a writer. Material on Driffield's first wife is scarce and what material there is, does not show him in a good light. Willie Ashenden, a writer, when in his youth knew both Driffield and Rosie, is asked to contribute his knowledge. Through Ashenden's private reflections, the character of Rosie and Driffield is portrayed. The second Mrs. Driffield and Alroy do not want to publish what Ashenden knows because it might hurt Driffield's reputation which is by no means small. Alroy asks:

"But how the devil am I to get over the first Mrs. Driffield?"

"The skeleton in the cupboard," I [Ashenden] murmured.19

Rosie is the principal character. When Driffield meets her she is a barmaid free with her body, who becomes his mistress, later his

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wife, and is repeatedly unfaithful to him. She is not portrayed as a vile character, but is kind, happy, and

"... She was naturally affectionate. When she liked anyone it was quite natural for her to go to bed with him. ... It was her nature. ... It was a pleasure to her and she liked to give pleasure to others. It had no effect on her character; she remained sincere, unspoiled, and artless." 20

She finally runs away from Driffield with a Lord George to America. Ashenden, who also has his affair with her, sees her in New York years later. She is old, yet neat, prim and in the process of making a date for an evening of entertainment. This passage of time helps to give some reality to Rosie. The reader gets few glimpses of the life that Driffield and Rosie led together, but the reader is led to believe that she treats him as kindly as she does her friends. Maugham flaunts poetic justice, as he does in Up At the Villa, but Rosie is always happy. She has no conflicts and is a creature of emotion and instinct.

Philip Carey appears in this book under the name of Ashenden, who as a boy lives with his uncle, a vicar, at Blackstable. The uncle is the same worldly, vain individual as he is in Of Human Bondage. Ashenden is really more Maugham than Philip, because Ashenden is a writer and has much to say on literature and the literary field. As in The Narrow Corner, the action is seen through the eyes of a detached narrator, and the story moves with Ashenden. He is the same type of writer who went to Paris in The Moon and Sixpence to see what Charles Strickland was doing and why.

The two characters of Alroy Kear and Edward Driffield have caused a great deal of discussion and probably created some hard feelings among the literary society of England. Alroy Kear is a literary dandy, who is always seen with the right people, and is ever ready to invite a hostile critic to lunch:

... He laid his book at the feet of a great artist as the tribute of a young man entering upon the profession of letters to one whom he would always look up to as his master ... he begged for criticism and guidance. ... The authors he wrote to, flattered by his praise, answered at length. ... He asked for their advice with a humility that was touching and promised to act upon it with a sincerity that was impressive. Here, they felt, was someone worth taking a little trouble over.21

Throughout the book, Alroy is held up to ridicule as an author whose actions belie his deeds. More than one novelist began to search to see if Maugham meant him to be Alroy Kear.

... Indeed, one British novelist, promptly suspected by his friends of having inspired the character, was kept for some months under their surveillance, though whether in fear that he would do damage to himself or to Mr. Maugham I am not quite sure. ... 22

Hugh Walpole was especially embittered, but Maugham told him, and the world, that Alroy Kear was a composite, and not meant to be a portrayal of any one character. However, after twenty years, and the death of Hugh Walpole, Maugham makes the following confession:

... Hugh Walpole then was the most prominent member of that body of writers who attempt by seizing every opportunity to keep in the public eye, by getting on familiar terms with

critics so that their books may be favorably reviewed, by currying favor wherever it can serve them, to attain a success which their merit scarcely deserves. ... It was true that I had had Hugh Walpole in mind when I devised the character to whom I gave the name of Alroy Kear. ... 

Thus Maugham finally admits that Hugh Walpole had reason to be somewhat perturbed.

When the admirers of Thomas Hardy interpreted the character of Edward Driffield, they began to cry out in protest because, "... it is impossible to escape the feeling that Driffield is intended as a portrait of Thomas Hardy. ..." Maugham cannot deny that there are many parallels: both Hardy and Driffield were of humble origin, both were interested in architecture, both married twice, their novels were written on about the same themes, both had books banned, both married a younger wife the second time, and lived in semi-retirement on a country estate; their physical characteristics are almost the same. However, there are differences, many of them, but critics are still not convinced. Maugham still denies that he was portraying Thomas Hardy. Even if the critics condemn Maugham for using Thomas Hardy as


a source, they cannot be too much bothered over his portrayal, because Maugham's approach is sympathetic and understanding. Despite all of these charges, Driffield's characterization is full of gaps and there are many loose ends. "... Through both series of tribulations Driffield steers a bewildered, retiring course—a little animal wounded in some part which we cannot see and bleeding very slowly to death."25 Another critic says, "... Driffield himself is a far more shadowy figure [than Rosie], and not very successful..."26

Maugham leads us to believe that Rosie and not Amy Driffield, the second wife, is the inspiration for much of Driffield's work. Surely the second Mrs. Hardy did not appreciate this. Amy is efficient, conscientious, and feels it her duty to fetch her famous husband out of the London pubs he loves so well, as well as inducing him to take an occasional bath which he hates. She is only one of the reasons Driffield is a sympathetic character.

A patron of the literary world, Mrs. Barton Trafford, also is shown up as a vain, self-centered woman whose main delight in life is to help and be associated with a great literary name.

As for the reality of the characters, Maugham again, as in The Hero, lets cynicism get the spotlight. The story is not complex. Maugham sets up his personnel in the frame of a literary field and proceeds to knock the supports out from under them. Even the strong


portrayal of Rosie as the 'skeleton,' takes a back seat. Cynicism, which makes the author's hand visible, does not develop characters. There are too many 'asides' by Ashenden, and thus Maugham, which distract from the characters. However, Maugham's cynicism does not become bitter, and the book is humorous and exceedingly interesting. Rosie is a harlot without the dirt and grime; Alroy is somewhat ridiculous, but happy and relatively sincere; Driffield is kind and portrayed with some pity.

All authors have their favorite books, and for Maugham, Cakes and Ale is the one. An old man now, he rather sorrowfully reflects:

... the book I like best is Cakes and Ale. It was an amusing book to write. I found it a pleasant task to surmount the difficulty of dealing with events that had taken place long ago and events that took place thirty years later. ... I like Cakes and Ale, because in its pages lives for me again the woman with the lovely smile who was the model for Rosie Driffield.27

In The Narrow Corner (1932), Maugham again turns to the Orient for his setting and characters. The scene is a small unimportant South Seas island which Maugham portrays as almost isolated from the rest of the world. On a fly leaf is a quotation expressing this detachment: "Short, therefore, is man's life and narrow is the corner of the earth wherein he dwells." It is "... a novel unconcerned with problems and providing no sweeping view of an era or a society."28

27. Maugham, "For Maugham It's Cakes and Ale," op. cit., 38.
The story concerns an English doctor who leaves a well-established Chinese practice to treat a wealthy patient in the Malay Archipelago. Returning on a small ship with a rascally sea captain and a youth fleeing from justice, he has his hour of interesting adventure. They are forced by a storm to take shelter on a small island. The boy has an affair with the daughter of a white resident of the island, and her fiance commits suicide.

Dr. Saunders, who for some unexplained reason was forced to leave England, has settled in China and built up a comfortable practice. He adopts the Chinese way of life, and even begins smoking opium. Though a keen student of human nature, Dr. Saunders does not take a large part in any of the action of the book. Maugham's philosophy is readily apparent in this character. He is an atheist and has strong strains of solipsism and hedonism if a combination of the two is possible:

"... I believe in nothing but myself and my experience. ... Life is a dream in which I create the objects that come before me. Everything knowable, every object of my experience, is an idea in my mind, and without my mind it does not exist. ... Dream and reality are one. Life is a connected and consistent dream, and when I cease to dream, the world with its beauty, its pain and sorrow, its unimaginable variety will cease to be."29

However, his philosophy is not pure solipsism, it is more one of resignation and acceptance. "... It was an exquisite pleasure to him to know that there was no one in the world who was essential

to his peace of mind. . . ."30 He despises idealists and wastes no tears on their misfortunes. In fact, Dr. Saunders almost seems like Philip Carey grown old, and there is a close parallel between Philip and Dr. Saunders. Philip thanked the God he no longer believed in for his freedom. The parallel for Dr. Saunders comes when they are in a storm and the boat is in danger of sinking: "... He was terrified. ... He had an instinct to appeal for succor to a God he did not believe in, and he had to clench his teeth to prevent his trembling lips from uttering a prayer. ..."31 The story is not written in the first person, but the characters always move and act through the eyes of Dr. Saunders. His reflection on their actions gives unity to the story and he seems almost detached from the book: "... detached by his nature ... there is no danger that he will pry the dramatic situation open prematurely, or act to defeat the fate that overtakes his comrades. ..."32 His detachment and importance as an instrument of motivation causes him to stand head and shoulders above the other characters: "... The one positive contribution that The Narrow Corner makes is the study of an English doctor with a large native practice in a Chinese city, and the manner in which he has built himself into his adopted world. ..."33

30. Ibid., p. 309.
31. Ibid., p. 106.
32. Dorothea Brande, "Seven Novels of the Month," The Bookman, LXXV (November, 1932), 735.
33. Helen McAfee, "Outstanding Novels," The Yale Review, XXII (Winter, 1933), XXII.
Turning to the minor characters, there is an assortment that are vividly described, but they do not live for the reader. Captain Nicholas is an old salt who "found the daily round of honest life a trifle humdrum. He needed a spice of crookedness to counteract the depression his dyspepsia caused him."34 He apparently would not stop at murder if it were to his advantage and he has a shady past. Nevertheless, he is humorous, brave, and his good traits are emphasized as well as his bad. He conducts a funeral aboard another ship that is clumsily performed yet is touching. In a storm, he handles the ship masterfully and gains the respect of both Dr. Saunders and Fred Blake, the other passenger. Nicholas, with all his bold front, has one fear, that is his wife who appears at the end of the book and drags him home.

Another old sailor, Mr. Swan, is memorable because of a descriptive passage: "... He surveyed human kind and its activities from a great distance, but from no Olympian height, from behind a tree, slyly, and hopping from one foot to another with amusement."35

Maugham's attitude toward idealists is shown by what happens to two of them, Fred Blake and Erik Christessen. Fred wants no part of Dr. Saunders' philosophy of resignation:

Resignation? That's the refuge of the beaten. Keep your resignation. I don't want it. I'm not willing to accept evil and ugliness and injustice. I'm not willing to stand

34. Maugham, The Narrow Corner, p. 77.
35. Ibid., p. 164.
by while the good are punished and the wicked go scot-free.
If life means that virtue is trampled on and honesty is
naked and beauty is fouled, then to hell with life.36

Maugham obliges and has Fred either fall or be pushed overboard
and drowned. As for Erik, who is a lover of the classics, and an
advocate of the Christian religion, Maugham has him commit suicide
when he discovers his fiancee, Louise Frith, is having an affair with
Fred. He could not face Maugham's reality.

A writer, Mr. Frith, also comes in for a touch of cynicism.
Dr. Saunders pays him the dubious compliment of going to sleep while
Frith is reading his poems to him.

Because The Narrow Corner is a series of character studies, the
plot is insignificant, insofar as it is only a study, the characters do
not develop. There is little struggle of conscience and only a few
matter-of-fact descriptions of the reactions of these certain types
of characters to a few situations. This is not enough to make them
real, but after they have been typed, the reader follows their actions
with interest. The book is simply entertaining.

Maugham's next book, Theatre (1937), contains two general
thoughts or studies. One attempts to portray the personality of an
actress. The other is a study of a middle-aged woman who is fearful
of losing her youth and attractiveness, or as one critic states, "the
hazard of love." Will love make or mar her."37 There is no plot in

36. Ibid., pp. 293-294.
37. Percy Hutchison, "Maugham's Portrait of a Woman," The New
the conventional sense, only a character study. Maugham rushes Julia Lambert through her early stage career, has her marry Michael Gosselyn, and then sets her up as a woman in her middle forties and begins his study. Trying to persuade herself that she is still young and attractive, she enters into several amours that ultimately satisfy her vanity. Incidentally, Maugham may mean that the characteristics of Julia the actress illustrate the outlook and philosophy of more actresses than Julia Lambert.

Julia is a dramatic genius, there is no doubt about it, and she becomes a star. But at the age of forty-six she begins to wonder if she may be losing her charm. It becomes an obsession with her and anything that shows she still has appeal is grasped by her as an indication that she is not yet old. Thus she becomes the mistress of a young gigolo, Tom Fennell, whose intelligence or charms do not go beyond his bedroom finesse. There is a brief affair with an unknown Spaniard on a train. A masseur gives her a rub-down every day. Upon looking at some photographs of herself she exclaims: "Not bad for a woman of forty-six," she smiled. 'They are like me, there's no denying that.' She looked around the room for a mirror, but there wasn't one.

... "38 At another time she says: "Well, I don't mind telling you I think it's a bit of all right having an unknown young man sending me flowers at my time of life. I mean it just shows you."39 Julia, the


39. Ibid., p. 82.
actress, does not act on the stage only: "... People thought that she only acted during the two or three hours she was on the stage; they did not know that the character she was playing dwelt in the back of her mind all day long..." Actualy, she is the sum total of all the parts she had played. Her actions in everyday life are those of the stage. The whole world is her audience. When visiting Michael's folks for their approval of the marriage, Mrs. Gosselyn says, "... No one would dream you were on the stage." ("I should damn well think not. Haven't I been giving a perfect performance of the village maiden for the last forty-eight hours.") She becomes practically incapable of showing an honest emotion. She begins to realize that when she is hurt or humiliated, it is Julia the actress, not Julia the woman that resents the offense. When she attempts to pour out a true emotion on the stage, her act flops. Her neglected son, Roger, pierces her composure for a minute when he says:

"When I was just a kid, I was fourteen, I was standing one night in the wings watching you act. It must have been a pretty good scene, you said things you had to say so sincerely and what you were saying was so moving, I couldn't help crying... I was uplifted; I felt terribly sorry for you, I felt a bloody little hero; I felt I'd never do anything again that was beastly or underhand. And then you had to come to the back of the stage, near where I was standing, the tears were streaming down your face; you stood with your back to the audience and in your ordinary voice you said to the stage manager: what the bloody hell is that electrician doing with the lights? I told him to leave out

40. Ibid., p. 132.

41. Ibid., p. 37.
the blue. And then in the same breath you turned round and faced the audience with a great cry of anguish and went on with the scene.

I've never believed you since. . . .42

This outbreak does not alter Julia's acting or thinking and she continues with her dual personality. Her hazards of love neither made nor marred her a great deal. She finally reconciles her thoughts in terms of the Platonic ideal:

"... We [the actors] are the symbols of all this confused, aimless struggling that they [the people] call life, and it's only the symbol which is real. They say acting is only make-believe. That make-believe is the only reality."45

Michael, her husband, is a good business man, a poor lover, and overflowing with vanity. To Julia he becomes a crashing boor, and after realizing she is no longer in love with him, she expresses a typical Maugham convention: "... She stretched her legs out in bed and sighed with relief. 'By God, it's grand to be one's own mistress.'"44

Julia has sense enough to stay with Michael and he is a good manager.

Her lover, Tom, is only interesting in that he provides a way for Julia to convince herself she is still desirable. Maugham keeps him in character, and never at any time does Maugham lead us to believe that Tom is in love with Julia. He is satisfied with his mistress and wants things to go no further.

42. Ibid., pp. 259-260.
43. Ibid., p. 292.
44. Ibid., p. 60.
Maugham writes: "I have sought to worm myself into a woman's heart and see life through her eyes and feel emotions through her sensibilities. No one but a woman can tell if I have succeeded. ..."45 Perhaps only a woman could answer this, but as for developing characters Maugham has failed. The story is hackneyed, and only considers one small part of a woman's life. Maugham's theatrical atmosphere makes both the story and the characters seem interesting but unreal. "Theatre is as artificial and insubstantial as the title suggests ... they [the characters] move in a world ... remote and artificial."46 Maugham has not succeeded in making Julia have any real emotions in which the reader can believe: "... Mr. Maugham can only tell us that she fell in love, experienced ecstasy, or was plunged into despair: he cannot endow her with the feeling. ..."47 Perhaps this unreal atmosphere was created by Maugham to show the artificial life Julia leads, but if he has done this, he has not succeeded in portraying Julia the actress. His fake atmosphere creates a feeling of unbelief, and as one critic remarks, "... Nor can I help feeling that the whole thing is essentially untrue."48

Christmas Holiday (1939) is another book where the psychological study of the characters is prevalent. Charley Mason, a respectable son

45. Quoted in Cordell, *op. cit.*, pp. 140-141.
of a minor middle-class English family, goes to Paris for a Christmas holiday expecting to see the sights and have a pleasant, naughty time. Instead of having a pleasant time, he is forced to listen to the long harangues of his friend, Simon, on the techniques of being a dictator, and also spends his days listening to the tragic story of Lydia, a Russian prostitute, whose husband is a murderer. Charley returns home, looking weary after this mental strain, and his parents chide him about the good time they think he had. His father even hints that he might visit a doctor.

The life of a middle-class family is the background of three distinct stories woven by Maugham into a relatively complete story, however the movement of the author is easily detected and Maugham does not obtain the desired objectivity. The first story deals with Charley who is a young, well-bred, mild-tempered Englishman, neither stupid nor clever, but indoctrinated with middle-class conventions that conflict with the beliefs and actions of Simon and Lydia. The story of his reactions to them is most intriguing.

... The world he knew, the peaceful happy world of the surface, was like a pretty lake in which were reflected the dappled clouds and the willows that grew on its bank, where care-free boys paddled their canoes and the girls with them trailed their fingers in the soft water. It was terrifying to think that below, just below, dangerous weeds waved tentacles to ensnare you and all manner of strange, horrible things, poisonous snakes, fish with murderous jaws, waged an unceasing and hidden warfare. ... 49

The second story is a series of lectures by Simon who is training himself to be a dictator. He is by no means stupid and some of his observations ring true for contemporary history. He is a revolutionist against democracy, and Maugham portrays him as slightly silly, but at the same time uses his speeches as propaganda against the dictators and also against the masses who let themselves be led by such characters. His long speeches show he is a radical and the reader tires of Simon continually telling how he is denying himself. Maugham makes a few references to a bad home life and poor background as the causes for Simon's beliefs, but beyond that he does not explain him. An example of Simon's thoughts is shown when he tells Charley, "... I shan't rest till I know in my bones that if it were necessary to put you against a wall and shoot you with my own hands I could do it without a moment's hesitation and without a moment's regret."50 Also, "... Democracy has attached an absurd importance to human life. Morally man is worthless and it's no loss to suppress him..."51

The third narrative is a story within a story which takes up a large portion of the book. Lydia Berger, the prostitute, tells Charley the story of her husband's crimes and how he was convicted for murder and sent to Devil's Island. She has the idea that she can atone for his sins by her own suffering so she has chosen prostitution

50. Ibid., p. 39.
51. Ibid., p. 284.
as a means of redemption. She tells Charley, "... I believe that somehow--how I don't know--my humiliation, my degradation, my bitter, ceaseless pain, will wash his soul clean. ..." 52 The circumstances of the murder are described in detail and a character study of Robert Berger, the murderer, is given which is relatively complete. The author's hand is readily apparent at this point as he offers explanation of the murderer's motives and mind.

Charley's reactions to these situations help to tie the book together, but in reality the effect upon him is not strong. He is nobody's fool. Maugham tells us at the end of the book that "... the bottom had fallen out of his world," 53 but, as one critic writes, "... It seems unlikely that the young man's world has been changed; so little has this chilly microcosm affected our own hearts or minds. ..." 54 Charley does not fall for Simon's verbal outbursts, and with Lydia, he shows sympathy and lives with her for several days in the same room without having an affair which seems to show that he is master of the situation. Charley does learn about another part of life, and his middle-class life is satirized, but he learns it all by hearing it.

... and when they [Simon and Lydia] start talking they knock off several pages at a clip, take a deep breath and

52. Ibid., p. 162.
53. Ibid., p. 314.
54. Robert Littell, "Outstanding Novels," The Yale Review, XXIX (December, 1939), X.
dive right in again: speeches that are virtually little stories in themselves and sound much too theatrical to be convincing. . . . 55

These long passages become somewhat tiring.

. . . as she [Lydia] pours out her past to Charley it seems to me that her recital becomes too prolonged, too static, for the best effect. The same charge, I think, can be urged against those passages in which Simon declaims his mission to the world. . . . 56

Thus if the dialogue is unreal or not convincing, the characters also are not accepted as real. The story of Robert Berger is distracting and seems out of place, but it is a competent case study, " . . . seen entirely from the outside, in exposition, hypothesis, philosophizing about him. . . . " 57 The story may be seen from the outside, but the reader is aware that the author has stepped in to give the interpretation. The sequence of events or the actions of Berger give few clues to his character.

Maugham skillfully mixes these stories, but one is aware that the stories are the important thing. The characters are typed and contrasted as in the case of Lydia and Charley, and Maugham describes their interaction, but the results of their acquaintances are not clearly exposed. Charley is shocked, but remains relatively unchanged in spite of Maugham's telling us his world was destroyed. Simon remains the radical, and Lydia remains the prostitute seeking to absolve the sins


of her worthless husband. Maugham brings his characters to the stage, they tell a story, and move offstage again the same as they came on. The Christmas holiday and Charley serve as the stage on which the characters may move, but the stage, as well as the characters, remains static.

Up at the Villa, Maugham's shortest novel, contains only about 35,000 words. Actually, it is probably a long short story, because the action is confined to a forty-eight hour period, "and the characters are determined primarily by their reactions to a single situation." This one situation brings out the character traits of all the individuals, and furnishes the only concept of their development.

Mary Panton, an attractive widow with a small income, is in Florence trying to decide what to do with her beauty and spare time. She has a choice to make immediately because of two proposals: one from an old friend and empire-builder, Edgar Swift, who is able to offer her security; the other from a gay English playboy, Rowley Flint. Rowley says:

... I was lucky enough to inherit an income which made it unnecessary for me to earn my living. Do you think I should have got some job that would have taken the bread out of the mouth of a poor devil who needed it? ...


This attitude compares with that of Dick Lomas in The Explorer. Both have an income and do not need to work. Edgar is "... a handsome man in the prime of life. He had dignity without arrogance. He inspired you with confidence. Here was a fellow whom no predicament could perplex and no accident discompose. ..."60

Maugham himself tells us of these two types of characters at the beginning of the story. They are already typed, and the interest of the reader turns to Mary’s choice and the reactions of the characters to a single incident.

The single incident is a whim of Mary’s, "more, I suspect at the prompting of Mr. Maugham rather than her own volition."61 She meets a young cafe violinist, Karl Richter, and either out of pity or for want of excitement or feeling of superiority has an affair with him. Karl is in love with her and asks her why she had given herself to him. She answers, "You were lonely and miserable. I wanted to give you a few moments’ happiness."62 That is Mary’s excuse for her actions. Karl becomes enraged, "I never asked for pity. Why didn’t you leave me alone? You have shown me heaven and now you want to thrust me back to earth. No. No. No."63 He rapes her and shoots

60. Ibid., p. 11.
62. Maugham, Up at the Villa, p. 91.
63. Ibid., p. 92.
himself in her bedroom. She calls Rowley and they decide to dispose of the body and say nothing about it. The good part of Rowley comes out as he protects Mary. Edgar returns from a trip, and Mary tells him what has happened. He still offers to marry her, but only in a sense of duty, and grabs the chance to be released. This shows the weakness in Edgar. Mary accepts the proposal of Rowley.

There is no doubt that the story moves swiftly and it is interesting, but the reader finds difficulty believing in the characters. Karl is an honest Austrian refugee who arouses some pity, but is out of the story almost as soon as he enters. Maugham makes Rowley into a 'good' character because he helps Mary in her crisis, and he even professes that he will reform if Mary promises to be his wife. Perhaps he will, but the reader is in no way convinced. He does have a strong will, but that is all we have to go on. Edgar appears strong, but he too does an about-face when confronted with marrying a harlot. Maugham chooses this means to make Edgar seem weak, but many people may wonder whether his decision is weakness or discretion. Mary herself is weak and emotional throughout the book, and Maugham keeps her in character. The characters are shadowy and the only free will is shown when Rowley decides to help Mary dispose of the body. The other characters are merely emotionally batted around by the force of the crime. It is a crime in the sense that Mary is the final straw that drove Karl to suicide.

... Not that the author gives us the human interpretation of her complex crime. It is as though he were not quite aware of her emotional dilemma. In fact, it seems as though he did
not quite believe in her existence at all, using her without much passion to carry out his exceedingly clever plot. Which makes the reader feel somewhat cheated and inclined to believe in nothing at all. ⁶⁴

Poetic justice also takes a side seat if we blame the crime on Mary, which even Rowley does:

"... How could you expect him to guess that it wasn't love that made you give yourself to him. ... It was an intolerable humiliation. No wonder he nearly killed you. You'd raised him to the stars and then you flung him back to the gutter. He was like a prisoner whose jailors lead him to the door of his prison and just as he is about to step out to freedom, slam it in his face. Wasn't that enough to decide him that life wasn't worth living?" ⁶⁵

Mary looks forward to a reasonably happy life as does Rowley, and there apparently is little danger of the incident destroying the lives of the three main characters. "... Mr. Maugham has a remarkable way of writing as if he didn't care a damn about the people either in his book or anywhere else, but he makes one want to know what is happening to them." ⁶⁶

The dialogue, which is so essential to good characterization, is weak and thin. Clichés are common. "... The screaming falseness of its dialogue ... should alone be enough to turn the stomachs of even moderately sensitive readers. ..." ⁶⁷

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⁶⁵. Maugham, Up at the Villa, p. 165.

⁶⁶. Robert Littell, "Outstanding Novels," The Yale Review, XXX (March, 1941), XIV.

The foregoing statement, probably a slight overstatement, can be borne out by an example:

[Rowley] "Can you blame me? Surely it's very natural that in spring a young man's fancy should lightly turn to thoughts of love."

His manner was so disarming, his frankness so engaging that Mary could not but smile.68

The conversation is incidental in this book, and it definitely takes the back seat to the plot. "This is a striking plot, full of psychological and dramatic potentialities. Yet it comes off thin and pale, leading nowhere into human depths, but always ending in drawing-room talk..."69

As in The Hero, The Hour Before the Dawn (1942), deals with an English family in time of war. However, the earlier book has more social implications, while the latter attempts to depict the effect of World War II on only one English family. This English family is not as narrow-minded as the Parsons' in The Hero, and make many sacrifices to the war effort. Not that they get by without a few cynical slaps from Maugham, but their upper-class affiliations are not held up to so great a contempt.

The Hendersons, an English family of the upper class, turn all of their efforts toward helping to win the war. Mr. Henderson works with the Red Cross; the estate is turned into a refuge for city

68. Maugham, Up at the Villa, pp. 42-43.

children; one son, Roger, is in the think of the fighting; a son-in-law, Ian Foster, also sees combat. However, there is trouble. Jim, another son, is a pacifist and refuses to fight. He works on a farm close to home and is held up to much contempt by some members of his family and the townspeople. Jim falls in love with a pretty German refugee, Dora Freidberg, and finally marries her. To his bitter surprise, he discovers she is a Nazi agent and had been guiding German bombers to a secret air field near the Henderson estate. Jim, throwing away his convictions, kills her and then commits suicide.

Maugham claims that he seldom has read any of his books after they have been published, nevertheless he must have strained his memory and picked some of the characters in this book from some of his earlier novels. Jane Foster has many of the humorous characteristics of Julia Crowley in The Explorer. She is humorous, witty, and completely happy with her husband, Ian, who is much like Dick Lomas in the earlier work. Jane and Ian are suited temperamentally and in every other way. Their marriage is one of the few happy ones in all of Maugham's novels. However, the marriage of Dick and Julia gave promise of being successful. Mr. Parsons, in The Hero, is the same type of man as is Mr. Henderson, but there are marked differences. Both are old soldiers, and relatively stupid, and Mr. Henderson "... could more easily forgive an injury than a social solecism. You could rely on him to the death, but you couldn't always rely on him to do the right
thing... In regard to common sense, Mr. Henderson is far more advanced than Mr. Parsons and is much more admirable. Mrs. Craddock's character appears as May Henderson, Roger's wife. Here again as in the earlier novel, Mrs. Craddock, are two unsuited personalities married. Roger's duty is to his country. Roger does not give in to her, and she finally leaves him for Dick Murray, whom she has loved for several years. It is Mrs. Craddock's matrimonial troubles in a different setting and with a different ending.

Roger, the pride of the family, lives through Dunkirk and comes home somewhat a hero. Telling of his trials behind the German lines, he brings to the reader a small picture of the war. A determined, intelligent type of character, he is perhaps the strongest character in the book. However, he does not develop as an individual and his main function in the story is to show up the weaknesses of a woman, and also to tell a short account of the fighting.

Maugham shows no mercy to the pacifist, Jim Henderson, and may be his opinion of all pacifists. Until he discovers Dora's actions, Jim is strong in his convictions, and had said, "... They can beat me, they can put me in prison, they can stand me up against a wall and shoot me--I will not serve in the Army, I will not kill, I will not do anything to help others to kill." After Dora's treachery, which


71. Ibid., p. 83.
causes his thirteen year old brother to be killed in the bombing, Jim rides England of a spy and an ex-pacifist.

Attempting to show the effect of war on one family, Maugham has introduced several plots, each involving different characters. As a result, there is no center of interest or complete portrayal of characters. All characters being members of one family serve to unify the story, but as in The Merry-Go-Round, the members all move in such different fields that the reader's interest does not remain with any one character. One critic writes:

But do these people stand as types or do they develop into individuals? I find difficulty in attaching myself to them; I am curious about them while the story is in motion, but my intentions toward them, as Oscar Wilde once said about the Squire's daughter, are honorable but remote...72

Clifton Fadiman, expressing the same thoughts, declares, "... At no point, interested as we may be in the evolution of the plot, do we become absorbed in the characters."73 Although cynicism is not strong enough to detract from the characters as it does in Cakes and Ale and The Narrow Corner, Maugham again gives the story precedent over the development of characters.

For the first time in his novels, Maugham uses Americans as principal characters in The Razor's Edge (1943). More important still,


he has written a religious novel that is not as pessimistic toward a
God as his earlier books. This fact led some critics to remark that
maybe Maugham was experiencing a religious revival, but close reading
of this novel and his next two books reveals that he has not had a
drastic change in attitude.

In The Razor's Edge, there is another search for spiritual
certainty. Larry Darrow, a young American flier and veteran of World
War I, is troubled over the death and misery he has seen in the war.
Given over to a doubt of God, he leaves his fiancée, Isabel Bradley,
and a chance for wealth and a comfortable position in Chicago to search
for knowledge and religious satisfaction. His search takes him all
over the world, and while in India he finds his peace in the Absolute
which is nowhere and everywhere; it has no qualities, nor is it a
person or a thing; it is finite and infinite, eternal and complete.
He returns to Paris, finds Isabel married, but also discovers Sophie
MacDonald, a childhood friend, who has become a prostitute frequenting
the dives of Paris. To save her, Larry offers to marry Sophie, but
the plan is ruined by Isabel who is still jealous of him. Isabel and
her husband, Gray Maturin, return to a promising enterprise in America,
and Larry plans to live among the people of his country and use his
new found powers as best he can.

The narrator of the story is Maugham who makes no attempt to
conceal his identity, and in fact admits it. He has small influence
on the outcome of the story, but tells his tale in a conversational
tone, and acts as a referee between the contending factions as he
meets them in Paris and London. He is a type of observer as is Dr. Saunders in *The Narrow Corner*, but slightly more interested. Maugham meets Larry and his friends at a party in Chicago, and the story proceeds as he meets them, accidentally and otherwise, through the next several years. His trip to Paris is reminiscent of the one he took in *The Moon and Sixpence* to find out about Charles Strickland.

Larry's quest is a struggle for spiritual certainty, but not as hard and as long as Philip Carey's. Willing to try any faith once, Larry lives with monks, flirts with atheism and finally finds his soul and peace of mind in a mountain retreat in India. His search had taken him to Germany where he worked in a coal mine with a huge fellow named Kosti. A heavy drinker, Kosti turns philosophical at times and in many respects suggests Philip's old friend, Cronshaw. His new acquaintance awakens Larry's interest in metaphysics and, speaking of him, Larry says:

"... he said that the world isn't a creation, for out of nothing nothing comes, but a manifestation of the eternal nature; well that was all right, but then he added that evil is as direct a manifestation of the divine as good. They were strange words to hear in that sordid, noisy café, to the accompaniment of dance tunes on the mechanical piano." 74

Going to India, Larry finds his questions answered one morning. Larry described it in these words:

"... The sun caught the lake through a cleft in the heights and it shone like burnished steel. I 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 loveliness 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. ... How can I tell you what I felt? No words can tell the ecstasy of my bliss. ... "75

Kitty Fane has almost the same experience with a sunrise in The Painted Veil. Larry explains in detail his beliefs, but admits there are some things he still cannot fully understand—evil, for instance. His exposition of his new found religion is too long to explain, and it suffices to say that he is satisfied with his new power and his search is over. Larry also has mystical powers which are not explained, such as his ability to cure a prolonged headache of Isabel's husband, Gray Maturin. Larry's adventure in India is parallel in many respects with personal experiences described by Maugham in A Writer's Notebook.

Seldom content to let women have too many virtues, Maugham again portrays them in a questionable light. Isabel is the type of woman that Charles Strickland left to shift for herself. Not that Isabel is worried about getting a husband, but she is vain, selfish, shrewd, and thoroughly convinced of her place in upper society. She tries to convince everyone of her self-sacrifice in giving up Larry,

75. Ibid., p. 220.
and she cultivates an attitude of self-pity. But the shrewd Maugham is not fooled when she says:

"I gave Larry up for the one and only reason that I didn't want to stand in his way."

"Come off it, Isabel. You gave him up for a square-cut diamond and a sable coat."

The words were hardly out of my mouth when a plate of bread and butter came flying at my head. . . .76

Isabel's cruellest act is to place a convenient bottle of liquor in the same room with Sophie, whose only hope is to give up drinking which she has done. However, Sophie yields to the temptation, returns to her old life and later is found dead in a river with her throat cut. Maugham blames Isabel for her death, but the woman shows few signs of a guilty conscience. The other two women, besides Isabel, in the book, Suzanne and Sophie, are prostitutes, and as usual, Maugham has compassion for them. They are not condemned, only pitied, as in the case of Rosie in Cakes and Ale, or Lydia in Christmas Holiday. As a possible explanation for his kindly portrayal of lower characters, Maugham writes:

... I have known crooks who were capable of self-sacrifice, sneak thieves who were sweet-natured and harlots for whom it was a point of honour to give good value for money. . . .

.......

... I take the goodness of the good for granted and I am amused when I discover their defects or their vices; I am touched when I see the goodness of the wicked and I am

76. Ibid., p. 166.
willing enough to shrug a tolerant shoulder at their wickedness. I am not my brother's keeper... 77

Interesting as Larry's story may be, there is another character vividly portrayed, who almost steals the spotlight. Maugham's hopes are with Larry, but his friendship remains with Elliott Templeton, an elderly American social climber who has taken upon himself to join the European aristocracy. Elliott's chief delight is in giving and going to parties and hob-nobbing with the hoi polloi; he is a comical figure, slightly repulsive, yet "... Maugham makes him likable in a curious way, not only for his loyalty to his sister's family, but also for his innocence and single-mindedness in pursuit of trivialities..." 78 Elliott resurrects an old coat-of-arms and adopts it as his own; he also joins the Catholic Church probably because of his love of pageantry and contributes large sums of money to build a small church for his memory. Growing older and unable to attend so many functions, Elliott realizes that his popularity is waning. A prolonged sickness adds to his inability to get around, and Maugham's description of the few weeks before his death is masterful. The reader feels a deep pity for an old man and a contempt for the type of society he loves. The final insult occurs when a noble lady does not ask Elliott to her party. Elliott, with the grave yawning in front of him, exclaims:


78. Malcolm Cowley, "The Devil a Monk was He," The New Republic, CX (May 1, 1944), 609.
"... Oh, it's so unkind. ... I hate them, I hate them all. They were glad enough to make a fuss of me when I could entertain them, but now I'm old and sick they have no use for me. Not ten people have called to inquire since I've been laid up, and all this week only one miserable bunch of flowers. ... There's not one of them who cares if I live or die. Oh, it's so cruel." He began to cry. Great heavy tears trickled down his withered cheeks. "I wish to God I'd never left America."79

Maugham, knowing Elliott will never be able to attend the party, steals an invitation for him, and presents it to the old gentleman saying that the lady had sent it herself. This makes Elliott happy, but knowing his fate, he dictates a return note: "Mr. Elliott Templeton regrets that he cannot accept Princess Novemali's kind invitation owing to a previous engagement with his Blessed Lord."80 Of course, Maugham never delivers the message. A few moments after Elliott dictated these few words, he closes his eyes and utters the last words he ever spoke, "The old bitch."81

It is a vague possibility that Elliott expresses some of Maugham's own disappointments in old age, for Maugham in his declining years writes:

By way of postscript. Yesterday I was seventy years old. ...

On the continent of Europe they have an amiable custom when a man who has achieved some distinction reaches that age. His friends, his colleagues, his disciples (if he has

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80. Ibid., p. 192.
81. Ibid., p. 192.
any) join together to write a volume of essays in his honour. In England we give our eminent men no such flattering mark of our esteem. At the utmost we give a dinner, and we don't do that unless he is very eminent indeed. Such a dinner I attended when H. G. Wells attained his seventieth year: Hundreds of people came to it. Bernard Shaw, a magnificent figure with his height, his white beard and white hair, his clean skin and bright eyes, made a speech.

My own birthday passed without ceremony. I worked as usual in the morning and in the afternoon went for a walk in the solitary woods behind my house.

I went back to my house, made myself a cup of tea and read till dinner time. After dinner I read again, played two or three games of patience, listened to the news on the radio, and took a detective story to bed with me. I finished it and went to sleep. Except for a few words to my coloured maids I had not spoken to a soul all day.

So I passed my seventieth birthday and so I would have wished to pass it.

Of course, Maugham may be entirely sincere in his professed non-interest, but it seems singularly important that he has taken the trouble to mention the fact at all.

Allowing for certain weaknesses, Maugham has succeeded in giving a certain depth to the characters in The Razor's Edge. First of all there is that feeling of progression in time that was so successfully achieved in Of Human Bondage. Maugham meets these characters off and on over a period of ten or twelve years. They are older, somewhat changed, and the reader gets a more comprehensive view of them. Also

the cynicism which does not lead to good character development, is much lighter than in such books as The Hero. Despite his interest in Indian religions, Maugham seems to be on good terms with the world. The technique of using the first person singular also gives a certain reality to the characters.

Allowing that the character development is better than usual, there are several weaknesses. Larry's search is not uncommon and even to those "... readers whose concern with the Absolute is strictly limited, Larry's quest will be neither implausible nor ridiculous..."83 Though the search is not ridiculous, the struggle within Larry and the conflict of conscience is not convincing. Maugham tells us he is having a conflict of conscience but does not succeed in portraying Larry's emotions successfully. He seems to be more interested in describing the type of religion Larry obtained rather than how he achieved it. As one critic remarked, "... his ineffable young hero is neither believable as a person nor reasonable as a bringer of a message..."84 Elliott is typed at the beginning of the book and remains in character. It is Maugham's story of an American in European society, a pathetic and vivid study to be sure, but hardly complete. Neither is there thorough portrayal of the other

83. "Old Man with a Razor," Time, XLIII (April 24, 1944), 99-100.
84. Orville Prescott, "Outstanding Novels," Yale Review, XXXIII (June, 1944), 765.
characters. Isabel is probably more complete because she becomes more vicious and uncompromising as the story progresses, but the others, Suzanne and Sophie, are relatively vague.

Nevertheless, these weaknesses cited above are not destructive in this book, and though his character development is not as successful as in Of Human Bondage or The Moon and Sixpence, Maugham has achieved a deeper presentation of characters than usual.

Admitting that his days are numbered, Maugham, in 1944, expressed a plan for his few remaining years:

... Some years ago I decided to write four more novels and then have done with fiction also. One I have written [The Razor's Edge]... One was to be a miracle story set in sixteenth-century Spain [Catalina]; the second, a story of Machiavelli's stay with Cesare Borgia in the Romagna, which gave him the best of his material for The Prince, and I proposed to interweave with their conversations the material on which he founded his play, Mandragola. Knowing how often the author makes up his fiction from incidents of his own experience, trifling perhaps and made interesting or dramatic only by his power of creation, I thought it would be amusing to reverse the process and from the play guess at the events that may have occasioned it. I meant to end up with a novel about a working-class family in the slums of Bermondsey... 85

The novel of Bermondsey has never been written and Maugham says that conditions in these slums have changed so that he doubts if he will ever write it. 86 The other two novels were written.

The first one, Then and Now (1946), follows the plan he outlined in the above quotation. It is his first historical novel since

86. Ibid., p. 364.
Making of a Saint. The story concerns Niccolo Machiavelli who is sent as a Florentine representative to the court of Cesare Borgia at Imola. Borgia's spectacular military and diplomatic successes are threatening the security of Florence and it is Machiavelli's job to employ tactics of delay until the Florentines can think through the crisis. Devoted as he is to his government, Machiavelli is also intrigued by the beauty of Aurelia, the beautiful young wife of Bartolomeo Martelli, a wealthy merchant. The plot immediately divides itself between Machiavelli's diplomatic bouts with Borgia, and with Machiavelli's attempt to seduce Aurelia. The two stories interact somewhat, and through Borgia's interference, his well-layed plans concerning Aurelia fail. Returning to Florence he devises a scheme of revenge and writes a play with the incidents he has gone through as the basis of his comedy with only the names changed.

The title, Then and Now, connotes that human nature and public affairs have not changed much over the centuries. For instance, Borgia says:

"... Your citizens have been too busy making money to be willing to train themselves to defend their country. ... You are governed by businessmen and businessmen's only idea is to make a deal at any price. Short profits and quick returns, peace in our time even at the cost of humiliation and the risk of disaster. ... "87

A contemporary parallel is that of Neville Chamberlain, who after the Munich visit before World War II, claimed he worked for peace in our time.

Machiavelli is pictured as a crafty, intelligent, and shrewd diplomat, and the "... rather forced amusement of the book is in Mr. Maugham's trick of putting all the political wisdom of The Prince into the mouth of its author as a formula for conducting a love affair..." The diplomatic and amourous intrigues are involved and highly interesting, and it is enough to say that the reader is entertained. As for character development, there is little to be said. Machiavelli and Borgia are two shrewd minds, matched together in diplomatic gymnastics, and the reader watches the spins and the twists rather than the individual participants. Again, as in most of his novels, the characters are typed, but not thoroughly explained. These types and their shrewd maneuverings take precedence over any deep development of characters. Maugham's thinly veiled references to conditions now as they were then do not help to create a sixteenth century atmosphere. Also the story concerns Machiavelli's short stay with Borgia only, and not his whole life. Neither is Borgia completely portrayed. The political philosophy proclaimed by both men is not as complete or interesting as it might be, and as a picture of Renaissance Italy, it is hardly well rounded. One critic remarks, "... as a study of the morals and politics of the Renaissance, it is both dull and superficial." Nevertheless, Maugham has

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89. Orville Prescott, "Outstanding Novels," The Yale Review, XXXVI (September, 1946), 189.
told an interesting tale, but the characters are shadowy and their portrayal is wholly incomplete.

In his latest book, Catalina (1948), and perhaps his final one, Maugham again writes a historical romance. Spain, during the Inquisition, is the backdrop for this book. The heroine, a young and beautiful Catalina, trampled by a bull at the age of sixteen, is left a seemingly hopeless cripple. On the steps of the cathedral the Blessed Virgin appears to her and predicts a miracle. The Virgin tells her that "... The son of Juan Suarez de Valero who has best served God has it in his power to heal you..." De Valero has three sons, one a bishop prominent in the Inquisition, another son is an officer serving the Catholic king in the Low Countries, and the third is a baker in the village. The baker ultimately performs the miracle. Catalina, after further trials and other encounters with the Virgin, marries the man of her choice and becomes a famous actress.

Maugham's cynicism has not deserted him in his old age, and some of the miracles occurring in the story are shown to be somewhat less than an act of God. For instance, when the Bishop is suddenly clothed in an aureole of light, the crowd proclaims it as a miracle, but "... Only Domingo noticed that a pane of one of the stained-glass windows was broken and by a fortunate chance a ray of sun passed through the aperture to hit the Bishop and suffuse him with glory." Passages

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91. Ibid., p. 138.
such as this, cast a shadow of doubt on all the miracles and their validity seems somewhat questionable. The Inquisition, and thus the Catholic Church, is also held up to an unfavorable light. Books on Trial, a Catholic publication in Chicago, condemned Catalina by saying that it was a "Snaky parody on all things Catholic; disapproved."92

Catalina is the heroine of the story, but her character is vague. She is the unifying agent for the story, and the means by which Maugham brings in his satire on the religious conventions. The first half of the book deals with the miracle, but the second half continues on an entirely different theme when she becomes an actress. There are two separate distinct plots and "... The impression is of someone having said to Mr. Maugham, or of his having said to himself: '154 pages is a long short story. Double it and you have a novel..."93 This technique is distracting from the standpoint of good character portrayal. The early life of Catalina and her meeting with the Virgin seemed to have left no impression whatsoever. In the second half of the book, she is Catalina in name only, and an entirely different type of person. "The middle is both an end and a new beginning."94 Maugham only tells us she has changed, he does not fully explain how, but to Maugham this is probably incidental--he is telling a story.


As for the other characters, they also do not stand out above the plot and Maugham's cynicism. Catalina's uncle, Domingo Perez, is a Cronshaw type of character, who can see through some of the miraculous events. Blasco de Valero, the Bishop, is a pious, hard-working Inquisitor, who finally sees that perhaps he has been wrong all of these years in his performance of what he thought was his duty to God. Don Manuel de Valero, the military man, is stupid but a good soldier and kills thousands of people for his love of God and king. The baker and performer of the miracle, Martin de Valero, serves only to show, as Domingo tries to tell the Bishop, that "The stone which the builder rejected is become the head of the corner." Dona Beatriz, a prioress of a house of nuns, tries to get Catalina to take the veil for the prestige it would give her own order. Dona is somewhat less than a God-fearing woman, but does help Catalina escape with her lover. None of the characters come to life; they are subordinated to the story. Also, Maugham's satire is much too apparent for the characters to get out of the author's living room.

Maugham has again told an interesting story, but there may be a deeper religious significance to the book. He has repeatedly said such things as, "I don't know why it is that the religious never ascribe common-sense to God." His The Summing Up and A Writer's Notebook have several quotations in this vein, and Philip Carey could not

95. Maugham, Catalina, p. 83.
understand that God could be so cruel. In The Summing Up, Maugham states, "... I cannot believe in a God who is less tolerant than I. I cannot believe in a God who has neither humour nor common sense.

... "97 Therefore, it may be that Maugham has given his conception of the Christian God in this book, that is, his conception if he believed in Him. It is not the Bishop or the great warrior who performs the miracle, it is the lowly baker who has labored for a living and kept his parents out of the poorhouse. The Bishop begins to wonder if he has been doing right and paraphrases Micah, 6:8 when a mob threatens to burn Catalina as a witch before Martin, the baker, can perform the miracle. He says:

"Laugh. As the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of fools. What does the Lord require of you, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God. Hypocrites and blasphemers. Fornicators. Vile. Vile. Vile."98

Thus, in what may be his concluding novel,

... Maugham--urbane to the last--celebrates with tactful irony the tolerance, humor, and good sense of a God who is the perfect gentleman; contrasts His generous wisdom with the cruel folly, the morose pride of bigoted humanity.99

98. Maugham, Catalina, p. 133.
99. Rolo, op. cit., 111.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Now that all of Maugham's novels have been examined, certain general conclusions become apparent. In twenty-one novels, over a period of fifty-three years, Maugham seems to have shown some inconsistency in his attitude toward certain classes or types of people, and for this reason the following statements are generalities showing his more consistent attitudes.

In the first place, Maugham seems rather intolerant of anyone who does not think in terms of his own philosophy. Idealists are held up to ridicule and shown as a cause for much misery. Narrow-minded, obstinate, generally stupid, this type of person lives a wasted and useless life, unredeemed by virtuous deeds. Classified by Maugham as idealists, churchmen are treated with contempt. His attitude toward the Church of England and the Catholic Church is anything but pious, and he consistently delivers backhanded references to all they stand for. Clergymen, as portrayed by Maugham, could not be more worldly, vain, or insincere, had they tried.

Next, Maugham wages open war with the upper-middle and high classes of society. Their customs, mores, and institutions are all narrow and uncompromising. Their God, parties, pride of ancestors, morality, and literary and art values are all wrong, and the society in which they move is false and intolerant of all who attempt to break out or tear down this house of cards. According to Maugham, they do
not know what life is and, when they meet with some of the real facts of existence, they refuse to face it. In the conflict with Maugham's meaningless world, which has no purpose and only vague values, their training fails them and the bottom falls out of their world. The materials needed to patch the hole are too expensive to procure, and the characters wallow in the 'slough of despond.'

If the British Empire depended on Maugham's type of government men to rule it, there would be no reason for it to continue or even to struggle for survival. Misfitted and ignorant, they are highly incapable of governing, but continue to act as if they are the only hope for humanity.

Another position, and clearly defined, is Maugham's attitude toward women. As an explanation of much sorrow and trouble in the world, the feminine sex is probably on the same level as the idealists, and for Maugham, bad women are not the exception; they are the rule. They are deceitful, vain, unfaithful and decidedly lacking in intellectual prowess. The man who loves a woman puts his life and future at her feet, and more often than not she will oblige him by tossing both life and future out of the window. There are a few women in his novels who are not such evil influences, but they are either stupid or given a sense of humor which matches their husband's, and this leads to a reasonably happy marriage.

It is important to note that Maugham's disapproval and satire is directed toward those of the upper levels of society. Those of the lower he treats much more respectfully. He accepts their actions and
their outlook on life without condemnation, and they are portrayed so as to arouse sympathy and understanding. Prostitutes are not condemned, nor are the actions of the people in the poor districts of London and Paris. To Maugham, the lives of these people seem more real and much more close to his simple pattern of life. Free from Maugham's satire, these lower characters are portrayed as the only ones with common sense, and relatively good values.

However, the question remains: Is Maugham skillful in developing the characters in his novels? Excluding Of Human Bondage, and with the possible exception of The Moon and Sixpence and The Razor's Edge, Maugham does not develop his characters. The following statements explain why he does not do so.

First: The use of stock characters is one of the foremost reasons his characters do not develop. There is no development when a character is typed in the first few pages of a book, such as in Up at the Villa, and Theatre. They are inelastic and their actions merely follow their types.

Second: In line with this theory of literature, Maugham has, in such novels as The Magician, The Hour Before the Dawn, The Making of a Saint, and The Painted Veil, stressed the plot to so large an extent that the characters are subordinated to it. The reader's interest, rather than being focused on the characters, is attracted to the activities and intrigues of the story. Maugham also uses stock characters in order to make the story move swiftly without undue digressions, therefore
the reader is confronted with types of characters, not individuals, who move through a series of Maugham-made adventures.

Third: To get a comprehensive and understandable view of a character, the reader must see the person react to several important situations. But Maugham's characters react to one or two situations only; Christmas Holiday, Catalina, Up at the Villa, and The Painted Veil are examples, and the result of so small a frame of reference is shadowy, unreal characters.

Fourth: Maugham in a sense is too much a scientist to develop characters in that he finds it difficult to endow his characters with feeling or emotions. In many instances, as in Mrs. Craddock, The Narrow Corner, and The Moon and Sixpence, he is content merely to describe, or rather write out his case study of a character, and as a result he does not portray the emotions, passions, or inward struggles which surely must have occurred. If the reader is not conscious of the struggle, the characters do not fully develop. Maugham enjoys dangling his characters on a psychological string and then sets up his camera to record their reactions.

Fifth: In some books such as The Merry-Go-Round and The Hour Before the Dawn, Maugham has portrayed several characters of about equal strength, and because of this, the reader's interest does not concentrate on any one character long enough to get a complete view of his development. In fact, with so many characters of almost equal strength in one book, there are not enough experiences shown of any one character to enable the reader to comprehend him thoroughly. It is
distracting to have this varied emphasis, and there is not that continuous line which directs the reader's attention.

Sixth: At times, Maugham's stories, as well as his atmosphere, are unconvincing. If a supposed Fifteenth Century atmosphere is one-half Fifteenth Century and one-half Twentieth Century, as in The Making of a Saint, and Then and Now, it is not convincing and the characters suffer the same fate. Also, some of his stories, interesting as they may be, do not seem convincing, and as a result the characters are not accepted either.

Seventh: One of the most important reasons Maugham's characters do not develop is that his hand is readily apparent in most of his novels. He does not achieve the author's detachment that is so necessary to character development. Some of his characters move, it seems, more by Maugham's prompting than by their own volition, as in the case of Up at the Villa and The Painted Veil. If there were logical antecedents for their actions, their character would seem more real. On this same theme, there are two more conventions, satire and cynicism, which show the author's entrance into the novel. Granting that Maugham is a master craftsman in the use of these devices, they do detract from strong character development. When an author employs these devices, the reader cannot help feeling the author's presence in the book; Catalina, The Hero and The Bishop's Apron are examples. The result is that the feelings, emotions, or actions described seem forced and surrounded by a halo of unbelief.
Eighth: Far too often, Maugham, following the naturalistic tradition, has emphasized the detestable qualities of his characters, such as in *The Bishop's Apron*, *The Narrow Corner*, and *The Painted Veil*. Not that he never mentions their good points, but the emphasis on their baser characteristics causes many of his novels to lack warmth and human kindness. Also, the characterization is not complete in situations where one side of a character's personality is shown.

Ninth: Besides having several characters of about the same strength in some books, Maugham also has included several stories approximately equal in power, which do not interact, as illustrated by *Catalina*, *The Merry-Go-Round* and *The Hour Before the Dawn*. Here again, there is not that continuous line that keeps the reader's attention.

Tenth: In many of his stories, Maugham does not create the feeling on the part of the reader that his characters progress through time. In a few cases only, there is a feeling of relentless moving on, of progression from one incident or experience to another. This technique or rather the non-use of this technique, creates static characters, as those in *Theatre*, *Liza of Lambeth*, and *Up at the Villa*, who have no chance to develop. A progression also implies reactions to many more situations which helps a great deal with the development of a well-rounded character.

Eleventh: Finally, and very important, Maugham's personal philosophy does not let a character develop. Maugham's people are ruled and swayed by many incentives--vanity, ambition, passion, reward--but there is nothing for them to aim for in a world without meaning or
a standard of action. They are caught in the current of their desires, and are merely to be observed tolerantly and sometimes satirically as a meaningless whirlpool sucks them six feet under the surface.

But, Philip Carey must not be forgotten, and in his portrayal Maugham has succeeded in developing a memorable character. Philip's struggles, defeats, and successes are vividly depicted by many experiences over a period of time. In Philip's portrayal, Maugham has obtained the author's detachment, as well as representing universal emotions, and Philip Carey is an amazingly real person. Other characters in Of Human Bondage, as well as in The Moon and Sixpence and The Razor's Edge, are strongly depicted, but not as successfully as is Philip Carey. He is Maugham's masterpiece, and an important living character in contemporary fiction.

Throughout his novels there is one person who stands out above all others—W. Somerset Maugham. Each novel adds a little more toward understanding the man and his convictions, and piece by piece, he has presented his life and thoughts.

Though Maugham does not develop characters in his novels, he cannot be dismissed as an unimportant writer. Generally, he has been honest with his public, and his admirable gifts for arousing interest and holding the reader's attention make him the kind of writer that is always a pleasure, and often a stimulus, to read. He has called himself a professional writer, and has followed this profession for a successful fifty-three years. If literature is to thrive during any given generation or period of time, there must always be some writers
who take their work seriously, and who are always curious and interested in human behavior. Cynical though he is, Maugham is a type of writer who is necessary in order that a people may keep their sensitivities alive and preserve common values essential to their well being. There must always be writers who disagree with certain phases of society in order that the people may be aware of their weaknesses, and among contemporary writers of this type, Maugham holds a high place. Maugham is not a pioneer in this field; he has a long line of distinguished predecessors, and to deny him respect is to deny respect to the literary art he has served so well.

Qualifying his own writings, and incidentally his lack of character development, Maugham says, "... I have taken living people and put them into the situations, tragic or comic, that their characters suggested. ... I have painted easel pictures, not frescoes."

Alexander Pope in "An Essay on Criticism" gives a partial justification for Maugham's technique and lack of emphasis on development of characters:

In ev'ry work regard the writer's end,
Since none can compass more than they intend;
And if the means be just, the conduct true,
Applause, in spite of trivial faults, is due.


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