

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

In all the works of Maugham with the Eastern and the South Sea background, even though they are only one part of his abundant writings, the reader can clearly see his literary style and his philosophy of life.

Maugham himself wrote in the preface to The World of Somerset Maugham that he did not want to be more than "a story writer."¹⁴⁷ He was interested in telling good stories. The situations in his novels, plays and short stories considered in this thesis were well-chosen and therefore effective and memorable. The fact that many writers had written about Paul Gauguin's life did not make The Moon and Sixpence less interesting. On the contrary, the book, because of Maugham's great craftsmanship, became a best-seller. The various circumstances in Charles Strickland's life; in London where he was a typical stockbroker entertaining and being entertained by dull business men, in Paris where he sacrificed everything including himself to painting, in Marseilles where he lived among tough sailors, and finally in Tahiti where he found peace and happiness because the beauty and tranquillity of his plantation enabled him to express himself in painting are treated so skilfully that the

reader's curiosity is aroused and not for a moment does he feel bored. This explains why the book was a success. In the same way his short stories were successful and some of them, for instance "The Book-bag," "Rain" and "The Letter," were included in the list of the world's best short stories.

Being interested in telling stories well, Naughtan usually chose the titles for his works with care. Therefore, the titles themselves suggest to the reader what the books are about. The titles of his works on the East and the South Seas, for example The Casuarina Tree, An King, East of Suez, On a Chinese Screen, "P. & O.," "The Outstation," "Honolulu," "Rain" and "Footprints in the Jungle" suggest an unusual and exotic background.

The technique which Naughtan often used in his short stories is to give the ending an unexpected twist such as one finds in "The Vessel of Wrath," "Rain," "Red" and "Honolulu." And when the reader comes to the end of such a story, he feels that the author himself receives cardiac satisfaction from the reader's surprise. In "The Vessel of Wrath," the reader is surprised to learn that Ginger Red not only became a convert but also wanted to become a missionary. But in "Rain," the missionary was not after all so virtuous as he seemed to be. As in "Red," the reader did not expect to discover that the rough Captain had been



the handsome young sailor. In "Honolulu," the reader thought that the girl lying near Captain Butler was the same girl who had saved him from Bananas' spell. It was indeed, a surprise to find that the original girl who had been so devoted to the Captain had run away with the Chinese cook.

Since Maugham's primary interest was to tell good stories, he did not attempt to make a deeper study of his characters. Although he started all of the books, except The Painted Veil which was derived from Dante's poem, from characters, most of Maugham's characters remained flat characters. They did not develop into real people. That was why E.C. Munro said that, in most of his works, Maugham was "like some casual visitor from a distant planet."¹⁴⁸ Maugham was, however, a keen observer with common sense. His characters, flat though they are, are interesting because Maugham reveals their inconsistencies and incalculable human nature. He shows the reader that a person who looks respectable may have a dark side and that even a criminal may possess good qualities. Maugham revealed this by presenting his characters in action. This technique caused him to be accused of superficiality. But, in fact, the seemingly casual statements about life made by his characters, are the result of deep thought. In The Summing Up, Maugham reveals his great interest in philosophy and his contemplation.

about life and God. Even Glenway Wescott wrote about this serious aspect of Haughan:

He has a reading and speaking knowledge of five languages, and has read everything including all the classics of religion and metaphysics, studiously. He is the most serious of men, seeking the general truth in all things, holding himself responsible for his every belief or disbelief, never feeling himself or others, thinking hard.¹⁴⁹

Unfortunately, however, his ideas and opinions are often overlooked because they are put in the story when the reader is absorbed in the situation.

Haughan himself frequently takes part in his books as a "disinterested spectator."¹⁵⁰ Therefore, he cannot go deep into his characters' minds and feelings; he can only watch their actions, which seem trivial and meaningless. This attitude suggests Haughan's belief that human life is insignificant. He also expressed this idea in Strickland's words: "Life has no value," and in his own comments about Blanche:

...Blanche's life, begun with who knows what bright hopes and what dreams, might just as well have never been lived. It all seemed useless and inane.¹⁵¹

Sometimes, instead of taking part in the story, Haughan created certain characters to act as the raisonneur and expressed his opinions through them. From these characters, Haughan is shown as a sincere, kindly, tolerant,

sympathetic man with common sense and grim humour. But he was at times sentimental.

Maughan vividly depicted the lives of the Westerners in the East and the South Seas at the end of the nineteenth century before World War II. During that time, Europeans looked upon this part of the world as an area for colonial expansion. They did not have genuine interest in the Easterners as equals. In fact, India, Burma, Hong-Kong and the Federated Malay States were under British rule; Indo-China and Tahiti, under French rule; the East Indies, under Dutch rule; and Honolulu, Samoa and the Philippine Islands, under American influence.

Also, during the period before World War II, there were no fast and modern facilities for transportation and communication. At that time, it took months to go back and forth between the West and the East. Therefore, the Westerners, when they left home, were not sure that they would ever see their home again, and they knew that while in the East they would have to live in isolation.

Nowadays, the problems of the Westerners in the East and the South Sea Islands have changed. The Westerners do not feel isolated because fast and convenient means of communication have made the world smaller. The countries in the East and the South Seas can be easily reached by plane. They have become independent and developed.

The educated Easterners have proved to be as capable as the Westerners, and, the terms "white men," "natives" and "half-castes" used in Hougham's works are now inappropriate. The attitudes of the Westerners towards the Easterners have also changed. The Westerners no longer act like the ruling-class but consider Easterners their equals -- human beings like themselves.

Although the era which Hougham depicted in his works has now passed into history, his works, thanks to his consummate craftsmanship, lucid language, keen observation, unemotional detachment and genuine interest in the lives of human beings, still give the reader not only enjoyment but also a vivid picture of the lives of the Westerners in those days, which will remain interesting so long as there are Easterners and Westerners in the world.