W. Somerset Maugham and a philosophy of life

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W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM AND A PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

'Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself'. This, which is the first principle of Existentialism, is the starting point of the present study on Maugham's production.

The heroes and heroines of the works analyzed here are people who, at a certain time in their lives and due to different circumstances, wonder about the meaning of life. They reach the conclusion that life has no meaning and that it is each person who has to create his own pattern and thus make of life something bearable.

Starting from the idea that life has no meaning, it is clear that these characters are not going to find a blissful happiness; first, because we know that 'happiness is something you must under no circumstances seek, it just comes if you interest yourself in absorbing pursuit'; and second, because this kind of happiness can never exist in a meaningless world. Thus, what they are looking for is a kind of life to which they can resign themselves with a certain degree of contentment, and in which they feel fulfilled. All this, of course, without having any great expectations from life.

Maugham proposes in his works three different ways by means of which his characters can reach this state of satisfaction: through Love, Art, and Truth.

Although this writer also reminds us that the only other way open for those who cannot come to terms with life is suicide, he seems also to suggest that the best thing one can do is resign oneself to the fact that life is meaningless and try to make the most of it.

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To my parents and Tong,
for this thesis is more
theirs than mine.

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INTRODUCTION

> The critic I am waiting for is the one who will explain why, with all my faults, I have been read for so many years by so many people.
>
> W. Somerset Maugham

I know this is not a very original way of starting my thesis since this quotation has already been used many times; however, I could not find a more appropriate one, for what I want to show through my study is exactly why this happened.

W. Somerset Maugham has never been taken seriously. In his lifetime, because he made so much money by his pen, nobody thought his literary production could be of any interest. His works were considered to be potboilers and so not worthy of a place among the serious, "real" novels. After his death things became even worse. Something he had more or less successfully managed to hide from the public, his homosexuality, became widely known; and this, together with the negative criticism his last article 'Looking Back' brought about, greatly contributed to the bad press he has always had. However, it cannot be denied that the main criticism Maugham has received has always been against his literary production and his skilfulness as a craftsman.

Most critics could not forgive him his success; however, there were just a few who realized how unfairly Maugham was being treated. Thus, Aldington1 says:

> Maugham has either been ignored or condescended to in a manner I find quite infuriating. What perverse nonsense it is to assume that a book or play which is immediately successful on a large scale must be bad!.

If I have decided to study Maugham it is because, agreeing with Malcolm Cowley2, I think that:

> critics have usually been unjust to Maugham; they have neglected his great achievements as a craftsman.

It is curious to notice how contradictory his critics' comments are; to such an extent that it is difficult to believe that they are talking about the same writer. Thus, Maugham is said to be:

> the most skilful writer in the world3,

a fact that would confirm the following quotation:

> with *The Painted Veil* Maugham has reached a height that would have seemed almost inaccessible for a writer; it will be hard for him to climb higher unless he abandons this genre which he has created4;

and yet, at the same time, he is also very strongly criticized:

> After one notices how restricted his serious interests have been, must not one conclude that he has failed to give himself sufficient scope to interpret much that is peculiar to our changing culture?5.

A critical analysis of his works should consider both their form and content. As for the latter, only on very few occasions have critics granted Maugham's works any profound meaning. The general feeling among critics was that he was a good story-teller, but they never considered the possibility of finding any philosophical, moral or transcendental ideas in his works. *Of Human Bondage* and *The Razor's Edge* are the only two novels in which critics have been able to see the heroes' quest for a meaning of life.

I am not going to deal with the content of Maugham's works in this introduction, since this is the real topic of my thesis and so, I

shall study it in detail in the following chapters. However, I would like to dedicate a few words to his style.

As I have just said, it is very simple and critics have mistaken simplicity for insignificance.

> Some readers, Pfeiffer says6, call him superficial because his meaning is always clear. For many intellectuals a measure of obscurity is a necessary ingredient of the profound.

This seems to be especially true at the time Maugham wrote. He was the contemporary of the Modernist writers who were experimenting with new ways of writing. As Lodge7 describes it:

> Modernist fiction is concerned with consciousness, and also with the subconscious and unconscious working of the mind. Hence the structure of external 'objective' events essential to traditional narrative art is diminished in scope and scale, or presented very selectively and obliquely, or is almost completely dissolved, in order to make room for introspection, analysis and reverie.

Maugham kept apart from the Modernist wave and thus critics and writers thought that if he did not use the same devices it was only because firstly, he was not a good craftsman, and secondly, because he was not as learned as they were. However, agreeing with Aldington8 I would say that:

> My own impression is that Maugham knows more about literature, philosophy, and painting, and has better taste, than his condescending critics.

This can easily be proved not only by looking at the number of books he owned, but also by the evidence we find in his books of the great number of them he had read. He was very widely read not only in philosophical matters, but also in religious, historical, literary, and artistic ones.

What happens with Maugham is what Glenway Wescott9 rightly says:

> If you are looking for the deep thoughtfulness in a story or a novel by Maugham, you cannot expect to have it underlined for you as such.

Maybe, after all, Maugham expected his readers to be cleverer than his critics. And he was, himself, clever enough to be able to write for both kinds of readers: for those who merely want to be entertained, and for those who look for a deeper meaning in what they read. Why should a meaningful novel be obscure; why can it not also entertain? That was Maugham's legacy:

> Writing must never obscure its meaning; must never fail to interest, to entertain10.

Another thing to be taken into account is that simplicity is not easily attainable. As Maugham tells us in *The Summing Up*11:

> but if richness needs gifts with which everyone is not endowed, simplicity by no means comes by nature. To achieve it needs rigid discipline.

There were, nevertheless, few writers and critics who did appreciate Maugham's skills. Thus, George Orwell in an autobiographical note says12:

> but I believe the modern writer who has influenced me most is Somerset Maugham, whom I admire immensely for his power of telling a story straightforwardly and without frills.

What we should not do is what Edmund Wilson did in 'The Apotheosis of Mr. Maugham'13, that is to say, to base our criticism on one of his bad novels. He based his article on *Then and Now*, and

without scarcely having read any other of his works, concluded that Maugham's works had nothing worth to offer. The least he should have done before daring to criticize Maugham is read his whole production and try to find out what it was he was communicating to his readers. In any case, it would have been more honest if he had merely criticized this novel without trying to reach any general conclusions about Maugham's whole production.

There are three quotations I would like to consider to defend Maugham's craftsmanship as a writer:

> Maugham, a keen student of human nature, is often able to present a plausible explanation of the reason for his characters' conduct14.

> The greatness of the book (*Of Human Bondage*) consists in two qualities which are independent of the plot. One of these is completeness in the picturization of life; the other is integrity in the presentation of a personality15.

> Yet he has been able, in his greatest book, to portray human passion, aspiration, and defeat, and to do so without cant or exaggeration. This is a good deal for any writer to have done16.

After reading this we cannot but agree with Maugham when he writes in *A Writer's Notebook*, 1949:

> I have long known that there is something in me that antagonises certain persons17;

and with him we wonder:

> what it is in me that is antipathetic to them.

What we cannot accept is his next statement:

> Nor do I mind what they think of me as a writer,

since he did mind it as it is implied in the following quotation:

> I have no illusions about my literary position. There are but two important critics in my own country who have troubled to take me seriously, and when clever young men write essays about contemporary fiction they never think of considering me. I do not resent it18.

Of course, he resented it and this was one of the causes of his unhappiness.

One of the reasons for which Maugham was disliked is that he portrayed his friends and acquaintances with hardly any disguise. He won many enemies for this. At the same time, however, and precisely because of this, some authors also used him for their novels or plays. Thus, he appears in the following works: Ada Leverson's *The Limit* (1911); Hugh Walpole's *John Cornelius* (1937); S.N. Behrman's *Jane* (1952); Noel Coward's *A Song at Twilight* (1966); and Elinor Mordaunt's *Gin and Bitters* (1931). The latter is, perhaps, the most direct attack on Maugham since this was written in reaction to Maugham's *Cakes and Ale* and his supposed portraits of Thomas Hardy and Hugh Walpole.

Another aspect I would like to consider in this introduction is the question of Maugham's biography. Although considered as a second-rate author, he was a very popular author, and because of this many biographies have been written on him. As far as biographical fact is concerned, there are few facts of his life which are unknown to his readers.

For quite a long time Maugham was against having his biography written, not even by his own nephew, Robin Maugham. This, however, did not prevent critics from writing it, especially after his death.

Maugham was always a very enigmatic figure. He always had his mask on, and not even his most intimate friends could ever get to know him thoroughly.

The objective facts of his life are very well-known, since he, himself, used them in his novels and short-stories. Through their narrator, who is always Maugham, we learn about his childhood in Kent and about his social life as a writer.

He also wrote some autobiographical novels. Of these, *Of Human Bondage* is the one which follows his life more closely. It was, actually, written as a catharsis to liberate himself from unpleasant memories which were tormenting him, and if we cannot call it his autobiography it is only because fact and fiction are mixed in it. *Cakes and Ale* is also quite autobiographical, since he wrote it because he thought that in *Of Human Bondage* he had not said all he had to say.

Another kind of autobiographical material is his *A Writer's Notebook* and *The Summing Up*, which cannot really be considered to be novels. The former is a compilation of notes he had taken during many years and which he used for his novels. They include sketches of people, philosophical reflexions, opinions about other artists, etc. The latter follows more the pattern of a traditional novel, and as the cover of the Penguin edition tells us:

> Here is Maugham's impartial judgement on Maugham, a considered comment on life and on his own life's work, a careful weighing of religion, philosophy, and the arts19.

With so much autobiographical information in his works, biographies do not really discover anything new about his life. They only help us to know more about his social life and his relationship with his family and friends. Something all his biographies deal with

in detail is his homosexuality. While he was alive Maugham had managed to keep it secret; he never associated himself explicitly with any homosexual movement nor did he ever help them to claim for their rights. He lived at the time of Wilde's scandal, but he refused to get involved in the affair. Maybe this attitude was due to the fact that he did not want to accept his nature; he considered it as a bad joke life had played on him:

> My greatest one (mistake) was this, [...] I tried to persuade myself that I was three-quarters normal and that only a quarter of me was queer whereas really it was the other way round20.

We should not forget, however, that the fact that he was a homosexual had a great influence on his work since, as I intend to show later, his works deal mainly with outsiders . And as such he considered himself too, due to this and other characteristics of his.

When dealing with the biographies written on him, we must be careful and take everything they say with a pinch of salt, since we should not forget that some of them are not totally objective. Maugham was a very controversial writer and he won some enemies by his writings. This is, for example, the case with Beverley Nichols and his book *A Case of Human Bondage*. Formerly a friend of Maugham's, he turned against him when Maugham wrote his article 'Looking Back' in which he severely attacked his own wife, who was already dead and could not defend herself.

I am not interested in defending Maugham's actions, among other things because he was probably wrong in doing what he did. However, what is of interest to me is the fact that his biographers are not always right in the information they give. Thus, Nichols, in the book just mentioned21, says:

> In years to come Gerald was to gain an even greater ascendancy, he was to work on the Master night and day, elaborating this foulest of all actions, till he was at last brought to believe that Liza was not his daughter at all.

It is true that 'the Master' came to believe that Liza was not his daughter and that he tried to disinherit her; however, this happened in 1962 and Gerald, Maugham's companion for twenty-five years, and to whom Nichols refers in his book , had died in 1944. Consequently, he could not 'have worked on the Master' for this; no matter how many other things he did and what he was like. On the other hand, Ted Morgan22 seems to imply that it was the doing of Alan Searle, Maugham's companion after Gerald's death.

It definitely could not have been Gerald's doing since he had been dead for many years, and we know for certain that Maugham's argument with his daughter happened in 1962, as Wilmon Menard tells us in *The Two Worlds of Somerset Maugham*23, when Liza sued him for $648,900 in May of that year.

In any case, it is always difficult to decide who is right and who is wrong. Thus, I have just said that Ted Morgan thinks it was Alan who was responsible for Maugham's argument with his daughter; and yet, Robert Calder in his book *Willie: The Life of W. Somerset Maugham* 24 praises Alan's behaviour towards Maugham. If we believe Calder's description of Alan's character it is very difficult to believe that he could have done such a bad action.

Curious, and even funny is what we find if we compare what his different biographies tell us about his wedding date. In Ted Morgan's *Somerset Maugham*25 we are told:

> At 3 p.m. on May 26 1917 Maugham married Syrie in Jersey City.

Robin Maugham on his part says in *Conversations with Willie*26:

He married Syrie in New York in 1916.

Menard, in *The Two Worlds of Somerset Maugham* seems to agree with Morgan27:

He married her in New Jersey in 1917;

and with Calder28:

> They were married on 26 May in Jersey City. It is important to remember, however, that Maugham's decision to marry Syrie was not made exclusively in New York in 1917.

Pfeiffer29, however, moves the date to 1915:

In 1915 [...] he married a divorcée named Syrie Wellcome.

More curious, though, is what happens with Richard Cordell. Thus, in his book *W. Somerset Maugham* he says:

In 1915 he married Syrie30;

and in his other book on Maugham *Somerset Maugham: A Biographical and Critical Study*31 he changes the date to 1916:

In 1916 he had married Syrie.

I know that his wedding date is not an important fact for his biographers or for an understanding of his works; however, it proves that we should not always believe all that has been written on Maugham.

Perhaps more important for us is when we find that his critics give information which is proved wrong when we read his books. I am referring to his nephew Robin who wrote books on his uncle's life and who is not always right in what he says about him, as we have just seen with the date of his uncle's wedding. In *Somerset and all the Maughams*32 he says:

> My uncle Willie *never* mentioned the fact in his books, but he actually had two guardians when his father died in 1884. He was probably so obsessed with the Reverend Henry Macdonal Maugham that he forgot that the second guardian was Albert Dixon, the London solicitor who had told him of old Robert Maugham and the baked potatoes (italics mine).

We only have to read *Of Human Bondage* to prove him wrong; for not only does Maugham mention him as one of his two guardians, but he is mentioned at least five times: pp. 140, 331, 332, 498;

> They wrote to the family lawyer, Albert Nixon, who was co-executor with the Vicar of Blackstable for the late Henry Carey's estate, and asked him whether he would take Philip 33.

Must we conclude, then, that he did not even read his uncle's masterpiece?. Maybe its length put him off.

In spite of the fact that the information sometimes given in his biographies give is not very accurate, overall, we can believe what his biographers say and we get a clear idea of what Maugham's life was like.

In my thesis I am not going to pay very much attention to biographical facts since there are already too many biographies on him and I could not say anything new. As I said before, what I am really interested in is the content of his works.

Maybe what has happened with Maugham and his critics is that the latter have seen that Maugham the artist is too close to his art and they tend to think that this is not real art. Thus, they have only seen the biographical facts in his works and have not tried to find a possible philosophical meaning in them.

Maugham's production includes novels, plays, short-stories and other miscellaneous writings. The selection I have chosen on which to concentrate has not been based on the works themselves, that is to say, on whether they were good or bad, novels or short-stories; but on how well they could illustrate my point. Thus, although I have mainly concentrated on some of his novels, I have not necessarily chosen the best or the most famous. My study is also going to include some of his plays and short-stories and, as with the novels, they are not always his best.

Although I have just said I am not interested in biographical facts, this does not mean that I am not interested in the Maugham persona. As a matter of fact, the basis of my work is Maugham's philosophy of life and how it is reflected in his books. I could not possibly separate the author from his works since he is very much part of them. I am interested in him as far as he is present in his works. By being present I do not necessarily mean that he is the narrator of the story or a character in it; what I really mean is that in his works he transmits his philosophy, his experiences and so his persona is as important as the novels themselves. We need some background information of his life; we need to know what factors in his life determined the way he thought; what happened to make him be as he was.

All I am interested in about his life are the circumstances which made him think that life had no meaning and how he resigned himself to this. For me, his books are only the mirror of Maugham's

personality. They are Maugham's experiments to come to an understanding of, and an adaptation to, life. They represent the different stages he passed through until he came to be the cynical, resigned spectator of life.

My purpose when I decided to write my thesis on Maugham was to prove that he was more than a mere story-teller; that there is a message in his books but that we have to discover it.

Maybe he was unlucky to be the contemporary of writers such as Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and D.H. Lawrence who are considered as very 'profound' and who were experimenting with new forms of the novel. His style is, definitely, not like theirs; but his novels have a message as important and as 'philosophical' and 'profound' as theirs. Simplicity of style does certainly not mean superficiality.

I have discovered a message in Maugham's books which maybe is not the message he intended to transmit, and other critical accounts of his works may be closer to his intention than mine is. However, my reading of his works has made me enjoy them and through them I have known a different Maugham from the one I discovered in the biographies written on him.

What follows is, then, only a very subjective interpretation of his works and, as such, a verydebatableone.

CHAPTER I: A PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE

A: IN SEARCH OF HAPPINESS

A1: LOVE

As I said before, there are already quite a few biographies on the life of Somerset Maugham, and a lot of articles and critical books on his wide production. However, only a few of them would I consider as serious works, since most of them refuse to give Maugham a chance of showing that his works deal with serious matters; that there is a whole philosophy of life in them. So, maybe it is worth paying attention to his production from a psychological point of view; and that is what I intend to do.

What is it that makes him such an interesting case?. In Jensen's words:

> Maugham would be an interesting subject for a psychological analysis. His stammering, his shyness, the unhappy years of his childhood and of his youth, his French background. These among other things are facts that, when considered in relation to his apparent cynicism, his irony, his preoccupation with the theme of unrequited love, offer complete material to a mind of the psychoanalytic turn1.

Are these unhappy circumstances of his life going to deter us from writing about his life, as they did with his nephew Robin?:

> 'I have no objection now to you writing my biography after my death' [...] but I wanted to do so less and less. It would have involved delving into too much unhappiness2.

Certainly not; and what I do not intend to do either is to write, as Robin did, merely a 'superficial' story of his life.

If after reading St. John Adcok's warning:

> If, from any cause, you are afraid to look life in the face, you had better leave Mr. Maugham alone3,

we still want to try and understand him, then, we shall have to start with a detailed study of each of the circumstances which made him the kind of person he was.

I shall open a parenthesis now to clarify one thing; if I am interested in Maugham's life it is only because it is going to help us understand his works, because he is very much part of them and because through them he was communicating and experimenting with new ways to come to terms with life.

In Somerset were gathered all the ideal conditions for making a person feel utterly miserable, to such an extent that not even his longevity could make him overcome them. These circumstances, listed above, marked his life and helped to form his character:

> Being deprived at an early age of his beloved mother, and thrown on unfeeling relations, marked him for life. As a doctor and the brother of a great lawyer he

> saw deep into the human heart and his cynicism masked both a compassion of which he was almost ashamed and a bitter rage against the terrible tragedies, disablements and stupidities thrust, by its own limitations, upon the human condition4.

How does a child feel when he is deprived of his parents', especially his mother's, love at a very early age; taken to a foreign country, the language of which he does not master; and is brought up by people who do not understand him?. We only have to read *Of Human Bondage* and *The Summing Up* to know his feelings. Actually, the former was written as a catharsis because, even years later, he still felt:

> obsessed by the teeming memories of my past life [...] it all came back to me 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 novel5.

And it is this novel that we are going to study now. Not because it was his first novel, which it was not; but because being his autobiographical novel it will serve us as the basis for the understanding of his life and works. I think it is necessary to emphasize here the fact that this is not his autobiography, that all which happens in this book did not actually happen in his real life; although most of the events described in the novel did actually occur.

As Maugham said in *The Summing Up*:

> Fact and fiction are so intermingled in my work that now, looking back on it, I can hardly distinguish one for the other6.

This is especially the case with *Of Human Bondage*, but the important thing for us is that

> the emotions are my own7.

And it is emotions rather than events that we are going to analyse.

'The day broke grey and dull', with this beginning we are warned that something bad is about to happen; and what more terrible than the death of a child's mother. Thus starts Philip Carey's misery and in this same way Maugham's did. This was the event that would mark all his life to such an extent that even at the age of ninety he could still be found crying holding his mother's photograph. She had left him alone to face a world cruel to him.

In an article about the similarities between Jack London and Maugham8, Haire and Hensley mention as one of them the fact that London usually started his stories with a reference to the bad weather, as we have just seen Maugham does in his masterpiece. This is as far as they go; however, for the writer of this work the weather in Somerset Maugham's works has a specific function. It is usually through a reference to the weather that the author expresses his feelings. And yet, throughout my research I have

only come across one critical work in which mention is made of the meaning of the use of the weather in Maugham's works9.

Of Human Bondage is the story of a boy's apprenticeship in life; he suffers at first and, little by little, learns to come to terms with life. Thus the depressing beginning. It is true, however, that this is the only time in the novel that he uses a depressing weather to express unhappiness or misery, but it is not an unimportant reference. It is in a significant position in the story, and on reading it one automatically enters the atmosphere of the novel. It is only when we come across the references to the good weather and we see that they always happen when Philip is experiencing a sense of happiness that we understand the real significance of the first sentence of the novel. Examples of this are:

> (He) look at the sunshine [...] He was delighted with himself (by the way, something that very rarely happens)10,

> I stopped to look at the sunset [...] Because I was happy11,

> He was happy at the idea of seeing his friends again, and he rejoiced because the day was fine12.

And no less significant is the ending of the novel:

> And the sun was shining13.

If as a premonition of something bad about to happen we had a dull, grey day; for a 'happy ending' we needed the sun to be out. It is the perfect ending for such a beginning.

One of the most important topics in *Of Human Bondage* is Misery. As we mentioned before, it starts with the death of his mother when he is only a boy. If even before her death he felt a little lonely because he was an only child and was too much left to play by himself; now, that his dear mother is no longer with him, his loneliness is going to become almost unbearable. His misery increases when, as an orphan, he is sent to live with his uncle and aunt. In spite of having been married for many years, they are childless, and at so late a time this child comes to disturb the pattern of their lives. The religious atmosphere of his new home is too much of a burden for him. His wretchedness is even greater when he starts going to school, since to his misfortunes just mentioned we have to add his club-foot. This prevents him from joining in the games the other boys play, and at the same time, because of it, he is made fun of.

> It seemed to his childish mind that his life was a dream, his mother's death, and the life at the Vicarage, and these two wretched days at school, and he would awake in the morning and be back again at home [...] He was too unhappy, it must be nothing but a dream, and his mother was alive14.

This mere physical difference between Philip and his fellow students is going to create a gap between himself and the others.

He is left a good deal to himself and thus the feeling that he is an outsider increases. The effect of this is that:

> gradually he became silent15,

and he became so much used to being alone that

> it made him restless to be with people and he wanted urgently to be alone16.

However, in spite of this, he misses what is so important at such an age, friends:

> He looked at the people walking about and envied them because they had friends. Sometimes his envy turned to hatred because they were happy and he was miserable17.

He finds refuge from all his miseries in literature without knowing that:

> He was creating for himself an unreal world which would make the real world of every day a source of bitter disappointment18;

which is what happens. He is never satisfied with what he has, with the present moment; and so, he is always imagining what the future will be like. But, when the future comes, it only brings

disappointment. He has to learn an important lesson before he can put an end to all his misery. With this we would enter the psychological part of our analysis of the novel, although this is something we are going to leave for later on. For the moment we shall just say that the clue for the mystery of this riddle is what could be considered as the first principle of Existentialism:

> Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself19.

However, Philip is going to suffer much more before he comes to understand life. The truth is that his suffering is not always inflicted on him, it is something for which he, himself, masochistically searches; it is a kind of punishment for his pride.

The new source of misery is Mildred, a waitress in an ABC bar. It is surprising to see why this painful relationship starts:

> It was obvious that she disliked him rather than otherwise, and his pride was wounded20.

He has to make her love him, but he fails.

It might have been his previous circumstances in life what made him act like this. His need of kindness and care is so great that for him it is better to feel this heart-breaking passion than not having anybody or anything, just an endless boredom:

> He was troubled and the fear seized him that love would pass him by. He wanted a passion to seize him,

> he wanted to be swept off his feet and borne powerless in a mighty rush he cared not whither21.

He falls prey to this passion to degrading limits, until he finally exhausts it. Unless seen from the point of view of his great loneliness and his craving for affection, we cannot understand this passion. Agreeing with Theodore Dreiser we can say that

> In pursuit of his ideal from his earliest youth he clings to both men and women in a pathetic way, a truly moving spectacle22.

Philip does not even ask for his love to be returned, he only wants her to let him love her:

> I don't mind that you don't care for me. After all you can't help it. I only want you to let me love you23.

He thinks he is too

> insignificant, ordinary and ugly and (what is worse for him) crippled24

for any woman to care for him.

So far we can understand his passion; it is when Mildred comes back to him after having left him and after he has met Norah that we start to feel a little puzzled about this affair. What is it now that makes him go back to her?. He has met a woman much worthier than Mildred and who returns his feelings, who

> gave him all that a wife could, and he preserved his freedom; she was the most charming friend he had ever had25

and yet:

> He did not care if she was heartless, vicious, and vulgar, stupid and grasping, he loved her. He would rather have misery with one than happiness with the other26.

It seems that after all it is true that:

> in matters of happiness and misery [...] men come often to prefer the worse to the better, and to choose that which by their own confession, has made them miserable27.

We wonder now if it is not his desire to make her surrender, in a way , to humiliate her, that makes him love her so desperately. His is not blind love:

> He had read of the idealization that takes place in love, but he saw her exactly as she was28,

he sees all her shortcomings:

> It was only when he gave her anything that she showed any affection29 ;

She would only take advantage of his weakness30.

All this might also be due to his desire to hurt himself. There is one thing which could help us understand the reason for Philip's behaviour. At this stage in his life Maugham agreed with the theory that to love is better than to be loved:

> but when all was said the important thing was to love rather than to be loved31.

If this is so, it is only natural that Philip prefers Mildred to Norah, because he loves the former, whereas the latter loves him. This last theory of loving and being loved is something I would like to deal with later on when I come to comment on Maugham's conception of love, with its different connotations.

Finally, to finish this topic of misery and Mildred's part in it , I would like to conclude by saying that as everything in *Of Human Bondage*, this long episode also has its meaning in the wider context of the novel, since

> it is usually part of a young man's apprenticeship that he becomes ensnared by a woman who is vulgar, insensitive and unintelligent. In most cases the hero finally frees himself and, although emotionally scarred, is more mature because of his experience32.

The quest for freedom in this autobiographical novel has been considered as the motive for the action of the novel. I do not, particularly, think freedom is what Philip is looking for in his pilgrimage of life. However, I intend to concentrate on this later on, after having analyzed the whole novel, since I need this as the basis for my hypothesis about the real topic of Maugham's works. Nevertheless, freedom plays an important part in *Of Human Bondage*, as its title implies, and I cannot but dedicate a few words to it.

We are going to analyze it in relation to misery. Summarizing, we could say that the causes of Philip's unhappiness are the miserable conditions of his life at the Vicarage, his wretchedness at school, and the burden of a strenuous relationship with Mildred. All this apart from his attitude to life which, at the same time, is motivated by the circumstances which surround him. These circumstances make him feel an outsider; and as such his chief desire is to cease to be one and to find his way back to himself33. His problem, and the outsider's, then, is the problem of freedom34:

> A condition of perfect freedom [...] being an unavoidable fate (The Surrealists) or our conceivably attainable goal (The Kantians) 35.

In order to get this freedom what he has to do is to free himself from all the bondages which suffocate him. The first bondage he must outgrow is the oppressive environment of the Vicarage. Here there are two factors influencing him negatively:

what we could call his home-life, and religion. As far as the first one is concerned, Philip never feels at home at his uncle's. It is true that he comes to love his aunt after he realizes how much he means for her:

> I've tried to be like a mother to you. I've loved you as if you were my own son36;

> He had not known with what a hungry love she cared for him37.

The case is even worse with his uncle for whom he never has a nice word:

> His uncle was a weak and selfish man whose chief desire it was to be saved trouble38.

As his uncle is the reverend of the village, Philip is obliged to 'suffer' some of the strictness this kind of life implies; as, for example, attending Mass regularly, as well as saying his prayers every night:

> He had been taught by his uncle that his prayers were more acceptable to God if he said them in his nightshirt than if he was dressed39;

and as a consequence:

> He was beginning to realize that he was the creature of a God who appreciated the discomfort of his worshippers40.

Philip's disenchantment with religion comes mainly by observing his uncle's behaviour:

> Black-stove [...] lighted if the weather was very bad and the Vicar had a cold. It was not lighted if Mrs. Carey had a cold41;

> When her husband wanted a holiday, since there was no money for two, he went by himself42.

If he who should set an example behaves like this, what can be expected from the others?.

This strict faith which had been forced upon him could not last long because it becomes too heavy a burden so that

> when Philip ceased to believe in Christianity he felt that a great weight was taken from his shoulders [...] he experienced a vivid sense of liberty43.

This is not, however, the first hurdle he has to overcome in his way to freedom. First comes school. And it is here in his wretchedness that he puts religion to test, and it fails. The solution for all his problems would be a miracle. If his club-foot were cured, he would be like the other children and they would accept him. The miracle does not occur and he has to put up with a good deal of hard-treatment.

After some years at school he cannot but feel that

> His life at school had been a failure. He wanted to start afresh44.

He is in such a hurry to leave school and start life that he does not stop to consider the effect it can have on his future. If he had stayed he could have been given a grant to go to Oxford. We mentioned before how difficult it is to distinguish between fact and fiction in Maugham's works, and that the important thing is that the emotions are his own. In this case, Philip does not show any regret for this action; however, this is one of the autobiographical facts of the novel, and Maugham does show his discontentment for such a hasty action. He does not do it in this novel, though, but in *The Razor's Edge* when he says:

> I never went to Cambridge as my brothers did. I had the chance, but I refused it. I wanted to get out into the world. I've always regretted it45.

One of the most burdensome bondages is passion; you cannot be free unless you can control it. In the case of *Of Human Bondage*, the bondage is Philip's passion for Mildred; and this has been amply considered above. The only thing to say now is that this is a bondage for which he , himself, is responsible. He is conscious that it is doing him no good at all, and

> he wanted passionately to get rid of the love that obsessed him; it was degrading and hateful46.

The curious thing is that it is not Philip who makes the move for his freedom; it is Mildred who takes the final step, as has always been the case in their relationship.

Finally, we get to the last bondage:

> Having emancipated himself from environmental, physical, cultural, religious, aesthetic and emotional restraints, one final bond remains: Philip's need to 'understand' the meaning of life47.

> He who asks what is the meaning of life is already sick. The meaning of life is life itself48.

We cannot but agree with both of Freud's statements. As far as the first one is concerned, Philip's 'pilgrim' in life starts when he leaves school and the Vicarage and decides to go to Heidelberg. He is not satisfied with his present life and sets off in search for something better. He feels completely out of place in the society he is living and sets off to find himself, to fulfil himself. Thus, I think in a way we can say that he is sick; however, at this point he does not know what is wrong with him; he does not imagine that his life is the problem. As for the second statement, that is the answer Philip is going to find for the riddle of life. His pilgrimage in life takes him from Heidelberg to London; from London to Paris, to go back to England more mature than he left but without having found what he was looking for.

He certainly has not found what he wanted, but he starts wondering what is wrong with life; at least with his life. He is

eager to live; he is tired of preparing for life49; but he does not realize he is letting life escape through his fingers by thinking of the future. And this is a very important form of enslavement, too,

> that of living in a world of illusion, of not seeing life as it actually is and therefore frequently suffering the pain of disillusionment50.

No matter if he is not happy in one place, he will move to a different one and try something else. However, when he is there, he is disappointed; things are not as he expected them to be. He lives in a world of illusions which are never fulfilled. In his unhappiness he puts too much faith in the future, and this attitude is , according to Freud, typical of unsatisfied persons:

> A happy person neverfantasises,only an unsatisfied one. the motive forces of fantasies are unsatisfied wishes, and every single fantasy is the fulfilment of a wish, a correction of unsatisfying reality51.

However, he does not realize that the solution to all his problems lies inside himself. Nobody can help him discover the meaning of life:

> It is worthless unless you yourself discover it52.

Finally, the solution, which had been hidden in the Persian rug Cronshaw gave him, comes to his mind:

> There was no meaning in life, and man by living served no end [...] Life was insignificant and death of no consequence [...] it seemed to him that the last burden of responsibility was taken from him; and for the first time he was utterly free53.

> He could not reconcile himself to the believe that life had no meaning and yet everything he saw, all his thoughts added to the force of his conviction [...] Life was not so horrible if it was meaningless, and he faced it with a strange sense of power54.

There is no point in escaping from reality, in keeping moving from one place to another trying to find a new life,

> your life is what you make of it55.

This is the existentialist principle he has come to believe in:

> Life has no meaning, that the meaning comes from the individual, not from anything eternal or absolute56.

It is from this point that Philip's life starts to go well. He has come to terms with life, and yet he still keeps making plans for the future and thinking he is going to start life. It is not till the very end, with his decision to marry Sally and give up all his hopes of travelling that he finally chooses the happiness of a normal life with a wife and a job against an uncertain future travelling and in which we can foresee the same fate the other travels brought him. It is only when he realizes it is useless to

go on with his search for nonexistent absolutes that we can conclude that he is on the way for his recovery.

> Is that the secret, to learn to hold the present in the hand?. To take no thought for the morrow?57.

His travels are not going to fulfil his illusions. Why not?. What is it that Philip is looking for?:

> Traherne said he was seeking 'happiness', Ramakrishma said he was seeking God; but they meant the same thing. Blake would have called it 'vision'58.

They need something to give meaning to their lives, and so does Philip. It is really from here that my analysis starts. I would like to take the idea that there is no meaning in life as my starting-point. Some explanation is needed, however, concerning what, then, I have been trying to show with my analysis of *Of Human Bondage*. I have mentioned before that I do not intend to write a biography of Maugham, nevertheless, I am very much interested in the development of his philosophical ideas about life because they are essential for an understanding of most of his works. It seems to me that the main idea from which most of his serious works develop is the one just mentioned of the meaninglessness of life. If they part from this idea it can only be because that is what Maugham himself thought. It is not that he ever stated it so clearly, but for me, it is obvious that is what he thought. There is no real way of proving it, and yet this is the

conclusion we reach after researching on his life.

If I have started my study with *Of Human Bondage* it is because what I am interested in showing is that due to all his misery he came to wonder about the meaning of life and that he discovered it has no meaning. As I did not want to enter into an analysis of Maugham's life I thought I could use Philip to show how he came to reach this conclusion about life. I do not mean that we should consider this novel as his biography, that everything which happens to Philip did actually happen to Maugham. However, we cannot deny that this is an autobiographical novel, and as such there is very much of the author in it. For me, it does not make any real difference that Philip suffers from a club-foot (in spite of this handicap having strong classical associations with art) and that what really happened to Maugham is that he was a stutterer. The important thing is that there is something which prevents them from integrating into the society to which they belong, which makes outsiders of them. What is essential for us is emotions, feelings, and these, he admitted, were his own.

Throughout my analysis I intend to show how all Maugham's serious heroes at one point or another in their lives wonder about the meaning of life; and as we saw before, agreeing with Freud we could consider them as sick. For the moment then, let me ask you to assume that this is true.

Once this conclusion is reached, there are only two ways open to his characters: either they commit suicide or they set off in search of happiness, which according to Tatarkiewicz consists

in finding satisfaction with our life59. We shall come back to the first solution later on in our analysis; for the moment we are going to concentrate on the quest for happiness. I am going to call it happiness, but we could also call it contentment or fulfilment. It is the search for something to give meaning to the meaningless life; something to make our lives worth living.

It is usually the case that people who wonder about life are not happy; and according to Telfer

> A person who is unhappy can become happy in either of two ways: by altering his circumstances or by altering his attitude to his circumstances60.

It seems to me that the former can be a false way-out; and, in fact, in most of Maugham's books it proves to be so. In the case of Philip Carey, even before wondering what is really wrong with him, he realizes he is not happy where he is and leaves school and the Vicarage and sets off to Germany trying to be happier there. Germany is not, however, the only place he will visit in his search for happiness; Paris will follow, and once again he will be disappointed. Wherever he goes he feels the same, what is wrong with him?. For Robert Calder it is Freedom that Philip is looking for61.

It is true that he feels oppressed by so many bondages, and he needs to free himself from all of them; but once he has done so he still feels the same:

> His school-days were over, and he was free; but the

> wild exultation to which he had looked forward at that moment was not there62.

The same is going to happen every time he frees himself from a different bondage. He expects a greater change than it actually brings about:

> Philip entered deliberately upon a new life. But his loss of faith made less difference in his behaviour than he expected63.

After all, it is only another of his dreams; once he is free life will be different for him. He cannot be happy now because he is oppressed by so many external things; he cannot act freely, he has to behave as it is expected of him. At the end he comes to admit that freedom is just another illusion:

> the illusion of free will is so strong in my mind that I can't get away from it, but I believe it is only an illusion. But it is an illusion which is one of the strongest motives of my actions64.

Does he really strive for his freedom?. He seems to want to get rid of all his bondages; and yet, in the case of his relationship with Mildred although:

> He wanted passionately to get rid of the love that obsessed him; it was degrading and hateful65,

on the other hand, he clings to her for what I consider to be his fear of loneliness. Throughout the novel we find many references to Philip's loneliness. It starts when he is just a child and his mother is still alive:

> Philip had led always the solitary life of an only child66;

increasing with the passing of the years:

> Philip had few friends67

> He looked at the people walking about and envied them because they had friends68

> Sometimes he felt so lonely that he could not read69

A proof of how great his fear of loneliness is can be found at the end of the novel in his dismay when he learns that Sally is not pregnant, and so he does not need to marry her:

> His heart sank. The future stretched out before him in desolate emptiness [...] He could not confront again the *loneliness* and the tempest70 (italics mine).

He not only needs to be free but at the same time to be part of the world he lives in. If the outsider's problem is the problem of freedom, his chief desire is to cease to be an outsider71. He cannot be alone, he wants to keep his freedom, but

in communion with somebody else, such as Birkin intended in Lawrence's *Women in Love.*

As psychoanalysis tells us, man wishes to be happy:

> Men seek happiness, they want to become happy and to remain so72.

However, Philip cannot be happy because he lacks the things which are considered to be necessary for being happy: friends, love, affection, family. That is Philip's real problem; no freedom, as he comes to realize at the end:

> All his plans were suddenly overthrown, and the existence, so elaborately pictured, was no more than a dream which would never be realized. He was free once more. Free!. He need give up none of his projects, and life still was in his hands for him to do what he liked with. He felt no exhilaration, but only dismay. His heart sank. The future stretched out before him in desolate emptiness [...] He could not confront again the *loneliness* and the tempest73; (italics mine).

Finally, he has discovered why he is so unhappy; he has always been alone. Now he knows that what he wants more than anything in the world is

> a wife, a home, and love74.

We have just seen how the change of circumstances does not help Philip find the contentment he needs to go on with his

life. It is a change of attitude, the second solution I suggested above for finding happiness, which would be more appropriate. Only one positive attitude can be adopted to this negative conception of life, and this is resignation.

Nevertheless, this resignation can take one of two forms: one can either resign oneself to one's fate, having to stand this meaningless life until one dies; or, on the contrary, one can try to make the most of it, following the existentialist principle that

> Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself75.

In this case the resignation is accompanied by a quest for a 'happier' life.

An example of the attitude of complete resignation would be Maugham as Dr. Saunders in his novel *The Narrow Corner*. As we shall see in detail later, he is just a spectator of the 'play' of life. He does not seem to act, he just is:

> 'I believe in nothing but myself and my experience. The world consists of me and my thoughts and my feelings; and everything else is mere fancy. Life is a dream in which I create the objects that come before me'76.

The other characters in the novel are still striving to find a meaning of life and he observes them as one who has already

experienced these things.

Let us concentrate now on the second attitude, that is, resignation to our fate, but in order to try to find something to give meaning to our lives.

> There are only two things in the world that make life worth living: love and art77.

This quotation taken from his masterpiece is going to serve us as the starting point of our analysis of this attitude.

Love and art are then the two solutions Maugham seems to offer for the problem of life; although, as we shall see later, they do not always succeed in their purpose.

We are going to analyse the former first, and for this we need to know what psychoanalysis tells us about it and its importance for our happiness. We find that Eric Fromm, in his book *Man for Himself*, tells us that

> Love is supposed to be the only source of happiness78.

Sartre does not use the word happiness but he talks of stability of being, which could be another way of describing what men look for in life:

> Love is one of the forms under which we pursue stability of being79.

One of the things from which men suffer most in life is Loneliness, which is , as we have seen, Philip's real problem. I do not think man can really be happy unless he has somebody with whom to share his failures and successes. As early as Plato we find statements like:

> The happy man needs friends80,

and it is so because although

> every friendship is desirable for itself, [...] it starts from personal need81.

Mere friendship, however, does not seem to be enough, since what all the characacters in Maugham's works look for is not only a friend, but a special one. It is undoubtedly true that we need friends, but we also need a special friend, somebody who we can rely on and who can walk with us in the difficult path of life. Agreeing with Russell, I think that in this loved person we look for more than just sex:

> Love is something far more than desire for sexual intercourse, it is the principal means of escape from the loneliness which afflicts most men and women throughout the greater part of their lives82.

This is what happens with Bella in *The Merry-Go-Round.* She has always led a solitary life as the only child of a widowed dean. When she offers to marry Herbert, a dying poet much younger than herself, she is

> making one last bid for happiness83.

Even the happiness of a short marriage will be enough to compensate for what her life has been until then:

> I've been lonely in my life, so dreadfully, lonely84.

She needs to be loved, to feel that she is important for somebody, that is why she is so happy with her husband:

> 'It's so good to be loved', she answered. 'No one has ever said such things to me before, and I'm so ridiculously happy'85.

She knows her husband is going to die soon, that her happiness is not going to be eternal and yet she is happy because her life has a meaning now. She has known what happiness is and it has given her strength to go on even once he

has gone. At least she has her dreams of happiness.

Stendhal is right when he defines happiness as

> the product of 'love and work'86.

You need to be satisfied with your work in order to be happy. However, work is not as a big a problem as love since if you do not like your work you can find, or try to find, a better one. I do not mean that work is not important, just the opposite; it can be a very important source of unhappiness, but it can also be our only refuge from life. It is usually the case that people who cannot find any meaning in life, people who feel lonely consider their jobs as the only source of happiness. This is what happens to Julia, the heroine of *Theatre,* . After being passionately in love twice she turns to her acting as her only escape:

> They say acting is only make-believe. That make-believe is the only reality87.

She has been a slave of her passion but she is not going to let that happen again to her; she is going to be her only master; but, unfortunately, in a 'make-believe' world. In this world she is a star; in the real one just a failure because she knows

> success isn't everything in the world. After all, love is the only thing that matters88.

But as in the world of the theatre, you put the mask on and the performance goes on.

Although Maugham also made his job the aim of his life, in his literary works he does not really contemplate it as a solution for our troubles. Thus, I am going to concentrate on love as a solution for the loneliness of men.

Of all the conditions necessary for acquiring happiness, the most important one for Maugham is love:

> The great tragedy of life is not that men perish, but that they cease to love89.

When writing about love in Maugham's works, we have to distinguish between to love and to be loved. For Maugham

> it's loving that's the important thing, not being loved [...] When all was said the important thing was to love rather than to be loved90.

This is the theory Philip follows in *Of Human Bondage*. He does not ask Mildred to love him, he only wants her to let him love her. However, at the end of the novel he lets himself be loved by Sally, and he would rather have that than anything else. We wonder what has happened to the belief that loving is more important. The answer is simple: when one loves , one loves with passion, and that is something that usually turns out badly, as we

shall see happens in most of his works. Philip's love for Mildred represents passion whereas what he feels for Sally at the end is not love, but what Maugham calls loving-kindness:

> and yet, he knew that he did not love her. It was a great affection that he felt for her, and he liked her company91.

This idea of loving-kindness is present in most of his novels. This is the positive side of love. Loving-kindness gives the idea of a quiet, gentle love which, not being based on passion, can last longer and endure all the ups and downs of the married life. A proof of it is that after a while Philip's passion for Mildred is exhausted; it is too violent to last.

It is through this notion of love that we can come to understand what have been considered as the two flaws of *Of Human Bondage*: Philip's infatuation with the hideous Mildred, and the happy ending. How can he love Mildred?. The answer is simple: he needs love; he needs to have somebody with him, as we saw above; and as, according to Maugham's theory, to love is better than to be loved, he tries to be happy by loving:

> 'It's very hard when you're as much in love as I am. Have mercy on me, I don't mind that you don't care for me. After all you can't help it. I only want you to let me love you'92.

He thinks that nobody will care for him, that he is

> insignificant and crippled and ordinary and ugly93.

Philip desperately needs love, and if he cannot be loved, then he will love somebody, no matter how horrid this person is. As with Maugham we can say that

> he found it hard to find or give love, but longed for it all his life94.

As for the ending, for me it is the most adequate and coherent one. Why should the public expect an unhappy ending?95. He sets off in search of happiness. First he liberates himself from different bondages and then he tries to find happiness through love, only that he does not realize that

> it is affection received, not affection given that causes this sense of security96.

If this that Russell thinks is true, by the end of the book Philip has gained what he had been looking for: happiness.

For the same reasons that Philip marries Sally, Jack (*Marriages are Made in Heaven*) marries a woman society considers unworthy:

> I was tired of this miserable existence of mine. I was sick to death of being always alone. I wanted someone

> to care for me, someone to belong to me and to stand by me97.

It is not love that brings them together but a pleasant regard for each other and a great need to escape from the loneliness of their lives. His feelings and needs are more important than society:

> 'I want to live with you just as you are' [...] If anybody says ,'is that all'? [...] he must have had little experience of solitariness and dread, little experience indeed of solitary dread98.

So far we have talked of two kinds of love: passion and loving-kindness. They could be identified with the distinction the Greeks made when referring to love: Eros, described as passionate love; Philis, as friendship, and Agape as God-like love. This third kind of love is present in Maugham's work and also as another way of finding happiness. For the time being we are going to continue considering the role of the first two kinds of love and we shall study the third one later.

Continuing with the topic of love as an escape from loneliness and concentrating on love as passion, we are going to study now another of his novels, *Mrs. Craddock.*

Bertha Ley has lived with her aunt, Miss Ley, since her father died, and although they keep each other company, yet they

keep all their feelings to themselves and they are 'spiritually' as lonely as though they were living alone:

> Their chief desire appeared to be to conceal from one another the emotions they felt99.

She does not seem to be dissatisfied with her life; however, when she meets Edward Craddock she realizes that the world she is living in is empty; all her riches do not mean anything to her; and her sumptuous house is nothing but a prison:

> She could not return to the house [...] and the walls seemed like a prison100.

There is something lacking in her life; hers is a useless, meaningless life. Thus, when she meets Edward she thinks she has found what she needs most in life:

> You can give me happiness, and I want nothing else in the world101.

From now on she is never going to be alone, she will have somebody with whom to share her happiness and anxieties. She does not care about social prejudices. Everybody is against her marriage with him since they belong to different social classes. The common thought is he can only be interested in her for her money, and that she is going to make a fool of herself by

marrying him. And a fool she makes of herself; not because of what people think , but because all she gets in exchange for her passion for him is just loving-kindness:

> Love to her was a fire, a flame that absorbed the rest of life; love to him was a convenient and necessary institution of Providence, a matter about which there was little need for excitement as about the ordering of a suit of clothes102.

Loving-kindness proved to be the right solution in Philip's case. Even Sally, though she loved him, did not love him with passion. Bertha needs more than that, she not only needs to love; she also needs to be loved. She needs to feel that she is loved in the same way as she loves him. She needs to have her love returned. As Sartre said:

> love is the demand to be loved103.

As we saw with Philip's passion for Mildred, Bertha's feelings for her husband also keep her in bondage. She is a slave of her passion. She cannot let him go because she needs him. Loneliness frightens her. Thus her joy when she learns she is expecting a baby; from now on she will not be alone again; she will give him all her love and she will not need to depend on her husband. It is the beginning of her freedom104. She puts in her baby all her expectations of happiness. Thus her misery when the child is born dead; her life has escaped through her fingers, again:

> Her sobs were terrible, unbridled, it was her life that she was weeping away, her hope of happiness, all her desires and dreams105.

Once more she is alone in life and once more she turns to her husband for comfort and affection:

> In her loneliness she yearned for Edward's affection; he now was all she had, and she stretched out her arms to him with a great desire106.

The old passion comes back; but it is a passion born out of need. I would consider it more as need than love. The same happens with Philip; he is a slave of his passion for Mildred only because he is desperate for love. And the proof is that it can more or less easily die if something else comes along. If Bertha had had her child she would have freed herself from her bondage. As she has lost him, her only hope is, again, her husband because as she says:

> For me love is everything, the cause and reason of life. Without love I should be non-existent107.

Her husband cannot give her what she wants, which is love, and she is left once more alone and unhappy, with nobody to stand by her.

Finally, she frees herself from the passion which torments her and resigns herself to a meaningless life, in which

indifference to it is the only solution. But for this she needs to create her own world, artificial, illusory, of course, and away from the present.

When her husband dies, it is a matter of no importance for her. She is free now, and it does not make any difference any longer. She had regained her freedom when she stopped loving him. She is as lonely now as she was when he lived.

The Bertha we find at the beginning of the novel is not satisfied with the life she leads but is still hopeful of finding somebody to give meaning to it. She has not really suffered; she has just had an uneventful, boring life. The widow Mrs. Craddock of the end of the book has discovered the meaninglessness of life; she has learnt not to expect anything from it:

> She had advanced a good deal in the science of life when she realized that pleasure came by surprised, that happiness was a spirit that descended unawares, and seldom when it was sought108.

She has fought a battle for happiness and has lost it; not only has she not found it but she has suffered and the battle has left her

> tired out, in body and mind, tired of love and hate, tired of friendship and knowledge, tired of the passing years109.

She will not fight again, it is not worthy. She does not want to have anything to do with the world any more:

> I myself stand on one side, and the rest of the world on the other110.

Marriage did the trick in Philip's case, it does not in Bertha's. The difference is found in that Philip is loved at the end of the novel whereas Bertha loves but is not loved. Maugham's theory that it is loving that is important is not proved right here. It is not enough to love somebody, one needs to be reciprocally loved. I think we could agree with Russell when he says that

> it is affection received, not affection given, that causes this sense of security (i.e., security needed to face life), though it arises most of all from affection which is reciprocal111.

Maugham insists on this same idea that loving is more important, in another of his novels, *The Painted Veil.* Thus, we hear Kitty, the heroine of the novel, say:

> but it's loving that's the important thing, not being loved. One's not even grateful to
> the people who love one; if one doesn't love them, they only bore one112.

However, she is not sincere when she says this since here she is only considering one side of her situation. It is true that she does not love her husband , though he is very much in love with her. His love only bores her in spite of his goodness and handsomeness. When everything is clear between them, when she

does not have to pretend that she loves him any more, she feels relieved:

> It was a relief that she need never again submit to his caresses113.

In this case, his love for her does not mean anything to her. The case is different, though, with her lover. She is passionately in love with him, and yet, he does not love her. Now, to love is not enough for her; she needs his love, too. When she does not get it she feels :

> She had nothing to live for any more114.

As De Rougemont said

> to love in the sense of passion : love is the contrary of to live115.

She had entered a loveless marriage with Walter only because she wanted to be married before her younger sister; as she did not love anybody she thought she could live quite happily with the man who loved her so much. Walter, on his side, knows his wife's real feelings for him, however, all he asks is that she lets him love her. When she gets to love Charlie, she does so passionately. At the beginning she is extremely happy; love is everything for her. She soon comes to realize that for him, she is only another lover and not worth sacrificing his future for. Life

is over for her; she cannot go on behaving with her husband as she did before, and her happiness is over too because she knows now what real happiness is. There is nothing to live for now:

> It was rather hard to be finished with life at twenty-seven116.

Suddenly she comes to feel desperately unhappy; she has been left alone in life. She had not realized how important her husband's support was for her; she had taken it for granted and she did not consider it of any importance. She does not feel sorry that she has lost him, but she feels:

> a sense of emptiness, it was as though a support that she had grown so accustomed to as not to realize its presence were suddenly withdrawn from her so that she swayed this way and that like a thing that was top-heavy117.

And yet, at this point she still keeps thinking that to love is the important thing.

If Kitty had had the youth Philip had, she would have appreciated the value of her husband's love for her. She would have known how important it is to have somebody who cares for you by your side, and not to have to walk the path of life alone. She comes to discover it when it is too late.

She comes now to think that life is not what she thought it was. When single, she had been very much spoilt by her mother, and had always lived in very comfortable circumstances. When she

was about to lose her privileges she used Walter as an escape, and he had always protected her. Now she comes face to face with life; not only with a simple life, since her husband takes her to the heart of a cholera epidemic. The life of the people who live there makes her realize how empty her life has been until then. She starts wondering what is wrong with her life and she starts her search for a meaning of life, she needs something to give meaning to it:

> I'm looking for something and I don't know what it is. But I know that it's very important for me to know it, and if I did it would make all the difference118.

What is this something?. The resigned Maugham of *The Narrow Corner* appears now :

> Some of us look for the way in opium and some in God, some of us in whisky and some in love. It is all the same way and it leads nowhither119.

He offers several ways out but, after all, they are only false escapes. Opium and whisky only help temporarily and God and love are only an illusion. However, these illusory aims serve their purpose.

Maybe, after all, they are only an illusion, but they have given meaning to some people's lives; they have made of life something satisfying, something for which it is worth living.

God as the aim in life or as what gives meaning to our life is represented by the life of the nuns in the cholera stricken

place. Their life is one of Goodness; they dedicate their lives to the service of God and to the rest of the community. Even if there is no other life after this one, it will not really matter because

> their lives are in themselves beautiful[120].

Thus, in this novel we find Maugham's triad of values: Goodness, Truth and Beauty, which are the three things Edward Barnard (in the short-story *The Fall of Edward Barnard*) is also said to value in life[121]. This is what his new life has made of him. He left a comfortable life in the city to look for something which, as the other heroes of Maugham's, he does not know what it is.

His friends think he has failed in life; however, his success has been complete since he has found a meaning for life:

> You can't think with what zest I look forward to life, how full it seems to me and how significant[122].

He has made his own pattern of life and for him it is quite good:

> 'Do you think it is so little to have enjoyed contentment? We know that it will profit a man little if he gain the world and lose his soul. I think I have won mine'[123].

What else can we ask for in life?.

Another example of Goodness as a way for a happy life can be found in *Of Human Bondage* in the Athelny family. They are the only happy people in the novel, and their life is one of goodness and of simplicity. The father is not a Christian but he allows his wife to take the children to Church because they cannot learn anything wrong there.

> I have an idea that the only thing which makes it possible to regard this world we live in without disgust is the beauty which now and then men create out of the chaos [...] the richest in beauty is the beautiful life. That is the perfect work of art124.

This is a very significant quotation since in it we find a reaffirmation of the chaos of life but also the idea that out of it we can make something beautiful, and that is what matters. However, as I said before, it only depends on us. Once again we have the metaphor of life as a work of art and us as artists. With this we go back to what we said above that art is with love the only thing that gives meaning to our life.

In Maugham's works the contemplation of beauty always produces happiness. Thus, we see that Philip has a great sensitivity for beauty, and this feeling is something that the reader shares with him:

> It was the first time that he had experienced [...] the sense of beauty [...] 'By Jove, I am happy' he said to himself, unconsciously125.

A proof of how significant this sense of beauty is for Maugham, is that this metaphor of beauty as happiness is also used in other novels, as for example in *The Razor's Edge*:

> The sun rose [...] 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 joy126.

As for Truth as the aim in our lives, we shall study it later on , when we finish with the topic of love.

Love is also described as an illusion which

> leads nowhither127,

and yet for Waddington, the one who describes it like this, it represents his whole life. It is his shelter against the misery of life.

As we have just seen, this is not the case with Kitty, our heroine. Finally, she recovers her freedom; her husband dies and she frees herself from the passion she felt for her lover. Her freedom does not bring her happiness; she has suffered and she is left with a

> valiant unconcern for whatever was to come128.

But she has learnt something from her suffering; she has witnesssed a life of goodness which seems to offer happiness,

even if it is an illusory one. It also offers what she is in need of: peace129. However, Maugham provides her with another shelter against misery. She cannot face life alone, she feels lonely and miserable and she needs love very badly. She turns to her widowed father for love and the future she faces now is one of a life shared with him and the child she is expecting, and following the model of the nuns' life. And with the sun rising we leave her to a future which promises to be more rewarding than her miserable past.

Marriage is the keyword in all Maugham's plays. In the first volume of his plays we find successful marriages both between members of the same class: *Lady Frederick* and *Mrs. Dot*; and of different classes: *Smith*. We find marriages in which passion is the main force, as in *Mrs. Dot* and *Jack Straw*; but in both cases they have to struggle before getting their reward. Marriage in *Smith* and *Lady Frederick* is of a different nature; it is the result of a period of understanding and respect for the woman of a lower class. It is not passion that the man feels for her but loving-kindness.

The marriages we find in plays such as *The Bread-Winner* and *Our Betters* are those between people of the same class and of marriages we can say that they only have the name. They live together because it is convenient to be married and, of course, the life they lead is one of pretence. Naturally enough, we usually

find the presence of lovers, both in the case of the man and the woman. What these marriages mean is well represented in *The Constant Wife* in which the man appears as the bread-winner and for this reason he is free to do what he wants and the woman is supposed to be faithful to him. When she starts earning her own bread, she does not need to be faithful to him any longer. It is a society in which money is the only value and love of no consequence.

> There is not, except in *Sheppey*, a single, happy or even affectionate marriage in the whole of the Maugham's plays. There is a hint of happiness in *Smith* and *The Land of Promise*130.

If we find this hint of happiness in these plays it is because the marriages in them are not based on passion. We have already seen quite a few examples of passion love and how it never ends well in Maugham's works.

Freeman, the hero of *Smith*, after a wild youth goes bankrupt and goes to Rhodesia to start a new life. The man who goes back to England after eight years in this far-away country is a completely new person. He has suffered but he has learnt how useless his life was before:

> I've had a very rough time, and the world has knocked me about a bit. Of course, I think it's knocked the nonsense out of me. I only want very simple things now 131.

But something is lacking in his new life; the beauty of the dawn and the stars is not enough to make him happy. He feels lonely

> so horribly lonely132

to enjoy the beauty of life. Finally, he discovers what it is he wants:

> I'd discovered that man was not made to live alone 133.

And that is why he goes back to England, to find a wife. He does not expect to fall passionately in love with anybody; he knows that

> there's very little love in the world. A man ought to be grateful if a woman cares for him134.

That is all he wants; a good woman who is prepared to respect him and look after him. Love does not bother him; it is bound to grow between them if they live together. This is what happens to Norah and Frank in *The Land of Promise.* Their marriage is one of convenience on both sides. Frank needs a woman to keep his house tidy and to look after his needs; Norah

wants to leave her brother's house and she has nowhere to go. Love has nothing to do with it; as Frank says:

> What's love got to do with it?. It's a business proposition135.

His needs are provided for now, but he has realized that is not all he wants; he needs love, or as Maugham, would call it, loving-kindness. They live together but they are not sharing their lives, they are putting up a fight to see who is stronger. At the end they realize how useless their attitude is; they both need each other's company and 'love'. They have learnt to understand each other and can now start a new life together.

Something similar to what happened with Kitty in *The Painted Veil*, happens now with Mrs. Otto in *Smith*. She married Otto Rosenberg only because of his money and , of course, all she has to do for him is boring for her. She does not even take care of her ill baby; all she cares about is playing bridge and being with her rich friends. It is only when her baby dies and her husband threatens to separate from her, that she realizes how important he is for her. She does not love him, but he is all she has in the world and he has always been good to her:

> I didn't know where I was to go if he left me. It seemed to me the whole world was coming to an end136.

It is worth sacrificing her useless life for what his love means. Once again, we see how it is really need that makes two people share their lives.

Although Maugham seems to offer love as one of the things which can give meaning to life; however, it does not always work out all right. It is clear that, for him, passionate love is not what is going to make us happy; just the opposite since, as we saw before, to love with passion is the opposite of to live. It is loving-kindness that is really going to help us escape from the loneliness which threatens our lives. In any case, we find very few happy marriages among his wide production and this makes St. John Ervine conclude that:

> Mr. Maugham , apparently, has not noticed that the majority of marriages are affectionate and that the history of marriage is illuminated by numerous instances of great love and devotion that have lasted for life, nor has he noticed the singular felicity which attends the marriage of people who share the same enthusiasm or are engaged in the same work137.

Maybe this is because, unfortunately, he did not experience it himself. Like the marriages he describes, his own was also a failure.

A2: FAITH

So far, we have studied two kinds of love in the works of Somerset Maugham: passionate love and loving-kindness. As we saw in the previous chapter, in their fear of the loneliness of life Maugham's protagonists cling to love as the solution for their boring, uneventful life. They are all characters who are desperately in need of a special friendship, and thus passion is born. It does not work, though, and the most they can get is a bearable life shared with an agreeable companion who, feeling the same way, is prepared to reach a compromise for a better life. There is, however, a third kind of love which we defined as agape, and which is the path some people follow to give meaning to their lives. It is this kind of love that we are going to study now.

A clear distinction has to be made between Truth, Faith, or God on one hand; and Religion or Church , on the other. The latter is always something negative in Maugham's works and it is never presented as a possible help for human beings. An example of the negative light in which it is considered can be found in *Of Human Bondage* , where it is one of the bondages from which Philip has to free himself. The treatment the representatives of the Church receive is not very favourable, either. In two novels, *Of Human Bondage* and *Cakes and Ale*, the Church is represented by Maugham's uncle the Reverend, and I gave some examples above of the character of this man.

A very cruel picture of the Church is found in one of Maugham's early bad novels: *The Making of a Saint.* The man of the Church in this case is Protonotary Savello, and he shows no pity for anybody:

> There was a look of such ferocity in his face that one saw he would indeed hesitate at nothing1.

His cruelty has no limits; thus, he says to Caterina:

> Remember that we hold your children, and shall not hesitate to hang them before your eyes2.

Not even in the case of two innocent children does his heart melt. He is the only one who does not hesitate to go on with his threat:

> The men hesitated; but there was no pity in the man of God3.

The Church in Maugham's works does not offer refuge for the soul in pain; Faith does, however, although , unfortunately, only in some cases:

> Throughout the ages many have found in the belief in a life to come an adequate compensation for the troubles of their brief sojourn in a world of sorrow. They are the lucky ones. Faith, to those who have it, solves difficulties which reason finds insoluble4.

Faith gives meaning to the lives of the people who believe in it. What will happen if after all there is no life everlasting?. We found the answer in *The Painted Veil* :

> Think what it means if death is really the end of all things. They've given up all for nothing [...] I wonder if it matters that what they have aimed at is illusion. Their lives are in themselves beautiful5.

The important thing is not what you will get in the future, but the reward you get in your present life. Thus, we find in *The Narrow Corner*:

> -'Where d'you expect to get if you just take things at their face value?'
> -'The kingdom of Heaven'.
> -'And where is that?'
> -'In my own mind'6.

If belief makes him a happy man what happens next is of no importance.

Maugham's theory as far as Faith is concerned seems to be the one we find in *Sādhāna or the Realization of Life*:

> Man's abiding happiness is not in getting anything but in giving himself up to what is greater than himself, to ideas which are larger than his individual life, the idea of his country, of humanity, of God7.

This was the aim of the nuns in the cholera stricken place in *The Painted Veil*, and this is also what Sheppey is going to do in the play of the same name.

Sheppey, a barber by profession, had never been a very religious man although he had always led a good life. All he had always cared about were his job and his family. As it is the case with everybody, he also had his dreams for a better life in case he could win on the lottery. The dream day comes and now that Sheppey could make all his dreams come true, unexpectedly , his behaviour changes. He no longer

cares for all the material things which can make life comfortable. He has seen people suffer and almost starve , and now that he has a lot of money he intends to help them. He will not buy a farm and move to the country with his wife; he will not even help his daughter make a good marriage. He starts taking people to his house to feed and accommodate them, to the annoyance of his family, specially his daughter, who wants the money for herself.

Nobody can understand his behaviour. They expected him to retire and to lead a very luxurious life with all the commodities money can buy. Nobody could expect this behaviour from Sheppey, since he had never shown any interest for religious things; and, besides, and what seems to be the most important point of the play, nobody acts like this in real life. It is all very well to talk about helping the poor and ill; but, actually, nobody does it. The furthest one would go would be to give them some money; but very few people would take a prostitute and a thief to their homes trying to reform them. As Ernie says:

> 'The mistake you make, Sheppey, is taking things too literally. The New Testament must be looked upon as fiction, a beautiful fiction if you like, but a fiction. No educated man accepts the Gospel narrative as sober fact'8.

> The normal man is selfish, grasping, destructive, vain and sensual. What is generally termed morality is forced upon him by the herd, and the obligation he is under to repress his natural instincts is undoubtedly the cause of the disorders of the mind9.

This pure Nietzschean statement made by Dr. Jervis summarizes what is going to happen to this poor barber. As nobody acts like this,

when somebody does act in this way it can only be due to an unbalanced mind.

All the pity Sheppey shows for the needy, is found lacking in his daughter who is more than prepared to take her father to an asylum in order to get his money. This would have been his fate if death had not come to his rescue. And all this because he wanted to make people happy:

> 'I only want people to be 'appy'10;

which is something he knows is not very easy:

> 'Peace and 'appiness, that's what we're all looking for, but where are we going to find it?'11.

Sheppey is one of the very few Christians we find in Maugham's works. He does not expect to get his reward in this life. When asked what he expects to get for his money, he says:

> 'Treasure in 'eaven'12

and:

> 'Oh, I don't know. Peace of mind. The kingdom of Heave, perhaps'13.

He does not really know what he is looking for; all he knows is that by acting like this he is happy and in peace with himself; and that is what really matters. He does not care about what people say about himself; whether they think he is crazy, or whether the people he is helping do not really appreciate it.

Another idea we find in his answers given above is that of trying to find peace. This is a very important idea which we also found in one of the novels we studied in our previous chapter: *The Painted Veil.* If one cannot find happiness, at least, one should try to find peace. Maybe it is not the same, but if we manage to find peace of mind, we can make of our existence something bearable. This is what happens to Kitty at the end of the novel just mentioned:

> She could not know what the future had in store for her, but she felt in herself the strength to accept whatever was to come with a light and buoyant spirit [...], but the path those dear nuns at the convent followed so humbly, the path that led to peace14.

When we finish the novel we leave our heroine to a future which we can guess will not bring her much happiness, but we also know that she has learnt to be in peace with herself and that will help her to face whatever the future has in store for her.

> 'I don't think I shall ever find *peace* till I make up my mind about things [...] Who am I that I should bother my head about this, that, and the other?. Perhaps it's only because I'm a conceited prig. Wouldn't it be better to follow the beaten track and let what's coming to you come? [...] It's hard not to ask yourself what life is all about and whether there's any sense to it or whether it's all a tragic blunder of blind fate' (italics mine) 15.

This statement is made by Larry, the hero of one of Maugham's best novels according to the critics: *The Razor's Edge*. Larry is an American youth who comes back home , after taking part in the war, a completely changed man. After his experiences in the war he cannot follow the pattern of life his friends follow:

> 'I've got an idea that I want to do more with my life than sell bonds [...] go into a law office or study medicine'16.

All he knows is that kind of life does not appeal to him; that he needs to do something different, but what it is he does not know. When asked what he wants to do, his answer is very significant: 'Loaf'17. It is not that he does not want to do anything. He really needs some time to himself so that he can clarify things. He needs time to think , to wonder about life since:

> -'You have a lot of time to think when you're up in the air by yourself. You get odd ideas'.
> -'What sort of ideas?'
> -'Vague [...] incoherent. Confused'18.

All the ideas he had for his future have been shattered by the war; what used to be important for him, now is of no consequence at all. Had it not been for the war, he would probably have been what his friends consider normal: he would have found a job, most probably a very good one like the one he is offered in the novel; and he would have married Isabel, the girl he is in love with and the one who loves him. As it is, people think he is a bit crazy and very lazy since he does

not want to accept any of the jobs he is offered. His friends cannot understand him because in their circle they are not used to people who wonder about the meaning of life. This is quite understandable since most of them are well-off people who can get all they want, and who have not got any worries. The only person who seems to understand him is the writer of the novel, who is also its narrator, and who appears in the novel under his real name. As a matter of fact, he is also the only person Larry shares his views with. The narrator will come to understand this young man better as he comes to learn more about him and his circumstances; however, from very early in the novel he shows a great understanding to what may be happening to Larry. Thus, we hear him say:

> 'Isn't it possible that he's looking for something, but what it is he doesn't know, and perhaps he isn't even sure it's there?. Perhaps whatever it was that happened to him during the war has left him with a restlessness that won't let him be. Don't you think he may be pursuing an ideal that is hidden in a cloud of unknowing?'19.

We come once again to what we found in the heroes of the novels we studied in our previous chapter. We saw how at a certain point in their lives they started wondering about the meaning of life. Why this happened was different in each case, as it is also different now. What is important is that once more the hero has to face the same problem; as Maugham says:

> 'I think he's been seeking for a philosophy, or maybe a religion, and a rule of life that'll satisfy both his head and his heart20.

However, the problem in Larry's case is of a different nature from the one we found in the other novels. Larry could have had, if he had wanted, what the other heroes were looking for: love. Maybe because Larry has it, that it is not enough for him. What he really wants to know is

> whether God is or God is not. I want to find out why evil exists. I want to know whether I have an immortal soul or whether when I die it's the end21.

He is more worried about Spiritual things, which is quite logical considering the nature of his experiences. While he was fighting he saw how his best friend was killed trying to save his life; if our life finishes when we die, and if we lead such meaningless lives, then life is of no consequence. We need to find a purpose in life; we need to know that there is a reason for our suffering:

> 'I suggest to you that whatever it was that happened to Larry filled him with a sense of the transiency of life, and an anguish to be sure that there was a compensation for the sin and sorrow of the world'22.

We could say that when Larry leaves his home and friends , he does so to go in search of a God in whom he does not believe23. This is not surprising since Maugham himself did not believe in God. So, he could not create a character who had to defend doctrines he did not accept and which for him were nonsense.

Maugham, as we said before, travelled very widely along the world and came to know quite a lot of different beliefs. He, himself, had certain experiences which the believers considered miraculous. Most of the religions or beliefs he came to know about are those practised in different countries of Asia. He met some Yogis and Spiritual leaders; and even if he never accepted their beliefs, at least, he realized that the kind of life these people led was one of peace and, maybe, even of happiness. By meditating and by helping other people, these leaders had made of their lives something meaningful. Even if with him it did not work, it did not mean that it could not work with other people. He realized that Faith could also be a solution for the problem of life. And it is with these ideas that he experiments in *The Razor's Edge*.

Larry's story could be considered as the biography of one of these Yogis. As a matter of fact, it reminds us of the biography of Ignacio de Loyola that Maugham himself describes in another of his novels: *Don Fernando*. Thus, we see how he leaves his home , and sets off in search of something without knowing exactly what it is. The life he leads from the moment he leaves his home is one of hardship; sometimes by working hard and other times by meditating. He does not start thinking about God from the very beginning; it is something that comes to his mind after a while:

> 'I wanted to make something of my life, but I didn't know what. I'd never thought much about God. I began to think about Him now. I couldn't understand why there was evil in the world'24.

The problem with Larry is that he does not believe in God; he wants to believe in Him, but he cannot:

> 'I couldn't believe, I wanted to believe, but I couldn't believe in a God who wasn't better than the ordinary decent man'25.

Through his contact with all these religious people he does not learn to believe in their God, but he learns about the beauty of a life of Goodness and he comes to think that

> the greatest ideal man can set before himself is self-perfection26.

We should not look for a personal God to whom we can turn in distress since

> 'God is within me or nowhere'27.

All he believes in is the idea of the Absolute which

> Is not a person, it is not a thing, it is not a cause. It has no qualities [...] It is truth and freedom28.

The solution lies inside ourselves; if we only tried to make ourselves as perfect as we can, the world would be different. For Larry the ultimate satisfaction

> lies in the life of the spirit29.

Once he has learnt all this he is prepared to go back to America to live. He has found a meaning for life; his life is not going to be useless. He is going to dedicate his life to do as much good as he can, and by doing this he will be happy since:

> 'my way of life offers happiness and peace'30,

which is not little.

We see, then, how what Sheppey wanted to get by his good actions, is what Larry gets by his: peace and happiness. That is what a life of goodness offers.

We also find in this novel something we saw in 'Sheppey', and it is the idea that there must be something wrong with the person who acts in such a good way. Thus we hear Isabel ask:

> 'What do you think it can be that makes him so *queer*?' (italics mine).

And Maugham's answer is :

> 'Perhaps something so commonplace that one simply doesn't notice it [...] Well, goodness, for instance'31.

We have just seen two of Maugham's triad of values , and also of Western culture: Goodness and Truth; the other being Beauty which is something we mentioned in the other chapter, and which we shall study in detail when we talk about Art.

If war was what made Larry wonder about life, and what made him turn to Faith; it is also war that makes John and Mrs. Littlewood, in the play *The Unknown*, reject Faith.

John, a true believer when he went to the war, comes back home having lost of his faith. What for him used to be

> The reason and the beauty of life ,

now is

> nothing but a lie32.

His family, a very religious one, and his girlfriend, Sylvia, cannot understand what has happened to him. They think the war has shattered him temporarily and so they try to bring him back to his old faith. As they cannot convince him themselves, they make the Vicar speak to him. One of their dialogues is worth quoting:

> John: 'I can't believe that there is a God in Heaven.'
> Vicar: 'But do you realise that if there isn't, the world is meaningless?'.
> John: 'That may be. But if there is it's infamous'.
> Vicar: 'What have you got to put in place of religion?. What answer can you give to the riddle of the universe?'.
> John: 'I may think your answer wrong and yet have no better one to put in its place [...] I don't see that there is any more meaning in life than in the statement that two and two are four'33.

In this short dialogue there are a few interesting ideas to comment on. It is not surprising that John cannot believe in God any more since he has seen many people, young people with families, die without having done any wrong. If God existed he would not have allowed this to happen. All his ideas about a supernatural man who looks after his worshippers and to whom people can turn in distress can no longer be sustained. Thus, his answer when the vicar suggests that if there is not a God the world is meaningless.

The vicar's next statement is very significant for our topic. Starting by its second part we can see that he admits that life is a riddle and that we need something to give it a meaning; which for him obviously is religion. It is important to notice the words he uses for his first question: 'to put in place of religion'. He does not even question the idea of having to find something to keep you going.

That is John's problem, that he cannot find anything to give meaning to his life:

> 'Life seems to me like a huge jig-saw puzzle that doesn't make any picture';

but, at least, he can still see a narrow way-out

> 'but if we like we can make little patterns, as it were, out of the pieces'34.

This sounds very familiar to us since it takes us back to the idea we saw when talking about love,that each one had to make his own

pattern of life; that life was like a work of art and we were artists. Here life is metaphorically described as a 'huge jig-saw puzzle , that doesn't make any picture'; and we saw how in *Of Human Bondage* it was described as a 'Persian rug', which in the end comes to mean the same thing.

We hear John repeat the same idea with different words when he says:

> 'I think what I mean is that life in itself has no value. It's what you put in it that gives it worth'35.

At least he is not as lost as Philip was in *Of Human Bondage*. It took Philip years to learn what for John seems to be clear from the very beginning.

He also seems to know how he would like to be: like his friend who was killed in front of him:

> He had one quality which was rather out of the ordinary. It's difficult to explain what it was like. It seemed to shine about him like a mellow light. It was like the jolly feeling of the country in May. And do you know what it was? Goodness, just Goodness. He was the sort of man that I should like to be36.

The fact that he does not believe in God, does not mean that he cannot lead a good life. He , like Larry, also aims at self-perfection, and a life of Goodness.

Although apparently it seemed that this play was going to defend a completely different philosophy of life from the one we found in *The Razor's Edge*; however, the two heroes share very similar ideas. Neither

of them believes in God. Larry, who was an unbeliever goes on being one, but comes nearer to the life of the Spirit. John, a believer, loses his faith but goes on thinking that a life of Goodness is the best life.

There is, however, a very important difference between the novel and the play; and it is their attitude towards religion. In the novel it is seen as something positive, as something which helps men make of their lives something beautiful. In the play, the case is just the reverse. Religion is seen through its representatives and believers, who try to direct other people's lives, as for example happens with Sylvia, John's girlfriend. Although they love each other, once she learns about John's loss of faith she can no longer marry him. This could be more or less understandable since as she says:

> 'How could we possibly be happy when all that to me is the reason and the beauty of life, to you is nothing but a lie?' 37.

What is not so easily understood is her insistence in wanting to convert him into her faith. He leaves her free to think and believe in whatever she wants; however, he must believe in what the others believe.

When we close the book at the end of the play, we do so with a feeling that it is going to be very difficult for him to lead a life of Goodness because he is going to find a lot of obstacles in his way. Thus, his love for Sylvia is killed when she forces him to take communion when she lies to him saying that this is his dying father's wish and that if he did so his father would die in peace. However, she knew all the time that his father was already dead.

John is not the only person in the play who loses his/her faith after the war. Mrs. Littlewood also loses hers when her two sons, all she had in the world, are killed. She had led a miserable life after her husband abandoned her when her children were very young. However, all her misery had been worthwhile because she had her two sons. When God, as she says, takes them, she loses all she had and life ceases to be of any consequence:

> 'I feel that I have nothing more to do with the world and the world has nothing more to do with me. So far as I'm concerned it's a failure' 38.

The strongest thing Maugham dares to say against God is put in Mrs. Littlewood's mouth when she says:

> 'Who is going to forgive God?' 39.

We said before that John saw a more or less clear solution for the problem of life; he knew that he, himself, had to give his life its value. Mrs. Littlewood's case is different. For her, life is

> 'just like a play. I can't take it very seriously. I feel strangely detached'40.

We wonder that if she feels like this she does not put an end to it , but she answer our question when she says:

> 'I don't feel that life is important enough for me to give it a deliberate end. I don't trouble to kill the fly that walks over my ceiling'"41.

Christmas Holiday is another of Maugham's novels in which we find some religious ideas which are worth paying attention to.

Life to Charley, the teenager son of a well-off family, had always been easy and comfortable. It is with his trip to Paris at Christmas to celebrate his first anniversary with his father's firm that he starts to discover that life has another side.

He goes to Paris with the intention of having a great time as a grown-up away from the family; but it is not exactly fun what he has when he is put into contact with the prostitute Lydia, "the princess". Her life has been one of hardship, just the opposite of what Charley's life has been. Although Charley could have left Lydia, he cannot do so and spends all his holidays with her. What is it that makes him spend his time and money with her, since he is not even having sexual relations with her?. That is what Lydia, herself, wonders:

> 'Why do you bother about me? Why don't you just turn me out into the street? [...] Shall I tell you? Goodness. Just pure, simple, stupid goodness'42.

It would only have been fair if he had decided to ignore her and had tried to have as much fun as he could since, after all, when he went back home everything would go on the same for her. He is not really going to solve her problem, but, at least, he is going to give her a few days' rest. He is too good to turn his back on a person who needs him.

He is also conscious that he is enjoying a privileged position in life, but that is not his fault and, of course, he is not going to reject his privileges. As he tells his friend Simon:

> 'Don't you think it's enough if I do my duty in that state of life in which providence or chance, if you like, has placed me?'43.

He is not prepared to do what Sheppey did, but , as we saw, nobody acts like this in real life. However, his behaviour is irreproachable; that is how everybody should behave.

Lydia is the other person in the novel in which we find a religious belief. As a Russian she has suffered a lot in her youth. She saw

> the horror and misery and cruelty of the world44

but she managed to find something to help her bear her misery:

> Something that was greater and more important than all that, the spirit of man and the beauty he created45.

Once again we find the idea that out of the chaos of the world man can create beauty. It all depends on you, like when you see a painting (metaphor for life in Maugham's works)

> 'It's only you who count. So far as you're concerned the only meaning a picture has is the meaning it has for you' 46.

Lydia's case is curious since she becomes a prostitute to pay for her husband's crime:

> 'I know that my suffering as well as his is necessary to expiate his sin' 47.

Perhaps, there would be much to say about her behaviour, but we cannot deny that there is a Christian meaning in it. In the following quotation of hers we find her religious belief:

> 'I don't believe in the God of the Christians who gave his son in order to save mankind. That's a myth. But why should it have arisen if it didn't express some deep-seated intuition in men?. I don't know what I believe, because it's instinctive, and how can you describe an instinct with words?. I have an instinct that the power that rules us, human beings, animals and things, is a dark and cruel power and that everything has to be paid for, a power that demands an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, and that though we may writhe and squirm we have to submit, for the power is ourselves'48.

Maybe she does not believe in the Christian God, but she does believe in a supernatural power; which reminds us of the God of the Middle-Ages who was a God to be feared, who punished men instead of forgiving them.

As we said before, Maugham does not create 'religious' characters in the real sense of the word but with some of them as the Yogi said to Larry in *The Razor's Edge*:

> 'The distance that separates you from faith is no greater than the thickness of a cigarette paper'49.

There is a common characteristic between *The Unknown* and *Christmas Holiday* which, at the same time distinguishes them from the novels we studied in our previous chapter. In the latter the heroes and heroines came to see the real side of life at the beginning and the novels were their efforts and struggles to come to terms with life. In the former, however, the heroes face the problem of life at the end and we finish the novel without a definite idea of what is really going to happen; although, of course, we can more or less guess. Thus, we leave John without Faith and without the love he felt for his girlfriend, and with the idea that life is meaningless.

Charley's discovery of the meaninglessness of life is very easily summarized with the sentence with which the novel finishes:

> The bottom had fallen out of his world50.

A3: ART

We come now to the third and last part of our main chapter. What we are going to study now is Art as another way of trying to find a meaning for life. The happiness one can find through art is the result of one's fulfilment when producing a work of art.

Art plays a very important role in Maugham's production since the metaphor which runs throughout his works is that of life being a work of art which men, the artists, produce out of the chaos of the Universe. Each one has to make his own pattern. This is something we saw when talking about *Of Human Bondage*, when he uses a Persian rug as the solution for the riddle of life:

> 'You were asking just now what was the meaning of life. Go and look at those Persian carpets, and one of these days the answer will come to you'1.

This idea is something Maugham shared with Nietzsche, for whom the world is

> valueless, meaningless chaos2,

but also

> a work of art3.

If we consider Eagleton's interpretation of Nietzsche's theory as valid,

> the world's lack of inherent value forbids you from taking a moral cue from it, leaving you free to generate your own gratuitous values by hammering this brutely meaningless material into aesthetic shape4.

This is what we find in *The Summing Up* when Maugham says:

> He (the artist) creates his own values5,

and that

> art, art for art's sake, was the only thing that mattered in the world; and the artist alone gave this ridiculous world significance6.

He uses almost the same words as Nietzsche:

> It is only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* [...] that existence and the world are eternally justified7.

Maugham himself, in his autobiographical novels also talks about this idea of having to make a pattern of life out of a meaningless life:

> I have sought to make a pattern of my life. This, I suppose, might be described as self-realization tempered by a useless sense of irony; making the best of a bad job8.

This quotation taken from *The Summing Up* is not, however, the only one we find in his works with reference to this idea. In this same

novel we have others from which I am only going to quote one in which he talks about the things which are going to form this pattern:

> I wanted to make a pattern of my life, in which writing would be an essential element, but which would include all the other activities proper to man, and which death would in the end round off in complete fulfilment9.

In *A Writer's Notebook*, another autobiographical work of his, he reconsiders what his life has been, that is, he has a look at the pattern he has formed and seems to be satisfied with it:

> I do not think I can write anything more that will add to the pattern I have sought to make of my life and its activities. I have fulfilled myself and I am very willing to call it a day10.

We feel, however, that one never reaches this point though, because as experience changes, so the pattern has continuously to be revised. And thus, he continued writing.

This idea of fulfilling oneself, together with this other quotation from *The Summing Up* :

> The artist is the only free man11

takes us to *The Moon and Sixpence* which is the novel we are going to concentrate on for our study of art as the path to a happy life.

The Moon and Sixpence is the first novel Maugham wrote after his masterpiece *Of Human Bondage*, and it was from one of the reviews the latter had that he got the title for his new novel. Philip, the hero of *Of Human Bondage*, is so busy looking for the moon that he cannot see the sixpence at his feet. However, this title was more suitable for the previous novel that for this one. This was not going to be the last time that Maugham took the title for one of his novels from one of the articles written about his work, since in 1940 he used "the mixture as before" as a critic described one of his books for the title of a collection of short stories.

The Moon and Sixpence is based on the life of the French artist Paul Gauguin. Maugham wrote this novel after having visited Tahiti, where the artist spent the last years of his life. This is a familiar setting for Maugham, since, also as an artist, he shared with Gauguin his love for this place and its beauty. It was also to this part of the world that Maugham went to look for inspiration for his work; and as a result we have most of his best work: short-stories and novels.

Art is represented in this novel not only by the artist-hero, Strickland, but also by the anti-hero Strove.

As we have just said, Strickland is based on the French artist Paul Gauguin. This does not mean, however, that Maugham followed his life word for word.

When we meet Strickland for the first time he is a stockbroker, and, in his wife's opinion, quite boring:

> 'He's on the stock Exchange, and he's a typical broker. I think he'd bore you to death'12.

Next time we hear about him it is to learn that he has abandoned his wife and has gone to Paris. And the only reason he gives for that 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'13.

So far we can understand him, in spite of his desire being too sudden. When he is not so easy to understand is when we realize that he does not care for anybody, not even his wife and children:

> -'Don't you care for her (his wife) any more?.'
> -'Not a bit'.
> -'Damn it all, there are your children to think of. They've never done you any harm. They didn't ask to be brought into the world. If you chuck everything like this, they'll be thrown on the streets.'
> -'They've had a good many years of comfort. It's much more than the majority of children have. Besides, somebody will look after them'14.

Echoes here of Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil* .

If a man behaves like that towards his own children, nothing really much can be expected from him. Maybe he is justified in his reasons for quitting his job and abandoning his home, but it is his unconcern for everything and his selfishness what make him detestable for the reader. When we see the life he leads in Paris, where he almost starves, and even the death he has, we understand that painting was really something he had to do. Why is it so is something which we are

going to analyse later. Maugham seems to want to create the effect that what Strickland experienced was something similar to a spiritual call; only in this case it is art and not God that is calling him.

It is all right that he suffers in order to get what he wants, what we cannot accept is that he sacrifices other people too, and he does not even care. For him they have to be sacrificed for something which is greater and more important: Art. What we have here is what we find in Shaw's *The Doctor's Dilemma*:

> How much should society tolerate from the anti-social artist in order to benefit from great art?15;

which was also a dominant theme of the time and which can be found in authors such as Ibsen and Joyce.

He is lucky with the people he comes into contact with, because either they understand that art should come first, as in the case of Strove; or they just help him out of pure disinterest and goodness. Actually, nobody behaves to him as he behaves with the others.

After some years of real poverty he manages to get to Tahiti where he will spend the last years of his life. It is here that he paints his best works and finally paints his masterpiece:

> With the completion of the work, for which all his life had been a painful preparation, rest descended on his remote and tortured soul. He was willing to die, for he had fulfilled his purpose16.

We note here, again, the presence of religious language . After so many hardships, he has succeeded; his life is complete and his sacrifices have not been in vain.

What this purpose was and how important it was, is something we are going to see later on.

Art, then, comes to Strickland as a force he cannot control and which forces him to leave his comfortable, easy life in London and go to Paris and start his apprenticeship as a painter. He does not know why, but he has to paint:

> 'I seemed to feel in him some vehement power that was struggling within him; it gave me the sensation of something very strong, overmastering, that held him, as it were, against his will'17.

Nobody, except Strove, considers him a good artist or thinks that he has genius; and yet, he does not care at all.

We do not even know what he thinks of himself as an artist. However, what the author says about writers:

> The writer should seek his reward in the pleasure of his work and in release from the burden of his thoughts; and, indifferent to aught else, care nothing for praise or censure, failure or success18,

which could be applicable to any artist, is the philosophy Strickland follows.

Although the narrator tells us that nobody thinks Strickland is a good artist, yet no real opposition is found to his work, either. The narrator does not understand what it is that makes Strickland paint,

> 'The only thing that seemed clear to me [...] was that he was passionately striving for liberation from some power that held him. But what the power was and what line the liberation would take remained obscure'19.

Strickland does not even wonder why he feels like that. In other heroes, Philip (*Of Human Bondage*), Larry (*The Razor's Edge*), we hear them wondering about the meaning of life and what they can do to give meaning to theirs. However, in *The Moon and Sixpence* nothing like this happens. We know he is trying to get something by painting, but what it is we do not know till we are told at the end:

> He was willing to die, for he had fulfilled his purpose 20;

> He had achieved what he wanted. His life was complete. He had made a world and saw that it was good21.

The underlying religious theme of the novel reaches its climax here with this God-like association. Although, as we have already seen, this idea is latent in most of Maugham's works due to his theory that it is man who has to create his own world.

The creation of his work is a kind of catharsis for the artist; it has value only for him and that is why he destroys it afterwards.

Before we know that by painting Charles is fulfilling himself, we are only conscious that he is held by a passion which is no less tyrannical than love

> and the passion that held Strickland was a passion to create beauty,

and for that he

> will shatter the very foundation of (his) world22.

This is something which can also be found in Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in the person of the artist Basil Hallward. This artist fulfils himself through his art, to such an extent that he is afraid of showing the picture he has done of Dorian because he has put too much of himself in it leaving his soul bare to the public's eye:

> 'Every portrait that is painted with feeling is a portrait of the artist, not of the sitter. The latter is merely the accident, the occasion. It is not he who is revealed by the painter; it is rather the painter who, in the coloured canvas, reveals himself. The reason I will not exhibit this picture is that I am afraid that I have shown in it the secret of my own soul'23.

As I mentioned before, there are two ideas which are very important for our study of art in this novel. They are the idea of fulfilment and that of freedom. In order to consider them we are initially going to take Calder's *W. Somerset Maugham and the Quest for Freedom* as the basis for our discussion.

We saw when we studied *Of Human Bondage* how Calder saw Philip searching for freedom rather than happiness (as I see it). As the title of his book indicates, all his analysis of Maugham's works will be based on the idea that freedom is the motor for all his heroes' actions.

I do not intend to deny that freedom is important for them. However, as with *Of Human Bondage*, so with *The Moon and Sixpence*, I would like to prove that Strickland is on the search for something else, something that I would call fulfilment.

I would like to start with the following quotation:

> *The Moon and Sixpence* is an examination of freedom in the form of an artist's search for liberty, and the simplest of his bondages- social pressures and conventional ties- are treated at the beginning24.

If this were really the topic of the novel, it would finish with chapter VIII when the artist-to-be leaves home and goes to Paris. It is true that Strickland runs away from 'social pressures and conventional ties', but once he goes he is never again subjected to any kind of ties, not even emotional ones, as we saw when he talks about his family. The only remaining bondage after he leaves home is his bondage to sexual desire; and he hates this weakness of his:

> 'I am a man, and sometimes I want a woman. When I've satisfied my passion I'm ready for other things. I can't overcome my desire, but I hate it; it imprisons my spirit; I look forward to the time when I shall be free from all desire and can give myself without hindrance to my work'25.

However, this tie is not really so important since, once he has satisfied his appetite, he leaves his lover without caring at all about what happens to her, as he does with Blanche Strove.

My theory might seem difficult to understand since in the novel itself we find quotations which seem to imply that, actually, what Strickland is looking for is freedom. Two of the quotations I am referring to are the following:

> 'The only thing that seemed clear to me [...] was that he was passionately striving for *liberation* from some power that held him. But what the power was and what line the liberation would take remained obscure'26 (italics mine).

> 'Do you know how men can be so obsessed by love that they are deaf and blind to everything else in the world? They are as little their own masters as the slaves chained to the benches of a galley. The passion that held Strickland in bondage was no less tyrannical than love [...] And the passion that held Strickland was a *passion* to create beauty' (italics mine) 27.

There are two words in these quotations: liberation and passion, which clearly imply freedom. We also saw before, when talking about love, how passion was one of the worst bondages. And yet, in spite of all this, for me, freedom is not the real motor of Strickland's actions. I think we should ask ourselves why it is that he wants to, or has to, paint.

I am not going to enter into Katherine Mansfield's criticism 28 about the little insight we have into the painter's mind or about his desire to become an artist being too sudden. What I really wonder is why he needs to paint. For me the answer is clear: he needs to give a

meaning to his life; he needs to create an order. Maugham gives us a very good picture of the life he leads in London, and what a useless life it is!. We could say that his wife's life is useless, too; but that is the kind of life she likes and she is satisfied with it. And, as we know, that is what really counts. Strickland, however, does not seem to get very much fun out of life.

Of course he needs to run away from all this if he wants to start a new life; although there is no need for him to behave in such a cruel way with the other people, especially his family.

If he does not stay in Paris it is because there, he has not found what he was looking for. He has the talent necessary to become an artist, but he is not one yet. He needs to admire the beauty of Tahiti to acquire what is lacking in his art. And it is not until he starts painting what satisfies him, not the rest of the world, that he feels content, that his life becomes meaningful.

If he destroys his masterpiece at the end, it is not only:

> as a supreme gesture of contempt for the world's opinion,

as Kuner says 29, since that has been his attitude from the very beginning. He has made his own pattern of life and he is satisfied with it; and the others' opinion does not count because , as Maugham tells us in *The Summing Up*:

> 'It was long before I realized that the only thing that mattered to me in a work of art was what I thought about it'30.

This is something he insists on in *Christmas Holiday* when Lydia says:

> 'But it's only you who count. So far as you're concerned the only meaning a picture has is the meaning it has for you'31.

This idea becomes more significant when we remember that Maugham uses a work of art as a metaphor for life. And we find this again at the end of *The Moon and Sixpence* when Dr. Countras says:

> 'I think Strickland knew it was a masterpiece. He had achieved what he wanted. His *life* was complete. He had made a *world* and saw that it was good'(italics mine)32.

Before going on with my theory about what it is that makes Strickland paint, I would like to open a parenthesis to point out the importance of Beauty.

We mentioned before Maugham's triad of values and we said that Beauty was one of them. It is in this chapter that we can really see its importance.

> 'Beauty, which is the most precious thing in the world [...] Beauty is something wonderful and strange that the artist fashions out of the chaos of the world in the torment of his soul'33.

This is Strove's description of beauty and it is a very significant description for us since it includes something familiar to us which we pass to see now.

When talking about *Of Human Bondage* we saw how happy and relaxed Philip felt when admiring the beauty of the world, which is a characteristic shared by most of Maugham's heroes. If beauty is: 'the most precious thing in the world' it is because it gives meaning to a chaotic world (Nietzsche's theory again); but, the most important thing is that 'the artist *fashions* it'. And we know that in Maugham's work we can, and we should, understand by artist man. As Strove goes on to say:

> 'To recognize it you must repeat the adventure of the artist'34.

It is beauty also which gives meaning to Strickland's life, and I would like to close this parenthesis with a quotation in which we find the three elements that, according to my theory, are the three pillars men use to build their lives: Love, Truth, Beauty; something which, I think, is also implied in this quotation:

> 'Do you know how men can be so obsessed by *love* that they are deaf and blind to everything else in the world?. They are as little their own masters as the slaves chained to the benches of a galley. The passion that held Strickland in bondage was no less tyrannical than love [...] And the passion that held Strickland was a passion to create *beauty* [...] 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'35.

Going back to my idea of art as what gives meaning to life, I am going to use a quotation, which Calder himself uses in his book, taken from Maurice Beebe's *Ivory Towers* and *Sacred Founts*:

> 'Quest for self is the dominant theme of the artist novel, and because the self is almost always in conflict with society, a closely related theme is the opposition of art to life. The artist-as-hero is usually therefore the artist-as-exile'(italics mine)36.

If I use this quotation it is because there are a few things which are quite relevant for our study. The first one is the way he describes the theme of the artist novel, his calling it 'quest for self' is a ratification of my idea that what the artist is searching for is fulfilment. Another important idea is that of the artist being in conflict with society. Maugham's heroes always escape from their environments. However, I do not agree with his idea of art as opposed to life since, as I have just said, art is life. It is true that the artist is an exile, but it is just because he does not accept this life that he creates his own; and it is then that art and life become one.

Finally, I would like to use another quotation from Calder's book, which I am in disagreement with:

> In his efforts to free himself from many restrictions - social, familial, physical, sexual and spiritual - Strickland would appear to be like many other characters in Maugham's fiction. He stands apart from the rest, however, because his real bondage is to something different - the passion to paint. His denial of family, home, honour, comfort and love therefore comes not from a voluntary choice but from the force of a stronger obligation. There is within him an obsession, a possessing spirit, which can only be liberated through the medium of paint, and this overshadows all else for him37.

Obvious Freudianism underlying this, as we can see.

The first part of this statement is true; what I do not agree with is the second part of it. It is precisely the fact that his action is not a voluntary choice what brings Strickland closer to the other heroes. Larry's quest in *The Razor's Edge* could also be described as a bondage. He could very well have accepted the good job he was offered and could have married Isabel and he would have led a very comfortable life. However, he has to solve the doubts he has in his mind; he needs to find out what is the purpose of our existence:

> -'You've had your fling. Come back with us to America.'
> -'I can't darling. It would be death to me. It would be the betrayal of my soul'38.

We could also say the same of Philip in *Of Human Bondage*. He could have won a scholarship to go to Oxford and he would have managed to lead an easy life. And yet, he abandons everything and sets off in search of his self.

Theirs is also a bondage, they cannot but leave everything and move around until they find self-fulfilment.

We said before that art in *The Moon and Sixpence* was represented not only by Strickland, but also by the anti-hero Strove. It is him we pass to comment on now.

The portrait we have of Strove is that of a buffoon. He is a figure for whom, even when he is suffering most, we can only feel at the most pity.

We meet him through a friend of his, our narrator, when he is in Paris.

He is a very good person who feels kindly for everybody no matter how the others treat him. Goodness is second nature in him; he could be described as the perfect, non-existent Christian who always returns good for bad.

He is a bad artist himself, but he can recognize real art when he sees it. He is the first person to see Strickland's genius. For him:

> 'art is the greatest thing in the world'39.

For it he endures everything; even after the death of his wife, indirectly caused by Strickland, he cannot destroy a picture the latter did of Strove's wife:

> 'I don't know what happened to me. I was just going to make a great hole in the picture, I had my arm all ready for the blow, when suddenly I seemed to see [...] the picture. It was a work of art. I couldn't touch it... It was a great, a wonderful picture. I was seized with awe, I had nearly committed a dreadful crime'40.

Strove's relationship with his wife reminds us of that of Philip Carey with Mildred in *Of Human Bondage*. In this novel, Philip is infatuated with Mildred even when he sees her real nature. She dislikes him completely and shows it. She goes out with other men and she is only nice with him when he brings her presents.

In Strove's case even when Blanche abandons him to go with Strickland, he still adores her and is ready to take her if she goes back to him.

Both Philip and Strove punish themselves by providing the means for their beloved's happiness with other men. Philip gives Mildred money so that she can go on holidays with Griffins. Strove leaves his apartment to his wife and Strickland so that she does not have to suffer more than can be helped. Both present a masochistic attitude towards love.

In Strove we find an idea which we also find in *Of Human Bondage*. After his pilgrimage in life Philip realizes that the best pattern of life is the commonest one; that is, that in which men are born, grow up, get married and die. There is no need to look for anything else. Strove when he is saying goodbye to the narrator says:

> 'Perhaps that is the wisdom of life, to tread in your father's steps, and look neither to the right nor to the left'41.

However, in the first case the acceptance of the commonest pattern comes as a welcome thing, and is accepted optimistically. After all the things he has seen that life offers, this one is the best for him. In *The Moon and Sixpence* Strove's acceptance of this idea is like a defeat. Art for him is the most important thing in life and yet he is obliged to accept an ordinary life.

He knows that beauty gives meaning to life, but unfortunately, he has not got enough talent to get fulfilment from it. This is also what happens with Philip and Fanny in *Of Human Bondage*. Philip, in his search for self, tries art but he does not have the necessary aptitudes for it. He could become a mediocre artist but never a first-rate one; and

if he became an artist he would not be happy since he would not get complete satisfaction from his work, as his art teacher knows:

> 'It is cruel to discover one's mediocrity only when it is too late. It does not improve the temper'42.

Fanny, one of the other persons who try their luck with art, is more unfortunate than Philip and when she discovers that she will never get from art what she was expecting she commits suicide; as we shall see when we come to that chapter.

Maugham also uses other kinds of artists in his works, like a musician in *The Alien Corn*, or a writer in *Cakes and Ale* and many other works, since the narrator, Maugham, is one.

I do not think it really matters what kind of artist one is, what I have been trying to show applies to any kind of artist and to art in general. We might, however, feel inclined to think of the artist as a painter because of Maugham's use of the metaphor of the making a pattern of life like a painting in a canvas.

B: SUICIDE

We mentioned above that there were two ways-out when facing the problem of the meaninglessness of life: one was the quest for 'happiness', understanding by happiness a relative one; and the other solution was to negate life by committing suicide. It is this last 'solution' that we are going to study now; but our study will be closely related to the different alternatives the heroes chose for a happy life.

There is no way of knowing for certain if Maugham was conscious of the perfect scheme he was forming with his works, as we shall soon see. My guess is that he knew he was offering a philosophy of life with different alternatives and maybe, he also knew that the solutions he offered to the riddle of life were not infallible. For each of the three alternatives he gives he offers cases in which they work and others in which they do not work. However, for me, the pattern we can form by a detailed study of his production is something he never saw. He was just writing about his experiences; he did not want to, and could not, offer a definite solution since he knew there wasn't any.

We have just seen three ways through which men can be happy: Love, Faith , and Art. In each case we have seen 'positive' and 'negative' experiences; people for whom Love, Faith, or Art was the way to Happiness, and others who were so unfortunate as not to be able to find contentment through any of these three things.

When this happens it is not because the solutions are not good, but because they cannot be loved, or they cannot believe, or they have no aptitudes for becoming artists. However, they know that if they could

have these things they would be happy. When this happens, the only solution is, as we saw, resignation. If they cannot resign themselves to a life without these things, then, the only thing for them to do is to commit suicide. And of this alternative Maugham also offers examples.

We are going to start with a suicide as a result of the hero's failure to get his beloved's love. The play to which we are going to make reference is *The Hero* (London: Hutchinson, 1901).

This play reminds us of another play we have already studied, *The Unknown*, since both plays start when their heroes come back home after the war, in the former, and in the middle of it in the latter. Both heroes return completely different from when they left , to the annoyance and disappointment of their families. We have just seen how in *The Unknown* it happened because of John's loss of faith. In the play we are concerned with now it is because James is no longer in love with his girlfriend, who has been waiting for him to come back for many years, having lost her youth in her waiting.

While he was on the front he met the wife of one of the officers and he fell in love with her. Before meeting her he thought he was in love with his girlfriend, Mary, but once he learnt what love is, he realized that what he felt for Mary was only loving-kindness:

> James knew what love was, a fire in the veins, a divine affliction, a passion, a frenzy, a madness. The love he knew was the love of the body of flesh and blood, the love that engenders, the love that kills. At the bottom of it is sex, and sex is not ugly or immoral, for sex is the root of life1.

He knows his love is not returned, and that he should not love this woman, since she belongs to somebody else. Thus, he tries to kill his feeling:

> till he tried to crush it, he did not know how strong was this passion; he did not realize that it had made of him a different man; it was the only thing in the world to him, beside which everything else was meaningless2.

When he goes back home he is still more disenchanted with Mary because although acting with good intentions, yet she tries to impose her views:

> 'They have no right to be happy under such circumstances. I want to make them feel their wretchedness'3.

It is not that he cannot love her because of the way she is; after all, she is a very good girl. Besides, when one loves one loves in spite of , or even because of the lover's faults. James knows that the woman he loves is not perfect, but :

> What did he care that the woman lacked this and that?. He loved her because he loved her; he loved her for her faults4.

He cannot pretend he is still in love with her, although he intends to keep his promise and marry her:

> 'I will do all I can to make you happy. I can give you affection and confidence- friendship; but I can't give you love'5.

But as he would have done in her case, and as he knows:

> 'What are affection and esteem to me without love?'6.

As he himself says:

> 'It is only the lover who lives, and of his life every moment is intense and fervid'7.

When he reveals his feelings to his parents, they cannot understand him. The fact that he does not love her is not important for them; she is a good girl, she has been engaged to him for many years and he must

> act as a gentleman and an officer8

and marry her.

It does not matter that he feels that a marriage without love is 'prostitution'; all they want is that he keeps his promise. If afterwards he is not happy that is not important.

They love him 'tyrannically' he must do what they want. James feels imprisoned in a cage whose bars are

> loving-kindness and trust, tears, silent distress, bitter disillusion, and old age9.

He cannot go on living like this, with everybody's , especially his parents', disapproval. He tries to make them happy and becomes engaged to Mary again. He even conceives the illusion, for a short while, that they might be happy together. It is much easier to

> fall back upon the ideas of all and sundry10;

which is a common idea among Maugham's works. However, he soon realizes that is not what he wants, that he is acting as the others want him to act. If only he were not conscious of this, he might be happy but he feels imprisoned. Love had ruined his life, but it had also shown him

> that life was worth living11.

Without this love, and with people who love him on condition that he behaves 'nicely', he does not think his life is worth living. He cannot live like a bird in a cage, he needs his freedom and he goes in search of it when he decides to kill himself :

> 'It is the beginning of my freedom'12.

We pass now to two suicides committed because these two people did not have the aptitudes necessary to become artists, and this was the only thing that could make them feel fulfilled and that their lives

were not useless. I am referring to Fanny's suicide in *Of Human Bondage* , and to George's in the short story *The Alien Corn* .

Fanny Price is an English girl who goes to Paris with the idea of becoming an artist. She attends lessons at a School of Art where she is one of the 'oldest' students. In order to pay for her lessons she almost starves but , unfortunately for her, she has no talent and although she refuses to admit it, at the end she cannot but accept that what the teachers tell her is true. All her suffering is not worth it, she will never be an artist. Her illusion to become an artist was all she had in life, since she has no friends due to her bad character, and her family does not care for her. Once she learns that there is no future for her in Art she kills herself.

Something similar happens to the hero of *The Alien Corn.* His circumstances are different from Fanny's since he is the elder son of a rich Jewish family, and thus the heir to a very considerable fortune. And yet, he spends a few years without knowing what to make with his life. His family thinks he is lazy because he does not work; but the truth is that if he does not work it is because he does not see any purpose in it.

In time he realizes that what he wants to do is play the piano; he wants to become a pianist, to the annoyance of his family. He goes to Germany and works like mad on his piano, he has seen that doing this he feels fulfilled and happy. As he says:

> 'Art is the only thing that matters. In comparison with art, wealth and rank and power are not worth a straw'13.

He not only says so but also means it. He is prepared to renounce his fortune if only they can give him a few pounds so that he can go on with his piano lessons.

On his family's initiative, he reaches a compromise with them: after he has been two years studying piano they will ask for the opinion of a very good pianist; if the artist thinks George is good his family will not interfere with his work. If, on the contrary, he/she thinks that he has no talent he will go back home and work with his father.

Once the two years are over, he is told that he has no talent. If he cannot fulfil himself in what is, for him, the only valuable thing in life , there is nothing else for him to do. His life is over and he commits suicide.

It is only in the case of Faith that Maugham does not provide us with any example of a suicide due to the inability to accept Faith as the motor of life. The character who comes the nearest to suicide for this reason is Mrs. Littlewood in the play *The Unknown*; but, as we saw before,

> 'I don't feel that life is important enough for me to give it a deliberate end. I don't trouble to kill the fly that walks over my ceiling'14.

Life, after her two sons' death, has nothing to offer her. Faith has failed her in too many occasions for her to turn to it in her distress. In any case, she will pass through life until her time comes to leave this world.

We might say that all these cases we have just considered are extreme cases, since these people could have tried to look for something else to give meaning to their lives. As a matter of fact, some of these characters had something that for other people is the aim of their lives. Thus, in the case of James in *The Hero*, he rejects what Philip is happy to get in *Of Human Bondage*: loving-kindness from somebody who cares for him.

However, truth is that it takes all sorts to make the world, and what for one person is of the utmost importance, for another is meaningless. In any case, we know that in this case Maugham was also talking from what he had seen and knew and we cannot deny that many people commit suicide to escape from a life which does not seem to offer anything meaningful to them. We could also say that life experiences many changes and that circumstances can change, and that after a time, things which we did not think could improve suddenly change. So, we could very easily think that suicide is a silly action. However, one thing we have to grant Maugham and it is that in his works he never offers suicide as an easy way-out. People who commit suicide are usually those for whom life really seems to have nothing better to offer. We find some quotations in his works in which suicide is presented as an action which needs a lot of courage to do. Thus, in *Mrs. Craddock* we find:

> 'People say it requires no courage to commit suicide. Fools!. They cannot realize the horror of the needful preparations, the anticipation of the pain, the terrible fear that one may regret when it is too late, when life is ebbing away. And there is the dread of the Unknown, above all, the awful fear of hell-fire' 15.

We also find significant quotations in his autobiographical works. Thus the following from *The Summing Up* :

> I wonder why so many people turn with horror from the thought of suicide. To speak of it as cowardly is nonsense [...] Putting aside those who regard suicide as sinful because it breaks a divine law, I think the reason of the indignation which it seems to arouse in so many is that the suicide flouts the life-force, and by setting at nought the strongest instinct of human beings casts a terrifying doubt on its power to preserve them16.

We should not conclude that Maugham is suggesting suicide as an easy way-out since he , himself, put up with his life although he had intended to kill himself when he reached the age of sixty.

The philosophy he offers is , for me, as I suggested before, that of Resignation, of trying to make the best of life. This is something we shall see in greater detail in our next chapter when we study the role of Maugham as a character in his works.

CHAPTER II: MAUGHAM AND HIS MASKS

That Maugham is present in his works is something we mentioned before and which, I hope, is obvious after what was said in the previous chapter. However, so far, his presence has been felt only in as far as Maugham is behind the philosophy he transmits in his works. What we are interested in now is the Maugham persona present in his writings.

As it was to be expected, we find him as the narrator of his stories; but he is also a character, and sometimes more than one, in them.

It has been mentioned before that Maugham was a complex person who was always hiding behind a mask. He was afraid of showing his real self to the public. If this was the case in his real life, in his works he also tried to hide behind a mask, although in this case the mask was not as impenetrable because as he very well knew and told us in *The Moon and Sixpence*:

> Sometimes people carry to such perfection the mask they have assumed that in due course they actually become the person they seem. But in his book, or his picture the real man delivers himself defenceless [...] to the acute observer no one can produce the most casual work without disclosing the innermost secrets of his soul1.

And this was what happened with him as we pass to see now.

Maybe the best way of dealing with our topic is by looking at his works according to their nature. The plays are going to be left out since there is no narrator in them and Maugham cannot be identified with any of the characters in them. The author's presence in them is felt at a different level, but this is something we saw before when talking about his philosophy of life.

We pass now to analyse his works, and for this we are going to divide them into three groups: novels, short-stories, and travel books.

Let us concentrate on the novels first.

As we are interested in studying the different forms under which Maugham appears in his novels, what we are going to do is select some representative ones and study Maugham's role in them.

Perhaps the best we can do is to start with *Of Human Bondage*, since in this novel we are going to meet the author as a child and accompany him in his apprenticeship years until he reaches adulthood.

Since this is an autobiographical novel, it is obvious that the protagonist has to be the author himself, seen through the eyes of the person he has become now. Although we talked about some of the similarities between Maugham , the writer, and Philip, the hero of the novel, in our previous chapter ; however, mention of this fact is compulsory here again.

In spite of being autobiographical, the story is not told in the first person singular. The narrator, a mature Maugham, tells Philip's story as though he were talking not about himself, but

about a stranger; somebody whom he refers to as 'he'. Thus, we find an omniscient narrator who has all the reasons to be omniscient since what he is telling is his own story.

Since we have already talked about Philip's, i.e. Maugham's, life as it is described in *Of Human Bondage*, and as we shall come back to it again when we study *Cakes and Ale*, another autobiographical novel of Maugham's; we are going to concentrate now on the narrator, that is to say, the mature Maugham.

He is not merely telling a story; he is re-living it, and he allows himself to comment on his inexperience when he was younger; even making fun of himself:

> He was strangely grotesque when he ran2.

Through his comments we see that the narrator, who in this case we have to identify with W. Somerset Maugham, not with Willie Ashenden as it is the case with other novels; is not completely detached from his other self, the one he is talking about.

His comments usually serve several purposes. On one hand they show us his inexperience at that time:

> A greater experience than Philip's would have guessed from these words the probabilities of the encounter3;

inexperience that the narrator seems to pity and sympathize with:

> He was so young, he did not realize how much less is the sense of obligation in those who receive favours than in those who grant them4.

He seems to be asking us to understand that at that time he was learning how to walk in life; that he was not really to blame.

However, he not only pities himself, he can also afford laughing at his ingenuousness; and when one can laugh at oneself it is only because he has overcome his shortcomings and he is not afraid of people laughing at them:

> In his ingenuousness he doubted her story as little as he doubted what he read in books, and he was angry that such wonderful things never happened to him5.

Sometimes his comments tell us that the author-narrator has been reflecting on his life trying to discover what was wrong with it, what were the mistakes he made. Thus, he tells us about the negative influences he had:

> The companionship of Hayward was the worst possible thing for Philip6.

The mature Maugham also comments on things and events that happened in his youth and whose importance he has come to realize with the passing of the years. Thus, we hear him saying:

> At first life seemed strange and lonely without the belief which, though he never realized it, had been an unfailing support7.

And it is here that he clearly distinguishes between his self at the moment of narrating the story, and his younger self, the one he is telling us about. We see this when he says 'he never realized it'; maybe Philip, the younger Maugham, never did; but the mature Maugham does.

We mentioned in another part of our study that *Of Human Bondage* is a Bildungsroman, a novel about a young man's apprenticeship in life , and through the narrator's comments we come to realize that Philip's apprenticeship has been a successful one. The mature Maugham, the famous author and narrator of this novel has definitely learnt; at least now his eyes are more open.

The novel we pass to study now is *Cakes and Ale*. Maugham's presence is needed in this novel because, though not an autobiographical novel (as *Of Human Bondage* is), yet, some of the events, or better, some of the people in the story were his contemporaries and then , who better than him to talk about them. Besides, and as he admitted, he had not said in *Of Human Bondage* all he had to say about his youth in Whitstable:

> Old recollections returned to me, I found I had not said all I wanted to say about the W. of the note, which in *Of Human Bondage* I had called Blackstable. After so many years I did not see why I should not get closer to the facts. The Uncle William, Rector of Blackstable, and his wife Isabella, became Uncle Henry,

vicar, and his wife, Sophie. The Philip Carey of the earlier book became the I of *Cakes and Ale*8.

Thus, we find a first person narrator, under the name of Willie Ashenden. The former being Maugham's first name, and the latter the name he adopted for his role of narrator for some of his works; this being also the title he chose for a book of collected short-stories about his experiences as a spy during World War I.

We have here then, the first difference between this novel and the one we have just studied. In *Cakes and Ale* the narrator is also going to tell us about his youth, and , consequently, he is also going to appear as a character in the novel; but in this case the story is told by a first person narrator who is not the main character of the story, since this is not his story.

Another difference is that the narrator appears in the story as such; he is conscious of the fact that he is not only telling a story, but writing it. This, however, is not going to prevent him from being as objective as possible, no matter whether by doing this he makes himself appear ridiculous. It is this that makes us have confidence in him. He will tell us whatever he has to say; to such an extent that at one point in the story he wishes he had not been writing the story in the first person singular because:

> It is all very well when you can show yourself in an amicable or touching light [...] it is charming to write about yourself when you see on the reader's eyelash the glittering tear and on his lips the tender smile;

> but it is not so nice when you have to exhibit yourself as a plain damned fool9.

The narrator, then, appears in the story not only as the young Willie Ashenden, but also as a mature person, his real self at the time of telling the story. So, we can conclude that if the young Willie, as we shall see later, is Maugham when he was young; the narrator of *Cakes and Ale* is the mature Maugham, Maugham the writer, as cynical as he was in real life; who does not miss any chance to be ironic even at his own expense. This happens especially when he is talking about his youth, in which he portrays himself as a biased boy:

> 'I was not going to run the risk of being spoken to by a chap who wore knicker-bockers like a game-keeper, and I resented the familiarity of his good-humoured expression'10.

The most important characteristic of this narrator is, perhaps, that he not only tells a story but that he comments on it:

> 'It sounds a little brutal to say that when he had got all he could get from people he dropped them; but it would take so long to put the matter more delicately' 11.

It is usually in his comments that irony is found:

> I could not do my old friend the injustice of supposing him so barren of devices as not to be able to cope with such a situation12.

> I felt friendly disposed toward Roy. I was happy to think that I had not misjudged him when I suspected that it was not merely for the pleasure of my company that he had asked me to luncheon13.

It is the best way of destroying Alroy; maybe if his attack had been a serious one the effect would not have been as successful.

We must be careful with what the narrator tells us, because he is always consciously playing with what he merely says and what he shows and comments on. It is in the comparison between what he says and what he shows and his comments that irony is mainly found. This is the real, ironic Maugham at work. He can tell a serious story as well as anybody else; but he can also be very ironical, but always in a subtle way; his irony is not a direct one.

This contrast between his telling and showing is mostly used when dealing with people he dislikes, especially with Alroy Kear. Thus, he tells us:

> I had also a considerable affection for Roy14;

and then,

> I could not think of one among my contemporaries who had achieved so considerable a position of so little a talent15.

Is that really affection?.

It is not that Maugham is inconsistent here, as some people would consider him; this is only the way his irony works.

However, he does not want the reader to miss his point and thus, sometimes we find comments on a dialogue which has just taken place:

> I do not know whether, as I wished, I have indicated by my report of his dialogue with the waiter that his conversation was not as a rule brilliant or witty, but it was fluent and he laughed so much that you sometimes had the illusion that what he said was funny16.

Before passing to see Willie Ashenden as a character in the novel, there is one other point we have to mention. It is the use of the first-person narrator. Why did Maugham choose this method?. We have already talked about one of the reasons: as a kind of catharsis. After *Of Human Bondage* there were still some points that needed developing. They were his impressions and feelings, and the best way of dealing with them was by he, himself, narrating them. He had already used the third person point of view in his other autobiographical novel, and if he had used it again here, it would have meant repeating himself. Besides,

his choice of narrator in *Of Human Bondage* was perhaps the right one since with it he managed to detach himself from his younger self , providing at the same time a less biased portrait of himself. In *Cakes and Ale*, the real story is not that of himself, but of Rosie, and he can use the first person narrator because, actually, he is acting as a witness in the novel, and so he has to give his own testimony.

Another reason according to Calder17 is that:

> The first person singular, a handicap in many respects, is here the perfect device to facilitate the smooth transference from one point in time to another. Most of the action takes place within Ashenden's memory, and the reader follows his mental wanderings with hardly an awareness of a literary technique.

Besides,

> The use of the first person [...] gives the story an indefeasible unity by the mere act of telling it18,

unity that *Cakes and Ale* undoubtedly has.

Once we have studied Willie Ashenden as the narrator of the novel, we have to see him as a character in it.

We find two different Willies in the story, and both can be identified with W. Somerset Maugham. The young Willie is a portrait of Maugham when he was young, and of whom he had not said all he had to say in *Of Human Bondage*; and the older one ,

who can also be identified with the narrator of the story, is the mature Maugham, the one who is looking back on his life.

When we first meet Willie Ashenden in the novel, he identifies himself as a writer who

> was not in the public eye19,

and as we go back in time we are told that he studied medicine in London. His address in London, Vincent Square as a lodger at Mrs. Hudson's , was Maugham's real address when he lived in London. If we go to what is really the beginning of the story, his youth in Blackstable, we are told:

> I lived with an uncle and aunt on the outskirts of a little Kentish town by the sea20.

Another important thing is the name he adopts in the story: Willie Ashenden. The former was his real name, and as in real life, he disliked it very much:

> I resented it vastly when people called me Master Willie. I thought it a ridiculous name for anyone to have. In fact, I did not like either of my names21.

We wonder now whether this 'either' refers to Willie Ashenden or to Willie Somerset; the latter being his real middle name which he disliked, too.

Willie Ashenden is, as we have already seen, a very biased and in his own words:

> very respectable youth [...] I accepted the conventions of my class as if they were the laws of Nature22.

Of the grown-up Ashenden what we know is what we have said when talking about the narrator, since both are one and the same person. He is, then, a well-off writer who moves in the higher spheres of society; very ironical and cynical, through the eyes of whom we see all the other characters, including himself.

For Alroy Kear and Amy Driffield, he is only important because he was a friend of Rosie's, Driffield's first wife; and they need him to get information about this writer's life when he started writing. For us, he is important for the picture of society he portrays, but mainly for the great information he gives about himself and the good time he makes us have by reading his novel.

Before finishing with *Cakes and Ale*, and since I said before that my intention in writing this chapter is to try to discover as much as I can about Somerset Maugham through his works, I cannot but mention the importance of Rosie in Maugham's life. If Maugham wrote this novel it was because of her:

> But I had long had in mind the character of Rosie. I had wanted for years to write about her, but the opportunity never presented itself23.

And this is clearly her story as the subtitle of the novel indicates: 'The Skeleton in the Cupboard'.

When Maugham was young he had an affair with the daughter of the playwright Arthur Jones, an affair which lasted for eight years and which could have ended with a wedding if she had accepted him. Maugham really loved her, and *Cakes and Ale* is Maugham's homage to her. As Calder says:

> Maugham obviously loves his heroine, and this love tends to suffuse the whole book, so that even characters such as Alroy Kear are treated with a degree of affection. Rosie is 'all gold', as Ashenden says, and this colours the rest of the novel24.

> *The Moon and Sixpence* is written in the first-person singular [...] the narrator in this case, however, is not the well-developed 'Ashenden' persona of Ashenden, or the narrator of *Cakes and Ale*, *The Razor's Edge* and the short-stories. Whereas the latter is witty, tolerant, and amused by the behaviour of his fellows, the former is youthfully priggish, rather stiff and self-conscious. The ease and mellowness of the later persona are not present in *The Moon and Sixpence*25.

We agree with Calder that the narrator of this novel is not as well-developed as in other later novels; however, and although he is not given a name, we can identify him with Maugham the author, as we do with Ashenden. In the story, some of the information the narrator gives us about himself belongs to Maugham's life:

> I was very young when I wrote my first book. By a lucky chance it excited attention, and various persons sought my acquaintance26.

> I adopted the tone used by my uncle Henry, a clergyman 27.

Another reference is made to this uncle of his whom we met in his previous novel, *Of Human Bondage*:

> My uncle Henry, for twenty-seven years Vicar of Whitstable28.

The curious thing here is that he no longer disguises the name of the village as he did in the other novel and as he will do in 1932 with *Cakes and Ale* where , as we saw, it is called Blackstable.

Thus, we know that the narrator is a writer, and perhaps also a doctor like Maugham?:

> I gave him a sufficient dose of veronal to ensure his unconsciousness for several hours29.

Another thing which the narrator and Maugham share is that both go to Paris and participate in the Bohemian life there. However, in this part of the story, we can very easily distinguish between the two of them. It is the writer who is showing us the way artists live in Paris by taking the narrator there. The latter

is unconscious of the role he is playing; he is only interested in telling us Strickland's story.

Maugham hints in this novel at something which he will deal with in length in another of his later novels, *Cakes and Ale*: the tea-parties that rich women organize for artists in London. Maugham participated in some of these afternoon meetings, and so does our narrator.

Finally, and more important, Maugham visited Tahiti in the trips he made to the South Seas. Only a person sensitive to beauty, as we have seen Maugham was; only a writer or an artist could describe the beauty of the place in which Strickland spends the last years of his life, and which inspired so many of Maugham's stories.

There are also some things which the narrator says that make us identify him with the author:

> I was perhaps a little lonely, and it was with a touch of envy that I thought of the pleasant family life of which I had had a glimpse30.

It is a well-known fact that Maugham's youth was quite lonesome. We have a similar example of this in *Of Human Bondage* when Philip, the hero, gets to know the Athelny family:

> I felt in such an existence, the share of the great majority, something amiss, I recognized its social value. I saw its ordered happiness, but a fever in my blood asked for a wider course [...] In my heart was a desire to live more dangerously31.

With reference to the identification between narrator/writer, Calder32 says that:

> Maugham seems to identify, not with the narrator of the story, but with Strickland [...] and a number of critics have suggested that there is more of the author in the character of Strickland than is commonly recognized. It may be that Strickland is in many ways what Maugham would have liked to have been; in any case, part of the author is undoubtedly represented in the rebel painter [...] Strickland is in many ways a figure of the id, a projection of that part of the writer which was well hidden by his mask.

Although overall we agree with Calder, however, and after what we have just seen about the identification between narrator and writer, we cannot agree with the first sentence of the above quotation, which is also in contradiction with what he goes on to say and which is worth quoting:

> Repeatedly, he (Strickland) is presented as brutal, savage and lustful. In this, his character is mostly balanced by that of the narrator, and they represent two poles of the author's personality. The painter is that part of Maugham which would like to ignore society, convention and critical opinion, to find a garden where he can achieve artist liberation. The narrator, on the other hand, represents the part of the author which feels constrained to follow the safer path of moderation and compromise with the dictates of civilisation33.

There is still another characteristic of the narrator which I would like to consider. He is something more than just another character of the story; someone who lived what he is telling us

about. He is also a conscious narrator; he knows he is telling us about Strickland's life. thus he knows that what he tells us about Captain Nichols in chapter XLVI is nothing but a digression:

> So my digression has at least the advantage of a moral 34.

So far, we have seen the relationship between narrator/author and also hinted at that between Strickland/Maugham; however, the author, as author of the novel, is also present in the book. He knows that after all it is him who is writing a novel, not the narrator; the latter is only telling it. This is especially the case of chapter XLIII where he justifies himself for what may seem an unsatisfactory story:

> Looking back, I realize that what I have written about Charles Strickland must seem very unsatisfactory35.

The following quotation is worth paying attention to :

> Strickland, according to Captain Nichols, did not use exactly the words I have given, but since *this book* is meant for family reading I have thought it better, at the expense of truth, to put into his mouth expressions familiar to the domestic circle(italics mine)36.

At this point of the story it is the narrator who is speaking, not the writer and yet he knows that the story he is

telling is for a book. Why is it so?. It might be a slip on Maugham's part, otherwise we cannot really understand it since here it is not Maugham who is talking. This quotation takes us back to what we said before about the conscious narrator. This characteristic is also present when he says:

> If I am rhetorical it was because Strove was rhetorical (Do we not know that man in moments of emotion expresses himself naturally in the terms of a novelette?)37.

The real Maugham is present here; always afraid of showing feeling, of seeming ridiculous. He cannot but be the cold man he is when he has his mask on.

> He (Maugham) appears in the novel as the urbane, witty, tolerant narrator, a character frankly referred to as 'Mr. Maugham', with enough autobiographical features to make the portrait superficially convincing. However, 'Mr. Maugham', while a triumph of the fiction-writer's art, is designed to conceal rather than reveal the author's true self [...] He is , in many important aspects, both the saintly Larry Darrell and the worldly, disappointed Elliott Templeton. Through the device of fragmentation, he was able to represent three stages of his character development or, more accurately, decline the youthful Larry, the middle-aged narrator, 'Mr. Maugham', and the aging Elliott38.

This quotation taken from Brunauer's article 'The Road not taken: Fragmentation as a Device for Self-Concealment in *The Razor's Edge*' serves us as the starting point for the study of our next novel.

As we learn from this quotation, Maugham appears in the novel under three different disguises. Being the enigmatic person he was he could not present a direct portrait of himself in the person of the narrator, who even appears under his own name; differing from the other novels we have studied so far.

He not only uses his real name, but also introduces himself as the author of one of his novels:

> Many years ago I wrote a novel called *The Moon and Sixpence*39.

Once again, we find a narrator conscious of the task he is in charge of, and who starts the book by apologizing for the short-comings it may have since as he says:

> This book consists of my recollections of a man with whom I was thrown into close contact only at long intervals, and I have little knowledge of what happened to him in between40.

Although there are quite a lot of similarities between the narrator and the author of the novel, like for example his birth and education in Paris, the fact that he had a house on the French Riviera, or the dates of his travels; however, there are many facts which he does not mention. Thus, he does not mention the fact that at that time he was married and had a daughter.

We could not really expect so much from Maugham, and, in any case, it is not really important for the development of the story.

The Razor's Edge has not been regarded as an autobiographical novel, in spite of the critics having recognized that Larry is clearly a portrait of the author as a young man. For me, however, it is as autobiographical as, for example, *Cakes and Ale* is. It is clearly the story of his search for happiness through religion, mixed on the one hand with his social figure as a well-off writer in the person of Elliott Templeton; and on the other hand with the observant narrator, the one who has already experienced what Larry is going through at the time of the novel. Thus, we find in three characters, three different sides of the Maugham persona.

We mentioned, when talking about Truth, how Larry's quest for happiness was one of Maugham's experiments to get his own.

Larry has neither Maugham's physical characteristics, nor can we find in him as many biographical similarities with the writer as was the case with the narrator. Larry represents the Maugham who travelled around the world looking for an answer to the riddle of life. And it is curious to notice how it is a conversation about Larry's spiritual search Maugham the narrator has with him, that is with his other self, that made him write the novel:

> I feel it right to warn the reader that he can very well skip this chapter without losing the thread of such story as I have to tell, since for the most part it is nothing more than the account of a conversation that I had with Larry. I should add , however, that except for this conversation I should perhaps not have thought it worth while to write this book41.

As for Elliott Templeton, the only thing to be said about him is that he represents Maugham, the successful writer who moves among very healthy people and who leads a very useless life. It is not that Maugham has become an Elliott Templeton, but he may be in danger of becoming like him.

We started our analysis of this novel with a quotation from Brunauer's article, and I would like to finish with another quotation from the same article:

> In a real sense, *The Razor's Edge* was his swan-song. In it he took the stock of his life- what it was, what it could have been. The lost ideal, he incorporated into Larry; the actuality into Elliott42.

> He was very easy to get on with. He was much liked. But he had no friends. He was an agreeable companion, but neither sought intimacy nor gave it. There was no one in the world to whom he was not at heart indifferent. He was self-sufficient. His happiness depended not on persons but on himself43.

This is the description the narrator of *The Narrow Corner* gives us of Dr. Saunders, who is the character in which Maugham can be recognized.

This time Maugham is no longer the narrator of the story; the story is told in the third person by a narrator who has nothing to do with the story.

All the information we get in the story about Dr. Saunders that might make us think of Maugham is that he is a doctor who, due to some problems in his country, has fled to one of the islands in the South Seas. And we know that Maugham was a doctor and that he travelled to that part of the world.

However, what makes us think of him as our author is his attitude towards life.

He appears in the story as a character who does not want to get involved in the action of the story; he is a mere spectator of it; and what he sees confirms him that his attitude is right.

We mentioned in our previous chapter that Maugham had been trying to reach an understanding of life by using different paths. We seemed to reach the conclusion that for him the only solution was to come to accept life as it is and to try and make the most of it. One of his arguments was that one has to create his own life; that one's life depends only on what one makes of it.

We find these two ideas in the mouth of Dr. Saunders:

'But life is what you make it'44;

'My dear boy, you must take life as you find it'45.

He does not seem to care about what happens around him;

> 'The world consists of me and my thoughts and my feelings; and everything else is mere fancy. Life is a dream in which I create the objects that come before me'46.

He gives the idea of being a man who has had many experiences and who is never surprised by what happens in life. He does not talk much, but people go to him for advice and to tell him his problems; as young Fred does. However, the latter rebels against the doctor's attitude; he still wants to fight for a better life. Thus, when the doctor advices him to accept life as it is , he answers:

> 'I'm fed up with life as I find it. It fills me with horror, I'll either have it on my own terms or not at all' 47.

Fred realizes that Dr. Saunders' attitude to life is a passive one:

> 'You've lost heart, hope, faith and awe. What in God's name have you got left?'48.

The doctor's answer is very significant since it confirms that we were right in what we thought was Maugham's attitude to life:

> 'Resignation'49.

This seems to be the solution Maugham offers to the problem of life. After experimenting with different things he reaches the conclusion that all we can do is resign to the fact that life is as it is.

However, we should not think that he is telling us we should resign without putting up a fight first. He has tried and

> 'The most valuable thing I have learnt from life is to regret nothing' 50.

Theory which ratifies the following quotation:

> It may be a stroke of luck, and when you look back years later you may say to yourself that you wouldn't for anything in the world exchange the new life disaster has forced upon you for the dull, humdrum existence you would have led if circumstances hadn't intervene51.

Before passing to see Maugham's role in the short-stories I would like to say a few words about what happens with his two travel books: *On a Chinese Screen* and *The Gentleman in the Parlour*. The former derives from two visits Maugham made to China between 1919 and 1921; and the latter is a record of his journey from Rangoon to Haiphong.

The Gentleman in the Parlour is told in the first person singular since all that Maugham tells in the book are his own experiences. However, we do not really learn much about the real Maugham, only how he lived and behaved when he embarked on one of his trips to Asia in search of material for his works.

On a Chinese Screen is partly told in the first person and the rest are just vignettes and brief sketches with no narrator.

In both instances the Maugham we find is the famous writer who travels widely and enjoys certain privileges due to his position.

We come now to the short-stories and we are going to divide them into three groups: those told in the third person, and in which Maugham does not appear; those told in the third person but in which the main character is Ashenden, Maugham's self in the short-stories; and, finally, those told in the first person by Maugham, the writer to whom they have been told.

We are going to concentrate, then, on the last two groups.

The first person narrator is

> every inch the man of the world, a cool hand, a clear head, an observer of philosophical temper who has seen everything and is shocked by nothing. He is the sympathetic gentleman in the beautifully made suit to whom, at the club over brandy and soda, you confess that you harbor murderous thoughts about your wife or have been the cause of your business partner's death or have been sleeping with your dearest friend's mistress. He is of the world yet slightly above it, detached yet not devoid of feeling, a man who holds out the prospect of understanding unaccompanied by harsh judgment52.

He is usually described as the writer who is travelling in search of new material, as happens in the stories set in the South Seas; or as the writer in the London society who attends meetings with literary people and who likes to go to his club. These are two sides of the same Maugham.

We also find Maugham under the name of Ashenden; name he also uses in *Cakes and Ale*, as we have already seen. When Ashenden appears he is not the narrator of the story, but an active participant in it. These stories deal with stories whose action takes place during the war in which Ashenden is a spy. As Maugham says in the preface of *Ashenden*:

> This book is founded on my experiences in the Intelligence Department during the war, but rearranged for the purposes of fiction.

Ashenden is also a writer and, as Maugham did, uses his writing as an alibi for his secret affairs. Thus, in the story 'A Domiciliary Visit', when a policeman asks him what he is doing in Geneva, he answers:

> 'I am writing a play' 53;

and his reason for writing it there and not in England is:

'There is war. My country is in a turmoil, it would be impossible to sit there quietly and write a play'54.

We mentioned before that Maugham offered a lot of information about himself in his works and that we do not really need to read any biography on him to learn about his life, his character and thoughts. I hope this chapter has helped to ratify this.

CHAPTER III: PHILIP CAREY AND ANDRÉS HURTADO

I come now to the last chapter of my thesis, which I have decided to dedicate to a comparison between *Of Human Bondage* and a twentieth-century Spanish novel, *El árbol de la ciencia*.

Some explanation is needed as for why I have chosen *El árbol de la ciencia* and not one of the English Bildungsromane with which *Of Human Bondage* shares many characteristics. Being an English literature student maybe it was to be expected that I concentrated exclusively on the literature written in the English language; however, the reasons for my choice are, I hope, quite understandable.

The most important reason, and the reason for which this chapter has a special significance for me, is that the thought that there were some similarities between these two novels was the real origin of my research on Maugham. *Of Human Bondage* was the first novel I read by Maugham, and at that time I did not know anything about this English author. After reading this novel for the first time I realized that it reminded me very much of another novel I had read a long time before and which was one of my favourites among the Spanish novels. The novel I am referring to is, of course, *El árbol de la ciencia*. Thus, the first idea for my thesis was that it was to be a comparison between the two authors. As I became acquainted with Maugham's production I decided to change the topic of my thesis, but always contemplating the idea of dedicating a chapter to this comparison.

Another important factor which made me compare these two writers is that throughout my research on Maugham I have come across studies dedicated to compare this autobiographical novel of his with other

English novels of the same time, or with similar characteristics. It has also been compared with, or related to, some German Bildungsromane, as for example Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, or even with American authors such as Jack London. However, I have no knowledge of any study on Maugham and a Spanish author; and being Spanish myself, I cannot miss the chance of contributing to the field of comparative literature with just a hint for a possible further and deeper study on the common characteristics which, I think, exist between these two authors, and specially between their novels, *Of Human Bondage* and *El árbol de la ciencia*.

Of Human Bondage and *El árbol de la ciencia* are two autobiographical novels, though not two autobiographies, in the history of European Literature. The former is not highly regarded in the country in which it appeared, in spite of having been considered as the masterpiece of its author. The latter is highly regarded in Spain, but it does not seem to be considered so in the rest of Europe. Maybe the case would be different if their contemporaries were not novels such as *A Portrait of the Artist*, *Sons and Lovers* and *Wilhelm Meister*. Compared with them, *Of Human Bondage* and *El árbol de la ciencia* seem too simple and superficially unambitious. And yet, there is in them a philosophy of life as important and as well-developed as the one we find in the novels just mentioned. And this is what we pass to see now.

Maugham's novel is about three times longer than Baroja's and so we may expect to have more explicit information about the life of Maugham's hero than we have of Baroja's Andrés Hurtado . Of course,

this is also due to the nature of the English author's novel. Thus whereas Philip's Carey's story starts when he is only nine, we meet Andrés when he is eighteen , on his first day at the University.

Both children are deprived from an early age

> of the only love in the world that is quite unselfish1:

a mother's love. However, their circumstances are different. With the death of his mother, Philip loses all his family since he is an only child, his mother dying when giving birth to a second boy, and his father having died a few months before. He has to go to live with his father's brother and his wife, a middle-aged childless couple. When Andrés' mother dies he is not left an orphan since his father is still alive and he also has three brothers and a sister. However, the death of his mother is going to have as great an effect on Andrés as it had on Philip:

> La muerte de su madre le había dejado un gran vacío en el alma y una inclinación por la tristeza (His mother's death had left him with an empty heart and a tendency to sadness)2.

He does not get on with his family, and so they are his family only in the sense that they provide for his material needs; for the rest, he feels as lonely as though he had no family:

> Se sentía aislado de la familia, sin madre, muy solo, y la soledad le hizo reconcentrado y triste [...] prefería meterse en su cuarto y leer novelas (He felt isolated from his family, without a mother, very lonely, and loneliness made him hide

> his feelings and become sad [...] he preferred to stay in his room and read novels)3.

Something similar happens with Philip. With the Reverend Carey and his wife he finds only a house but not a home; and like Andrés, he is also going to find refuge from his loneliness in reading:

> Philip had few friends. His habit of reading isolated him; it became such a need that after being in company for some time he grew tired and restless4.

Here we hear Maugham's voice warning them of the danger of such an action :

> He did not know that thus (reading) he was providing himself with a refuge from all the distress of life; he did not know either that he was creating for himself an unreal world which would make the real world of every day a source of bitter disappointment5.

In Maugham's novel there is a detailed account of the miserable childhood of its hero, specially of his wretchedness at school. Philip is going to be more sensitive to all the misery of life because Maugham has given him a club-foot, which helps to distance him from the others:

> Because he could not join in the games which other boys played, their life remained strange to him [...] it seemed to him that there was a barrier between them and him 6.

Philip's life, both at the Vicarage and at school, is quite unsatisfactory and helps him to decide that he has to do something to change it. He quits the school and goes to Germany for a year. It is

here that he gets into contact with Science , two years earlier (he is sixteen now) than Andrés at the beginning of *El árbol de la ciencia*.

Up to this point neither of the two heroes has wondered about life; they do not like the life they lead and they want to change it, but they start by changing it in their minds. They make plans, idealistic most of the time, for the future:

> Su imaginación galopaba, lo consumía todo de antemano. Haré esto y luego esto- pensaba-. ¿Y después?. Y resolvía este después y se le presentaba otro y otro. (His imagination worked very fast, consuming everything beforehand. I'll do this, and then this- he thought-. And then? And he solved this problem and new ones would come up)7.

A new life is going to start for them both. Philip's change comes as an act of will, he breaks with everything and goes, a new life awaits him. Andrés' change is more an illusion than a reality:

> Ese paso del bachillerato al estudio de facultad siempre da al estudiante ciertas ilusiones, le hace creerse más hombre, que su vida ha de cambiar (The change from High School to university always gives the student certain illusions, it makes him think he is more of a man, that his life has to change)8.

Besides, he does not make any effort to change; the change comes as natural evolution: he has the age now to start going to university. This could be considered as the first difference between the two protagonists. Both are dissatisfied with life; however, Philip tries to change it, mainly by moving to different places looking for a better life, whereas all that Andrés does is complain about it and wonder about its

meaning. If he moves to different places it is not as a result of an act of will, but only because circumstances force him to move.

Their first contact with Science is different too. Andrés is a full-time student at university in Madrid; whereas Philip is not registered as a student in Heidelberg; he only attends lectures there sporadically. His contact with Science comes through the guests at the boarding house in which he lives. However, in Andrés' case what we see is the state of the universities in Spain: the old-fashioned system and the inefficiency of the teachers of whom the students make fun. What we find in *Of Human Bondage* is more the intellectuality of the students; they gather and discuss important topics. At this point Philip is not an active participant in these conversations, he just listens; but these talks are going to make him think and wonder about things he had not considered so far, such as Religion and Philosophy:

> It occurred neither to Hayward nor to Weeks that the conversations which helped them to pass an idle evening were being turned over afterwards in Philip's active brain. It had never struck him before that religion was a matter upon which discussion was possible9.

What Philip finds in these two friends is what Andrés finds in his uncle Iturrioz, but on a smaller scale. Philip does not belong to this intellectual world yet; he is a mere spectator, though not a passive one. Besides, the discussions Hayward and Weeks have are more akin to battles:

> Hayward could never resist the opportunity which Weeks offered him of regaining ground lost on a previous occasion, and Weeks was able with the greatest ease to draw him into

> a discussion. Though he could not help seeing how small his attainments were beside the American's , his British pertinacity, his wounded vanity [...] would not allow him to give up the struggle10.

These conversations are Philip's awakening to the world of consciousness. From now on he is going to start wondering about things which until then he had accepted as true without giving them any thought.

Andrés' conversations with Iturrioz are of a different nature. To start with, Andrés is an active participant in them. These conversations help him to voice his doubts about life. These are not intellectual battles; neither of them has nor wants to win. The uncle, with more experience, gives his opinion about these delicate matters which worry Andrés, trying to orientate him. These talks between uncle and nephew are the kernel of the novel and so I am going to leave them for later on because, actually, they belong to a later stage in the development of the hero's character. The first thing Philip and Andrés question on their way to maturity is religion. Both heroes are brought up in a very strict religious atmosphere. Andrés' family is a typical example of a Spanish Catholic family at the end of last century, and Philip lives with his uncle who is a reverend. In both cases Religion is imposed on them; they have no choice but to follow the doctrines of the religion their relatives believe in; and that is what they do in their childhood. At that age nobody asks questions, you believe what you are told. The most one can do is dislike what one sees; and this they both do.

Andrés is never a real believer, since his hurried first confession at an early age had a great effect on him. Soon after this he starts not

to attend Mass. All the references to religion in the novel are negative ones:

> 'Eres un verdadero católico- le decía Andrés- te has fabricado el más cómodo de los mundos' ('You are a real catholic- Andrés told him- you have created for yourself the most comfortable of worlds')11.

Priests do not escape from his criticism , either:

> 'Yo no puedo seguir así. No voy a tener más remedio que lanzarme a la calle a decir misa en todas partes y tragarme todos los días catorce hostias' ('I cannot go on like this. I won't be able to help going out onto the street to say Mass everywhere and swallowing fourteen wafers every day')12.

Andrés never looks for refuge in Religion. The attack is always against the institution itself, never against Faith.

Philip's case is different; Andrés merely lives in a Catholic family, Philip has Religion at home at all times. From an early age he realizes that being a believer is not always pleasant:

> He was beginning to realize that he was the creature of a God who appreciated the discomfort of his worshippers13.

Although as a child he suffers from having to accept the dictates of the Church, and although he is not blind to its contradictions:

> He had learned already that in the Bible things that said one thing quite clearly often mysteriously meant another 14,

he has faith in it and expects his faith to help him with his misfortune. At one point he even considers dedicating his life to the service of God:

> He wanted to surrender himself entirely to the service of God, and he made up his mind definitely that he would be ordained15.

Philip's disenchantment with religion comes as a result of a series of factors. The first one is the failure of religion to fulfil his expectations. It never comes to his rescue. If he did not suffer from a club-foot his life at school would not be so miserable, so he prays for it to be cured. It is not, and then the shock is quite an important one.

Another important factor is the way in which Philip is taught to consider Religion. It is something to be feared:

> Mr. Watson read prayers in an impressive manner, and the supplications thundered out in his loud voice as though they were threats personally addressed to each boy 16.

> He absorbed insensibly the feeling about him that the Tempter was ever on the watch to gain his immortal soul17.

Related to this is the fact that he is made to believe that:

> the unbeliever was a wicked and vicious man18,

and as he grows up he realizes that

> it was evidently possible to be virtuous and unbelieving19.

However, what is really going to make him open his eyes is to see the behaviour of his uncle, the Reverend:

> black stove [...] lighted if the weather was very bad and the Vicar had a cold. It was not lighted if Mrs. Carey had a cold20,

or

> when her husband wanted a holiday, since there was not money for two, he went by himself21.

If he, who should give example and who is the representative of what he preaches, behaves in such a way, Faith cannot really be anything worth bothering about.

And finally, the bad treatment Philip receives at school, where there exists a very religious tone, also contributes very much to his rejection of Faith.

When Andrés is seen for the first time, he has already decided what he wants to be: a doctor. Philip will also come to decide the same thing, but after having tried other things first. Thus, after returning from Germany, he goes to work in London for a while and then, goes to Paris to study art. All these comings and goings are going to help Philip to mature and to see that life is the same everywhere. The life of these bohemian art students is as miserable as his was in Blackstable. He starts wondering now what is wrong with life, whether it has any

meaning. Once again his idealistic plans for the future have failed. He expected the life of the art students in Paris to be similar to what he had read in books, and the contrast makes it even more miserable.

Disillusioned, he goes back home and starts his training as a doctor. It is not that he , particularly, wants to be a doctor, but he has to do something and medicine is what he dislikes least. His decision to become a doctor is another way he tries of coming to terms with life . All his dreams of intellectuality, of bohemian life, of trying to find abroad what he could not find at home, have failed. He is more down to earth now and tries an easier way out.

El árbol de la ciencia, as I have said before, starts with the first day Andrés attends lectures at the University. Thus, it is not known what has made him decide to be a doctor. All that is stated is :

> Cuando concluyó el bachillerato se decidió a estudiar Medicina sin consultar a nadie. (When he finished his A-levels he decided to study Medicine without consulting anybody)22.

Although, like Philip, one could suspect he might have done other things, since he does not really like what he is doing :

> -Iturrioz: ' ¿Tienes afición a la carrera?'.
> -Andrés: ' Muy poca'.
> (-Iturrioz: 'Are you keen on your studies?'.
> -Andrés: 'Very little')23.

Andrés does not act, he is simply dissatisfied with life and wanders about doing nothing to change it. He does not show any interest in his studies , not even in anything else, either. However, life

does not seem to treat him as badly as it does Philip. Hurtado gets his degree without much difficulty , and is soon given a post as a doctor in a village. The only thing he can really complain about is his family, in whom he does not find any support. Yet, even in his family he finds people whom he loves: his younger brother, Luisito, and his sister Margarita. If he really wanted he would be able to find in his sister a substitute for his mother. The only bad experience he has, apart from the death of his mother, is the death of his younger brother. Much as he loved Luisito , yet, when he learns of his death he cannot feel too much pain; due, as Mary Lee Bretz suggests, to Andrés' attitude:

> Se crea un aislamiento cómodo, impermeable al sufrimiento ajeno (He creates for himself a comfortable isolation, insensitive to the suffering of the others)24.

In Andrés I cannot see what I find in Philip. In *Of Human Bondage* the reader accompanies the hero in his search for the meaning of life. He only falls to a state similar to Andrés' when he loses all his money and has to give up his studies. Only then does he feel completely lost. And in this case only he is to blame for having wanted to force a relationship with Mildred which from the very beginning he saw was only hurting him. However, and as I have mentioned in one of the previous chapters , this attitude is due to the lack of love in his life and to his absurd pride.

In Philip there is a struggle to come to terms with life. He is, and has always been, an outsider; however, and like most outsiders, he wants to stop being one25, he wants to integrate into society. He envies people because they are happy and he is not:

> He looked at the people walking about and envied them because they had friends; sometimes his envy turned to hatred because they were happy and he was miserable26.

They live in the same world as him, and yet they are happy. How can it be so? . Have they found the meaning of life?. Philip has travelled and has seen that there are a lot of miserable people in this world and that there are also others, like his uncle, who make the world not a very nice place to live in. However, he has also seen happy people, usually poor, plain people, like the Athelnys and Norah, who have managed to make of their lives something worth living for.

Finally he comes to solve the riddle of the Persian rug, which his friend Cronshaw had told him contained the answer to the question of the meaning of life. But he had also told him that

> it's worthless unless you yourself discover it27.

At long last he comes to discover it:

> There was no meaning in life, and man by living served no end [...] Life was insignificant and death without consequence [...] His insignificance was turned to power, and he felt himself suddenly equal with the cruel fate which had seemed to persecute him; for , if life was meaningless, the world was robbed of its cruelty. Failure was unimportant and success amounted to nothing28.

This sounds very Nietzschean, and not surprisingly since, as we have already seen, Nietzsche's philosophy is very much present in Maugham's works.

Philip had spent all his life searching for happiness and as he could not find it his life was miserable. But now he comes to see that, now he is happy

> life might be measured by something else. Happiness mattered as little as pain29.

From now on he is not going to ask, he is not going to expect, anything extraordinary from life. Life is not going to give him anything; if he wants his life to be something good, it is he who will have to make an effort to get it. He has come to learn that your life is what you make of it. Life is the same for everybody; it depends on the pattern you make of it for your life to be happy or miserable.

He finishes his studies and is given his first post as a doctor; however, he is decided to give it up to go on travelling and chasing an ideal future which he knows will never come true. Unconsciously, he is still looking for the happiness he had always wanted to find; but he seems to be still living in a world of dreams:

> He had no ties in England, no friends; he could go up and down the world for years, learning the beauty and the wonder and the variedness of life30.

At the very end of the novel, with his proposal of marriage to Sally, he comes to accept that

> the simplest pattern, that in which a man was born, worked, married, had children, and died, was likewise the most perfect?31.

However, his marriage is not another ideal dream; he does not go to it with the idea of a blissful happiness. He knows he does not love Sally, what he feels for her is only loving-kindness but that promises more than passion, for when passion finishes there is nothing left. He comes to realize that what makes him think of marriage is

> the desire for a wife and a home and love. He wanted all that more than anything in the world32.

He can no longer confront

> the loneliness and the tempest33.

He is down to earth now, he has given up all his dreams of greatness, of extraordinariness, but as he realizes at the end:

> It might be that to surrender to happiness was to accept defeat, but it was a defeat better than many victories 34.

Andrés' case is completely different from Philip's. Like the latter, he also wonders about life :

> Uno tiene la angustia, la desesperación de no saber qué hacer con la vida, de no tener un plan, de encontrarse perdido, sin brújula, sin luz donde dirigirse. ¿Qué se hace con la vida? ¿Qué dirección se le da? (One has the agony, the despair of not knowing what to do with life, of not having a plan, of finding himself lost, without a compass, without a light where to direct one's steps. What can one do with life?. What direction can we give to it?)35.

And as Wilson would say36:

> the man who is interested to know how he should live instead of merely taking life as it comes, is automatically an Outsider.

Andrés' problem is his inactivity; he does not seem to want to belong to his society. Contrary to what happened with Philip, we never see him envying anybody for his/her happiness. It seems that there is nobody happy in this world.

Philip had his dreams of an ideal world; Andrés not even this. He resorts to Science as a salvation but it fails him. According to him

> 'la filosofía [...] le convence a uno de que lo mejor es no hacer nada' ('philosophy[...] convinces one that the best thing is to do nothing')37,

and that is how he behaves. What we find in this attitude is the notion of ataraxia which was so important in Baroja's production. It is a Schopenhauerian attitude, a pessimistic view of life. His uncle Iturrioz warns him of the dangers of such an attitude, of taking Science as the solution for the riddle of life:

> No comáis del árbol de la ciencia, porque ese fruto agrio os dará una tendencia a mejorar que os destruirá (Do not eat from the tree of science, because that bitter fruit will give you a tendency to improve yourselves which will destroy you)38.

Iturrioz is more in favour of Kant's philosophy , of the idea of combining the tree of life with the tree of Science; Schopenhauer , however,

> 'aparta esa rama (de la ciencia) y la vida aparece como una cosa oscura y ciega, potente y jugosa sin justicia, sin bondad, sin fin' ('removes that branch (of science) and life appears like an obscure, blind thing, powerful and succulent without justice, without goodness, without end')39.

Iturrioz is as sceptical of a possibility of finding a solution to the problem of the present world as Andrés or even Schopenhauer are:

> '¿Y para qué descomponer la sociedad?. ¿Es que se va a construir un mundo nuevo mejor que el actual?' ('And why should we change society?. Are we going to create a new world better than the present one?'40.

However, he is more experienced than Andrés and accepts life as it is, whereas Andrés refuses to accept it. Andrés follows Schopenhauer's philosophy of the non-action, but this does not help him come to terms with life. He does not act, but he does think about the problem of life. He considers analysis as a positive thing since

> '¡ Cuántos terrores no nos ha quitado de encima el análisis!. Ya no hay monstruos en el seno de la noche, ya nadie nos acecha. Con nuestras fuerzas vamos siendo dueños del mundo!' ('How many fears have analysis taken away from us!. There are no longer monsters in the bosom of the night, nobody watches us any more. With our strength we are becoming owners of the world')41.

Is it really such a positive thing?. That is Iturrioz's point.

'Sí, nos ha quitado terrores'- exclamó Iturrioz- 'pero nos ha quitado también vida. ¡ Sí, es la claridad la que hace la vida actual completamente vulgar!. Suprimir los problemas es muy cómodo; pero luego no queda nada' ('Yes, it has removed fears'- exclaimed Iturrioz- 'but it has also taken life away from us. Yes, it is clarity which makes present life completely vulgar!. To suppress problems is very easy, but then, we have nothing left')42.

And this is precisely the conclusion Philip reaches at the end of *Of Human Bondage*; it is better not to know anything, not to worry trying to find answers to questions which cannot be solved. It is better to take life as it comes and to try to make the most of it. This reminds us of Schopenhauer's philosophy which defends the theory that the more we know, the more we suffer.

We need something to make us go on living, an illusion, even if it is a lie. Philip had his dreams, but Andrés has nothing at all. He is not prepared to change his life; he understands that life is meaningless but he does not try to make the most of it, although he looks for some meaning or approach. Both Baroja and Maugham knew that one has to make his own pattern, and spent all their lives making it; even if, as in Baroja's case, there is no pattern to the pattern; and although they were not completely successful, at least they managed to accept life and learnt to put up with it.

One cannot be alone against the rest of the world, and Andrés is not an exception although he is convinced of the opposite:

-Iturrioz: 'Cada hombre no es una estrella con su órbita independiente'.
-Andrés: 'Yo creo que el que quiere serlo lo es'.
-Iturrioz: 'Tendrá que pagar las consecuencias'.
(-Iturrioz: 'Each man is not a star with an

> independent orbit'.
> -Andrés: 'I think that he who wants to be one is'.
> -Iturrioz: 'He'll have to pay for the consequences')43.

Nevertheless he is proved wrong and he seems to find in Lulú, whom he marries, the perfect companion. She is not a very lively person, which is what we would think he needs; but a very truthful one and one who really cares for him. Their marriage is a happy one and they get to love each other truthfully, according to Andrés because

> 'no teníamos interés en mentir' ('we were not interested in lying')44.

However, everything begins to go wrong when Lulú starts asking for a baby. He cannot explain to her that he does not want to bring a baby to what he considers an awful world; echoes of Schopenhauer again. Finally he satisfies his wife's wishes but unfortunately she dies when giving birth. Once his wife is gone, his bond with life goes too and he commits suicide. As his uncle says:

> 'Este muchacho no tenía fuerza para vivir' ('This lad did not have enough strength to live')45.

There seem to be only two solutions to the problem of life: either one accepts it as it is, and happily; or one makes his own pattern, but always as part of the world we have to live in. Philip comes to accept it; Andrés neither accepts it nor has energy to make his own pattern of life; and so the only way out for him is suicide.

Of Human Bondage and *El árbol de la ciencia* were written within a difference of very few years: the latter was published in 1911 and the former in 1915. It is also curious to notice that when Baroja and Maugham wrote these novels they were about the same age, 39 and 40 respectively. At this stage in their lives they are both trying to find ways of coming to terms with life. In these two novels we have seen two different philosophies of life: Maugham's, or better, Philip's, is an active one; he fights and suffers but he finally wins. Although he ,himself, describes it as a kind of defeat; but he also admits that this defeat is better than many victories. The ending of this novel has been very much criticized (although for me it is the right one, as I have already mentioned), but Maugham is experimenting here with notions, which he conceived at the time he was writing *Of Human Bondage*, with which to complete the pattern of his life, as he admits in another of his works: *The Summing Up*:

> I was forty. If I meant to marry and have children it was high time I did so, and for sometime I had amused my imagination with pictures of myself in the married state. There was no one I particularly wanted to marry. It was the condition that attracted me. It seemed a necessary motif in the pattern of life I had designed, and to my ingenuous fancy it offered peace46.

At the time Baroja wrote *El árbol de la ciencia* he still thought he had found , like Schopenhauer,

> en la negación de vivir el único escape a la irracionalidad y al absurdo de la vida (in the negation of living the only way-out from the irrationality and the absurdity of life)47.

With time he will come to change his mind and will try to find a better solution in Nietzsche's philosophy.

Although this chapter has dealt mainly with the differences in the attitude to life of the two heroes; however I hope it can be seen that there are also some similarities between them. I have not pointed them out only because they were not relevant for what I was trying to prove. The similarities increase if instead of talking about Philip and Andrés we talk about their creators; and maybe that would be something worth analysing . The only thing I would like to mention before ending this essay is how curious it is that at the same time in their lives, although in different countries and in favour of different philosophies of life (because after all these novels are no more partly autobiographical, specially in the philosophies they present) both authors seem to offer the same solution for the problem of life: marriage. It is a pity it did not work like this in their own lives.

CONCLUSION

My intention when I decided to write this thesis was to prove that Maugham is worth reading, that he is a serious writer, and not a mere story-teller as he is usually regarded.

At a time when writers were experimenting with new ways of writing, in which obscurity and complexity were the predominant characteristics; Maugham's simple, clear style did not seem to offer anything. As I mentioned before, my theory is that simplicity does not necessarily mean emptiness in content, at least in the works of William Somerset Maugham.

The writers of the beginning of the present century were very much influenced by philosophers such as Nietzsche, Kant, and Schopenhauer; and thus their works can be considered as kind of philosophical studies. Maugham was not an exception. He read all these philosophers and, as I hope to have proved through my thesis, there is a coherent philosophy of life in his works.

As I have already said, I think critics have been unfair to Maugham. He was a very prolific writer and among his very wide production there are good and bad novels. We should consider both types when trying to find him a place among the literary artists. We should not forget, however, that every author, even the best, has written a bad novel; and among such a wide production it is only natural that we find some bad novels. They are not the most numerous, though; and it is important to remember that novels such as *Of Human Bondage*, *Cakes and Ale*, *The Razor's Edge*, and *The Moon and Sixpence*; short-stories such as *Rain* , *The Outstation*; and plays such as *Mrs.*

Frederick and *The Letter* are already very highly regarded and will, most probably, become classics.

Maybe Maugham was not as good a craftsman as Shakespeare for example. However, the former also had his success and was, and still is, very widely read. A proof of this is that at the moment his works are being republished.

I started this work with a quotation in which Maugham wondered why, if he was so bad, people read him so much. This also puzzles me. Perhaps it is because his readers have been able to understand the message of his works while enjoying them.

I would like to finish my thesis asking for a second chance for this famous, though not very well regarded, author. If only we approached him without a preconceived idea of what his works are going to be like, we might be surprised to discover that, after all, his works have something to offer to the reader.

My last word in this work of mine will be to join Maugham in his wish expressed in his letter to the *Academy* 'That he not be entirely forgotten'.

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