CHAPTER -- V

CONCLUSION
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... if I have contented myself with telling tales
I have tried for my own satisfaction to present
them to the reader in the best shape I could...
I have attempted various methods, as the story
I had to tell suggested, for in order to get
the best out of a story it has to be told in
the way that best suits it...

A traveller in Romance: Uncollected Writings
Of Somerset Maugham

Ronald Paulson's remarks about Fielding are also true
of Maugham: "To speak of a twentieth-century view of Fielding
we must distinguish at the outset between readers and scholar-
critics. Readers have never deviated from enjoyment of Fielding's
novels. The critics are another matter."

Maugham's popularity has been world-wide and his works
have been translated into many languages. "He was a best-seller
throughout the world, from Spain where he went frequently, to
Japan, to which the paid a visit in 1959. But Maugham's
popularity has always stood in the way of a just appreciation of
his works. "Many critics have been unable to accept that a living
writer can be both popularly successful and a creator of serious
literature."

Wayne Booth is right when he states that the popularity of
a work should not blind us to its merits:
If I cannot condemn a work simply because its author refused to be commercial, or condemn another because the author set out to write a best-seller. The work itself must be our standard, and if the readers can see no reason for its difficulties except that critical fashion dictates an anti-commercial prose, he is bound to condemn it fully as much as he would if he discovered cheap appeals to temporary prejudices in a popular audience. In both cases the test is whether everything has been done that ought to be done, to make the work fundamentally accessible, realized in the basic etymological sense of being made into a thing that has its own existence no longer tied to the author's ego. And if it was the peculiar temptation of Victorian novelists to give a false air of sentimental comradeship through their commentary, impersonal novelists are strangely tempted to give the reader less help than they know they should, in order to make sure that they are seen to be serious.

Maugham was aware of the dangers of success: "The writer is wise then who is wary of success. It can only give him two good things - freedom to follow his own bent and the other is confidence in himself. Notwithstanding his pretensions and his susceptible vanity the author when he compares his work what he intended it to be is never free from misgiving."

Maugham also felt that art while avoiding direct moralising must leave its readers in some way enlightened about life ... "the world is full of inevitable evils and it is good
that men should have some hermitage to which from time to time he may withdraw himself; but not to escape them, rather to gather fresh strength to face them. For art, if it is to be reckoned as one of the great values of life, must teach men humility, tolerance, wisdom and magnanimity. The value of art is not beauty, but right action.\textsuperscript{6}

Maugham obviously meant an oblique kind of answer to questions about life that puzzle most people. He also said on other occasions, "I cannot help thinking that to entertain is sufficient ambition for the novelist and it is certainly one which is hard to achieve: if he can tell a good story and create characters that are fresh and living he has done enough to make the readers grateful.\textsuperscript{7}

The seeming dichotomy is dissolced if we take entertainment to be the pleasure we derive from a work of art and the pleasure we experience may also indirectly contain in itself some truth about life. The seeming dichotomy in Maugham's attitude as to the value of art is thus explained by Ivor Brown: "Consistency Emerson wrote is the hobgoblin of little minds adorned by little statesman, philosophers and divines... with consistency a great soul has simply nothing to do. Maugham would never have thought of himself as a great soul. But in his reflections about his life and his work, and his work, and his creations of characters on the stage and in print,
he was indeed a multitudinous man.

The editor of New York Times feels that "He (Maugham) does not qualify for greatness and would not claim such a superlative for himself, but he has given millions of readers much pleasure for all the years of this century and he will doubtless bring some pleasure to future generation". But Maugham does deserve the adjective great for his creation of the detached narrator persona who skilfully varies his stances to handle a number of themes which are of universal significance. This correlation of narratorial stance and theme has paved the way for his popularity with millions of readers all over the world as well as his immortality. As Cordell states, "The point of view of the sensible balanced sceptical ordinary man appeals to a wide spectrum of readers... His themes of love, hate, murder, suicide, belief and doubt are timeless, and his treatment of man's search for liberation may become more significant as humanity becomes more controlled by technology and circumstance."

The fact that Maugham's narrator persona is to a large extent reliable may also be responsible for his not being the favourite of critics. The problem today is, "not only that we have come to expect a story to speak for itself: if there must be a comment it should at least stem from a character rather than a narrator - it must present an "inside" view."
The question of defending Maugham also means the question of whether readerly texts have literary value and how to set about finding their value. Maugham through his oeuvre has managed to build up a relationship with millions of readers who wrote to him— from school-girls to G.I.S. But one senses the trend today that true art "is not for man in general but for a special class of men who may not be better but who evidently are different".

In judging the literary worth of a book we must take into consideration the aim of the writer. As Booth states, "if an author wants intense sympathy for characters who do not have strong virtues to recommend them, then the psychic vividness of prolonged and deep inside views will help him. If the author wants to earn the reader's confusion, then unreliable narration may help him. On the other hand, if a work requires an effect like intense dramatic irony, whether comic or tragic, the author may find new uses for direct reliable narration. Let each work do what it wants to do".

As unprejudiced analysis of the literary worth of Maugham's works makes us conclude that Maugham's management of point of view to analyse a number of themes that have universal significance would make one realize that he has great chances for immortality. The following findings can be drawn up on the
basis of the analysis conducted in the previous chapters.

The study of the narratorial stances in relation to the themes in the novels analysed reveal the truth that Maugham chooses the third-person narratorial stance to tackle themes common to humanity at large: the theme of love between man and woman; the result of marriage between two people with incompatible temperament; an analysis of various attitudes towards life; the theme of the inner workings of an actress's mind for a few years in her life; the narration of the course of a man's life from childhood to adulthood. As these thematic motifs are familiar to men the author makes use of the technique of omniscience which gains its power by concentrating itself on one individual at a time.

The implied author chooses the first-person narratorial stance to deal with unusual themes and characters. The first-person narrator is a novelist and it is not his own story that he narrates. He is a tireless recorder of facts and painstakingly puts together the picture of a genius in *The Moon and Sixpence*: he investigates clinically how literary reputations are made in *The Cakes and Ale*: and analyses how an ordinary boy with normal human instincts becomes divorced from materialism to emerge a saint in *The Razor's Edge*.

The first quality that makes itself felt when we draw up a list of the narrator's qualities is his tolerance.
He is not a cynic as he is supposed to be. He is surprised but never shocked by human vagaries. The narrator is not shocked when he hears the unusual tale of incest told by Mark Featherstone in *The Book Bag* but exhibits compassion; the young self of the narrator persona reveals warmth for his servant Mary Anne in *Cakes and Ale*; he makes his textual help tolerant of other people's vices in *The Narrow Corner*; he shows indulgence for Julia's love for acting out roles in real life. Whether in the first or third person the narrator exhibits his tolerance, love for goodness, and the ability to be agreeably surprised by the discovery that men are not all of a piece. "Of all the charges levelled against him none has hurt him more than that of cynicism" states Klaus Jonas. Maugham himself wrote, "All I have done... is to bring to prominence certain traits that many writers shut their eyes to. It has amused me that the most incongruous traits should exist in the same person -- crooks who are capable of self-sacrifice, harlots for whom it was a point of honour to give good value for money. I cannot bring myself to judge my fellows. I am content to observe them. There is nothing more beautiful than goodness or loving kindness, and it has pleased me often to show how much of it there is in persons who by common standards would be relentlessly condemned"...

The second quality of the narrator persona is his
compassion. He brings succour to the ailing Strickland along with Stroeve: as a young boy he befriends the Driffields who are looked down upon by the rest of Driffield society; he is ready with a sympathetic ear to the troubles of Isabel in The Razor's Edge: he often reveals by his descriptions that his sympathy is with the intelligent, passionate, Bertha Craddock in Mrs Craddock: The narrator is not detached thus cocooning himself and his readers from feeling real emotions.

The narratorial device is used by Maugham to take all sorts of liberties with his readers: after describing Strickland's adventures in Marseilles he frankly tells the readers that the captain's narration may owe its sources to the pages of some sailor's magazine. He begins the most important chapter in The Razor's Edge with the remark that the readers can omit this chapter if they wish to but for that chapter he would not have written the novel at all.

The narrator not only takes unusual liberties with the readers by talking about the nature of his narrative but he frequently asserts in some of his narratives that he is not writing a novel at all: "This book consists of my recollections of a man with whom I was thrown into close contact... If I call it a novel it is only because I don't know what else to call it". (The Razor's Edge, p.1)
The implied author endows the narrator-persona with the qualities of trustworthiness and reliability which endears him to the readers. It is to him that the characters confess their innermost secrets like the young hero of *The Alien Corn*: it is to the narrator that Isabel confesses about her relationship with Larry and Gray; it is to him that Larry narrates the course of his spiritual progress; it is in his presence that Miss King utters the word 'England' before she dies.

Graham Greene is not right when he states that "it has never been Mr Maugham's characters that we have remembered so much as the narrator, with his contempt for human life, his, unhappy honesty". The narrator is used as an instrument to manipulate the kind of reaction the author wants for the book in question.

The Maugham narrator is ironic. He never takes things for granted. He is agreeably diverted by the discrepancy between appearance and reality: he knows that women who are amoral like Suzanne Rouvier and Rosie can possess a good heart. He also lets the readers understand that women who are supposed to be models of virtue can be hard-hearted like Mrs Davidson of *The Rain* and Isabel of *The Razor's Edge*.

The narrator persona is made unusually privileged
on some occasions and limited to realistic interpretation on others. For example, the third-person narratorial stance that he assumes in *Liza of Lambeth* invests him with the privilege of showing to the readers what happens in Liza's household and Jim's after the street fight.

(Jim's household) Jim was still kneeling on his wife, hitting her furiously while she was trying to protest her head and face with her hands. (*Liza of Lambeth*, p.146)  (Liza's household) Liza... cried as if her heart would break... (*Liza of Lambeth*, p.147)

In *Cakes and Ale* the narrator is the only character acquainted with the Driffields in the past and the only character who moves beyond the time of the narrative to tell the readers that Rosie, a character supposed to be long dead by others, is alive. In *The Moon and Sixpence* on the other hand, the narrator frankly confesses about the limitations of his point of view whenever he analyses the workings of Strickland's mind.

The narrator persona is very friendly with the readers and hence is able to win them over to his view of problems. He becomes the reader's trusted friend and praises them occasionally by placing them and himself on the same footing: "I fancy that life is more amusing now than it was forty years ago and I have a notion that people are more amiable... They
were vain, pig-headed and odd... It may be that we are flippant and careless but we accept one another without the old suspicion; our manners rough and ready are kindly; we are more prepared to give and take and we are not so crabbed". (Cakes and Ale, p.33)

As equals the readers get privileged inside views of the characters by being shown the narrator’s reminiscence about them before they engage in action. This is achieved in the third-person novels by engaging the characters in conversation with the narrator-agent and also by being offered the narrator-agent’s judgement of them:

Miss Ley... read a page and then lifted her sharp eyes to the players. Edward was certainly very handsome; he looked very clean; "If health and a good digestion are all that is necessary in a husband, Bertha certainly ought to be the most contented woman alive". (Mrs Craddock, p.123)

The narrator’s reminiscences about himself always remind the readers of the implied author and that the distance moral or intellectual between the two is none at all. For example, in The Cakes and Ale when the narrator describes the rooms he hired as a student of medicine one is reminded of the rooms used by Maugham himself while a medical student at London. The readers have the delight of discovering the parallels
between the narrator's experience and the implied authors'.'

"Mrs Hudson's name was given to me by the secretary of the medical school at St Luke's when, a callow youth just arrived in town, I was looking for lodgings. She had a house in Vincent square. I lived there for five years in two rooms on the ground-floor... It was at that same table that I had eaten my hearty break-fast and frugal dinner, read my medical books and written my first novels". (Cakes and Ale, p.111)

The narrators' tone of ironic detachedness at the moment of crisis divests the tale of sentimentality. It also helps in ensuring the ideal distance between readers and characters essential for aesthetic enjoyment and contemplation. The narrator's stance at the end of The Alien Corn is a case in point:

But George did not go for a walk. Perhaps because the shooting season was about to open he took it into his head to go into the gun-room. He began to clean the gun that his mother had given him on his twentieth birthday. No one had used it since he went to Germany. Suddenly the servants were startled by a report. When they went into the gun-room they found George lying on the floor shot through the heart. Apparently the gun had been loaded and George while playing about with it had accidentally shot himself. One reads of such accidents in the paper often. (The Alien Corn, p.341)
The examination of the device of the narrator explains Maugham's preference for conversational cliche-ridden prose on occasions when he imitates the tone of the speaking voice.

Isabel gave me a rapid handshake and turned impetuously to Gregory Brabanzon.

"Are you Mr Brabazon? I've been crazy to meet you. I love what you've done for Clementine Dormer. Isn't this room terrible? 'I've been trying to get Mamma to do something about it for years and now you're in Chicago it's our chance. Tell me honestly what you think of it"...

"Well. I do think it's pretty awful".

(The Razor's Edge, pp.115-116)

The narrator's tone becomes very effective when he intends irony: "Smith said that Roy was a time-server. He said he was a snob. He said he was a humbug. Smith was wrong here. The most shining characteristic of Alroy Kear was his sincerity. No one can be a humbug for five-and-twenty years. Hypocrisy is the most difficult and never-racking vice that any man can pursue. It needs unceasing vigilance and a rare detachment of spirit... It cannot like adultery or gluttony be practised at rare moments; it is a whole-time job. (Cakes and Ale, pp.17-18)

The narrator does not seek to hide his presence in the third-person novels. He sets the scenes: "The bungalows
On either side of the road had very high roofs, thatched and pointed, and the roofs jutting out, were supported by pillars, Doric and Corinthian, so as to form broad verandhas... They had an air of ancient opulence. (The Narrow Corner, p.116)

He judges the characters directly. For example, he makes the following observation about Elliott: "He was a colossal snob. He was a snob without shame." (The Razor's Edge, p.6)

The narrator summarises the action that takes place when there is no need for dramatising it as he does in The Moon and Sixpence when he summarises Strickland's life as an artist for four years in Paris.

The narrator whether in the first or third-person is very garrulous. For example, he discourses on the uses of point of view in the midst of a love scene in Cakes and Ale. The omniscient narrator of Of Human Bondage suspends the flow of narration about Philip's growing-up by launching into a speech on the deliciousness of rum punch:

It was not rum punch. The pen falters when it attempts to treat of the excellence there of, the sober vocabulary, the spare epithet of this narrative are inadequate to the task: and pompous terms, jewelled, exotic phrases rise to the excited fancy. It warmed the blood and cleansed the head; it filled the soul with well-being; it disposed the mind at once to utter wit
and to appreciate the wit of others; it has the vagueness of music and the precision of mathematics. (Of Human Bondage, p.493)

The narrator persona whether he is in the third or first-person affords the readers rich psychological insight into human nature whether it is the small world of the short story or the spacious world of a novel:

He was a silent, rather sullen man, and you felt in that his affability was a duty that he imposed upon himself christianly; he was by nature reserved and was morose... the most striking thing about him was the feeling he gave you of suppressed fire... He was not a man with whom any intimacy was possible. (Davidson, 'Rain', p.16)

In The Theatre, for example, the scene where the son confronts his mother with his views about how her profession has affected her personality, testifies to Maugham's capacity for offering penetrating psychological insight into his characters' minds:

You don't know the difference between truth and make-believe... (Theatre, p.262) ... where are you? If one stripped you of your exhibitionism, if one took your technique away from you, if one peeled you as one peels an onion of skin after skin of pretence and insincerity, of tags of old parts and shreds of jaded emotions, would one come upon a soul at last?" (Theatre, p.263)
Finally, the analysis of the interdependence of narratorial stance and theme enables us to find out the implied author's thirst for stripping away appearances to find out the meaning behind life. For instance, we are shown Dr Saunders philosophising about life when Fred confesses to him about the crime that made him run away from Australia: "youth, youth! you're a stranger in the world yet. Presently like a man on a desert island, you'll learn to do without what you can't get and make the most of what you can. A little common sense, a little tolerance, a little good humour, and you don't know how comfortable you can make yourself on this planet". (The Narrow Corner, p.273)

Maugham's narratives thus reverberate with wide philosophical implications and that is the reason for his being the favourite of both the people who want a good read and the few who read for making sense of our life on earth. As John Bayley states that by itself may be a "recipe for survival".

To conclude, Maugham's works analysed in this thesis reveal that they have true literary worth and they would secure for him immortality revealing as they do a perfect correlation of form and theme to reveal various facets of human nature. As Ted Morgan states, "By contemporariness Gertrude stein meant what would last, what would remain of value, to subsequent
generations of readers. This is the water-shed of literature dividing period-pieces from classics. Many books are judged great in their own time and then they are forgotten. They please the reader because they are shaped by the same forces that mould his non-reading hours, they recreate a sense of the present with which he can identify, but the work's value dies as soon as the present becomes the past. The book that endures because succeeding generations find it meaningful is on its way to become a classic. Much of Maugham's works have endured, many of his books are still in print, and his plays are often reviewed.¹⁸

Future generations of readers would find Maugham's works valuable because his works reveal the whole gamut of human emotions. They also make a valuable contribution to the continuing dialectic between the relation of the artist to his art, and more fundamentally, the relationship between the individual and society. As Cordell states, "Maugham's explorations of the forms of restrictions which surround the individual and of the difficulties he faces in finding true liberation of spirit are a valuable contribution to twentieth-century writing".¹⁹... His novels also testify to the best use that can be made of discourse at the inter-personal level to secure an enormous number of readers. What Booth states about the reaction of Jane Austen's readers is also true of
Maugham’s readers: ... "only here can we find a mind and heart that can give us clarity without oversimplification, sympathy and romance without sentimentality and biting irony without cynicism."
NOTES

CHAPTER V


14 Jonas, p.35

15 Maugham, as quoted by Jonas, p.36.


18 Morgan, p.375.

19 Calder, p.257.

20 Booth, p.260.