CHAPTER VI

THE LAST PLAYS : THEMES
I A General Outline

In this chapter it is proposed to discuss the themes of the six plays of the third volume of Maugham's Collected Plays.¹ As pointed out earlier,² Caesar's Wife and The Unknown belong to the earlier phase in chronology but to this phase in spirit. Maugham himself realized this and placed them in the third volume, and it is but fair to examine them here.

The Letter is the only unpreserved play of this phase. It is adapted from the short story of the same title, and no interval of time separates the play from the story. The play is just the story in dialogue; that is why it remains unnoticed despite the power of the original. The play goes unmentioned in Maugham's autobiographical The Summing Up and is not discussed in any of the books on him; this dissertation follows them.

The same does not, however, apply to The Unknown, a play based on Maugham's novel, The Hero, written in 1901. The Unknown is vastly different from The Hero; the sheer interval of nineteen years makes the play a piece of fresh writing. Though the essentials of the story in the two are the same, the emphasis in the play is on the conflict of traditional convictions with chastened thinking as against

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¹ Caesar's Wife (1918), The Unknown (1920), East of Suez (1922), The Sacred Flame (1928), For Services Rendered (1932), Sheppey (1933).
² Chapter I, pp. 10 above.

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that in the novel on the rupture between the hero and his betrothed. The play is remembered and preserved, the novel forgotten.

All these plays offer contemplation and merit keen notice, if only because they consistently interpret thought-provoking areas of human behaviour in the context of significant modern events and conditions. They are penned by the new Maugham who

is a basically serious man, much concerned with moral values. His sense of humour is less light-hearted. He would never again write an Our Betters ...... The new Maugham wrote Sheppey.  

II(A) Social Themes

The social climate reflected in these plays is radically different from that in the earlier phases. After the ravages of the first world war, thinking people are now sitting up and wondering if an entire generation has not paid the price for what is after all a horrible political gaffe. This mood is revealed in The Sacred Flame and For Services Rendered with varying intensity. The social themes in these plays will now be discussed in the same order as in chapters II and IV.

(a) Relationship between the sexes

The shrinking of this theme is an index of the shift in Maugham's interests in this phase. Fanciful themes of the early farces like 'Woman's pursuit of man', 'Woman, man's reformer', or social themes of the middle plays like 'the separation of the values of love, sex and marriage' do not have room in these plays.

Matrimony: The only aspect of matrimony that finds significant expression in this phase is the inner essence of marriage.

In *The Land of Promise* (1913) Maugham painted a sensitive picture of the flowering of love after marriage, an alliance executed with reluctance growing into a partnership of abiding love. This link is taken up in *Caesar's Wife* (1918) which offers a study of the same process of post-marriage emergence of love.

The rudiments of the theme of *Caesar's Wife* have been taken from a French novel, and Maugham acknowledges the debt in the preface. He does not propose in this play to find a daring, unorthodox solution to the ancient problematic triangle of two men and one woman as he does in *The Circle and The Constant Wife*, or as Graham Greene does in *The Compliant Lover*. *Caesar's Wife* deals with the problem without descending into physical results, and makes reason

and self-effacing love triumph over conjugal envy. In \textit{Flare Path} (1942) Rattigan follows this lead to the extent of the wife's spurning the lover and clinging to the husband because he needs her. Arthur's profound attachment to his wife banishes jealousy from his heart (except on a rare occasion of intense agony),\textsuperscript{5} and a powerful impediment to the 'marriage of true minds' is removed.

Yet, emotion is not shut out from Arthur's life; it is rationalized. Initially he silently shares with Morell in Shaw's \textit{Candida} the ecstasy of being married to a good woman,\textsuperscript{6} but the clouds of Violet's being drawn to Ronny soon darken Arthur's joy. Both Violet and Arthur are instinctively concerned with the essence of their relationship rather than its form. Arthur never yearns for her loyalty; he wants her happiness, and, above all, her love. Even as his unqualified love for Violet shapes Arthur's generous view of her youthful straying away, Violet's innate goodness and gratitude to him tempers her passion for Ronny. On the heels of the expression of her rapture discovered in Ronny, she stresses,

"I want to do the right thing, Arthur, but you mustn't ask too much of me."

The conflict she is called upon to resolve is grim, for wanting to do the right thing is not enough, one must have

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{5} \textit{Caesar's Wife}, p. 85. \\
\textsuperscript{6} \textit{Candida} (Bombay, 1961), p. 9. \\
\textsuperscript{7} p. 168.}
the strength to do it in the face of the wrong thing. Arthur tells her this in effect, and ultimately reason and love triumph over impulse and passion in Violet's case too. Maugham thus projects through this couple a picture of a lasting marriage having an ethical bias in which what is 'longed for' consistently 'waits upon what is right'. In conformity with his meditative mood the theme of matrimony appears in this phase only in this perspective of soul-to-soul commitment. Both in *The Land of Promise* in the early phase and in *Caesar's Wife* in the last, marriages contracted in haste triumph at leisure. In the former, the process is aided by the peculiar economic and social compulsions; in the latter it is purely emotional.

**Sex** : The theme of sex is touched in passing in this phase in *The Sacred Flame* and *For Services Rendered*. In the former, it is restricted to the suggestion of the sex-starvation suffered by the wife of a war-disabled hero which lands her into an inevitable attachment to his brother. In *For Services Rendered* the poignant sex-ravenous condition of the unfortunate unmarried women in the post-war world is brought out. To his mother's query what the matter is with his unmarried elderly sister, Eva, Sydney replies,

"She wants a man, that's all."
The crudeness of the remark reveals the horror of the privation, a direct effect of the war. The second sister, Ethel, has taken her man to her continuing distress. The third, Lois, says,

"I'm sick of waiting for something to turn up. Time is flying and soon it'll be too late,"

Constance in *The Constant Wife* (the middle phase) distinguishes between love, sex and marriage as a pleasant exercise and controls the three according to the demands of her pleasure. For Lois in *For Services Rendered* the distinction between the three is a dire need; if she waits for love and marriage she may miss sex too. A comparison between the two attitudes brings out the typical contemplative posture the themes assume in this phase.

**Love**: In the first two phases the theme of love is barely touched in its deep, emotional perspective, but in this phase it occupies considerable space. In *Caesar's Wife* and *East of Suez* it is projected through the proverbial triangle of two men and one woman, but in the former there is a new discovery of love and joy, whereas in the latter the unresolved triangle culminates into tragedy.

In *East of Suez* the triangle of love is subordinate to the main theme, "the meeting of the twain". George who believes that "the Eurasian is vulgar and noisy (p. 110)" is nevertheless in love with Daisy, a Eurasian damsel, whom

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9 p. 177.
Harry has married. It is again not on principle that Harry decides to marry a Eurasian girl; his advocacy of the Eurasian's cause is the intellectual shadow of his passion for Daisy. The strain of being neglected by his social compeers tells on him: the unspoken word is often more venomous than the spoken. A momentary upsurge of lofty generosity arising out of love thus becomes a constant source of irritation to Harry. Daisy's dilemma in her love-life is similarly unrelated to the main theme of the play. She never aligns herself ideologically with Harry; her dilemma remains confined to the pulls of the two lovers. In East of Suez the theme of love thus fails because it is not harmonized with the central theme of the play, 'Britons Abroad'.

In Caesar's Wife Arthur's love for his wife, Violet, twenty years his junior, is almost spiritual. He instinctively believes in and practises Maugham's good maxim to ask of no one more than he can give without inconvenience to himself. The odds of his age and Ronny against him, he succeeds in winning Violet's love by constant tenderness, devotion, and kindness. Whereas Violet's relations with Ronny have all the charm of

10 p. 138.
12 Caesar's Wife, p. 87.
illicit, whispered cooing, her love for Arthur has a fresh and mature beauty, and holds, like the 'for ever' ending of a fairy tale, a promise of sustained happiness.

Violet's extramarital infatuation is nowhere conceived as adultery, thus freeing the play from Victorian morality. In its essence it is her groping search for love. She tells Arthur,

"You can't know the rapture and the torture and the ecstasy that consume me."\(^1\)

Finally, however, she is convinced it is only a shadow, a trifle more plausible perhaps than the one she was engulfed in when she married Arthur. The shadows pass and the real substance is hers at the end of the play.

In *The Sacred Flame* love is a minor theme and is projected on a more idealistic plane. Love here takes the form of intense anxiety for the beloved and is shorn of jealousy and even persuasion. The awareness that

"We can't love because we ought to. Love comes and goes and we can none of us help ourselves."\(^2\)

is germane to this tender plane of love. It assumes here the strange pensive phase of compulsive and complete separation from sex - like a soul without a body, a fragrance without a flower.

Like all ideal states this phase of love is too

\(^1\) p. 69.
\(^2\) p. 241.
ethereal to last, and its ephemeral nature is projected in Stella's love for Maurice's brother, Collin. The coexistence of the two levels of love is possible in her because of the shame she feels for her fall.\textsuperscript{15} The theme of love in Maugham's plays reaches its pinnacle here in the ideal grasped in a moment of self-effacement, which, by its very nature, cannot last, but nevertheless illuminates the mundane performance of the ideal-aspiring lover.

(b) Other Personal Relationships

Some non-sexual relationships between men and women are depicted in these plays. The parent-child relationship leads with its projection in \textit{The Unknown}, \textit{For Services Rendered} and \textit{The Sacred Flame}. In \textit{The Unknown} John is pulled one way by his filial duty to respect his mother's advice to participate in the religious rites he abhors, and the other way by his agnostic conviction. In \textit{For Services Rendered} the self-centred, snobbish father of a war-profiteer, Leonard Ardsley, treats his suffering daughters and invalid son with condescension. Here the revolting spectacle of the parents of certain species eating up their offsprings is transferred to human life in all its awful implication. His eldest daughter's-Eva's—remark to him on her fiancé's suicide, "You killed him, you fiend",\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{15} p. 312.
\textsuperscript{16} p. 159.
about sums up the suppressed anguish Ardsley inspires in his children. So far as the mother is concerned, the estrangement is much less vociferous and more passive, but hardly less pathetic. She cannot realize the agony of her daughters frustrated by the war. She tells her son, she is

not at home in this world of today.\textsuperscript{17}

The father can understand, but would not; the mother has sympathy but no understanding. The pathos in the war-asundered parent-child tie is effectively brought out in its short analysis in \textit{For Services Rendered}.

On the other hand, in \textit{The Sacred Flame} the mother, Mrs. Tabret, overflows with tender love for her son and daughter-in-law. She has some similarity with the Golightlys in \textit{Penelope} in Maugham's early career: both have unbounded sympathy for their offsprings and an active interest in their welfare. Yet, the problem in \textit{The Sacred Flame} is much more serious than that in \textit{Penelope}, and the parents in the two plays go their corresponding diverse ways. The basic likeness of an affectionate parent-child relationship is, however, a significant link between the gay dramatist of the early phase and the mature thinker of the last.

\textsuperscript{17} p. 179.
(c) Socio-economic issues: Britons abroad

Social themes like snobbery and the employer-employee relationship are not found in the last phase. There are probably two reasons for this. As pointed out earlier (Chapter IV, pp. 129, 134, 154), in the post-war years the class-distinctions by birth more or less disappeared, knocking down the very basis of snobbish inclinations. Secondly, Maugham concentrates in this phase on the philosophical springs of human behaviour and is no longer interested in its outer manifestations. The other issue of socio-economic import, viz., "Britons abroad", is however, a live one, for the British presence in the East and Middle East continued to be dominant till the second world war, a good fifteen years after these plays were written. In keeping with this situation, the theme of 'Britons Abroad' is projected in this phase in Caesar's Wife and East of Suez. In the former, this theme forms the hemline of the chief theme of the discovery of conjugal love. Arthur is "the right man in the right place" not only in diplomacy but also in family-life. The awareness in both Violet and Arthur of their special responsibility to present an unperturbed, cultivated front to the natives is constantly emphasized and softens sentiment. Arthur tells Violet,

18 Already discussed, vide p. 213 f. above.

19 p. 73.
"Remember that all of us here, you more than most women work for the common cause by our lives and the example we set."  

The theme of "Britons Abroad" is thus successfully introduced in this play in its simple aspect of patriotism.

East of Suez offers an elaborate treatment of the theme of Britons abroad in its aspect of the meeting of the East and the West. It is Maugham's only Asian piece in which the social complexities of the confrontation of the two cultures are probed. On the whole, Maugham despairs of a smooth blending of the East and the West, like Kipling who declared, 'Never the twain shall meet', and like Shaw's heroine in *The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles*.

The three divergent attitudes towards the Chinese and issues of Anglo-Chinese marriages are introduced early in *East of Suez*. Harold Knox expresses his horror of the moral sense of the half-caste or the Eurasian, of his inability to speak the truth. Harry contests these generalizations and pleads for justice for the much-maligned Eurasian. Their mutual friend, George Conway, initially sides with Knox, but there is an evolution in his attitude.

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20 p. 69.

21 It is incidentally this aspect of the play that affected its fortunes adversely in countries other than England. Cf. Maugham in *A Writer's Notebook*, p. 263: "There is one queer thing about patriotism: it is a sentiment that doesn't travel. . . . Caesar's Wife was a success in England, but a failure elsewhere."

22 Edinburgh, 1949, p. 80.
From his hardened coldness for the Eurasian in the first scene he journeys in the fifth scene as far as hoping "the twain shall meet", for the inscrutable heart of China expands to the self-same joke that convulses a duchess in London and a financier in New York.  

The hard-headed East is represented in the play by the dauntless Amah, Lee Tai, and Sylvia Knox. The attitude of the first two is modelled on that of the Chinese philosopher who told Maugham,  

"Why, when you lived in caves and clothe yourself with skins we were a cultured people."  

George's voice of conciliation, however, remains confined to theory. The practical experiment in the form of Harry's marriage with the half-caste, Daisy, is a dismal failure. Maugham does present the two extreme views as well as the middle path, but hints through that marriage at the solution of the problem being as far away as ever. Moreover, the structure and the characters of the play (to be discussed in Chapter VII) do not fully synchronize with the theme, and the play does not satisfy as a dramatization of its problematic theme.  

(d) Politics  

Despite a few allusions to muddled politicians in  

23 p. 166f.  
relation to war in *For Services Rendered* and *The Unknown*
politics does not attain the stature of a theme in this
phase.

(e) War

Having already passed through two harrowing world wars
the twentieth century bids fair to going down in history as
the goriest single period. War naturally casts a gloom
over the literature of this century. While Maugham's only
tragedy, *For Services Rendered*, is exclusively devoted to
the theme of war, *The Unknown* is concerned with the twin
themes of religion and war. In *The Sacred Flame* and *The
Breadwinner* the first world war provides the context. In
all these plays the devastating ravages of war on society
are depicted with a compassion that recalls Robin Maugham's
description of his famous uncle in his advanced years:

"Behind the soberly dressed, cynical, famous
man of letters there still lurked the com­
passionate young man who had written *Liza
of Lambeth*."

In *The Unknown* war plays a direct and extensive role.
Here the first world war is actually in progress, the
old Colonel and the Vicar are loyal war-enthusiasts.
Colonel Wharton's son, John, leads the attack on war in this
play. He has just returned home from the front on leave.

25  *Somerset and All the Maughams* (New York, 1966), p. 32.
26  Cf. Joseph in Priestley's *Desert Highway* (Four Plays,
London, 1944) and the Bishop in St. John Ervine's *Robert's
He has recovered from his bodily wounds, but in his mind are smouldering those angry fires of despair which have been kindled by the rude spectacle of horror and irredeemable waste in the war. John testifies to the camaraderie generated in war where

One gets to know very intimately all sorts of queer people.27

His soul is tortured particularly because his friend Robbie, an epitome of all virtues and radiance, has been killed.28 John's attitude is prompted not by fear like François' in Jean-Paul Sartre's Men Without Shadows,29 or the soldiers in Sean O'Casey's The Plough and the Stars.30 In Maugham's treatment of the theme of war the soldier's fear of fighting is not stressed.

John's despondent mood is the exact opposite of his father's and the Vicar's, and is caused by the general consequences of war and not by the individual's fear of it. He knew the explicit meaning of war: patriotism, courage and bravery. He has now discovered the implicit meaning: wild and senseless destruction of the good and innocent. Chris in Arthur Miller's All My Sons (1947) expresses the same shock.31 Like him John is 'revolted by the horror

27 p. 49.
28 Cf. Elvin in Priestley's Desert Highway: "It's always them good kids that gets it." p. 194.
29 Penguin Plays, p. 178.
and pain and suffering'. If the generalized thinking on war is revealed through John, the personalized reaction is revealed through Mrs. Littlewood, who is benumbed by the overwhelming share of misery she is forced to bear. Her two sons are killed in action at a short interval. She is resigned to the loss of the first, but wails in pathetic indignation,

"But why did God take my second? He was the only one I had left, the only comfort of my old age, my only joy .... I wouldn't treat a dog as my Father has treated me."

The theme of religion here subtly emerges from that of war. John and Mrs. Littlewood are spokesmen of the universal agony of mankind protesting with numberless tongues against the imposed evil of war. The stormy clouds of war surround the horizon of religion which turns out to be the main theme of The Unknown.

Finally, in For Services Rendered the tragic impact of war on the mental climate of society is delineated with full force. The malaise of war is exposed by placing men and women of various circumstances and temperaments vis-a-vis the first world war. The many-sided portrayal in this play of the disintegration of a family in the wake of the war is severer than that depicted in most other

32 p. 59.
33 p. 53.
plays. Priestley's *Time and the Conways*, for instance, shows the relief in the end of the war in Mrs. Conway's remark,

"I feel we all can be happy again, now that the horrible war's all over and people are sensible again, and Robin and Alan are quite safe."\(^{34}\)

In *For Services Rendered* the end of the war is but the beginning of the devastation. Maugham's indictment of war anticipates that in Miller's *All My Sons*, and is bitterer and deeper.

All the three Ardsley sisters bear signs of the ravages of war. Their ailments are diverse, but they are all traceable to war and are stages in the development of the theme. Eva's betrothed, Ted, has been killed in the war and, she says,

"Looking after Sydney helped me to bear the loss of Ted."\(^{35}\)

Her second fiancé, Collie, kills himself, and her anguish (p. 216 supra) is so unbearable that she becomes insane. While Eva misses hers, Ethel takes her chance and marries Howard only to weep at leisure (the end of Act I). It is an awkward alliance with a drink-addict below her station. But the background of war raised his status and he looked very nice in uniform. He was an officer.\(^{36}\)

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35 p. 106.
36 p. 96.
Banking on the experience of these two, Lois decides at the end of the play to elope, to enjoy sex without marriage, which in any case is impossible, a whole generation of young men being killed in the war. Forced celibacy, impossible marriages and wantonness are the directions indicated by war to post-war womanhood.

The consequences of war on the male world are portrayed through Sydney, Collie, Ardsley, Wilfred and Howard. Sydney represents the brave, sensitive and intelligent soldier. With his unseeing eyes he looks far into the problem of war. He develops the same attitude toward the politicians as John Wharton in The Unknown does towards the church. Unlike John, who plunges into debate right at the start, Sydney keeps his own counsel till late in the play when he is provoked into giving tongue to his indignation. Perhaps there is not much to discuss in what he has to say. The news of Collie's suicide followed by Leonard Ardsley's heartless reaction bursts his restraint and sparks off his bitter tirade against the war-mongering politicians:

"I know that we were sacrificed to their vanity, their greed and their stupidity."

And the worst of it is that

"One of these days they'll muddle us all into another war."

In that event Sydney would unleash a heart-rending cry from housetops,

"Look at me; don't be a lot of damned fools;"
it's all bunk what they're saying to you, about honour and patriotism and glory, bunk, bunk, bunk. 37

Sydney shares this mood with many a denouncer of war in literature as well as in real life. To Shaw in J. B. Priestley's Desert Highway it seems

if chaps at top can't arrange it better than this, it'ud be cheaper to shoot them in stead o' shooting each other. 38

The actual thinking pattern of the fighting forces took a similar line.

In the end the disasters of war taught them a gradual disgust for the 'muddle-through' politicians who spoke in the name of Britain, ...... a contempt, mixed with envy, for all fit males of military age, who had escaped their share of front-line service. 39

This is war through the fighting soldier's angle.

The other angle shown in For Services Rendered is that of the human fiends who revel in rubbing salt into the wounds of the sufferers. They are descendants of Cornwall in King Lear whose words

37 p. 164. This prophecy came true in 1939 in the form of World War II of which Maugham writes - "In England...... every one .... is working for the country. Labour has given up gains that were the result of years of struggle ...... under no more pressure than the advice of their leaders that the sacrifices were necessary for the country's good " - K.W. Jonas, ed. : The Maugham Enigma (London, 1954, p.40.
38 Four Plays, p. 192.
"Out, vile jelly," accompanied the plucking of Gloucester's eyes. In *For Services Rendered* Howard performs the same verbal office by ridiculing Sydney's passionate plea.\(^4^1\)

Wilfred is a shrewd businessman who took the tide of the war at its flood, 'made a packet and sold out at the top of the market.'\(^4^2\)

Leonard Ardsley's is the vulture's vision, much more reckless, cruel and self-centred than Keller's in Miller's *All My Sons*. The latter ardently loves his wife and sons, and kills himself when he knows that his turning out defective machinery has been responsible for his son's suicide. He highlights the social corruption in war by exposing the dirty tricks played by armament manufacturers. Ardsley's villainy is a bottomless pit. It does not stop at wife or son. Through him, Maugham projects the darkest aspect of war, viz., the inhuman exploitation of the innocent with war as the catalytic agent. His presence in the play is significant for its theme; he does not participate in the action of the play beyond typifying through his speeches.

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41. p. 165.
42. In many war-plays this viewpoint of the selfish, lucky war-advocate is depicted. For instance, in Sartre's *Men Without Shadows* (Op.cit.) Pellerin is its spokesman (p. 193).
the war-vulture's attitude. If the Ardsley children and Collie are the objects of the ruthless verb of war, Howard, Wilfred and Leonard are its subjects. They control the war-machine with their active voice and action.

The trail of economic havoc left by war in society is indicated through Collie Stratton. His failure in business is only half the story; the other and bitterer half is that no friend is ready to honour his word for a paltry sum, and he is a veteran naval officer who has risked his life for the motherland. Finally he kills himself. The fighter whom the war failed to kill, his own society now succeeds in exterminating. The violence of war thus lingers long after the boom of guns has stopped, and assumes menacing proportions.

In this way, the all-round gloom left by war is symbolically depicted in this play. War is a dismal affair; it destroys the credulous and innocent and allows the sly and calculating to grind their axe and get away with it. War happens to be yet another field of human activity presenting all the grisly features of human nature at its worst. Here, too, might continues to be right. Man's so-called advancement has not conferred on right an inherent, unaided status; the modern age has only multiplied the forms of might. Taking advantage of a phenomenon like war, they all unite to trample on the Collies, to unhinge the Evas and to force their terms on the Sydneys. This is the view of war presented in Maugham's plays.
Moral Themes

Maugham's mental preoccupation with the meaning of life and a code for human behaviour dates back to his youth and has been noted in Chapter I above. In his earlier plays he writes in part with an eye for the topical and partly to give vent to that preoccupation. In some of his plays of this last phase he gives up the topical and writes wholly to unburden himself of his views on metaphysical and ethical subjects. The fact that his play on the theme of religion, The Unknown (1920), is based on his novel, The Hero (1901), shows that his thinking on religion had been formulated even before he penned his early light plays.

(a) Religion

Religion is a theme of considerable significance in East of Suez and the main theme in The Unknown and Sheppey. In East of Suez it appears as a natural aspect of the confrontation of the overseas British and the Chinese. The reaction of the Oriental convert to Christianity is depicted here through the inscrutable Amah, who, in an interesting account of her being made to leap from church to church, claims to have been baptized five times. Is she thus not five times as Christian as Harry, she asks with affected naivety.

43 p. 37 f.
44 p. 147.
Secondly, the Christians ask the poor Chinese to love each other, but do they practise this commandment themselves? The Amah says,

"I no think missionaries love one another velly much."  

The third drawback of the Christian missionaries according to the Amah is their vile tongue. 'Going to hell' would seem to be a recurring strain judging from her account of it.

The Amah is thus the spokesman of the intelligent convert to Christianity who cannot help comparing her native religion, having no propagatory wing, with the huge Christian missionary activity with which that religion is not unnaturally identified in non-Christian societies. In *A Writer's Notebook* Maugham bluntly asks,

"If the use of religion is to make men moral, and so long as it does this dogma is unimportant, it seems to follow that men can't do better than to accept the religion of the country they happen to have been born in. Why then should missionaries go to India and China to convert people?"  

This pointed view is projected through the Amah in *East of Suez*. As he is entirely without the desire to convert anyone to his way of thinking, it is natural that Maugham loathes the missionary engines of conversion.

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45 P. 148.
46 P. 61.
47 *The Maugham Enigma*, p. 33.
Degradation Among 'Religious' Men

If the colour assumed by Christianity in East of Suez is by no means flattering, in Sheppey it is exposed to positive ridicule. The 'religious man' in that play is a regular sinner. In Lady Frederick, too (Chapter III, p. 94, above), there is a tangential reference to such an immoral 'religious' man. The description need not be confined to a particular sect. It is Maugham's satirical attack on all sham in religion. Sinners are not the monopoly of a sect; they crowd the ranks of every religious denomination. Fallacy, hypocrisy and sin masquerading in pious platitudes, in spiritual talk, are the ugly but universal lot of religion, and are depicted in that light in Sheppey. 48

Religion and Hypocrisy

Sheppey is a thought-provoking study of the effect on the human mind of the constant association of religion with hypocrisy. It is projected in a minor key in Florrie's proposal to go to the pictures even as her father is about to be taken to a lunatic asylum, for

"I promised God I wouldn't, not if he made the doctors say poor dad was potty." 49

God in Florrie's conception is like a ticket clerk that hands across a counter tickets for the price you pay.

48 p. 274.
49 p. 288.
This concept is by no means uncommon. Making a vow in return for a favour by God is an accepted form of practical religion. Religion is in such cases a handmaid of man's selfish ends. And a stunning aspect of this perverse operation of religion is the readiness with which it is taken for granted as a norm of human behaviour.

This paralysis of the faculty of judgment is delineated in Mrs. Miller's tolerant view of her daughter's horrid vow and eagerness to escape to the pictures. She only exclaims, "Oh, go on with you. After all one's only young once." 

This process which ensures that even honest ordinary men and women are unwittingly driven to succumbing to the pressure of hypocrisy is outlined by Maugham in *A Writer's Notebook* as follows:

"Christianity has decided that man should have neither love, nor care, nor thought for himself, but only for his soul, and by demanding of him that he should behave otherwise than as his nature prompts, has forced him into hypocrisy."

**Practising Christ's Message**

In Sheppey himself we have a rare giant of intellect and sensibility who tears the veil and grasps the real essence. His sense of religion is made of sterner stuff than of anyone around him. Reduced to its bare essentials

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50 p. 289.

51 p. 11.
his creed is simplicity itself: Practise Christ's message of love with absolute sincerity. He strives to reach the logical end of this resolve, but fails. His small world cannot contain him. The destiny of a Sheppey in this world infested by Ernies and Florries is undoubtedly bleak; but the real tragedy lies in his wife's inability to understand him. She abandons him to the doctors as Peter deserted Christ to the cross. Sheppey's aspiration to follow Christ is beyond Mrs. Miller's grasp.\textsuperscript{52} Her being alien to Sheppey's state of mind is symbolically shown in her departure to bring kippers at the time of Sheppey's death.\textsuperscript{53} Sheppey does not belong even to a minority, he remains alone. This sombre fate of religious idealism in the world is an important aspect of the theme of religion in Sheppey.

Sheppey's failure makes him a sardonic symbol of the gaping chasm that separates selfless idealism from pragmatic wisdom, that helps word keep deed constantly at bay. The ridicule that awaits idealism in the world of enlightened self-interest is developed stage by stage. Sheer goodness in action has made periodic appearances in Maugham's other writings.\textsuperscript{54} But in Sheppey it fills the whole frame as

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{52} p. 286.
\item \textsuperscript{53} p. 291.
\item \textsuperscript{54} Sally in Of Human Bondage, John's friend in The Unknown, Stroeve in The Moon and the Sixpence, Eric in The Narrow Corner, Salvatore in the story of the same title, Larry in The Razor's Edge and the Greek in Catalina are his various creations exemplifying sheer goodness. Besides, he was attracted by the writer Tillotson's goodness and wrote an essay on him, and wrote two essays on goodness in Points of View (London, 1958).\
\end{enumerate}
The Intellectual basis of the Religion of Love

Sheppey's new way of life is not a swaying in the whirl of momentary inspiration. It has the sound base of intellectual conviction as revealed by his cool and confident repelling Ernie's supposedly rational objections.\textsuperscript{55} This is the final and significant stage in the development of the theme, for here Sheppey's resolution sheds off the roots from which it has sprung up. He no longer follows Christ, he walks on the path which he is convinced is the only right one.

Sheppey's pristine innocence and naive belief in the possibility of translating religious commandments into action thus have an air not only of emotional integrity but also of intellectual conviction and acumen. Contrary to what his detractors proclaim, he continues to have "me 'ead screwed on me shoulders all right."\textsuperscript{56} His comprehension of his duty is clear without being arrogant, his determination to do it unshakable. He is not attached to Christ as an individual; he wishes to establish a concord between message and performance, and Christ is but its blessed symbol. The principle stands firm, symbol or no symbol. Christianity here extends beyond its limited kernel and becomes coextensive with real religion. It is this

\textsuperscript{55} p. 251.
\textsuperscript{56} p. 217.
grandeur of its theme that justifies R.H. Ward's remark,

"Although in actual fact so far inferior as to be incomparable to Hamlet, potentially Sheppey is greater than Hamlet."\(^5\)\(^7\)

Whereas religion in action informs Sheppey, the theory of religion informs The Unknown. The essential catholicity and intellectual purity of the depiction of the theme in The Unknown are noteworthy. Gerald Weales's remark,

"The playwright's concern in The Unknown was plainly not proselytism,"\(^5\)\(^8\)
racknowledges this merit of the play.

The Loss of Faith

The theme is introduced early in the first act through the revolt by John and Mrs. Littlewood against traditional religion. The vital conflict John is called upon to resolve is between the shreds of his faith hugged since childhood but torn by the cruel war, and his devotion to his loving, aged parents, and, above all, to Sylvia, his fiancée, all traditional devout Christians. The dilemma sways him perhaps for a split second, but the scales of conventional faith have fallen from his eyes so drastically that he would rather injure the feelings of his loved ones than perpetrate the show of faith.

\(^7\) Religion in Modern English Drama (Philadelphia, 1961), p. 20.
Mrs. Littlewood undergoes a similar process in the first act. On the heels of her being certified by the Vicar himself as 'a deeply religious woman', she flings a surprise on everyone by telling him that she thought church would bore her.\(^59\)

**Miracles of Faith**

In their frequent exchanges with the Vicar and others John and Mrs. Littlewood furnish us with lucid expositions of their standpoints. John apparently feels that one's religious beliefs are a private matter, but Sylvia insists that social content is involved in them. In their debate on miracles a suggestion is discerned that they are products of one's faith, a view endorsed by Cauchon in Shaw's *St. Joan*.\(^60\) When you wholeheartedly believe in something not capable of physical and objective verification, that thing exists for you.

"No argument can ever touch that feeling," \(^61\) John points out.

**The Benefits of Faith**

Like her husband's, Mrs. Wharton's faith has an incredibly calming effect on her. She can maintain her equanimity in her great loss, her husband's death.

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59 \(\text{p. 18.}\)
60 \(\text{The Orient Edition (Bombay, 1961), p. 112.}\)
61 \(\text{p. 57.}\)
Well, if faith is going to be of such practical utility, why grudge it? Even the staunchest non-believer will find himself endorsing Sylvia's response to Mrs. Wharton's quiet courage:

"Oh, Mrs. Wharton, what a blessed thing it is to have a faith like yours." 62

Whether based on intellectual conviction or not, genuine reliance on God goes a long way in making life happy by taking the sting out of many a calamity. Apart from its spiritual and philosophical aspects, passionate theistic inclination has this practical advantage.

The Social Mode of Religion

Like the personal aspects of faith in God its social aspects are also discussed in The Unknown. The social mode of religion, Christianity at any rate, represented by the complex hierarchy of ecclesiastical dignitaries, compulsorily demands faith in God on the part of every individual.

John writhes in suffocation under the burden of this restriction to his freedom of thought. He explodes at Sylvia,

"At the back of all your Christian humility there's the desire to dominate. It isn't so much that I didn't believe as that I didn't believe what you wanted me to believe. You wanted to bring my face in the dust." 63

62 p. 68.
63 p. 84.
Here in Sylvia is thus drawn the line of demarcation between faith in God as a source of hope and as that of misery to others. Mrs. Wharton is the symbol of the former, the intolerant, demanding Sylvia of the latter.

**Regimentation in Religion**

An interesting aspect of the social compulsion of religion practised by the church is pointed out by John when he answers the Vicar's point-blank query whether he believes in God. The reply is,

"I don't think it's quite your business to ask me. (With a smile.) Wasn't it St. Paul who said: Be not zealous overmuch?"  

This is a veritable instance of the agnostic, if not the devil, quoting the scriptures which are themselves against the regimentation of religious belief which the Vicar endeavours so strenuously to perpetuate. John would like to strike a deal with him on the lines of Richard in Shaw's *The Devil's Disciple*, who tells the Minister,

"By your leave, Minister; I do not interfere with your sermons: do not interrupt mine."  

**The Effect of Suffering**

In the battle of wits between formal religion and individual reason the contribution by Dr. Macfarlane opens a new line. He joins issue with the Vicar, but injects

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64 p. 54.
jolly wit as he has none of the bitterness of John and Mrs. Littlewood who have passed through fiery ordeals. An unbiased and pragmatic thinker, his responses are utility-oriented and often stem from his own close observation and experience. He makes fun of the concept of the purifying and ennobling quality of suffering, in conformity with Maugham's own experience in hospitals. Dr. Macfarlane's disarming worldliness is at its most amusing when with characteristic Maughamian wit he pricks the bubble of the suffering of Sylvia's soul:

"I have an idea our souls are like our manners, all the better when we don't think too much about them." 

Sin in Christianity

These are all topics on the fringe of religion. As the discussion proceeds we are drawn closer to the more serious aspects of Christianity. The concept of original sin is important enough to claim some space in most plays on Christian dogma. For instance, in Graham Greene's The Living Room, James voices one of its justifications when he tells Michael,

"I used to notice, in the old days, it was often the sinners who had the biggest trust. In mercy."

The Vicar in The Unknown faithfully states the view that

66 p. 51.
67 A Writer's Notebook, p. 57.
68 p. 77.
69 p. 20.
sin was born with man and has remained glued to him like his shadow. Expressing his abhorrence of this idea, John says,

"I think it a pity that Christianity has laid so much stress on it. We assert in church that we're miserable sinners, but I don't think we mean it...and I don't think we are." 70

Here, incidentally, he shares the view of numerous thinkers like Christopher Isherwood and Swami Vivekananda. 71 John does not accept the axiomatic sin in Christianity. He conceded that men make mistakes, but he attributes them to human nature.

The discussion on sin soon involves the Vicar into spinning an amazing yarn about the genesis of sin. The entire human community is inherently and endlessly sinful and the disasters like war that visit it continually are the periodical retribution it has to undergo. This is the cheerless prospect as the Vicar sees it. 72 But in that case what of the benevolence, love and mercy attributed to God? John's pertinent comment follows the Vicar's exposition:

"Either God can't stop the war even if He wants to or He can stop it and won't." 73

Here is, then, the burning question which tortures the sensitive mind trained by tradition to believe in an all-

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70 p. 49.
72 p. 51.
73 p. 51.
powerful and all-merciful God, but prompted by its natural inclination to seek a rational explanation of every phenomenon. The two horrid wars in the twentieth century brought this question to the forefront shaking formal religion to its roots.

**Man and God**

The constant intimacy God is supposed to have with man's everyday affairs robs religion of its spiritual stature. Men pray to God day and night, ask Him to pardon their sins, and as a natural corollary, expect rewards for merit. In this give-and-take religion God ceases to be a supra-physical, spiritual entity. The inevitable effect of this mixing so intrinsically in humdrum secular matters is that a position of a sort of super-leader is thrust on Him. Men expect orders from Him and order Him about. Dreams and visions on the one hand, and vows on the other, form the media of these exchanges. Florrie in Sheppey indicates the initial stage of this trade, Mrs. Littlewood the last stage, viz., a broken contract. Stretching God's promise of happiness to its logical end she thunders at the Vicar the ringing question,

"You say that God will forgive us our sins, but who is going to forgive God?"  

This is an echo from Omar Khayyam whose famous lines run as under:

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74  p. 53.
For all the sins wherewith the face of man
Is blackened, man's forgiveness give-and
take!^75

Being steeped in the traditional lore of God's promise of
mercy Mrs. Littlewood is naturally outraged at its non-
fulfilment and weighs God in the same scales she is
weighed in.

The Practical Solution to the Dilemma of Christianity

The solution to the dilemma of traditional Christianity
is attempted in *The Unknown* in two directions. Dr. Macfarlane
brings his cool worldly sense to solve the problem. Giving
a concise statement of it he glibly says,

"Alas, who can deny that in this world virtue
is often unrewarded and vice unpunished? ....
The rain falls on the just and the unjust alike,
but the unjust generally have a stout umbrella."

He then outlines how he 'found peace':

"I don't believe that God is all-powerful and
all-knowing. But I think He struggles against
evil as we do... And I believe in this age-long
struggle between God and evil we can help....;
for in some way, I don't know how, I believe that
all our goodness adds to the strength of God."76

In this view the assumption of God is accepted but the other
aspects are adjusted to suit traditional morality. Of His
three attributes only goodness is retained, but omnipotence

75 R.A. Cordell: *William Somerset Maugham* (Edinburgh,
1937), p. 179.
76 p. 79f.
and mercifulness are rejected. Thereby the fundamental urge of the human mind to seek the support of some kind of superior power is not only accounted for, but also shorn of its potential of agony as exemplified in Mrs. Littlewood's reaction. The simple religion the doctor prescribes for humanity is: Do good and assist God in His campaign against evil.

**Agnosticism**

The other direction the solution of the problem takes is agnosticism. Objections to God's existence in this play have none of the superficial air of Callifer's objection in Graham Greene's *The Potting Shed*:

"But if God existed, why should He take away His faith from me?"  

In *The Unknown* Mrs. Littlewood's blunt denial of God is debated after her departure. The Vicar remarks that atheism is out-of-date and that there has of late been a revival of belief in God. The Vicar's pose of turning the tables on John is, however, short-lived, for John pertinently terms this revival one of rhetoric rather than religion, thus making the fundamental point of the agnostic that every supposedly new argument in favour of God's existence is but new wine in an old bottle. The agnostic does not believe in God's existence,

77 Three Plays, p. 137.
but with the same vehemence he does not believe in God's non-existence. A matter that cannot be thrashed out on the basis of acceptable evidence is not open to argument, and God is such a matter.

This discussion naturally leads to the contention that arguments are futile. But the agnostic cannot escape so easily. He must endeavour to explain why so many reasoning men believe in God although they know that there is no evidence to show He exists. In a commendable effort in that direction John maintains,

"You don't believe in God for any of the reasons that are given for His existence. You believe in Him because with all your heart you feel He exists. No argument can touch that feeling. The heart is independent of logic and its rules."

Indeed, many people, with James in Greene's *The Pott-ng Shed*, wouldn't believe in a God I could understand. John's explanation makes the Vicar concede crestfallen,

"I dare say there's something in what you say."

The Meaning of Life

In John's agnosticism it is fruitless to seek the meaning of life; for what is life but a series of events happening mostly without our concurrence and without any

78 p. 54 ff.
79 *Three Plays*, p. 146.
apparent causal sequence, punctuated at rare intervals by events intended and authored by us? John tells Sylvia,

"Life seems to me like a huge jig-saw puzzle that doesn't make any picture, but if we like we can make little patterns, as it were, out of the pieces." 80

To John's mind life has a meaning only over a short period which may abruptly be terminated by death or a similar drastic event. In Mrs. Littlewood's case the death of her second son is the cruel finale which shatters the pieces she is trying to make a design of. It is through her that the idea of reincarnation is introduced here in passing. 81 She is also sorry to note the discord between John and Sylvia, and muses philosophically,

"Isn't it strange how people in this world seem to go out of their way to make themselves unhappy!" 82

These would seem to be actual demonstrations of John's contention that philosophical theories are often results of musings in intense moods of the mind rather than final shapes of coherent speculation, and hence the great divergence among them.

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80 p. 60. Perhaps the very incompleteness of life constitutes its romance, as Mrs. Callifer in *The Potting Shed* appears to suggest in her remark, "We are none of us sure. When you aren't sure you are alive." *Three Plays*, p. 151.

81 p. 78.

82 p. 76.
Thus, the theme of agnosticism developed in this play extends beyond its philosophical essentials. The agnostic, by definition, does not attempt a solution to the problem of life. He stops at pointing out the impossibility of probing it, and defies further ideological query. In *The Unknown*, however, the agnostic attitude of John is linked up with the instinctive urge in man to get at the meaning of life, because even as the design of events in our life cannot be discovered, their compulsion cannot be evaded. The final impression of the theme of religion in this play is that the more you think and argue about God and the meaning of life the more convinced you are that they are unknown and unknowable.

(b) Ethical Values

Along with religion Maugham's mind is constantly preoccupied with ethical values. In one of his notes he affirms that his

object is to find a rule of conduct for the average man under the normal conditions of the present day.\(^3\)

It is in *The Sacred Flame* that Maugham's most searching enquiry into the ultimate standard of ideal human behaviour is found. The triumph of absolute ethical standards over legal and conventional standards is the theme of this play. Maugham's contention that

\[^3\] *A Writer's Notebook*, p. 23.
it is dishonest to assert that if moral values are not absolute they must depend on prejudices or preferences.\(^84\)

is exemplified in this play.

A disastrous accident maiming an aviator, Maurice, provides the play with a sombre background. Saving a life is about the noblest deed a human being is capable of; yet to Maurice it has been the 'unkindest cut'. The concept of the possibility of the supposedly good turning out in effect to be infinitely wicked is introduced here. His wife Stella's being pregnant by his brother Colin is a sealed book to Maurice at the moment. His mother, Mrs. Tabret, is faced with the poignant dilemma: to end painlessly his otherwise purposeless existence and spare him the untold humiliation, or to desist from what in legal parlance and conventional ethics is murder at the cost of pushing him into lifelong anguish.

Protagonists of law and traditional morality would not pardon Mrs. Tabret for taking her son's life, whatever the motive and whatever the consequences. They would, however, look at her considerably less askance if it is an accident, or if the overdose is administered on the wretched son's insistent pleading: this would be somewhat akin to suicide and her offence would be confined to abetment. They would even sympathize with a Mrs. Tabret who administers the fatal overdose in a momentary inspiration to regret it forever thereafter.

\(^84\) Ibid., p. 273.
But Maugham is handling a bold theme and he handles it boldly. It is his conviction that man's duty is to exercise all the functions (of his conscience), permitting none to overbear the others.\(^{85}\)

Mrs. Tabret practises this precept and brushes aside all those possibilities actually suggested by her anxious listeners.\(^{86}\)

"I took five tabloids, .... and dissolved them in a glass of water. I took it in a gulp .... I sat by the side of his bed holding his hand till he fell asleep, and when I withdrew my hand I knew it was a sleep from which he would never awake. He dreamed his dream to the end."\(^{87}\)

Here the thought-provoking theme is developed to a superb pitch. The problem is solved unequivocally. Through Mrs. Tabret Maugham declares that there can be circumstances when actions frightfully shunned, and defined as crimes by the statute-book and understood as such by society happen to be the noblest deeds possible; as sometimes deadly poisons effect a cure, an apparent crime may solve a serious mental riddle.

**The Individual and Society**

This view is reinforced by its presentation on a different plane. Here an almost inevitable offence against

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85 A Writer's Notebook, p. 20.
86 p. 317.
87 p. 318.
marital morality is excused. Mrs. Tabret's crime is glorified, but that of Stella and Colin is but pardoned. The other case of apparently immoral love is that of Nurse Wayland for Maurice. Notwithstanding Maurice's sexual incapacity, society would, with Stella, call it 'horrible and disgusting', and charge the nurse with 'an abnormal aborted sexuality'.

Society is a blind prosecutor; it revels in hurling charges and spreading gossip without considering possibilities. This nature of the social mind also is also mentioned in The Sacred Flame, in connection with the possibility of Stella's divorcing Maurice. Even though nobody could reasonably blame Stella if she left a crippled husband, society would indulge its favourite pastime of raising a scandal about her 'selfishness'.

Both these cases of socially unpalatable love are nevertheless excused by Mrs. Tabret. When Nurse Wayland accuses Mrs. Tabret of defending her (Stella) for having been untrue to your son,

she rejoins,

"I'm excusing her, Nurse Wayland."  

She also takes a generous view of Wayland's love for Maurice, as her last memorable words to her indicate:

88 p. 299 ff.
89 p. 302.
90 p. 303.
"Let us cleave to one another. So long as you and I can keep our love for Maurice alive in our hearts he is not entirely dead."91

Human Nature

The several redeeming features of Stella's extra-marital alliance with Colin are unfolded in the course of the dialogue. Her case is presented with formidable supporting evidence, and then she is excused.

First of all, there is human nature. Mrs. Tabret makes the point that the satisfaction of the normal human desires ought to be one of the cardinal principles of any system of individual and social ethics; indeed, the institution of marriage itself is designed to provide the most convenient and secure avenue of sexual companionship to man and woman, especially the latter. Stella's marriage exists only in name after Maurice's accident, it is defunct in its essence. Mrs. Tabret calls it 'so false a relationship'.92 Society and law are slow in keeping pace with absolute morality; yet they do recognize this anomaly and provide her, a trifle reluctantly, with the escape of divorce.

The Importance of Motivation

It is the tragedy of the human situation that once a thought, an urge, is translated into action, like Antony's

91 p. 319.
92 p. 295.
"Mischief" it is destined to 'take what course thou wilt'. That course is self-propelled, uncontrollable. Wise men, therefore, attach a great deal of importance to genuine repentance. That is again the reason why it isethically unsound to weigh the moral content of an action merely by its outward form and effect. That killing can amount to murder as well as a brave act of patriotism according to intention and circumstances is a gross but striking example of this. Mrs. Tabret applies this view to Stella, and affirms referring to her pregnancy,

"It persuades me of Stella's essential innocence. If she had been a loose and abandoned woman she would have known how to avoid such an accident." 93

Stella's is a genuine test-case of the doctrine of the correspondence of the moral status of an action to the intent and concept of the actor and not to its outward manifestation. Here the guilty could easily have circumvented the result of her guilt; the very presence of the result proclaims her innocence of intent.

Nevertheless, the lapse of Stella and Colin is a slip, if not sin, and its benefit accrues to them. As opposed to it, the seemingly monstrous and deliberate killing of Maurice by Mrs. Tabret is a noble sacrifice made at a stupendous personal risk. An interesting aspect of the

93 p. 298.
process of ethical verdict emerges from the attitude of the others to the two women. When the suspicion of killing Maurice falls on Stella, Major Liconda sympathizes with her, saying,

"To me one of the shattering things about it (crime) has been to notice that the most law-abiding and decent person may be driven to commit one." 94

Liconda is at pains to reconcile Stella's alleged crime with her known goodness. When in the end Mrs. Tabret gives herself out as the killer, the same Liconda is speechless with fond admiration and awe. Nurse Wayland, bent upon sending Stella to the gallows, exclaims hysterically on knowing the identity of the killer,

"Oh, Mrs. Tabret, I've been so horrible. I've been petty and revengeful. I never knew how mean I was." 95

The knowledge of the killer brings about a drastic change in the perspective of the others of the action. No one seems to be aware that the act for which they are now worshipping Mrs. Tabret has been a moment before discussed by them as a murder of a defenceless invalid. The significance of motivation in judging the ethical level of human actions is here effectively brought out.

In this way, the superiority of absolute ethical

94 p. 310.
95 p. 319.
standards of human behaviour not conditioned by time and place is conclusively established in *The Sacred Flame*.

III Conclusion

The contemplative themes of these plays are a natural and fitting finale to Maugham's dramatic career. Advancing years generally replace the youthful twinkle in the eye by a glow of thoughtfulness: Maugham's selection of themes in his dramatic writing broadly follows this sequence. Yet, his career displays an organic growth; ideas mentioned in passing or jest in the earlier light plays reach out in this phase into full-scale themes. For instance, the hypocrisy to which self-styled 'religious' persons are prone, mentioned in *Lady Frederick* (1904), not only lingers and occupies larger areas in *East of Suez* and *The Unknown* but very much gets beyond a joke. The introvert that lay concealed in Maugham now rises to the surface and examines the values of love, war, religion and morality. The man-woman relationship that dominated the early and middle phases is now relegated to a minor position, and themes having a bearing on man's emotional and moral life come to the forefront.

On the other hand, some attitudes exhibited in the farces are also dramatized in these plays with reduced emphasis. Arthur's self-denying worry about Violet's welfare

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96 p. 73. Cf. p. 230 above.
in Caesar's Wife finds an interesting parallel in Rex Cunningham's similar outburst in The Unattainable (the middle phase),

"I want to deny myself, I want to stand aside, 
I can suffer in silence. I'm made like that." 97

This is a typical example of the same attitude operating on two planes, farce and genuine feeling. Fond admiration for a pair of lovers is another such attitude. Putting into words the idea that the whole world loves lovers Mrs. Dot says in 1904 about Gerald and Nellie,

"It's quite charming to see two young things so engrossed in one another's society." 98

This mocking observation is transferred to the realm of real feeling in Caesar's Wife when Anne voices the same feeling about Violet and Arthur (p. 39). Like a gay girl shedding her monkey tricks on coming of age the attitudes in Maugham's boisterous plays shed their farcical gleam in his later plays.

The contribution made by Maugham to the post-war British world of thought is valuable because of the themes of these plays that project the turmoil and rethinking on ethical issues in the contemporary British mind much of which would never have seen the light of day had these plays not been

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97 p. 179.
98 p. 157.
written. What Maugham says of Calderon probably applies to him in the context of these plays:

"Sometimes he expresses sentiments and a morality that his audience have felt, but from timidity or obtuseness have refused to put into words."\textsuperscript{99}