CHAPTER V

A SURVEY OF THE LEADING THEMES AND TECHNIQUE
In the foregoing chapters the themes of the plays in the three volumes of Maugham's *Collected Plays* and a few unpreserved plays as well as the technique employed to project them have been discussed and the successes and failures indicated. It will be appropriate now to consider as a whole Maugham's major dramatic themes and the salient features of his dramatic method.

Among the social themes the relationship between the sexes is most extensively projected in Maugham's plays. This head accounts for the largest number of major and minor themes. Themes like 'the reversal of the man-pursues-woman trend' and 'woman, man's reformer' are confined to the two early comedies, whereas that of matrimony is spread over several plays in all the three phases. Lighter and superficial aspects of marriage, such as the place of conversational ability in marriage, are taken up only in the earlier plays like *Mrs. Dot* and *Smith*, whereas the social complexities of marriage, including its isolation from sex and love in the bustle of modern life, are considered in the early play *Penelope* and middle plays like *The Circle* and *The Constant Wife*, the emphasis in *Penelope* being on the individual wife's discomfiture and that in the middle phase on the representative social phenomenon. The working man's and woman's attitudes to love and marriage are also developed as themes in the early phase in *Smith* predominantly from the individual's
viewpoint. The most intense state of marriage, viz., 'marriage of true minds', stressing the essence of matrimony, is reserved for *Caesar's Wife* in the last phase, its outline having been indicated in *The Land of Promise* in the first phase. Likewise, love, the profoundest and the most informal condition of the man-woman relationship, is developed as a theme in the last phase in its happy (*Caesar's Wife*) and tragic (*The Sacred Flame*) nuances.

From this résumé there emerges a clear pattern of the evolution of Maugham's vision as his dramatic art developed. In the field of the behaviour of the individual as a sexual being the light, outer aspects are taken up in the earliest plays; the modern problems of the individual follow in the early phase; the modern problems with a pronounced social bias are discussed in the middle phase; and the crux shorn of formalities is projected in the last phase.

In the non-sexual man-woman relations the sister-brother relationship is depicted only in *Smith* and *The Land of Promise* in the early phase, but the more abiding parent-child relationship appears as a theme in all the three phases. An engaging sketch of affectionate, protective parents directing their daughter's destinies is contained in *Penelope* in the early phase. The middle phase has two significant parent-child relationships to offer. In *The Circle* a partly gay and partly dismal picture of the reunion of a separated mother with her grown-up son is presented. The war-strained, loose
parent-child pair is taken up as a major theme in *The Breadwinner*. In the last phase *The Sacred Flame* is reminiscent of *Penelope* in its tender mother-son partnership in feelings, the encompassing melancholy in *The Sacred Flame* being all its own. In *For Services Rendered*, in this last phase, the ultimate in war-provoked filial savagery is evoked in the bizarre, deleterious father treating his daughters and son as pawns in his game. Thus, in this area too, the design of the gay progressively leading to the serious is discovered.

Social snobbery is a topical theme of the early twentieth century, the first world war being largely instrumental in blurring the dividing lines in society and eliminating crude demonstrations of conceit. In conformity with this situation this theme is taken up in the early phase, especially in *Jack Straw*. In the later phases there are suggestions of superior attitudes in some plays like *Our Betters* and *The Circle*, but they do not assume the dimensions of a theme.

The theme of servant-master relations also receives a similar deal. It is extensively delineated in the early phase in *Smith* and *Grace*, but does not figure in the later phases.

Unlike these two social and topical themes, that of 'Britons abroad' is spread over the three phases. The three decades of this century, during which these plays were written, marked the height of British hegemony and the wide-spread
world presence of Britons. The preponderance of this theme over other social topics is consistent with this global situation. Moreover, the three plays on this theme offer diverse angles and the theme retains its freshness in the three contexts. In *The Land of Promise* in the early phase the British settlers function as emancipators of the wild, virgin land in remote Manitoba. In *Our Betters* in the middle phase the clash of British and American values is depicted on the homeground of the former. In *East of Suez* in the last phase the perennial problem of the confrontation of the oriental and the occidental is tackled, the Chinese representing the former and the Britons the latter. The theme here delves into the intricacies of a clash of two cultures and sheds its topicality to a marked degree.

The other serious social theme of momentous contemporary significance is War, and is taken up in *The Unknown* and *For Services Rendered* in the final phase. Thus, the pattern underlying the social themes outside the man-woman relationship is similar to that discovered in the themes involving that relationship. The topical and peripheral aspects belong to the early phase; the crucial linger till the last mellow phase. The fact that the moral themes concerning religion and man's moral behaviour belong to the final phase also falls into this pattern.

In the overall picture of these themes two features clearly stand out. In the first place, Maugham did not touch
strictly topical issues of passing interest. Ephemeral subjects like family planning, which prompted, for instance, St. John Ervine's play Robert's Wife, did not appeal to him. Such themes look alluring at the moment because of their interest to the public imagination of the day, but date very soon. Besides, it is difficult to extract from them anything of lasting import. None of Maugham's dramatic themes is such as is pre-eminently suited to the forum of the periodical press. The topical themes like social snobbery that he selected for dramatization are ingrained basically in human nature and not in the physical exigencies of social and economic life like family planning or practical politics. That is again the reason why Maugham's topical themes are capable of expansion into enduring plays. Thus, the theme of Jack Straw retains its validity because, although the peculiar brand of conceit depicted in it has long become extinct, the human tendency to show oneself off is extant today and will always be so. What is true of snobbery is truer of other themes like the confrontation of two cultures and war.

In the second place, Maugham's choice of themes conforms to his taste and temperament. Politics, education, serious grievances of women, economic and labour problems did not interest him. The themes of plays like Shaw's Mrs. Warren's Profession, Widowers' Houses or Heartbreak House or Ibsen's An Enemy of the People were out of his temperamental compass. On the whole, themes involving a plethora of material detail
did not arouse his writing instinct. This is his limitation, but, on the other hand, his honesty in selecting his themes does him credit and puts his dramatic talent to maximum use. Maugham's choice of his dramatic themes provides an instance in literature of the square peg in an almost square hole and the minimum waste of creative effort. Unlike many other writers he did not have to grope through an 'experimental' or 'apprenticeship' period. He found his foothold on the stage almost with his very first efforts. This is partly due to his unhesitating picking up of the themes congenial to his inclinations.

While the themes touching upon the man-woman relationship were the common stock of British drama in Maugham's heyday, as indeed in every other period, certain themes would not have been seen the British stage had Maugham not penned his plays. Social snobbery permeates in many British plays, but Jack Straw is unique in its sustained, indulgent picture of affectation dissolving itself in its own merry debacle. The Land of Promise offers an original treatment of the theme of the British taming of virgin lands. Our Betters views the British-American social melange from a new, balanced standpoint. But for The Unknown the British theatre would not have witnessed a many-sided analysis of agnosticism. The Sacred Flame is without a parallel in its treatment of the theme of the superiority of absolute ethical standards of human action to conventional ones. To Somerset Maugham goes the credit of
presenting these and such other themes perhaps for the first time on the British stage.

Restricted to Maugham's plays as the scope of this study is, it would be appropriate to glance over similar themes in his novels and short stories. Such a brief survey will place the dramatic themes in the proper perspective in the thematic pattern of the author's entire writing.

Maugham's novel Theatre, provides an interesting meeting place for his drama and his fiction: the theme of theatrical life is presented in it through the medium of fiction. Apart from this, many of his dramatic themes also appear in his novels and short stories. These may now be considered in the order followed in the foregoing chapters on themes.

The comic themes of Maugham's early plays, like 'Man's pursuit by woman' and 'Woman, man's reformer', are not found in his fiction. As for matrimony, the idea in the plays Lady Frederick, Mrs. Dot and Smith of the importance of conversational ability in marriage finds a parallel in the short story "Jane", in which a woman deserts an inane, taciturn youth for an older man of parts.

The basic concept in Penelope, viz., the adverse effect of constant attention in love and marriage, is an integral part of the story "Episode", in which the postman-hero decides not to marry his girl because

"I've thought about her night and day for eighteen months and now I'm sick to death of her."¹

¹ Collected Short Stories (Harmondsworth, 1967), Vol.4, p.132.
The play deals with the theme lightly, the story seriously. As for the theme of adultery, the elderly woman's infatuation for a young man is satirically treated in the play Our Betters and the novel The Merry-go-round. The same theme is dealt with in a contemplative vein in the play The Sacred Flame and the novel The Painted Veil.

Love, the most intimate form of the relationship between the sexes, dominates several of Maugham's plays, novels and stories, but it is significant that the aspects of the theme delineated in the plays are on the whole different from those developed in the fiction. The happy fruition of love that provides in diverse ways the culminating point in Penelope, The Land of Promise and Caesar's Wife is absent from Maugham's fiction. Only at a few points do aspects of love in the two media show some similarity: the idea of indifference - and not death or separation - being the tragedy of love is shared (almost verbatim) by The Circle² and the story "Red"³; a menial view of love and sex is reflected on similar lines in the play Smith and the story "The Treasure" (The Mixture As Before, London, 1940).

Man's sensitive communion with nature is treated as a theme in The Land of Promise and the stories "The Pool" and "Virtue". The play shares with the former story⁴ the alchemy

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² p. 78.
³ Collected Short Stories, Vol. 4, p. 421.
⁴ Ibid., Vol. 1, p. 119.
of association with a primitive land, and with the latter the romance of opening up a virgin country.

The non-sexual relationships which occupy a significant segment of Maugham's dramatic themes are almost totally missed in his fiction, except perhaps in his autobiographical novel Of Human Bondage.

Coming to social themes other than man-woman relationships, the theme of social snobbery, which is the crux of Jack Straw and a side-issue in several other plays, is depicted effectively mainly in the novel The Razor's Edge and in the stories "Lord Mountdrago" (Vol. 2) and "The Outstation" (Vol. 4). The depiction of the two levels of snobbish behaviour - the castigators of snobbery on the one being snobs themselves on the other - is handled in Jack Straw comically and in "The Outstation" seriously.

It is remarkable that whereas war as a theme is prominent in Maugham's drama, with one whole play (For Services Rendered) and parts of a few others devoted to it, it is almost wholly absent in his fiction. On the other hand, the picture of low-class life in London that he feelingly depicted in his novel Liza of Lambeth does not seem to have a parallel in his drama.


6 The parent-child relationship in Penelope, The Breadwinner, The Unknown, Sheppey, the sister-brother one in Smith and The Land of Promise, the mother-son one in The Sacred Flame, For Services Rendered, etc.
Coming to psychological ideas, the rejection of the belief in the ennobling quality of suffering appears in Sydney's contention in For Services Rendered, Bertha's in the novel Mrs. Craddock and Dr. Hurrell's in the novel The Merry-go-round. In his early medical experiences Maugham had watched suffering crystallizing into brutality rather than nobility, and he stated that finding in his novels and plays.

Out of the moral themes in Maugham's plays religion appears in similar colours in a few stories and the novel The Merry-go-round. An important aspect of all persuasion, emphasized in The Unknown, is stressed by Simon in Maugham's novel Christmas Holiday when he says,

"You have to persuade men to action not by reasoning, but by rhetoric."

Maugham's perceptive studies of hypocrisy in religion in The Unknown and the story "Rain" have much in common. The exploitation in the name of religion by missionaries in China and the Far East is shared as a theme by East of Suez and the story "Honolulu".

The fathers brought Christianity to the Kanaka and the children jumped his land.

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7 p. 127.
10 p. 56.
12 Collected Short Stories, Vol. 1, p. 78.
The idea in *The Merry-go-round* that superstition is a small price to pay for that wonderful support at the last hour is illustrated in the death of Colonel Wharton in *The Unknown*. *The Merry-go-round* also anticipates some of the author's ideas on moral issues that are later formulated into themes in the plays *The Sacred Flame* and *Sheppey*. Society is described in the novel as a grim monster, somnolent apparently, so that you think you can take every kind of liberty; but all the time he watches you and when you least expect it puts out an iron hand to crush you.

This aspect of social behaviour is referred to in *The Sacred Flame* in the context of the immoral love of Nurse Wayland for Maurice and Stella and Colin for each other. Similarly, the assertion in the novel that society punishes you just as severely if you act above its code as if you act below comes true in *Sheppey*, who acts 'above its code'.

In *The Moon and Sixpence* Maugham formulates a code of the artist's uncompromising independence; the corresponding code of sexual freedom finds expression in the plays *Our Betters*.

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13 P. 312.
14 P. 92.
15 Ibid.
and *The Constant Wife* belonging to the same phase of the author's career. The novel *Cakes and Ale* provides an outline of Maugham's creed of the beauty of the transitory,\(^{16}\) which is incorporated in *The Constant Wife* in Constance's plan to put a limit to her flirting spree so that

> it may achieve the perfection of something that is beautiful and transitory.\(^{17}\)

Barring these stray instances, serious moral themes, like that projected in *The Sacred Flame*, are not very prominent in Maugham's fiction.

This brief account reinforces the observation made in Chapter I (p. 8ff.) that the range of Maugham's dramatic themes is larger than that of the themes in his fiction. Whereas in the area of contemporary social portrayal there is some correspondence in the themes of his plays and those of his fiction, the light themes in his early plays as well as the serious ones - like war - in his later plays are conspicuously absent from his fiction. For the purposes of both, offering pure entertainment and expressing himself on matters concerning the human condition, Maugham thus seems to have preferred drama to fiction.

The salient features of Maugham's dramatic technique may now be summed up. The technique adopted in the three

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16 "For me no poet made a falser statement than Keats when he wrote the first line of *Endymion*." *Cakes and Ale* (London, 1958), p. 130.

17 p. 189.
phases of his dramatic writing has been analysed in detail in the foregoing chapters. A writer's technique is closely connected with the nature of his themes; it can be isolated only in theory, since technique is only a means of projecting the writer's vision. Maugham's technique illustrates the truth of this principle. Since the nature of his themes is on the whole traditional, his technique is bound to be largely traditional. This traditional nature of it is thus not a defect. It has already been noted that the plays that fail do so mainly because of the lack of the requisite degree of cohesion between the respective themes and the technique: The Unattainable, The Constant Wife and East of Suez are such major failures. The amalgamation of theme and technique has been achieved with a fair degree of success in most other plays, while in some like Jack Straw and Penelope in the first phase, The Circle in the second, and The Sacred Flame and For Services Rendered in the last an almost perfect balance of the two has been accomplished.

As for the general technique, these plays exhibit a good deal of pliancy. Farce, realistic reportage, depiction of emotion, symbolism and debate are appropriately utilized according to the exigencies of the theme. The subordinate role of technique is very well illustrated in the structure of Maugham's plays; his use of suspense is a good pointer here. In Jack Straw the secret is so thinly veiled as to be an open book to a normally alert reader, whose attention is
rivetted on what shape the two-tier social conceit in the play, constituting its theme, takes in the face of the double impersonation. In *The Sacred Flame*, too, the suspense is subjected to a similar treatment: it is not played up for its own sake, but is made the instrument of the theme.

Most of Maugham's plays have action-packed plots with striking beginnings and ends. There are some defective scenes in *The Land of Promise*, *Caesar's Wife* and *Sheppey* and an incomplete plot in *The Constant Wife*, resulting in corresponding, though not large, damage to the success of the plays.

Like the plots, the characterization in Maugham's plays is generally conducive to the promotion of the themes. Whereas those in the first two phases yield the same classification, those in the last phase admit of a radically different division, as pointed out in Chapter VII. This is ordained by the changed spirit of the themes in the last phase. Although the number of characters in most plays is limited to the demands of the themes, in some plays insignificant characters with no specific function are introduced, and that is a fault. The two old women in *Mrs. Dot*, Barlow in *Penelope*, Hornby in *The Land of Promise* are examples of such superfluous characters proportionately sapping the vitality of the themes. As Maugham advances in his dramatic career he cuts down the number of characters and provides each with a defined niche in the theme. This economy of characters and their deft alignment with the theme are seen at their best in *Jack Straw*,

The more memorable triumphs of Maugham's dramatic characterization may now be mentioned. The modern woman appears in her farcical garb in Mrs. Dot (Mrs. Dot) and Victoria (Home and Beauty), in her affable but devoted posture in Penelope (Penelope) and Norah (The Land of Promise), and in her thoughtful and fervent stance in Violet (Caesar's Wife) and Stella (The Sacred Flame). The mothers in Maugham's theatre show a vast change from Lady Mereston (Lady Frederick) and Lady Sellenger (Mrs. Dot) of the first phase to Mrs. Tabret (The Sacred Flame) and Mrs. Littlewood and Mrs. Wharton (The Unknown) of the last, through Lady Kitty (The Circle) who combines frivolity with pathos. Whereas the fops (Fouldes in Lady Frederick and Blenkinsop in Mrs. Dot) are limited naturally to the early farces, the snobs (The Parker-Jenningses in Jack Straw, Clay in Our Better, Ernie in Sheppey) are present in all the phases. In most social comedies Maugham indicates virtue by the side of vice. Jack Straw (Jack Straw), Freeman (Smith) and Bleane (Our Better) more or less neutralize the viciousness of the Parker-Jenningses, Rose and Pearl respectively.

Some of Maugham's dramatic personages are specially created to suit the singular themes of particular plays. Thus, The Land of Promise has a whole group of the sons of the soil. The Circle and The Breadwinner contain representa-
tives of two successive generations. In the plays of thought of the last phase Maugham introduces selfless, watchful thinkers like Sheppey, Sydney and John. Thus, the gallery of Maugham's prominent dramatic characters is extraordinarily varied and large.

As for the dialogue in Maugham's plays, it almost always has the basic virtues of simplicity and lucidity, and is seldom dull. Although the speeches are generally short and life-like, they are long enough when occasion demands. In the contemplative plays like The Sacred Flame and The Unknown, in which argument is Maugham's forte, and the dialogue is more elaborate and literary, longish declamations abound, and the air of a symposium prevails. Maugham's skill in epigram and humour in his comedies is a commonplace of criticism; his serious plays show him equally at home in racy discourse and pithy catechism.

How does Maugham's fictional technique compare with his dramatic technique? Owing to the fundamental difference between the two forms the 'first person narration' method cannot obviously be used in drama. Maugham's plays therefore remain free from the blemishes arising from a faulty adoption of that method. Realism, satire and argument are the general methods common to Maugham's fiction and drama, and, on the whole, he excels in their use. The technique of farce, which largely accounts for his enduring comic achievement, is not employed in his fiction. It is intriguing that he reserved
his native talent for farce only for his drama and starved his fiction of it.

So far as structure is concerned, it is a curious fact that Maugham, who, with one or two exceptions, constructs his plays most ably, cannot construct a novel.\textsuperscript{18}

is, by and large, true. His short stories are, however, constructed almost as skilfully as his plays. His play \textit{The Letter} was adapted from his short story of the same title and exhibits the same skill in plot-construction. On the other hand, the play \textit{The Unknown} and the novel \textit{The Hero}, which share the same theme, are both defective in structure. Although the three forms are inherently different and do not leave much room for parallelisms, a few examples of similarities do stand out. Thus, in the story "The Force of Circumstance" and the play \textit{East of Suez} an Anglo-Eurasian marriage is destroyed on similar lines by a former alliance. Secondly, chapters XX to XXIII of the novel \textit{Cakes and Ale} correspond to the 'manners' aspect of the comedies of manners in their vivid depiction of contemporary life. Then again, Maugham's technique of handling a mystery in the story "Footprints in the Jungle" resembles that in the plays \textit{Jack Straw} and \textit{The Sacred Flame}. In the story the death is at once identified as murder: there is no trace of the detective technique. In the plays, too, the

secret is almost an open book. In all the three cases Maugham uniformly makes the mystery subserve the theme and the characters.

Both Maugham's fiction and drama display the same variety of setting which owes itself largely to his extensive travels. The exotic atmospheres in his novels like The Moon and Sixpence, The Painted Veil, The Narrow Corner and Catalina are similar to those in the plays The Land of Promise, Caesar's Wife and East of Suez. As for his short stories, the impact of "Rain", "Red" and "The Outstation", to name a few, has its roots mainly in their picturesque regional environments. Thus, Maugham's talent for employing colourful backgrounds is in evidence in all the three creative media he used.

Among the characters of Maugham's fiction and drama there are numerous comparable portraits. Whereas his early farcical heroines have no matching personages in Maugham's fiction, the snobs, like the Parker-Jenningses (Jack Straw) and Rose (Smith), have some notable parallels, especially Elliott Templeton in The Razor's Edge. The self-centred hedonist, Victoria (Home and Beauty), who, as her mother tells her, should not upset yourself over her husband's death, for it is bad for your skin, 19

19 P. 233.
anticipates Mrs. Tower in the story "Jane", who, in a similar bereavement,
sobbed, dabbing her eyes cautiously in the hope that the black on her lashes would not smudge.  

Maugham's typical society lady, Pearl in Our Betters, reappears in the novel Cakes and Ale in Mrs. Barton Trafford, that cultured little lady who has a passion for making literary lions her domestic pets.  

Daisy, the Eurasian beauty in East of Suez, and Mrs. Lawson in the short story "The Pool", who had an exquisite daintiness which took your breath away, resemble each other.  

Coming to young male characters in Maugham's plays, Ernie in Sheppey (Act II) is cast in more or less the same mould as Simon in the novel Christmas Holiday, who was insensitive to kindness and took everything that was done for him as a matter of course.  

Harry in East of Suez and Walter in the novel The Painted Veil each leaves us wondering that

21 M.K. Neikop cit. p. 79.  
23 p. 18.
with his great qualities, his unselfishness and honour, his intelligence and sensibility, he should be so unlovable. 24

As pointed out earlier, 25 the young victim of a physical drawback is a recurring type in Maugham. Philip in Our Human Bondage, Maurice in The Sacred Flame and Sydney in For Services Rendered are touching examples of this type that derives its poignancy partly from its autobiographical element.

Several hypocrites and insensitive characters in Maugham's later plays, like the Vicar and Colonel Wharton in The Unknown, Mrs. Ardsley in For Services Rendered and Mrs. Miller and Bessie in Sheppey, appear to answer to the description in The Moon and Sixpence of how contradictory is human nature.

The protagonist in the novel concedes,

"I did not know how much pose there is in the sincere, how much baseness in the noble, or how much goodness in the reprobate." 26

On the other hand, Maugham's sensitive characters, John in The Unknown and Larry in the novel The Razor's Edge, owe their introspective mood to

25 Ch. I, p. 30 f.
what experience he had in the war that
so profoundly moved him. 27

Another facet of John's character, his loss of faith in the
midst of the ardent devotion of his parents and the Vicar,
is discovered in Kitty Fane in the novel *The Painted Veil*
about whom, vis-a-vis the nuns, the novelist says,

"It was significant that, though their
way of life so profoundly moved her, the
faith which occasioned it left her
untouched." 28

Finally, Maugham's constant preoccupation with sheer
goodness 29 projects itself in the 'good' characters in his
drama and fiction. Arthur (Caesar's Wife), John's friend
killed in the war (The Unknown) and Sheppey (Sheppey) epitomize this quality in his drama. Sally and Athelny in Of
Human Bondage, Dirk Stroeve in The Moon and Sixpence and Erik
Christessen in The Narrow Corner, and Salvatore in the story
named after him are more or less parallel sketches of goodness
in his fiction.

A few characters, however, belong exclusively to Maugham's
drama and are not found in his fiction. A mature thinker like
Mrs. Tabret who suits her action to her thought (The Sacred

29 Cf. the closing paragraph of The Summing Up. Also
Maugham on Alyosha Karamazov: "He has the rarest quality in
the world,... goodness..." A Writer's Notebook (London,
Flame), an all-round villain like Leonard Ardsley (For Services Rendered) are among such personages that Maugham reserves for his drama even as the themes they serve to unfold are his exclusively dramatic themes. To these may be added the farcical and comic characters from his early plays. Thus, a pattern resembling that in the area of the themes emerges: the farcical and comic characters, and those capable of extraordinary thought and action (Mrs. Tabret) and cruelty (Leonard Ardsley) belong only to the plays, whereas the remaining characters are, by and large, common to the plays and the fiction.

As for Maugham's style, his natural gift for easy phrasing, colloquial usage and effortless repartee made it particularly suitable to drama rather than fiction. As M. K. Naik points out,

So long as they are used in dialogue, they (the above-mentioned aspects) serve admirably to vivify character and situation, but if incorporated into the narrative itself, they will within a few years turn the narrative into a period piece.  

What sometimes degenerates into a blemish in Maugham's fiction almost uniformly enriches his drama. So far as his handling of language is concerned, Maugham's plays would appear to be superior to his fiction.

Maugham's dramatic writing spanned a fairly long period of thirty-five years from *A Man of Honour* (1898-9) to *Sheppey* (1933), and the variety he offered to the theatre-going public is almost Shakespearian ranging from the initial frolic to the final philosophy so far as themes are concerned, and from farce to tragedy so far as form is concerned. The overall impression Maugham's plays make on the reader's mind is of a rich, catholic and chameleonic personality expressing itself through a host of astonishingly diverse plays.