In this chapter it is proposed to examine the technique of Maugham's early plays in relation to their themes discussed in Chapter II. The technique will be discussed under four heads: (1) the general method, (2) structure, (3) characterization and (4) dialogue.

1 The General Method

Farce: The general method adopted in this early phase differs according to Maugham's aim in the different plays and the effect he envisages from them. In The Explorer (1899), Loaves and Fishes (1903), Lady Frederick (1903) and Mrs. Dot (1904) the technique of farce is employed. Farce has been defined as

a play full of ridiculous situations intended to make people laugh.¹

The three sources of the ridiculous in farce are:

(i) possible persons shown in impossible situations,²
(ii) physical sensationalism of a ludicrous kind,³ and
(iii) the unexpected, light, trivial treatment of the serious and vice versa. In the four plays all these types are discovered.

Mrs. Crowley and Canon Spratte in Loaves and Fishes,

Lady Frederick and young Lord Mereston in *Lady Frederick*, and Nellie and Gerald in *Mrs. Dot* are all possible persons but their mutual courtship is an impossible situation and is consequently farcical. As for physical sensationalism of a ludicrous kind, Dick in *The Explorer* makes fun of contemporary lovers who

are much too middle-aged, and their joints are creaky. Besides, it (going down on bended knees to propose) ruins the trousers.4

In *Lady Frederick* the appearance of the lady without makeup before young Lord Mereston is an example of physical sensationalism suited to farce. In *Mrs. Dot* the end constitutes such sensationalism when Mrs. Dot hits Gerald with a cushion.

The use of the trivial in a serious context is made by Maugham in the diverting scene of the dodging of her dressmaker by Lady Frederick. In *Mrs. Dot* Blenkinsop makes a speciality of treating serene topics trivially.

Eating is one of the perennial repositories of farcical humour which is really a special variety of treating an apparently serious occasion lightly. Lord Spratte in *Loaves and Fishes* tells his brother Canon Spratte that he likes to visit the Canon because

"I not only have a Christian disposition, but you have an excellent cook."5

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4 London, 1912, p. 96.
5 London, 1924, p. 57.
This device is more extensively used by Maugham in the middle phase.

The 'Manners' technique: Maugham's concept of artificial comedy broadly coincides with that of the Comedy of Manners of the Restoration period with the modern revival of which he is closely associated. The 'Manners' technique is combined with the farcical in these early plays to good effect. Aspects of contemporary life are smoothly woven into the artifice of these plays. Sometimes they stand out in bold relief as in the reference to the spreading habit of bathing frequently in *Loaves and Fishes.* This contemporary trait is shared by Shaw's *Arms and The Man* (1898) and *Pygmalion* (1912).

The labels Maugham uses for these plays generally correspond with the general methods mainly employed in them. *Loaves and Fishes* is called a 'satire' and it is one on modern clergy, and although the play rather fails, it does so not because of faulty technique but because of the absence of a central theme. Of the two other artificial comedies Maugham calls *Lady Frederick* a comedy and *Mrs. Dot* first a light comedy and then a farce, and the labels do

7 pp. 129, 130.
9 in the bath given by Mrs. Pearce to Eliza in Act II.
10 e.g. p. 97.
12 *The Collected Plays, Vol. I.*
serve to emphasize the difference between them. Whereas the artifice in the former is interrupted by melodrama, the latter is uniformly farcical. In Lady Frederick there are two short exchanges in the second act between Lady Frederick and Paradine Fouldes that are charged with feeling. When the Lady whips out the love-letters written by the late Lord Mereston, Paradine thinks she is about to fling them in his sister's - Lady Mereston's - face and shock her. He pleads sincerely,

"Betsy, Betsy, for heaven's sake, don't! Have mercy."

Lady Frederick's response is correspondingly grim :

"Was mercy shown to me?"

Here a tone alien to the artificial conception of the play is about to set in. The return of the lady herself to the fold of artificial comedy is indicated at the end of the second act where, in her mocking reaction to Paradine,

She smiles triumphantly and gives him a deep, ironical curtsy.

Having detracted from the general mood and tone of the play this short deviation into sincere sentiment ends here.

The difference between Lady Frederick and Mrs. Dot is traceable to some extra-literary factors. The former is largely a product of a deft design. It is the over-neat

13 p. 63.
14 p. 65.
formula at work that at times stifles the naturalness of the play and introduces the sentimental element foreign to its general spirit. In its first performance a critic actually found

something mechanical in the humour and in the characters

in the play. Maugham indeed strays in it slightly from his own precept:

In a story as in a play you must make up your mind what your point is and stick to it like grim death.

In *Mrs. Dot* he does not. He planned to make it 'innocuous' and succeeded admirably. The atmosphere in *Mrs. Dot* is so buoyantly unreal that we do not seriously notice the abrupt death of Lord Hollington which makes Gerald rich overnight. Although it is too much of a coincidence, the whole edifice of the farce is based on poor Gerald's sudden coming into money. The farcical requirement that Gerald's reaction to Lord Hollington's death should not seem wicked is fulfilled by making the deceased a distant relative and showing Gerald's readiness to

\[ \text{give my right hand to bring Hollington back to life again.} \]

15 *Theatrical Companion*, p. 55.
17 *The Collected Plays*, I, x.
18 p. 121.
The whole episode takes place with such rapidity that we are only conscious of the observance of a formality unlike Lady Frederick's lengthy account of her unhappy married life and relations with Lord Mereston. Mrs. Dot is therefore the most successful of the three artificial comedies because of the uninhibited use of the farcical technique in it.

Satire: If farce is thus the main general technique in Lady Frederick and Mrs. Dot, satire is an auxiliary element. Politics is a common butt of satire in the twentieth century. Shaw's Undershelf, for instance, says about his son,

"He knows nothing and he thinks he knows everything. That points clearly to a political career." 19

In Lady Frederick politics is the subject of a long harangue by Paradine Fouldes, who warns young Lord Mereston, an aspirant to the House of Lords, that

the British people like their leaders dull, and that if he has

a sense of humour,

he should

crush it. 20

The other area of satire in Lady Frederick is the

20  pp. 13, 14.
religious temperament, which the Lady describes as very susceptible to the charms of my sex. In another diverting narrative Lady Frederick kills politics and religion with one stone: she makes a diplomatist and a bishop her right and left companions at a party whispering horrid stories in her ears.

In Mrs. Dot the servant-master exchanges are a satire on the penury to which the gentry have been reduced in modern times. The other instance occurs when Blenkinsop's remark

"When it's backed by an adequate income,"

promptly caps Lady Sellenger's

"I love romance",

and the stung Lady's rejoinder calling it a very cynical observation shows that the satire has gone home. Marrying for money is a recurring contemporary folly in Maugham, and it is often a topic of satirical comment.

Blend of satire and farce in "Jack Straw": In Jack Straw Maugham successfully blends the satirical technique with the farcical, an objective he failed to achieve in Loaves and Fishes. The theme of Jack Straw is social snobbery which lends itself readily to satire, and the trick of double impersonation in the play is patently farcical. As J.T.

21 p. 28, Here is the germ of Maugham's famous story "Rain" in which an extensive caricature of a lustful missionary is presented.

22 pp. 132, 133.
Grein points out,

Jack Straw reveals a new feature of Maugham's chameleonic talent. Lady Frederick was pure comedy, of fantasy; Jack Straw is comedy of reality broadened by farcical extravagance.\textsuperscript{23}

On the whole, the techniques of farce and satire are suitably employed in Lady Frederick, Mrs. Dot and Jack Straw except for the intrusion of sentiment in Lady Frederick already indicated.

\textbf{Comic realism in "Penelope":} In Penelope (1908), Smith (1909), and The Land of Promise (1913) Maugham adopts realism as the general method, for it suits the depiction of the real social problems taken as themes in them. In Penelope this realism is light and comic, and as such it suits the theme of adultery which in modern times has lost its old tragic sting.

The genuineness of the betrayed wife's concern is shown through her emotion in a few key places. The first such place is in the first act where Penelope tells her father,

"I want him. I want him."\textsuperscript{24}

The second is the scene of the return of the prodigal in the third act when both Penelope and Dickie pass through a frenzy of emotion. This is profound sentiment and not sentimentality. Penelope has been feigning indifference to

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textbf{23} Theatrical Companion, p. 64.
  \item \textbf{24} p. 23.
\end{itemize}
Dickie, but when he completely breaks down, she is so moved that she can hardly keep up her acting any longer. She struggles with herself, and in a moment, masters the desire to throw herself in his arms.

The play ends up as a happy success of married love; the ecstasy of love returns to Penelope and Dickie in this cleansed form. M.K. Naik's remark that in Penelope, Maugham achieved pure comedy which rises above sentiment and satire is an apt summation of the technical excellence of the play. The method of comic realism suitably tempered with emotion is thus successfully employed in Penelope.

Serious Realism in "Smith": In Smith realism assumes a serious tone as required by such themes as class distinctions and the modern breakdown of the sister-brother bond. The atmosphere is light and pleasant in the Smith-Freeman scenes, charged with viciousness in those dominated by the aristocratic snobs and positively tense in the sister-brother (Rose-Freeman) and maid-mistress (Smith-Rose) confrontations.

Serious Realism in "The Land of Promise": The general method of serious realism punctuated with emotion is employed also in The Land of Promise. Indeed, the play has its basis

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in Maugham's real experience gained in his visit to an aunt living on a farm in Canada. The realism in this play is conditioned by the comic spirit in the man-woman strife in the third act which stops short of actual physical struggle.

**Melodrama**: In this phase the only plays which fail mainly owing to an unsuitable general method are *A Man of Honour* (1893-9) and *The Explorer* (1899). In both the general method adopted is melodrama. Their themes are idealistic and reflective, and discursive realism would have better suited them as the general method. Melodrama weakens the theme since it diverts the reader's attention from the serious implications involved. Two melodramatic elements are prominent in these plays: the frequent whipping up of emotion, and the unnecessary heated outbursts. They obstruct the smooth projection of the themes. If we compare these two plays with *Smith* and *The Land of Promise* we can realize what difference robust realism would have made to the two earlier plays.

On the whole, Maugham's choice of melodrama as the general method in the first two plays was disastrous. Thereafter, in the plays written with the sole object of entertaining his audience he uses farce and satire as the main

27 *Theatrical Companion*, p. 113.
28 As at the end of Act I in *A Man of Honour* and the opening scene of *The Explorer*.
29 As at the end of Act III in *A Man of Honour* and Act I in *The Explorer*. 
methods, whereas in those projecting social problems he employs the method of realism. In both these groups his choice of the method is generally conducive to the development of the theme.

2. Structure

As pointed out earlier, Maugham is a stickler for a well-knit plot, and his practice conforms to his precept in this respect. All the plays in this phase, except The Land of Promise, are laid out in the luxurious aristocratic houses of the Edwardian era. Much of the gay life Maugham portrays in them follows the pattern of the author's life at his Villa Mauresque of which Karl G. Pfeiffer says,

"It was all as grand and makebelieve as one of the host's drawing-room comedies." 31

It has therefore an authentic personal touch about it.

Not only the general plan but a few specific scenes can be linked to events in the dramatist's own life. For example, the trick played by Lady Frederick on unsuspecting Madame Claude (who goes to collect her bill from the lady and returns with an empty purse but a flattered heart) came naturally to Maugham who, as a boy, practised such tricks to the admiration of his playmates who

30 Ch. I, p. 20 above.
thought it was very clever that these fierce-looking traders could be gulled by this innocent-looking boy.32

The confident touch discerned in the course of events in these plays can thus largely be attributed to parallel episodes in Maugham's own life.

As the themes of most of these plays, like the man-woman relationship, snobbery and matrimony, are more or less traditional, it will be pertinent to sift the new and original elements from the traditional ones in their structure. Thus the pattern of impersonation in Jack Straw is commonly ascribed to Moliere and Marivaux, and Cordell goes so far as to remark that the play is obviously copied from the comic opera plot of Moliere and Marivaux.33

Though impersonations are common in the French masters, that by a man of himself is not found in any of their plays, and the charge of 'copying' is thus without basis. The play struck its first critics as equal in quality to, indeed superior in pattern to, widely acclaimed French plays, and not copied from them.34

The element of originality in the structure of Jack Straw is indeed significant. It was easy to fall a prey to

34 Theatrical Companion, p. 65.
giving too much importance to the brilliant idea of double impersonation to the eclipse of the social theme of perennial importance. Maugham introduces the impersonation in such a way that a normally alert reader can quickly see through the guise of Jack Straw. The natural confidence he displays in acting his supposed role, his not turning a hair on the prospect of meeting the Pomeranian ambassador and particularly his knowing the Pomeranian anthem the moment it is played are all pointers to the double nature of his disguise. The reader is anxious to know not what will happen, but how the other characters in general and Jack Straw in particular will react to the developing crisis.

As Sarcey so cogently puts it, our author has 'la main lesté'. He sounds but does not harp on his strings.

The restraint with which the mystery is handled is greatly instrumental in putting across the social context of the play effectively. Having laid the general plan, Maugham allows the scenes to take their natural course in conformity with his own precept outlined earlier (Ch. I, p. 19 above). Curious as it may seem, the occasional experience of fact being stranger than fiction is recorded by J.T. Grein.

35 p. 212.
36 Theatrical Companion, p. 65.
37 Ibid.
Freed from the obligation of extraneous probability, which in a farcical comedy is in any case out of place, the plot of Jack Straw scrupulously follows the course of an inner probability, and establishes an unalienable blend with its theme.

A comparison of Penelope with J.B. Priestley's Ever Since Paradise (1947) is also instructive in the context of the fusion of the new and old in the structure of these early plays. The themes of the two plays are broadly similar but the plots are dissimilar. In Ever Since Paradise the husband and wife are tired of each other, find another pair to get close to, are bored with them and finally come back to each other. Maugham's play has none of these elaborate complications. He is original enough not to use a worn-out device like the stratagem of providing a rival in love proposed, for instance, by Mrs. Sullen in Farquhar's The Beaux' Stratagem. Maugham strikes a mean between tradition and invention in the area of plot-construction. He does introduce some new interesting devices to further his themes, but they are unassuming and not drastic.

These examples demonstrate the smooth combination of tradition and innovation in Maugham's art of plot-construction in the early plays.

As for the important features of the structure of the individual plays of this phase, the atmosphere of gaiety in the early farces is preserved by introducing hilarious scenes.
The opening scenes, the scenes in which Canon Spratte (Loaves and Fishes), Paradine Fouldes (Lady Frederick) and Blenkinsop (Mrs. Dot) participate and several others are pure frolic and are included in the plays as comic appendages. They cannot be called irrelevant because in the airy, farcical atmosphere of the plays the idea of formal relevance is itself not strictly relevant, and all the scenes do show the slender relevance expected of them.

In Jack Straw the plot has a special contribution to make to the development of the theme. The twin personality of Jack Straw - the waiter and the prince - is the main instrument of the happy projection of the theme of the play. The scum shakes the dregs with the hand and stirs the whole social structure.

There is a remarkable economy in Mrs. Parker-Jennings's fussing in the second act over the royalty in her guest-house. It is suggested in a few flashes of the preparations for the party she is giving in his honour; it does not assume, for instance, the detailed form a similar occasion does in John Osborne's The Blood of the Bambergs where such not-so-ingenious details as the creation of a new ministry of culture to take charge of royal occasions are mentioned.

The plot of Penelope is punctuated with episodes which appropriately sustain its theme. There is perhaps one exception: the scene in which Barlow asks Dickie to examine him and later confesses his silly infatuation for Mrs.
Fergusson. This episode is unrelated to the theme and dull.

The beginning of the play is, however, one of the resounding triumphs of Maugham's inventive talent. Penelope's discovery of Dickie's adulterous inclination leaves her aghast; but, a cultured modern wife, she suppresses her shock, and summons her parents, uncle and solicitor for urgent consultation. The strange, funny texts of her telegrams to them, suited to their respective hobbies and occupations, are a subtle safety valve through which her mental concussion finds a temporary way out. Besides, the telegrams, anticipating those sent to Julia and Alex in T.S. Eliot's *The Cocktail Party*[^38], are an effective device to inject mystery in the play. The little secret, which gives the comedy a most engaging opening scene, is divulged by Penelope herself who has been sitting in the adjoining room.

Dickie's meandering back to his wife's affectionate arms is presaged by a verbal duel like the one Edward and Lavinia pass through in *The Cocktail Party*.[^39] The same type of scene is also found in A.A. Milne's *The Dover Road*. Dickie is oppressed by a nostalgic longing for the Penelope of old sitting on the arm of his chair, and for her close supervision of his trivial conveniences - the very aspects that goaded him out of the marital compass.

[^38]: London, 1950, p. 78.
The hand-in-glove fitness of the plot and the theme is achieved in Smith as in the earlier plays. The incident of the callous disregard shown by the idle, self-centred rich to the death of Mrs. Otto's child marks the climax of the conflict between the two worlds which has been gradually simmering since their first confrontation when Rose ridicules Freeman's expectation of finding her at the station to receive him - a brother - after eight years' separation. Barring the sincere grief expressed by Freeman, not a word of sympathy is spent on the unfortunate child. The treatment of its death is, on the other hand, restrained, unlike, for instance, that in A Streetcar Named Desire (1947) where Blanche's tongue bounces voluble describing the horrid manifestations of death. The difference in the two techniques is that between restrained suggestion and passionate expression. The child's death is but one, though important, link in the plot, and Maugham's restrained handling of it is commendable.

Another sensitive area in Smith is Smith's preferring Freeman to Fletcher. She is glued to the view that she wants a man who's got a strong pair of arms, and that none has a stronger pair than Fletcher's. A

40 pp. 171,172.
42 p. 186.
spontaneous little device is here introduced to give Freeman a common plank of competition with Fletcher. A cork has stuck in a bottle, and Fletcher is unable to draw it. Smith is firm in her belief that if he can't draw it, nobody can. Freeman applies his working fingers and out flies the cork! Physical strength now turns the scale in his favour which his urbanity and wit have won half the way. The stress on this natural element in the love instincts of the female manual worker is a remarkable feature of Maugham's treatment of the theme. The change in Mary Smith's inclination from Fletcher to Freeman provides the curtain a natural drop at the end of the third act.

Just as the demonstration of Freeman's physical strength dislodges Fletcher from Smith's affections, Freeman's proposing to Smith drives the last wedge between Rose and him. To these two may be added Smith's entry at the very moment Freeman is discussing his expectations from his would-be wife. These are all examples of Maugham's systematic management of the plot. Smith deserves particularly to be noted for the well-laid plan of scenes and movements of characters in tune with emotional upheavals in the play.

The Land of Promise (1913) marks a departure from the earlier plays in the matter of plot construction. It presents radically different atmospheres in the first and the remaining
acts. This is done more systematically than in The Explorer (1899) in which the same technique is attempted. The first act is placed in urban London and the remaining three in distant, wild Manitoba. St. John Ervine's *Friends and Relations* offers a close parallel to this arrangement. In *Smith* only the London end is shown and the other suggested; in *The Land of Promise* both the ends are depicted.

Considered in isolation, however, the first act exposes itself to the criticism of the *New York Times*, *December* 26, 1913, that it does little more than establish a character.44 Considered in relation to what follows the first act is not without interest, the old lady's death projecting the overt selfishness of her family into a variegated pattern. But as part of the play it is a loose end: only two persons from this act, Norah and Hornby, reappear later, the latter without a significant dramatic function. The first act is in fact designed as a prologue, but in actual writing it has become too long for one. The aesthetic demand could have better been met by a much shorter act.

So far as the plot is concerned, the only link the first act keeps with the rest of the play is Norah's conventional deliverance in the fourth act by the unexpected cheque for £2500 by James Wickham, a relic from the first act.

44 *Theatrical Companion*, p. 111.
This contrivance is not only stereotyped and commonplace, but also not in the least necessitated. Norah has found her land of promise and has no use for such an emaciated escape. The chance incident has a mediaeval flavour and does the dramatist little credit. It robs the fourth act of a good deal of its profound drama just as Eggerson's offer of a job to Colby in T.S.Eliot's The Confidential Clerk (1953) does. Till that humdrum dialogue the touching pathos in Colby's situation is smoothly developed. But it is suddenly and arbitrarily transformed into a dull convenience. The harm done to drama in The Land of Promise is not of that magnitude, because the contrivance in that play is only an additional aspect and not a vital link in the plot; it does not change Norah's life as the one in The Confidential Clerk does Colby's.

Barring these two defects in The Land of Promise and one in Penelope, the structure of these early plays is on the whole so designed as to project their themes adequately.

3. Characterization

The object of this section is to assess the extent to which the characters in these early plays fulfil their roles in the presentation of their themes. In a few cases Maugham employs the elementary device of naming the characters in conformity with their roles. Penelope thus bears the ancient

Greek name and substantially justifies it. She is indeed a revised edition, for, unlike the epical Penelope who showed a lack of decision and did not refuse the hated bridal with one of the suitors, Maugham's Penelope carries out her plans with admirable precision and provides no niche to a suitor. The Golightlys in Penelope are also named after their habit of taking everything merrily in their stride. Jack Straw too appears to be a thoughtfully selected name, for there was in the fourteenth century a labour leader of that name in England, and Maugham's Jack Straw is essentially a socialist.

This rather elementary device of calling persons after their characteristics is employed by many comic dramatists. Congreve's Waitwell, Foible and Pelulant, Shaw's Candida and Doolittle are well-known examples. Maugham happily does not overdo this simple trick which remains a minor amusing aspect of his scheme of characterization.

Farcical Characters: In the farcical comedies Maugham introduces appropriately farcical characters. The main test of the success of a farce is whether the characters properly belong to it. Considered apart from the farcical context they are repulsive and do not possess an inherent

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dignity. In their talk and actions purposiveness is reduced to the minimum and is arbitrary. For instance, we cannot conceive of a Mrs. Dot being sorry for failing to click with Gerald Halstane; she could very well be paired with any other nondescript man. Persons in a farce betray an attitude of humorous resignation than which Maugham can imagine no more comfortable frame of mind for the conduct of life. The magic wand of the writer must have the power to transform the characters in a farce into pleasing, one-dimensional persons. To that end he should be able to make a shrewd, scrupulous selection so as to endow them with a uniform levity. Even a single non-farcical remark may arouse the reader's dormant sense of propriety and shatter the harmony of farce. The characters in the three plays, except to the extent indicated in Section 1 above in Lady Frederick, are cast in a patently ludicrous pattern. Maugham endows Lady Frederick with many good qualities. Her goodness has indeed been noted by Laurence Brander who remarks,

"She has all the good qualities of a bad woman." But the conception of the play does not demand this goodness. The emphasis on Lady Frederick's innate goodness, the streak of idealism in her, and the Peter Berolles affair

48 A Writer's Notebook, p. 64.
50 p. 89.
51 pp. 16-19, 55, 62-63.
52 pp. 59-60.
are all serious, emotional, vital and long enough to rebel against the farcical tone of the character. On the contrary, Mrs. Dot is completely in tune with the artifice of the play. Never once does she deviate from the frolicsome path. Lady Frederick is a partly successful effort to create a gay, farcical heroine; Mrs. Dot is a triumph.

The Modern Woman: The modern woman leads the galaxy of the prominent types in these early plays. As Maugham remarks in the preface to the first volume of his Collected Plays,

How every woman is a New Woman.53

Canon Spratte tells his daughter who wishes to live

"in my own way",

"You're hopelessly behind the times, my poor girl. The new woman is as extinct as the dodo."54

In Mrs. Fitzgerald (Loaves and Fishes), Lady Frederick and Mrs. Dot, Maugham paints authentic portraits of the modern woman with none of the mediaeval inhibitions. They are women of fashion leading apparently unrestrained lives. But this new life does not always happen to be a bed of roses, if Paradine Fouldes is any guide.55 Independence ushers in a painful dependence on money. Financial problems often stare the modern free woman in the face. And then there

53 p. xix.
54 Loaves and Fishes, p. 47.
55 Lady Frederick, p. 9.
are orthodox opponents advocating a tough line toward the fair sex like Admiral Carlisle who maintains,

"Women's hearts are like old china, none the worse for a break or two."  

This process is not in evidence in the artificial comedies; it is reserved for *The Land of Promise* where it belongs.

In *Jack Straw* Maugham draws an engaging little sketch of a modern romantic girl in Ethel. A girl rolling in wealth, she despises dull Lord Serlo and secretly wishes to marry a brave pauper. Later she exhibits all the symptoms of a love-torn girl. When Jack Straw is apparently within an ace of the handcuffs she pleads with him,

"Oh, please go while you have a chance. I couldn't bear to see you arrested."

Penelope is a devoted modern housewife caught in a matrimonial whirlpool. In her constant attention to Dickie's smallest whim Penelope is like Stella in Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*. What Maugham suggests Williams elaborates. Penelope is a symbol of the eternal validity of the hoary virtue of tenacious fidelity. She is one of Maugham's sunny female successes.

56 *Lady Frederick*, p. 15.
57 p. 230.
58 p. 265.
59 *Penguin Plays*, p. 125. Stella: When he's away for a week I nearly go wild! ... And when he comes back I cry on his lap like a baby.
In *Smith* there are three specimens of modern womanhood from three different areas. Rose and Emily form part of the group of aristocratic idlers who as a separate class will be considered later. In *Smith* Maugham paints a delectable portrait of the modern British working woman entirely in unison with the theme of the play. She hates indigence; she tells Fletcher,

"I don't know as I want to live all my life in a basement."

Born in straitened circumstances she has no desire to marry into them. She is a menial but in form; she has a copious streak of the typical modern woman. In modern life, she coolly asserts,

Steadiness is not everything in a man.

Retaining the basic menial trait of the ambition of a prosperous married life Smith also displays a nascent feminine urge in looking after Freeman's dinner and darning his socks. She exudes conventional charm when she chaffs Freeman for not remembering the taste of the meal served by her. Maugham's discerning insight into the female mind is in evidence here. To a woman indifference shown by a man is a trifle more annoying than even adverse criticism; for criticism presupposes close attention but indifference is a great blow to female vanity.

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60 p. 141.
61 p. 141.
62 p. 182.
Norah in *The Land of Promise* is a mixture of two complexes: the urban 'white-collar' complex and the 'ladies first' complex. The first is like Blanche's similar prejudice in *A Streetcar Named Desire*: she calls Stanley 'common', not 'just ordinary', but 'bestial'. Norah's urban complex is slowly rubbed off by her association with her rural sister-in-law, Gertie, in the latter's home in Manitoba. Her 'ladies first' complex is depicted in her struggle with Taylor, in which it gradually disappears.

The other aspects of Norah's personality are also brought out by Maugham with a scrupulous eye for essentials. In the first act her haughty spirit, her unrelenting rejection of favours by financial superiors, her ability to face frustration and her dormant humanity are systematically elaborated. It is mainly through constant association that the patient rural blood of Manitoba starts flowing in Norah's febrile urban veins. The failure of such an attempt is also not uncommon: in St. John Hankin's *The Cassilis Engagement* (1907) Ethel cannot be assimilated in the rural Cassilis household. Norah's is the opposite case. She herself outlines the alchemy of association. There is a marvellous psychological consistency in the repeated impact of constant contact

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63 p. 163.
64 p. 259 ff.
65 p. 219 ff.
67 p. 295.
on Norah's mind. The emancipation of Norah's soul synchronizes at the end of the play with the emergence in the British community of an awareness of the deep implication of their self-appointed task of 'opening up the country'; the development of her personality thus runs parallel to the progress of the theme.

The Edwardian Young Briton: The Edwardian young man appears in these plays in various shades. The early idealistic play, The Explorer, contains the typical, strong, humourless British explorer in Alec Mackenzie.

When Alec Mackenzie makes up his mind to do a thing, he appears to do it. His naive explanation of his stubbornness reveals his unwavering will. He tells Lucy,

"The only way to be strong is never to surrender to one's weakness."

His idolization as an ancient Roman by his followers is the fitting climax to this straightforward creation of Maugham's aesthetic adolescence. Alec is a superman, but a wooden, lifeless one, who conquers without fighting. An idealistic character of such kind and proportions is against Maugham's grain in this early phase even as the idealistic theme is. Alec fails as a character and takes the play with him.

68 p. 6.
69 p. 91.
70 p. 128.
The young men in the farcical plays are nondescript characters with no other purpose than mouthing witty sallies.

It is in Jack Straw that the modern versatile youth comes into his own. If Lady Frederick and Mrs. Dot are heroine's plays, Jack Straw is a hero's play. He is instrumental in crushing the snobbery of the moneyed class on the one hand and of the traditional title-holders on the other. And he has to perform the operation keeping the comedy intact. Maugham endows him with appropriate pluck, fecundity and bland, roguish humour. Lord Serlo is a minor character in the play, but is remarkable in being what the hero is not. He is Jack's rival in love but trails far behind. He is a typical genial nonentity, an earlier sketch of whom Maugham has drawn in Lord Wroxham in Loaves and Fishes, a young man with no particular distinction of appearance.\footnote{71}

Serlo's function is to add lustre to Jack Straw by contrast.

In Smith, there are two representatives of the modern youth. The first, Otto, the Jew, would not have been important but for J.T. Grein's charge against the play of repeated reference to Jews in terms of ungraciousness.\footnote{72}

Now, there are four\footnote{73} references to Otto's being a Jew, all

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
    \item \footnote{71}{p. 83.}
    \item \footnote{72}{Theatrical Companion, p. 93.}
    \item \footnote{73}{Smith, pp. 120, 126, 169, 200.}
\end{itemize}
incidental, and none in terms of 'ungraciousness'. In fact, Freeman pays Otto the compliment of saying,

"I knew him much less than I do now."

Indeed, Otto and Freeman are the two men in the play having rugged exteriors encasing humane hearts. They are depicted in a favourable light, the first in absentia and the second as large as life. Otto is a hard-working man of regular habits (p. 127), a dutiful husband (pp. 122, 199), a conscientious and loving father (p. 199), and has, above all, the instinctive good sense to ask his wife to eschew Rose's society. Grein's remark is not only wide off the mark but exactly contrary to what the text of the play suggests. The superficial nature of class-barriers is the main theme of the play and Otto's function is to show the hollowness of the British prejudices against the Jews.

Freeman is the main male vehicle of the theme in Smith. Having joined the workers' camp he plays the role of a link between the two classes. He anticipates Stanley in A Streetcar Named Desire in brushing aside outward glamour and grasping the essence, but unlike him he belongs to comedy, is persuasive and polished. He is the emergent working gentleman having the strength of body as well as of conviction. He is the spokesman of the new generation of wholesome youth ready to work hard and promote the genuine

74 p. 137. Stanley: "Some men are took in by the Hollywood glamour stuff and some men are not."
culture of humanism. It is through him that the class-
pattern is rearranged: the humanists - Smith and Freeman- 
on one side and the snobs on the other.

Taylor in The Land of Promise is the representative of the 
modern rural youth. His primitive faith in the husband's 
protective superiority matches well with wild Manitoba. 
Along with Norah he discovers the land of both love and 
prosperity and projects the theme adequately.

The Elders: Among the elders in these plays only the 
Golightlys in Penelope are organically related to the theme 
of the play. Far removed from Admiral Carlisle, a puppet 
farcical father (Lady Frederick.), and Lady Sellenger, a 
hankerer after a rich son-in-law (Mrs. Dot), they are 
sincerely concerned with their offspring's welfare. Besides, 
they occupy a remarkable position in their own right. They 
represent the elderly married couple who have successfully 
braved the storms of twentieth-century life, providing a 
stimulating contrast to their daughter and her husband. 
The tempestuous gale of modern social and intellectual demands 
is transformed by them into a favourable breeze by adjusting 
their sails: the wife has her religious and philanthropic 
calls to pay, and the husband is busy looking after his 
mathematical symbols. They allow each other enough room 
for their personal interests and also keep themselves with 
loving detachment posted with their reciprocal hobbies. 
They are pleasantly different from such frigid elderly
couples as Sir Claude Mulhammer and Lady Elizabeth in Eliot’s *The Confidential Clerk* in which the wife comes to know of the husband’s passion for pottery only after a lifetime of married life.

The Golightlys also symbolize one end of a balanced parent-child relationship in the modern environment. Filial contacts passed through rough weather in the nineteenth century as works like Samuel Butler’s *The Way of All Flesh* show. The modern child is no longer afraid of the parent. The extreme stage in this direction is depicted in Maugham’s *The Breadwinner* (1930). In *Penelope* a happy balance is struck. The parent-child relationship here displays on the one hand the absence of old inhibitions and obstacles to free communication and understanding, and, on the other, the presence of the respect due to age and experience and a hope of wise counsel ably fulfilled. The Golightlys are thus a vital component of the play.

**The Snobs**: The snobs constitute another important group of characters in these plays. Those in *Lady Frederick-Montgomerie*, Carlisle and Lady Mereston – and in *Mrs. Dot* – Lady Sellenger – are summarily sketched as warranted by the farcical pattern of the plays in which social comment is not the main purpose. In *Jack Straw* there is an extensive caricature of the snobbish Mrs. Parker-Jennings who enlivens the theme by her animated hypocrisy. Her husband timidly follows her. In the next generation the son is enthusiastic
on the mother's side, but the daughter, Ethel, looks upon her actions with quiet disdain. In the last act Mrs. Parker-Jennings confesses,

"I have been very sorry for it (snubbing the Vicar's wife) since, and I've been punished for it. They knew I was an old snob - like you, Florrie - they thought they'd pay me out." 

That 'like you, Florrie' indicates an interesting psychological trait - the slipping person's impatient clutching at a fellow-traveller's hand and seeking a companion in the fall. The portraits of Mrs. Parker-Jennings, Mrs. Withers (Florrie) and Lady Wanley - put the theme of snobbery in the play in clear relief.

The Pleasure-seekers: The last prominent group of characters in these plays is that of the pleasure-seekers. In Lady Frederick and Mrs. Dot these characters are a medium of the frolic of the plays. They are nonchalant and amoral; consequently their pursuit of pleasure is nonpurposive and harmless. Paradine Fouldes in Lady Frederick is a jolly elderly rogue who ends up by marrying Lady Frederick. Blenkinsop in Mrs. Dot is a jaunty humbug - a twin of his namesake (invented by Maugham during his long journey from Salween), whose book becomes famous without anybody's having read it. To these tongue-wielders goes a good deal of

75 P. 267.
credit for the entertainment these plays offer.

The pleasure-seekers in Smith (Rose, Emily, Algy) stand
on an entirely different footing. Although they appear to
derive enjoyment during the first three acts, in the fourth
their bored minds are revealed. All the time they are en-
gaged in a feverish unsuccessful race to fill their time
with amusement, only to find that a sad vacuum is eating
into their vitals, and that they are themselves the cause
of each other's mental ruin. Maugham calls them 'prudish,
formal and punctilious', and remarks,

"Few can regret that the course of events had
swept them out of the way."\(^\text{77}\)

The disappearance of this decadent set, one after another,
in the last act of Smith is symptomatic of their being washed
away by the tide of humanism in the form of Smith and Freeman.

To sum up, the characters in the successful farcical
comedies are flat and static. Their attitudes at the begin-
ning and the end of the play are the same. There is no inter-
action of incident and character. This is as it should be,
for their sole function in these comedies is to provide
vivacity and merriment, which they admirably perform without
being round and dynamic.

The characters in the successful social comedies -
Penelope, Smith and The Land of Promise - are round and

dynamic. Penelope and Dickie, Smith, Freeman and Rose, Norah and Taylor all pass through trying circumstances which shape their personalities and are in turn moulded by them. The personalities of these characters at the end of the respective plays show a world of change that has taken place in them because of their experiences during the three or four acts of the plays.

4. Dialogue

In this section the part played by dialogue in Maugham's dramatic technique of the early plays will be examined. The failures like The Explorer, The Tenth Man and Grace (Landed Gentry) are generally mediocre in style and confused in theme. Where Maugham fails in thematic conception he also fails to put energy in the dialogue. As J.T. Grein says, The Explorer is the least coruscating. A Man of Honour, by no means an unqualified success, can, however, boast of what J.T. Grein calls fine and nervous English.

Witty Dialogue: In his successful artificial comedies Maugham excels in witty dialogue. Farcical incidents and witty and humorous style are the main appeal of an artificial comedy. Early in his career Maugham became aware of his gift for repartee and put it to good use. As he says,

It is easy to write an epigram but it is easier not to write one.

78 Theatrical Companion, p. 46.
79 Ibid., p. 24.
80 The Collected Plays, I. x.
The charm of an epigram often consists in its apparent absurdity. Lady Mereston's remark about Lady Frederick,

"It's one of the injustices of fate that clothes only hang on a woman really well when she's lost every shred of reputation,"

and Paradine Fouldes's surmise about the same woman,

"I surmised she was on the verge of bankruptcy when I heard she'd bought a new brougham", are good examples of this paradoxical type of epigram.

Very often funny exchanges are loosely studded in the context and are humour, pure and simple. When Lady Fitzgerald in Loaves and Fishes tells Canon Spratte,

"You're the most desperate humbug I've ever known",

he replies,

"You put me at my ease at once", thus projecting his puckishness. To the same lady's question if he is going away from his brother, Lord Spratte replies,

"I prefer my family in homeopathic doses." Examples from Lady Frederick, Mrs. Dot and Jack Straw can be given in scores. Such jokes provide the diversion that is the main purpose of these plays.

The Mock-heroic Element: The mock-heroic element also

81 p. 9.
82 p. 13.
83 p. 66.
accounts for a lot of fun in these farcical comedies. The combination of a sublime context with a trivial remark or vice versa unfailingly evokes a smile. In the scene of Lady Frederick's drowning her dressmaker in a sea of courtesy the lady refers to her as an artist and declares,

"An artist is fit to meet a king."  

This is not only a grandiose statement against a trivial background but also a parody of the seriousness with which the French take art (the dressmaker is French). The lofty remark endows the situation with the charm of burlesque like the mention of Aeneas's shield in Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*.

In *The Land of Promise* the comic poise is similarly maintained by Taylor's unexpected light rejoinders to Norah's fuming outbursts. The breaking of crockery is followed by Taylor's remark in a jocular vein,

"That's a pity. We're terribly short of crockery."

Her preference for being killed to being ordered about prompts this response from him,

"What's the good of that? Women are scarce in Manitoba."

*Humour in character and incident*: From *Penelope* (1903) onwards Maugham's linguistic technique undergoes a fitting change. The topical joke, the epigram, the banter yield

84 p. 46.

85 p. 279.
place to humour born of character and incident. When Barlow in *Penelope* remarks,

"It's a great mistake to think that gout is a mark of good family. The porter of my club is a martyr to it",

Dickie quips,

"Perhaps he's the illegitimate son of an earl."  

In Dickie's cross-examination about the name of his female patient who is the cause of his late return home, there is similar fun. These rollicking exchanges are tied up with character and incident. Barlow's mission in life is tracing every name to its family roots; Dickie's stammering and self-conscious irritability are a symptom of his extra-marital inclinations which constitute the origin of the theme of the play.

The conversation of the Golightlys (*Penelope*) is uniformly invigorating. The undertone of juicy fondness in it presents a sharp contrast to the nonchalance in the artificial comedies. As Brander says, Maugham had a superlative gift not only for badinage, but for pure comic romance; the latter is the hallmark of *Penelope* even as the former is of the farcical plays.

*Style in* *Smith* and *The Land of Promise*; In *Smith* language is put to special use as a gauge to differentiate between

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86 p. 28.

the two classes confronting each other. For instance, when Freeman says about Smith,

"She's a handsome woman,"

Rose remarks,

"A parlourmaid isn't a handsome woman, Tom; she has a good appearance." 88

In The Land of Promise, too, the dialogue reinforces the theme. For instance, in Norah's conflict with Taylor the comic direction of the theme is reassured through Taylor's jibes like

"Gee, what sharp teeth you've got." 89

The sense of fulfilment in finding 'the land of promise' is also properly conveyed in the energetic dialogue in the fourth act. "There's a beauty and a romance in it which fill the soul with longing." 90

The linguistic technique thus has a large share in the projection of the themes in the six successful plays. In the remaining five plays Maugham is not able to attain the technical level which he does in the preserved plays. In the latter the technical skill is complementary to the development of the themes with a few exceptions, notably the sentimental touches in Lady Frederick, Barlow's amorous

88 p. 128.
89 p. 279.
90 p. 308.
inclination to Mrs. Fergusson in Penelope, and the lengthiness of the first act and the offer of a sumptuous legacy to Norah in the last act of The Land of Promise.

The Early Phase: General Conclusion: Having examined the major themes and the salient features of technique in the early phase of Maugham's dramatic writing it will be appropriate here to assess his achievement in this phase as a whole. Although in this phase Maugham's mood is on the whole sunny, he clearly reveals two distinct tendencies, the farcical and the realistic. In the early plays, Lady Frederick, Mrs. Dot and Jack Straw, the farcical vein is predominant. Yet, already in Jack Straw there is a realistic strain in the depiction of social snobbery; Jack Straw and Penelope effectively combine light manner with serious matter and mark the transition from light comedy to serious comedy, of which Smith and The Land of Promise are good examples.

The five unpreserved plays are all failures, some owing to their themes and others to technique. Indeed, where the choice of theme is wrong, the technique also is uninspired. The five plays show the lowest level of Maugham's dramatic writing in this phase.

Maugham did write some novels and a few short stories in this phase, but it is remarkable that none of his novels, except perhaps Liza of Lambeth, and stories, except possibly one or two, are among his major writings. In the field of drama, however, he has already contributed one of his farcical
masterpieces, *Mrs. Dot*, and four notable social comedies. The early phase is thus mainly a dramatic phase, whereas in the other two phases, his drama prospers side by side with his fiction. The six successful plays of this phase show an astonishing mastery of dramatic technique which later undergoes changes according to the different themes, but has hardly any scope for improvement.

In this phase Maugham is seen to be an extrovert, but his dramatic outlook concerns itself predominantly with individuals like Penelope, Smith and Norah, although it does recognize the social edge of their problems. In the middle phase, as will be shown presently, his vision broadens, and, continuing to be an extrovert, he treats social problems mainly in their social contexts, making individuals tools in that treatment. Thus, although only two years separate *Our Betters* (1915) from *The Land of Promise* (1913), it is informed by a different spirit. The middle phase is therefore not merely a chronological convention, but marks a distinct stage in Maugham's evolution as a dramatist. The next two chapters will deal with the themes and technique respectively of the plays of that phase.