
The Embodiment of Social Problems in the Novels by S. Maugham

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Abstract

The article analyzes the impact of the social environment on human life, and the struggle of man to find his place in society in the novels of the English writer W.S. Maugham, who lived on the threshold of two centuries and skillfully reflected the characteristics of both realism and romanticism in his work. The inner world of the heroes, the principles of their existence in society, the impact of the environment on human life, regardless of age, as well as serious problems such as human collisions with the environment in the prose examples of the writer who deeply understands the essence of the problems of man and society, pays attention to the socio-philosophical harmony of life and the world are the object of research. The struggle for life and rebellion of the heroes against the accepted laws of society were emphasized based on the author's novels such as "The Moon and Sixpence", "Theater", "Cakes and Ale", and "Liza of Lambeth". At the same time, the article identifies the forms of manifestation of human and social problems against the background of social features and reveals the mechanism of conflict. The attitude of various writers and critics to Maugham's work was also touched upon.

Keywords: *human, society, social, novel, character, life*

1. Introduction

The deep crisis of capitalism in the twentieth century is remembered not only by numerous wars, political crises, and revolutions but also by the profound impact on the psychological state of individuals. In modern times, each individual has the opportunity to obtain sufficient information about these events that took place in the recent past, but only from the perspective of the works of writers who witnessed that period directly can we understand how the politicized and ever-changing social environment affected the psychological state of man. This time, Western writers were able to use the opportunities of the influence of literary and artistic thought to turn the motives of humanity into the leitmotif of their themes. World wars, cataclysms, and coups, which have replaced each other for a century, could not bypass human art and literature. Literary styles and trends that are improving and updating against the



background of these processes also renewed the new way of thinking of mankind. It is no coincidence that new literary and artistic features were observed in the works of writers of this period. Although the works of the artists of this period did not differ much in the variety of themes, they differed enough in terms of conveying his idea to the reader and emphasizing the points related to it and highlighting the moments. Their work was characterized by a sense of originality, emotion, and character, often based on notes based on analytical thinking.

One of the main topics in the works written during this period is the artistic reflection of social changes, new worldviews, and class contradictions in society. This aspect is reflected in the works of prominent representatives of realist literature, such as H. Wells, B. Shaw, J. Galsworthy, C. Conrad, G. Green, and S. Maugham. In the novels of these writers, the contradictions of society and the public mood of the masses are vividly described. In the first half of the century, writers believed that in addition to man's relationship with nature and society, social status also influenced man's character and the events that took place around him. These writers tried to express the internal psychological process with a "flow of consciousness."

Human and social issues and the relationship between personality and the environment have been widely discussed in every age and every field. These themes, of course, have a wide place in Maugham's work, taking into account the different requirements of the new era. The writer tried to convey to the reader the influence of the social environment on human life and the developmental features of human character as a result of this influence. One of the social problems in society is the issue of discrimination faced by individuals. This concept is multifaceted and combines different qualities. The primary basis for this discrimination is the nature of the roles of women and men in society. At first glance, this was determined only by the fact that biological qualities are an inevitable factor, but later, the concept of male dominance over women emerged in society, combining many factors. From the Victoria period to the middle of the twentieth century, the roles of women and men in British society were clearly defined. A gender-based division of labor was established in society to define the roles and responsibilities of individuals. Although a woman was considered to be morally superior, she was considered to be physically weak and had no role in society. Men, on the other hand, were property owners, influential in the public sphere, and active in business and politics.

One of the main events of this period was the establishment of a Marxist-leaning literary group consisting of writers, poets, and critics. The leader of this group was the literary critic, historian, and journalist Ralph Fox. He was born in a bourgeois family and wrote extensively on the crisis of the bourgeoisie in his articles, especially in his novel "*The Novel and The People*", published in 1937. Influenced by the October Socialist Revolution and the founding of the Soviet Union, Ralph considered the analysis of literary and artistic events from a Marxist point of view to be the only correct methodological principle in revealing the truth. He developed his views on Marxism. He dedicated his life to the spread of Marxism and was assassinated in 1937. Ralph Fox noted that the purpose of these articles is to talk about the future of the English novel and the solution to problems that will arise in this regard (Hecker, Volosova and Doroshevich,1975).R.Fox's views on the novel provide a basis for analyzing the work of writers who created the first half of the twentieth century, including S. Maugham.



2. Methods

The methodological direction of the article is based on various theoretical concepts and school conclusions on the analysis of the mechanism of the problem, explanation of the role and place of social problems in the analysis of the selected works of Somerset Maugham - "Cakes and Ale", "The Razor's Edge", "Moon and Sixpence" (1919), "Theater", 1937. In this regard, the historical-comparative method was used to analyze the author's works in the context of world artistic thought and prose of the twentieth century, to reveal important aspects of the embodiment of social problems. The subject of social problems itself dictates the application of the historical method: Somerset Maugham's work aims to reveal the features of the evolution of English literary prose. Theoretical views and opinions of researchers such as S. Swain, T. Morgan, D. Gooding, U. Smith, I.M Fulfer, and A. Marchetti were used to reveal the theoretical parts of the problem. At the same time, the article uses contextual, descriptive-analytical, as well as stylistic analysis, and linguistic methods. Since the life and work of Maugham date back to the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, the influence of general events in the history of England and the world in general on this period has been studied through the cultural-historical method.

3. Findings and discussion.

3.1 Attitude to S. Maugham's novels in English literary criticism.

The history of postmodernism, formed in the second half of the twentieth century, has managed to develop a new concept in the history of humanitarian thought, depending on social and national contexts. From this point of view, social problems occupy an important place in the works of the English writer S. Maugham, who embodied different types of art in literature and deeply revealed the dialectic of the specifics of different types of art and the common features that unite them.

William Somerset Maugham's work, which is part of the general flow of 20th century British literature, is characterized by a growing interest in national materials, East and West, past and present. In Somerset Maugham, Biography, Morgan called him a "historical exhibit" and noted that he was a creative figure who began writing in the nineteenth century and continues to write in the second half of the twentieth century because literary activity was the basis of his life: "It was the one activity in which he had complete and lasting faith" (Curtis & Whitehead, 2013).

In S. Maugham's novels, the dramatic element actively interacts with epic and lyric and gives his stories dynamism with beginnings that are of great importance for the 20th century. On the one hand, because his works touch on topical issues of time and society as a whole, sincerely reflect the shock of the general development, and express the writer's sober attitude to the events of life in a natural and vivid language, on the other hand, it is important as a basis, which effectively influences the formation of the writer's epic tradition. It should also be noted that the work of a writer with a simple style has a philosophical, moral, and transcendental quality. However, some critics of his time accused the clear and simple style of his works of simplicity. However, if you look closely, behind his simple and clear writing style, there is a high level of professionalism in the writer, a fairly deep word, and thinking skills. Somerset Maugham was a contemporary of modernist writers who experimented with



new writing methods. In the literature of modernism, a new system of methods of description and artistic movement is established along with a new human meaning; in this case, all the typical features that are not subject to personal, or social laws are presented as the most important properties of human nature.

Although critics point out that Maugham's work depicts more art than real life, if we look at Somerset Maugham's novels, we can see that he often tries to convey to the reader the situation in which human behavior and images fall. The main reason why Maugham's novels were so popular with readers was that they appealed to all types of readers with a comprehensive description of the characters. Another reason for his success in the novel genre is that even the small scenes he writes are dramatic and have a carefully crafted plot line that focuses on character development. The main goal of the author was that each work he wrote throughout his career was better and more successful than the previous one. In general, the artist has left his mark on world literature by writing 20 novels.

By the time Maugham began to write, the life stories of the destitute were beginning to gain popularity. While practicing as a medical student, the future writer witnessed the lives of poor people in London, where he lived in a working-class neighborhood. All of this required more in-depth research to record the information he saw and obtained.

3.2. Embodiment features of social problems.

The author wrote the English work "*Liza of Lambeth*" in 1897. It tells the tragic ending life of 18-year-old Liza, a factory worker, and the main protagonist. Liza lived with her mother in the slums of Lambeth. This painful love she felt for a married man named Jim eventually ruined her life. The work ends with the death of Liza, who dies without bleeding. Against the background of descriptions of poor neighborhoods and streets, we witness the writer's harsh realism in the form of various characters. Maugham noted that he wrote this work without any additions or exaggerations, inspired by the scenes he saw and witnessed in hospital departments, in the area where he stayed, or in the houses where he was called, and sometimes in his spare time. The work, which has an impressive theme, effectively describes the ruins and the hardships of people living miserable life. Although he later touches on this topic in his later works, "*Liza of Lambeth*" is the most vivid example of the reality of the lower classes. The author's experience in treating patients in working-class neighborhoods has helped to successfully describe many aspects of the work (Maugham, 2009).

If we look at the course of events in the work, the writer prefers to continue what happened in chronological order, without going back to the past. Although many critics have not commented positively on the work, Maugham's creative experience and outlook on life have been praised since it was his first pen experience. At the time of writing, most critics thought that Maugham was not yet fully formed as an arts writer, noting that the work had many shortcomings in style and structure. However, they also showed that critical and creative ideas combined had a more convincing effect.

Maugham is the author of 20 novels, each of which has a different structure. According to the English lexicographer William Smith, Maugham's novels are structurally divided into four parts: chronological, beginning, trunk, and going back to the past. Like



Maugham's early novels, "*Liza of Lambeth*" is a chronological novel that does not use scenes from the past.

Some critics, such as Mildred Kunkel and Richard Cordell, thought that although Maugham wrote on specific topics, he often used incomprehensible expressions and ideas.

British researcher David Gooding said of Maugham: "We should not question his interests and sincerity, we should pay attention to his way of thinking and writing style. Maugham ironically described the realities of people's appearance and behavior in the style of writing that existed during this period"

Cyril Vernon Connolly was a journalist, literary critic, essayist, and writer, as well as editor of the literary magazine *Horizon*. Unlike other critics, he has always praised Maugham's work, especially his novels, "*Cakes and Ale*" and "*The Razor's Edge*". Comparing these novels with Maugham's other works, he noted that irony, humor, and especially great dialogues, were masterfully written. American writer and critic Mark Van Doren, after reading "*Cakes and Ale*", drew attention to the observations and epigrams used here. He emphasized that the expressions used in this work were intelligent, painful, and very wise. In addition, Leslie Merchand wrote about her research in the *New York Times Book Review* on October 12, 1930. She considered Maugham's writings to be very sincere and logical.

Speaking about the work "*Cakes and Ale*", it should be noted that the integrity of the work in terms of meaning depends on the idea that dictates the unity of subject and meaning. The power of the symbolic imagination is manifested in the rise of its individual existence beyond the boundaries of space and time. (Maugham, 2016)

"*The Moon and Sixpence*" (1919) and "*Cakes and Ale*" are about real people, their work, and their place in society. But the main difference is that one of the heroes is a prototype of the great English writer Thomas Hardy, and the other is a prototype of the French artist Paul Gauguin.

Maugham wrote the novel "*The Moon and Sixpence*" inspired by the life of the famous French artist Paul Gauguin. The main character is 40-year-old Charles Strickland, who lives a standard English life. Charles, a stockbroker, was unhappy with his life in London and left his wife and children. He pursues his dream of becoming an artist in Paris and realizes his dream. Despite the hard life and difficult conditions he lived there, he never returned to London. He later moved to Tahiti and remarried there. Here he realizes his dream of painting and creates his masterpieces. At the end of the work, he died of an infectious disease. "*The Moon and Sixpence*" is one of Maugham's most influential novels. The author uses scenes from the past to some extent in this novel. In this work, the desire to create and the amazing talent are set against the mere glory. In the work, the artist's talent is considered as high as the bright moonlight, and his wealth is considered as worthless as a penny. Although Strickland is sometimes rude to his friends, when we look at his paintings, we see the brilliance of his inner world. He wanted to stay away from the people around him and just do what he loved. (Maugham, 2021)



Critics also stressed the perfection of the plot and scenes of the novel. Although the subject is unusual, the writer writes the events in a very convincing way.

Maugham thought that people should not oppose their creation and nature. If this happens, then they may have many negative traits. Sometimes wrong steps can lead to tragedy, and sometimes these decisions can be a turning point in human life.

One of Maugham's famous novels, "*Theater*" (1937), touches on a different subject. The main protagonist of the play is a well-known theater actress. The famous artist Julia, despite the passing of years, became famous everywhere for her skills and talents and rose with successful steps. She was always loved and respected by the audience. Although she married a handsome actor named Michael, she was not happy with him. Michael, who does not pursue the art of acting decides to become a director. They were even more successful working together in the theater. Although they seemed to be a loyal and happy family during their marriage, this was never the case. Although Michael had a calmer character, Julia was a very emotional woman. Julia, at her 40 age, falls in love with a younger man, Tom. Even though she had a 17-year-old son, she was not afraid of anything and lived her life as she wanted. She goes with Tom on invitations and did not hesitate to appear with him. As time went on, Michael thought that the news was a lie. There was no difference between Julia's real life and the performances she played. Demonstrating her masterful acting skills on the stage in real life, Julia easily got out of all difficult situations. People were easily deceived by her performances in real life. Only one person, Julia's son, could hear his mother's actions, and he was not deceived (Maugham, 2010).

The main character is very close to the author. Julia also grew up in a French-speaking English family as an author. His work is inextricably linked with dramaturgy. Y.Ī. Kagarlitsky writes: " They both belong to the same field of art (after all, Moem spent more time and effort in the theater than in any other field of literary research) and are artists of the same type " (Kagarlitsky, 1987). We cannot disagree with this opinion. So, in many ways, Julia Lambert is the author's own autobiographical, retrospective image.

Given the context in which this work was created, it should be noted that several points attract attention at the same time. First, in those days, the theater and its actors were as complete as the movie stars of our time, which attracted the attention of readers "because they could go behind the scenes." Second, the protagonist is in many ways similar to the author himself, because, as mentioned above, both were born in France and circulated in a theatrical environment. Third, Somerset Maugham also had two women in his life. His first love was Ethelvin Sylvia Jones, whom Maugham fell in love with in 1909. At the time, she was a 21-year-old actress, the daughter of playwright Henry Arthur Jones. Somerset proposed to her, but she was unexpectedly rejected. Their relationship lasted about eight years. Ethelvin played a role in his play *Penelope* (*Penelope*, 1908), so many critics and literary critics believe that Maugham's relationship with Ethelvin Jones could be reflected in the novel '*Theater*'. In the novel "Theater", the author's attention is focused on the feelings, experiences, problems, and creativity of the protagonist. The author perceives everything that happens as an integral part of his hero's life. Behind every word of the author is his personality, and at the same time, we hear the voice of the author in every replica of the protagonist. The theatrical novel becomes an object of great interest in terms of the author's high literary and artistic interpretation, which embodies the example of the English literary



and cultural tradition through such special discourse, the intertextuality of the work, and the influence of the works of earlier English and French writers.

The English writer Paul Hoffmann noted that Maugham was not always afraid to write about reality, which is why his works were always read. The events in the works were united like a ring, but each of them retained its originality. According to him, the bright and conspicuous elements in this work were in the minority. In particular, Julia's use of the theater for revenge is shameful and unacceptable.

Maugham himself loved to read and appreciated the people who made reading a habit. He said: "Acquiring the habit of reading is like building a shelter to escape almost all the difficulties of life".

According to the division of the English lexicographer William Smith, although Maugham's novel "*Theater*" belongs to the type of chronological novel, we can see that it contains scenes that broadly reflect the past. The female protagonist of the work - Julia Lambert, looking at her photo album, recalls her past and describes what happened to the reader.

Upon writing this work Maugham started from the present and used a return to the past to give information about the lives of the characters. This is an important step in understanding the motives, characters, and story of the work.

American literary critic William Soskin said that Maugham discovered his mastery in this work as a playwright. The work has insight, comedy, a brilliant gallery of people, and eloquently written ironic elements, all of which are the main features that distinguish the work from others. Not only in this novel but many of his works, Maugham sees life as a theater, staging human destiny and life as a comedy.

Maugham considers the forces of evil, the hidden source of human nature, selfishness, gossip, stupidity, and hypocrisy, to be erased from the face of the earth. The idea of such total pessimism and the perception of life as an endless tragedy is considered by researchers as the influence of the famous German philosopher Schopenhauer. However, it should be noted that Maugham's skeptical attitude towards people is changeable: The writer acknowledged that man's great creativity obscures his weaknesses and bad features. The playwright bows to the creator of human beauty: For example, Edward Barnard in "*The Fall of Edward Barnard*" (1921), Charles Strickland in "*The Moon and sixpence*", Nora Marsh in "*The Land of Promises*" (1913), and others.

In addition, according to the author, Truth, Beauty, and Goodness are instructions for any creative person, for example, in the "Trilogy of Artists" - is the artist Charles Strickland in the novel "The Moon and sixpence", writer Edward Driffield in "Cakes and Ale" and actress Julia Lambert in "Theater." These heroes are presented as the real creators of the real world, able to change it and elevate it to the top with the highest spiritual meaning.



3. Conclusion

It is impossible for all a writer's works to be perfect and to be equally accepted by the audience. Thus, Maugham's novels also have different qualities. His first novels were almost written during his probationary period, and in addition to these writings, he had many other responsibilities. The writer himself admitted that not all of his novels were successful. However, he says that in all his novels, from “*Liza of Lambeth*” to “*Catalina*“, there has been great progress, and most of them considered it close to perfection.

Like the other poetic means we have spoken of in the analysis of Somerset Maugham's works, he made the most of the artistic possibilities of detail. The writer also creatively applied the multifunctionality of detail to his works, fulfilling one of the main requirements of the genre - conciseness, word, and expression. The writer tried to give the detail following the meaning of the problem, the morality, level, literacy, ideal of life, lifestyle, and so on. Therefore, along with satirical, humorous, and symbolic details, it manifests itself in serious details in his works.

The detail is not only economical but also has a great meaning. Its selection and application depend, first of all, on the artist's deep knowledge of life and serious knowledge of human psychology. His rich literary heritage proves that Maugham was deeply acquainted with the life and human psychology. Therefore, all his works, including his stories, express great ideas both on the theme, the problem, the idea, and the perfection of plot composition, language, and style, socially valuable and thought-provoking laughter, and the ability to create a dialogue that illuminates human nature due to its ability to find and use original details and details, it still retains its significance and artistic value. In all his writings, the author examines human life and tries to find solutions to problems in society and the environment. Although Maugham's work was affected by the deplorable state of society, he did not lose hope and looked to the future with confidence.

The writer, as far as possible, focused on the person, and his interaction with the existing society of that time. As a true artist, S. Maugham not only raised topical and modern issues in his stories but also preferred to express his intentions and goals with the principles of perfect art. In each of his works, we see a new, creative personality that is fundamentally different from the artist seen in his previous works. It is not difficult to observe this in all his artistic heritage, including his stories.

In his works, the writer draws on the center of artistic analysis of many problems (socio-political, moral, etc.) that are characteristic of the time and humanity. The current problems in his work are highlighted in two aspects. On the one hand, the writer took the subject only in connection with the human factor, on the other hand, he found an indirect attitude to the social environment that puts people in a difficult situation.

S. Maugham, who created the creative human figures involved in the research in the article, also gave their psychological portraits under the literary and aesthetic principles of the time. This time, the writer preferred the dynamic form of psychology, highlighting the spiritual experiences, feelings, and emotions of the characters based on the course of events.



Maugham's literary heritage has further enriched world literature. His works can be considered modern not only for their time but also for all times. A writer had a deep understanding of human problems and a unique description of their life care, he was an artist loved by all people. Distinguished by their vitality, naturalness, and diversity, these works had a great influence on the development of both English and world literature. Maugham's work was a new and bright page for twentieth-century society and literature.

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