

**Universidad Nacional del Litoral**

**Facultad de Humanidades y Ciencias**

**Licenciatura en Lengua Inglesa**

**Tesis de Licenciatura**

**A Postcolonial reading of a selection of  
short stories by W. Somerset Maugham**

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**2020**

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**Dissertation**

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short stories by W. Somerset Maugham**

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**2020**

To Beatriz Isolina Rodriguez de Sisti

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to express my gratitude:

To my tutor Dr. Gastón Javier Basile, for his help in writing this dissertation.

To the teachers who lectured at Instituto Sáenz in Lomas de Zamora back in 2008 and 2009.

To my friend Roxana who has always believed I would end this dissertation.

To my mother, father and sister who have encouraged me to continue writing in spite of the difficulties that arose on the way.

Esteban Sisti

March 2020

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## Abstract

Despite being a successful and well-paid author throughout his lifetime, Somerset Maugham's literary achievements have generally been underrated in the academic circles in view of the traditional and conservative traits of his writing, especially when compared to the literary breakthrough of the Modernists at the turn of the century. However, his fiction has only fairly recently started to be assessed in its own right and from new theoretical frameworks. Many of Maugham's short stories –generally unacknowledged or under-researched by critics– depict the lives of Western, mostly British, colonists in the Far East. These tales portray the distress, isolation and emotional toll suffered by the colonists, as well as their moral debauchery, as they strive to survive in the faraway, inhospitable lands. This paper explores a selection of short stories by W. Somerset Maugham written in the 1920s depicting the plight of the European settlers in the colonies in an attempt to discern potential patterns of critique of the colonial enterprise and the recurrent allusions to the moral decadence of the Western colonists. A postcolonial reading of the selected text shows that Maugham's short stories level a form of criticism at the colonial venture by exposing the moral decadence of the European settlers in the colonies in the years that followed the Great War. However, despite the negative presentation of the European colonizers, chiefly couched in ethical or moral terms, Maugham's fiction still remains deeply embedded in the hegemonic and overruling colonial discourse of his time.

## Resumen

A pesar del suceso literario y éxito comercial que tuvo como escritor durante su carrera, la obra de Somerset Maugham ha sido por lo general desestimada en los círculos académicos por sus rasgos tradicionalistas y conservadores, especialmente al comparar su obra con los excepcionales logros de los modernistas de principios de siglo XX. Muchos de sus relatos breves, poco reconocidos o estudiados por la crítica, retratan la vida de los hombres occidentales, especialmente británicos, en las colonias de Lejano Oriente. Estos cuentos describen la desolación, aislamiento, y padecimiento emocional de los colonos, al igual que su corrupción moral, mientras intentan sobrevivir en tierras lejanas e inhóspitas. Esta tesina analiza una selección de cuentos breves de Maugham publicados en la década de 1920, que escenifican la suerte de estos colonos europeos en las colonias, con el fin de identificar potenciales críticas a la empresa colonial y referencias recurrentes a la decadencia moral de los colonos europeos. Una lectura postcolonial de la selección de cuentos muestra que los textos realizan una crítica de la empresa colonial al exponer la decadencia moral de los europeos en los años de postguerra. Sin embargo, a pesar de las críticas, se observa que la producción literaria de Maugham continúa estando firmemente enraizada en el discurso colonial hegemónico y dominante de su época.

## **1. Introduction**

In the 1930s, the British writer W. Somerset Maugham (1875-1965) was one of the most successful writers of his time, both highly-reputed and well-paid. However, literary critics were generally skeptic about his genuine talents as a writer, being mostly regarded as a mere epigone of a traditional nineteenth-century narrative mode which had been radically disrupted by the literary experiments of the Modernists, like Virginia Woolf and James Joyce. Many of Maugham's short stories –generally unacknowledged or under-researched by critics, a few exceptions notwithstanding– depict the lives of Western, mostly British, colonists in the Far East. These tales portray the distress, isolation and emotional toll suffered by the colonists, as well as their moral debauchery, as they strive to survive in the faraway, inhospitable lands.

The purpose of this paper is to explore a selection of short stories by W. Somerset Maugham written in the 1920s depicting the plight of the European settlers in the colonies in an attempt to discern potential patterns of critique of the colonial enterprise and the recurrent allusions to the moral decadence of the Western colonists.

### **1.1 Research questions**

This work will be guided by the following research questions:

Do the selected short stories by Maugham level criticism at the colonial venture by exposing the moral decadence of the European elite settlers in the colonies?

Are there indications of a post-colonial stance in Maugham's fiction in the light of such negative depiction of the European colonizers?

From these questions, the following hypotheses have been derived:



- (1) Maugham's short stories level a form of criticism at the colonial venture by exposing the moral decadence of the European settlers in the colonies in the years that followed the Great War.
- (2) Despite the negative presentation of the European colonizers, chiefly couched in ethical or moral terms, Maugham's fiction is still deeply embedded in the hegemonic and overruling colonial discourse.

## **1.2. General and specific objectives**

### **1.2.1 General objectives**

- (1) To analyze the figures of the colonizer and the colonized in the British colonies during the 1920s through some selected short stories written by W.S Maugham.
- (2) To explore the overall authorial treatment of his subject matter through the theoretical framework of postcolonial theory.

### **1.2.2 Specific objectives**

- (1) To define the most important tenets of postcolonial theory.
- (2) To describe the situation of the Western women and the female natives in the colonies at the time the stories were composed.
- (3) To state the situation of the British colonies during that particular period of time.
- (4) To explore the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized in the selected texts through a postcolonial approach.
- (5) To assess Maugham's underlying outlook on the colonial venture as featured in his narrative.

## **1.3. Methodology**

The research in this study is conducted through content analysis. Content analysis is defined by Stone, Dunphy, Smith & Ogilvie (1996) as, "any research technique for making inferences by systematically and

objectively identifying specified characteristics within texts” (as cited in Neuendorf, 2002, p. 10). Through content analysis it is possible to relate ideological perspectives, topics and other phenomena of the type to the data obtained from the text. Furthermore, the analysis is not restricted to manifest content, that is, the elements that are physically present and countable but also to latent content – which involves inference and interpretation – provided there is sufficient textual evidence.

In this vein, relevant extracts from the short stories will be analyzed to gain an insight into the main narrative structure, elements of characterization and the explicit or implicit assessment by the external narrator in order to respond the research questions. The literary analysis of formal elements of the texts will be conducted by drawing on key notions developed by narratology (Bal 1999).

#### **1.4 Organization of the present work**

The present dissertation will be organized into five chapters. The first one will deal with the author, his work and the critical studies of his publications. The second one will shed light on colonial literature and it will be divided into several subsections that will explore the dichotomy between colonizer and colonized, the main tenets of Postcolonialism and the contribution of other authors to this topic. Chapter Three will explain the post-war period and the British Empire through the notions of the Roaring twenties and the situation of the colonies. Chapter Four offers a thorough content analysis of the selected short stories dividing the presentation into four subsections: (1) the East as a little Britain and a pernicious place, (2) Vice is not determined by Ethnicity, (3) Women in colonial times and the decadence of moral principles in the 1920s. The final chapter will provide a conclusion in which the research hypothesis is revisited in the light of the corpus analysis.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 The Author

W. Somerset Maugham was born at the British Embassy in Paris, France on 25<sup>th</sup> January 1875. During his childhood, he was immersed in the French culture and he spoke French more fluently than English. He was very fond of his mother and he could never recover from her sudden death. At the age of ten he was an orphan so he had to go to England where he was raised by his father's brother, who was a clergyman, and his wife. They did not have children. In 1885, he started at King's School, Canterbury, where he was very unhappy due to the fact that he was bullied by his classmates since he stuttered and was bad at sports. It was during these years that he read Guy de Maupassant for the first time. This writer would become one of his favorites and when Maugham began writing his first short stories, Maupassant would be his model. In 1889 Maugham went to Germany where attended lectures on Schopenhauer, a philosopher who made Maugham question his beliefs about religion. That trip made him realize that literature was an important part in his life. Besides, he found he enjoyed travelling and this trip would be the first of many that he had in his whole life. In 1897, he qualified as a doctor but he decided to become a writer instead. That same year he published his first novel which had a modest success. During the First World War he was part of the Red Cross and in 1915 he entered the British Intelligence Service. That same year he fell in love with Gerald Haxton, who became his secretary until his death in 1944. In 1917 Maugham married Gwendoly Maude (Syrie) Barnardo Wellcome. They had a daughter, Elizabeth Mary Maghaum. Their marriage was a failure and they divorced in 1929. By that time he decided to live in the south of France. After the death of Haxton in 1944, Maugham met Alan Searle, his new partner and secretary until the writer's death. He was awarded with The Companion of Honour in 1954 and the Commander of the Legion of Honor in 1961. He died in Nice, France on 15<sup>th</sup> December 1965.

## **2.1.2 His work**

Maugham dedicated his whole life to literature - to the novel, short story, play, essay and travel narrative. Some of his works are the novels “Of Human Bondage” (1915), “The Moon and Sixpence” (1919), “ The Painted Veil” (1925), “ Cakes and Ales” (1930), “ The Razor’s Edge” (1944); the plays “ The Circle” ( 1921), “ East of Suez” (1922) and “ The Constant Wife” (1927); his short story collections “ The Trembling of a Leaf” (1921) , “ The Casuarina Tree” ( 1926) and “ Ah King” (1933); the travelogue “On a Chinese Screen” (1922) and the literary memoirs “ The Summing up” ( 1938) and “ A writer’s notebook” ( 1949). Many of his novels and short stories have been turned into films.

## **2.1.3 Maugham as a writer: Critical studies of his work**

By the 1930s Maugham was one of the most successful writer of his time, he was loved by his readers and he was also one of the best paid, but the critics appeared to have a low regard for the quality of his writing. According to Troy (1998), criticism of Maugham’s work starts with an article written by Edmund Wilson “The Apotheosis of Somerset Maugham” (1946) in which he holds, “ It has happened to me from time to time to run into some person of taste who tells me that I ought to take Somerset Maugham seriously, yet I have never able to convince myself that he was anything but second rate.” (p. 133).

Wilson’s article is an example of how the academic circles thought about the writer at that time. Modernist writers such as James Joyce and Virginia Woolf were the ones that showed innovative ideas: the conscious mind and the inner nature. However, after the publication of Wilson’s article, many studies about Maugham’s work appeared in defense of his qualities as writer. An example of this is Yevish (1973), who in an article titled “In Defense of Maugham”, argues that Maugham is a skilled narrator but a traditional one. Furthermore, Shakespeare (2015) holds that Maugham was a proficient short story writer who believed that each short story must have a beginning, middle and an end.

What is more, he had the ability to see clearly into people's souls so his writings often reflected his own personal experiences combined with fiction. Since he had a caustic personality, his works showed a world full of skepticism. With this in mind, Troy (1998) states that his short stories located in exotic places (the South Pacific and East and Southeast Asia) are usually the source for colonial and postcolonial studies due to the fact that Maugham depicted the British Empire and his colonies in a cynical way. Besides, he pointed out the hypocrisy of the colonizer.

Despite the negative judgments of his literary merits, Maugham wanted to be recognized by his peers and critics. In view of this, Onyiaorah (2000) remarks that the writer had very conflicting ideas about his work. She recalls what Maugham expressed in his literary memoir "The Summing Up" (1938): "In my twenties the critics said I was brutal, in my thirties I was flippant, in my forties they said I was cynical, in my fifties they said I was competent, and now in my sixties they say I am superficial". (p.1)

Nevertheless, Troy (1998) mentions that Maugham's style of writing has influenced many writers such as: George Orwell, Evelyn Waugh, Noël Corward and Graham Green. In this sense, Maugham finally achieved what he desired most: the acknowledgement of his own colleagues.

Scholarly studies on Somerset Maugham abound. However, until fairly recently the secondary literature tended to explore Maugham's literary career and achievements through a biographical approach rather than through a careful examination of his literary works. In particular, his short stories and non-fictional work have been relegated. (See Calder 1973; Calder 1989; Hastings, 2010; Blackburn and Arsov 2014). Although Maugham was a multifaceted and prolific writer, who achieved considerable popularity and financial success during his lifetime, many critics have characterized him as a second-rate writer, a claim that was allegedly based on Maugham's own self-assessment as a writer (Blackburn and Arsov 2014). Indeed, his literary production has generally been regarded in an unfavorable light when set against the breakthrough in fiction writing attained by some of his contemporaries at the turn of the century. In fact, there has been a persistent low regard for

Maugham's work in academic circles, especially because he was believed to represent everything that Modernists resisted. (Blackburn and Arsov 2016). As Joseph Epstein (1985) states: "his writing was an affront to them. He was apolitical and he wrote dead against the grain of modernism, with all its difficulty, preferring instead to write as plainly as possible about complex things." (p. 10)

The most complete early bibliography of Maugham's work is provided by Toole Stott (1973). Most of the literature about Maugham is reviewed by Sanders (1970) Bassett, (1998) and Jonas (2009). Epstein (1985) gives a synopsis of Maugham's life, and discusses various features of his works -his wide reading, his style, and his large body of work- and examines the views of critics of Maugham (Edmund Wilson and Morton Dauwen Zabel) and assesses the position of Maugham's work.

Maugham's short stories are indeed a major component of his legacy of fiction, to which one must add twenty novels, twenty six plays, seven books of essays, three travel books, as well as commentaries, memoirs, and periodical contributions. His first published collection of short stories was *Orientalism* (1899), and his fiction was published thereafter in British or American periodicals as well as one collected anthology. Since 1951, comprehensive collections of ninety-one of these stories have been republished in multi-volume sets, and a few others were published posthumously (Bassett 1998).

Until the 1990s the prevailing approach to Maugham was a biographical and largely psychological one, highlighting the alleged connections between his personal beliefs and personality traits, notably his homosexuality, with the content of his literary work (Bassett 1998). The first critical attempt of a collection of short stories by Maugham that draws on the theoretical framework of postcolonial critics is O' Halloran (1988). In her substantial paper, O'Halloran (1988) discusses how Maugham opposes notions of "progress" and "primitivism" in his fiction. She analyzes, first, the success stories of Edward Barnard in "The Fall of Edward Barnard", Larry Darrell in *The Razor's Edge*, and Charles Strickland in *The Moon and Sixpence* -where "All three choose the 'other'

[that is, the exotic East] rather than their own culture in order to discover their 'new' selves.” Second, she examines those characters who fail in the exotic environment: for example, Lawson in “The Pool,” the title character of “Mackintosh”, and Warburton in “The Outstation”, which show the exotic environment as “something to be on perpetual guard against”. Finally, she notes the portrayal of “Eastern” women and “Western” women in Maugham’s *The Moon and Sixpence*, *The Painted Veil*, and “Neil McAdam” which shows an emphasis on the exotic “ideal” of compliance (Bassett 1998: 169). A significant about-turn in the scholarly approach was the seminal study by Paul Holden (1996), the first monographic treatment of Maugham’s oriental fiction in the light of theoretical models introduced by postcolonial and gender studies. Holden argues that Maugham recycles orientalist, gender and class tropes, establishing a staunch male British subjectivity based upon emotional and somatic continence, rationality and specularly. Along similar lines, Xingbo (1996) examines representations of the “Other” in opposition to the colonial Self in twentieth-century European and American literature through a historical framework and an attention to the rhetorical nature of language. A chapter-essay on Maugham's *On a Chinese Screen* gives a close critical analysis of British narratives of travel and exploration in China to investigate the rhetorical nature of the historical construction of China as the “Other”. Hooper (1997) contends that Maugham’s writing needs to be re-examined within the context of colonial and postcolonial writing, and that his short stories, in particular, present one of the most detailed and evocative studies of end-of-era imperialism. According to Hooper, many of Maugham’s short stories deal with flux and transience, and with the difficulties of adapting to challenging environments.

In the past decades, a number of articles and studies started to revisit Maugham’s fiction more systematically from a postcolonial and gender theory perspective. Aladaylah (2012), for example, examines Maugham’s short story “Footprint in the Jungle” focusing on the ways colonialist discourse positioned the colonized natives into European colonialist socio-cultural hierarchy. This study examines Maugham's depictions of non-white communities - Malay, Chinese and Indian – arguing that

Maugham reinforced and spread the idea of physical and social differences between the Europeans and the non-European races, rendering the latter an inferior position to the former. Similarly, Doran (2016) analyzes Maugham's travelogue *The Gentleman in the Parlour* and argues that this work both expressed and helped to shape contemporary thinking about Southeast Asia and Western imperialism. Focusing especially on his representations of Burma and Cambodia, Doran examines Maugham's book in the light of postcolonial scholarship, especially the theoretical insights developed under the inspiration of Edward Said's *Orientalism*. Despite its pretensions to be apolitical, Maugham's travel book is shown to be a repository of Western colonial ideas and attitudes, integrally involved in the circulation of the prevailing European discourse of high imperialism. More recently, Doran (2019) examines how Maugham used stereotyped concepts of gender to convey his sense that British imperial rule in Burma (now Myanmar) was at risk. Doran argues that in pursuing this political agenda, Maugham was able to tap into long-held historical understandings, in the Anglo-Latin tradition, of the connections between gender problems and the decline of empires.

In sum, the critical approach to Maugham's work has shifted from a biography and psychology-based reading of his literary production, which was still very much biased by his second-rate status as a writer, to a more focused and text-based approach in the past decades, which draws on the latest contributions of postcolonial and gender theories to examine Maugham's fiction in its own right. This dissertation builds on this latter theoretical approach and seeks to problematize both Maugham's deep-rooted colonialist prejudices and ingrained Victorian stereotypes, along with his sustained criticism of the Imperial quest, especially based on moral considerations.

## **2.2 Colonial Literature**

### **2.2.1 Dichotomy: Colonizer / Colonized**



When it comes to colonial literature, it is necessary to address the notion of imperialism: the control over an overseas territory and its inhabitants. Colonialism was the dominant sociopolitical feature of nineteenth century Europe (the great period of colonization: 1875- 1914). According to Boehmer (2005), Colonial Literature was mainly written in Britain during this period of time and helped to make the British believe that their country was the one that had the right and power to interfere in the affairs of other underdeveloped countries. Boehmer (2005) stress the symbolic power that colonialism entailed: “To assume control over a territory or a nation was not only to exert political or economic power; it was also to have imaginative command” (p.5) In other words, the colonizer wanted to found a new home, which usually implied eliminating the traces of the colonized. Besides, the colonizer desired to rule the territory while the colonized generally suffered as a slave. Many of the native inhabitants of the colonial empire died due to the extreme conditions in which they lived. The colonized is seen as the Subaltern, as an individual of inferior rank who is branded as the Other. As Edward Said has noted in his influential work *Orientalism* (1978), the West exists as it compares itself to the East and its inability to govern itself. In connection with the Other, Boehmer (2005) states that Lacan has introduced the idea that “self-identity is constituted within the gaze of another” (p.21).

During colonial times, Social Darwinism was the prevalent doctrine, the belief in the “survival of the fittest” - the idea that certain people become powerful in society because they are innately better..In connection with this idea the British believed that sexual intercourse between the colonizer and the colonized was forbidden since purity was at risk. The Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain proclaimed that “the British race [was] the greatest of governing races that the world [had] ever seen”. (Boehmer, 2005, p.31)

However, there was a contradiction in the way the colony was shown to the British citizens. On the one hand, the colonizer sought to transform the colonial lands into a “Little Britain” trying to maintain British customs, language, the way the city was planned, cooking,

clothing, etc. On the other hand, the colony was usually described as a somber and dark place full of danger and disgrace.

### 2.2.2 Postcolonialism

Boehmer (2005) states that postcolonial literature means analyzing the complex relationship between the colonizer and the colonized radically. In his seminal work, Said (1978) posits that Western Culture has created the concept of the Orient, which is seen as the Other, a spot bordering Europe not only in a topographical terms but also as a form of thinking. As Said claims, “European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self.” (p.3).

These two worlds do not coexist on the same level: the West takes precedence over the Orient. However, this idea does not describe any real state of affairs since it is purely a construction made by the Westerners. In this regard, McLeod (2000) asserts:

Orientalism is first and foremost a *fabricated* construct, a series of *images* that come to stand as the Orient’s ‘reality’ for those in the West. This contrived ‘reality’ in no way reflects what may or may not actually be there in the Orient itself; it does not exist outside of the representations made about it by Westerners. It is not an ‘inert fact of nature’ but ‘man-made’, a creation fashioned by those who presume to rule. (p.42)

McLeod also notices that the West has granted the East the embodiment of being rudimentary, odd and docile. Thus, the West represents the positive side to this adverse description. As McLeod (2000) puts it, “Orientalism posited the notion that Oriental peoples needed to be civilized and made to conform to the perceived higher moral standards upheld in the West.” (p.47)

Spivak (1985) develops the concept of “Othering”, which implies that the British Empire excludes the Other by the use of violence. Hence, “Othering” indicates an ideology that separates the natives from the colonizers since the former do not follow the model put forth by their

masters. In her essay "*The Rani of Sirmur*", Spivak (1985) analyzes the connection between the British and the colonized in India during the colonial times. Spivak recognizes three degrees of "Othering": 1. The Colonizer uses violence to force the native to represent the Other in his own country; 2. The Colonizer creates the concept of the Native as a savage without morality; 3. The Colonizer possesses the education so He owns the Culture. The process of "Othering" constructs the notion of the "Subaltern", the people who have lost their voice and history and have been suppressed by the British.

Ashcroft et al. (2007) have defined a number of crucial concepts relevant to postcolonial theory:

(1) "Going native", a notion that indicates "the colonizers' fear of contamination by absorption into native life and customs". This concept implies not only sexual intercourse with natives but also the colonizer's involvement in the aboriginals' rituals; (2) "Hybridity". Bhabha contends that all cultural statements and systems are constructed in a space that he calls the "Third Space of enunciation" (1994:37). Cultural identity always emerges in this contradictory and ambivalent space, which for Bhabha makes the claim to a hierarchical purity of cultures untenable. This term means that one type of culture is derived from the blend of different societies; this cross-breeding will evince characteristics of the former but it will possess its own individual features.

(3) "Dislocation" The term is used to describe the experience of those who have willingly moved from the imperial 'Home' to the colonial margin, but it affects all those who, as a result of colonialism, have been placed in a location that, because of colonial hegemonic practices, needs, in a sense, to be 'reinvented' in language, in narrative and in myth. This also includes the idea that the colonizer takes possession of the natives' land, which often resulted in the disappearance or drastic alteration of the ways of life of the colonized.

(4) "Miscegenation" refers to the sexual union of different races, specifically whites with negroes. If miscegenation occurs, the colonizer dreads the possibility of losing control of the territory, so he will try at all costs to prevent that civilization mixes with nature. Nevertheless, this

also suggests that these opposites have to exist since both of them depend on each other.

### **2.2.3 Stereotypes**

Boehmer (2005) highlights that Colonial Literature imposed the writer's point of view, which meant that the British were regarded as a race of higher rank than the Other. Thus, British writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century helped shape the usual stereotypes: the Other as a lazy and otiose individual and the White Man as an efficient worker who believes in civilization and builds the overseas empire. The work of the Colonizer was compared to the one of the Romans: it was considered extraordinary. During the nineteenth century and the first part of the twentieth century Britain and the colonies were seen as "Utopia, or the lawless wilderness; the Noble Savage or the unregenerate Primitive; the Garden of Eden and the Holy City." (Boehmer 2005, p.43)

Furthermore, writings of that time showed the British in authority, the Colonized following the rules, and the Queen in Britain observing every action that took place in her Empire. Another recurrent issue was how the British saw the new land: a pernicious place that could potentially turn the British into barbarians. Boehmer (2005) holds that since the colonized were depicted as primitive and barbarian it was common that they were taken as servants, even if some of them studied in the colonies and helped the colonizer submit their own people. What is more, the figure of the hero was thus created: a young white male figure full of energy and capable of expressing coherence in a place surrounded by evil.

### **2.2.4 Other authors**

Boehmer (2005) claims that colonial literature repeatedly addresses the same main topics: the mission of the white men and the characterization of the colonized. Moreover, the pair white ruler/ black

assistant arose in colonial writings of this period. Yet it is important to take into account a number of authors who embraced the colonial mindset but also started to undermine its ideal underpinnings. Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and *Lord Jim* (1900) show the British fear for the loss of the Empire and an additional peril which made the British feel uneasy: racial mixing in the Colonies. *Lord Jim* describes a man who wants to be competent in his work but he has defects: he is a "colonial idealist" so he fails in his action. This novel reflects the menace looming above British Imperialism. Robert Louis Stevenson wrote *New Arabian Nights* (1882), a collection of bleak tales, and *Island Nights' Entertainments* (1892) another collection of tales located in the South Seas. Both of them depict the weirdness of the presence of the White Men in those faraway and threatening locations. In William Arnold's *Oakfield* (1853) the officers of British India are presented as corrupted by the place and as unable to interact with people other than the British themselves. Consequently, there is some kind of detachment between the British and the Indian. In this respect, Leonard Woolf, a colonial officer, cynically confesses: "We treat them [the colonized] as inferiors' but 'tell them that they are their own equals'" (Boehmer, 2005, p 135). He wrote *The village in the Jungle* (1913) in which he showed the life and ways of speaking of the Natives and at the same time the fear that the British felt for the Other. In *A passage to India* (1924) Foster invites the reader to see India as a place governed by incompetence and inefficiency since he perceived this country as impossible to understand. George Orwell's *Burmese Days* (1934) introduces an antihero, the man of the city transported to a colonial town who knows that colonialism is a perverted action against the natives but who cannot do anything to stop it. Graham Greene's *Journey without Maps* (1936) is located in Africa and despite the fact that he inspires a confident image of this continent, there is still the same dismal colonial view: the aloofness between the white men and the "savages".

### **2.3 The post- war period and the British Empire**

After the somber decade of World War I, the 1920s showed a considerable change in lifestyle. The period became known as the Roaring Twenties, and was generally regarded as a time of material wealth and the blossom of culture in the Western world. During this period of sustained economic growth, the industry grew, citizens started to consume more and celebrities appeared in the mass media.

### **2.3.1 Moral Decadence**

World War I, which started in 1914, introduced a time of deterioration in values. Wohl (1979) illustrates in his book “The Generation of 1914” that after suffering the war, the British felt that the world they had known before that date would never be the same. During the war, the people who had fought had been brutalized and many atrocities had been committed. When they returned, they irremediably had lost their faith. Human life seemed worthless to them. The common citizen questioned their principles and since the priests had supported the War, the citizens faced a deep religious crisis too. They felt utterly overwhelmed.

Inspired by Charles Darwin’s theory of biological evolution, Wells (1920) mentions in his book “The Outline of History” a true deterioration of moral standards and ethical values followed this dark period. Wells compared men to social dogs: those that were stronger could intimidate and conquer the weaker ones. During the Roaring Twenties, values began to decline and any sort of behaviour could be accepted.

A good example of this moral decline slowly taking hold of the people’s lifestyles is the so-called “Bright Young Things”, a group of creative people that belonged to the aristocracy and middle class in London in the 1920s. These men and women embodied the typical attitude of this decade. Johnson (2015) asserts that they had fancy dress parties, drank heavily, took drugs in excess, danced jazz and behaved in a way that flouted the traditional social customs of their time. Moreover,

relationships between people of the same sex, which were against the law in Britain at that time, were customary among the members of this group.

### **2.3.2 Women**

Women in Victorian times were considered inferior to men; however, this point of view changed during the Roaring Twenties. According to Adams (2014), Victorian women were mainly repressed in terms of sex, which was chiefly regarded as a kind of energy to be controlled and which could yield no pleasure for them. The thoughts of Thomas Malthus, which contended that there would be a shortage of food if human beings reproduced too much, took hold during this time. Malthus also expressed that sex was only for reproduction so the only solution was that people restrained their desires. However, at the end of the Victorian Era women started to change their ideas and this New Woman did not see marriage as her ultimate aspiration any longer. Therefore, she searched for other ways of fulfilling her life; for instance she could have sex with men without getting married or she could even have sex with other women as well.

Johnson (2015) describes in detail the life of women during the 1920s. The World War I had given them the chance to work for the first time and by the end of the 1910s some of them began to vote. Women felt more independent and they modified their lifestyles: hair, clothes and ways of approaching men. Women's sexuality gained a new momentum with the dissemination of Sigmund Freud's ideas: women realized that they had the same sexual appetite as men and that the suppression of it was against their own nature. As regards education, women began to pursue higher education and there was a widespread ambiance of sexual liberation in the universities.

Naturally, the situation of the native women in the colonies during this decade was completely different: they were servants of the white women in the colonies; they had to help the colonizers with the upbringing of the children, the cleaning and the cooking. In their home,

they were subjected by their men who were the owners of their bodies and minds (Wollacot 2014).

### **2.3.3 The colonial society**

Madison (1971) contends that Britain changed society in the colonies by substituting the privileged class with the civil service. In this sense, India can be regarded as exemplary. The most radical transformation was through education, which implied the imitation of the model given in England. However, this was not for the majority, only for the upper classes and the underlying idea was that the citizens would be Indian by race but English in their minds. The British themselves formed a separate class of people and they did not interact too much with the natives, their children studied in Britain and, when the colonizers finished their work, they came back home. The British ruled the place with the help of the Indian upper and middle class (lawyers, doctors, merchants, etc.) and the colonizers felt superior to the Indian lower class that were seen as the savages. The Creoles were considered a pariah and they were excluded from both societies: the Indian and the British.

### **2.3.4 Situation of colonies**

According to Kitchen (2016), during the decade following 1918 Britain continued ruling the Empire but the country had to subdue some movements of anti-colonial ideas and nationalist pride. General Sir Henry Wilson (1864-1922), the British army's Chief of Imperial General Staff, expressed that the British Empire was about to crumble due to the fact that the colonies had begun their path to independence. However, Britain remained virtually unharmed through this period of change and even intensified its power. Kitchen (2016) also states that the British Empire had recruited many natives from the colonies that helped to defend and expand the Empire. So, when the World War I finished, Britain feared these colonial armies could fight against and, hence, Britain strove to disarm them. At the same time Britain decided to show



the colonial soldiers some kind of gratitude. Therefore, for example, India was given some power to govern itself in a system of diarchy. In 1920 The League of Nations was founded to put an end to the World War I and, as regards colonialism, one of its covenants proclaimed that the natives should be treated in a fair way. In spite of the fact that this mandatory system was not as useful as it should have been, the nationalist groups from the colonies had the chance to voice their criticism to the whole world. From 1919 to 1922 several crises sparked off in the British Empire and despite the fact that the British army could stop the revolutionaries, the ideas of nationalism, self-determination and decolonization were in full swing during this interwar period.

### 3. Analysis

#### 3.1 W. Somerset Maugham as a short story writer

Shakespeare (2015), as explored in the literature review, characterizes Maugham as an expert in writing short stories. Although he is considered a classical author, he knows how to capture the reader's attention and make him/her desire to follow the development of the narrative. A characteristic of this writer that should be highlighted is the use of an external narrator (Bal 1999) in the short stories comprised in the corpus of analysis.

##### 3.1.2 Summary of the short stories

The short stories analyzed in this section were all written by Maugham in the 1920s and are set in the colonial times. The date of publication of the anthologies and a brief summary of each short story are provided below.

*The Trembling of a Leaf: Little Stories of the South Sea Islands* (1921) contains:

“Rain” and “The Pool”; “ P&O”, “ The Outstation”, “ The Force of Circumstance” and “The Letter” belong to *The Casuarina Tree* (1926) and finally “ Footprints in the Jungle” was published in “ Ah King” (1933).

“*Rain*”: A missionary in the colonies called Davidson tries to make a young woman, Miss Thompson, repent of her indecent behavior while they are stuck in Pago Pago, the rainiest place in the Pacific.

“*The Pool*”: Lawson, a cultivated English manager of a bank in Apia, Samoa, falls in love with Ethel, a pretty but half-caste girl. There will be a clash of different cultures and customs.

*“P&O”*: Mrs. Hamylin, a 40-year-old British woman who is coming home on a ship in the Indian Ocean, befriends Mr. Gallagher, an Irishman who suddenly becomes seriously ill during the trip.

*“The Outstation”* Mr. Warburton is a snobbish 54-year-old British man who efficiently runs an outstation in Sembulu, Borneo. His life will change completely when he meets Mr. Cooper, his new assistant, a young man born in Barbados, a British colony.

*“The Force of Circumstance”*: Guy is a young man who is in charge of a small outstation in Sembulu. He is happily married to Doris, an English lady. Due to the fact that there is a strange Malay woman who wanders around their house, Guy reveals his secret to Doris.

*“The Letter”*: In Singapore, Lawyer Joyce is defending Leslie, who is married to Robert Crosbie, a good friend of the lawyer’s. Leslie has killed Geoffrey Hammond, who was a planter, in alleged self-defence. Nonetheless, a letter written by Leslie to Geoffrey the day of his death is brought by a Chinese clerk who works for Mr. Joyce. This new piece of evidence could destroy Leslie’s statement and her acquittal.

*“Footprints in the Jungle”*: Gaze, the head of police in Tanah Merah, meets the Cartwrights and their daughter Olive. He has not seen them for a long time and this meeting makes him remember a murder committed twenty years before when Reggie Bronson, Mrs Cartwright’s former husband, was found dead in the middle of the jungle.

### **3.2. Tension between the East as a ‘Little Britain’ and as a pernicious place**

Maugham has depicted in these selected short stories a conflict that seems to dwell unresolved in the British mind. Boehmer (2005), as explored in the literature review, characterizes the East as an area in which the colonizers try to feel at home, altering the landscape in such a way that it bears a resemblance to their hometown. However, since the region has its own peculiarities, the British have the strong sensation that they are unable to modify it and that the wilderness that surrounds them may eventually transform them into different human beings. The concept

of “going native” can be applied to this idea. The colonizer gradually becomes uneasy about resembling the colonized as he increasingly adopts the natives’ habits, follows the traditions of the East and has sexual intercourse with the women of the place. The postcolonial concept of “hybridity” is also connected to the latter. Postcolonial theory and theorists widely employ this term to refer to the “creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization.” (Ashcroft et.al. 1998, p.118). Generally, the outcome of this contact between two different, opposing cultures is an ambivalent, ‘hybrid subject’, imbued with the dilemma of being caught amidst two clashing cultures. This contact brings into the subject a sense of ‘dislocation’, of not knowing which culture to pledge allegiance to. Moreover, this hybrid subject develops a ‘hybrid identity’, which clearly possesses features and characteristics of the two intermingling cultures. As a result of the fluid, and mutual interaction between the two clashing cultural groups, there emerges what Bhabha denominates as a “Third Space of Enunciation”, which is, in Bhabha’s own words, “a site of transformation and change where fixed identities based on essentialisms are called into question” (as cited in Kuortti and Nyman 2007, p.20).

In “*P&O*” the external narrator gives an accurate description of the Malay villages as chaotic and abandoned places. Nonetheless, the city built by the British in the colony is a synonym of order and peace. Mrs. Hamlyn, the main character, feels sad after being deceived by her husband and while she is on board she mulls over the difference she finds in the landscape of the East, providing a contrast between the native area and the Westernized quarters:

The car raced on..., past Malay houses ...and through busy villages where the market-place was crowded with dark-skinned little people in gay sarongs. ... Then towards evening it reached the trim, modern town, with its clubs and its golf links, its well-ordered rest-house, its white people, and its railway-station....(p. 743)

Lawson, the main character in *"The Pool"*, is a young cultured man who, at first, misses England so much that he finds a pool in which he feels at home. Indeed, he finds the small stream very similar to others in England, notwithstanding the hot weather of the colony. In this story the external narrator realizes that the pool is a character itself since it represents the place where Lawson and Ethel fall in love and this same place will later become Lawson's tomb:

But the spot that entranced him was a pool a mile or two away from Apia to which in the evenings he often went to bathe. ...It was just such a scene as you might see in Devonshire among the hills and yet with a difference, for it had a tropical richness, a passion, a scented languor which seemed to melt the heart." (p.85)

In *"Footprints in the Jungle"* the external narrator points out that the British could not stand being away from home so they replicated in each city they built in the East the typical British architectural style and urban landscape evocative of the fatherland. Therefore, they felt safe. He also praises the British for being so meticulous:

The European quarter is very silent. It is trim and neat and clean. ... and indeed there is in the aspect of this corner of Tanah Merah something quiet and delicately secluded that reminds you of the precincts of Canterbury." (p. 639)

Another interesting aspect that the author mentions through the external narrator is the need of the British to follow the same routine in the colonies as if they used to do in Britain, as does Mr. Warburton in *"The Outstation"* who pays attention to frivolity. He believes that a gentleman should not forget his civilized customs learnt in Europe even if he lives in the East: "The only concession he made to the climate was to wear a white dinner-jacket; but otherwise, in a boiled shirt and a high collar, silk socks and patent-leather shoes, he dressed as formally as though he were dining at his club in Pall Mall" (p. 269). This custom is paramount to him in spite of the fact that it is completely illogical. It gives him self-assurance: "Every Monday morning he read the Monday Times of six

weeks back and so went through the week. On Sunday he read *The Observer*.” (p. 282).

It has been observed how Maugham shows that the British try to obliterate the differences between their country and the colonies, in an attempt to reconstruct a civilized and homely urban space (in the likeness of Britain) in a foreign territory otherwise felt as alien and potentially menacing. On the other hand, the colony is presented as a pernicious, corrupting scenario, capable of demeaning and inveigling an otherwise morally decent British expatriate.

Maugham portrays through several examples how malicious the East seems to be for the colonizer. First of all, in *“The Force of Circumstance”*, the main character Guy, a young immature man, is left by his wife Doris and, while in shock, he starts to lose the civilized habits that he had recovered during the period of time they lived together. So he comes back to his typical routine feeling free to wear the usual items of clothing that the natives do. The external narrator implies that Guy has changed for a while due to the love he feels for his wife but now that she has gone he becomes a savage again: “Towards sunset he came back and had two or three drinks, and then it was time to dress for dinner. There wasn’t much use in dressing now; he might just as well be comfortable; he put on a loose native jacket and a sarong. That was what he had been accustomed to wear before Doris came. He was barefoot.” (p.300). What is more, in *“The Pool”* Lawson has become a drunkard and it is a common thought between the British living around him to blame the place for his addiction. However, they are being blind to the truth: Lawson drinks heavily because he cannot tolerate living among the natives and having a son that has their same physical characteristics. Besides, the external narrator explains that the Europeans do not respect Lawson any more since he has mixed with the natives, which makes him feel alienated. Chaplin who runs a hotel in the island is the only person that likes Lawson and tries to help him. Chaplin usually talks to the external narrator and shares his thoughts about Lawson with him: ““Good chap,... One of the best. Pity he drinks.... And when he’s drunk he wants to fight people....Dead drunk, three or four days a week. It’s the island

done it, and Ethel.” (p. 82). Moreover, in “*The Letter*” Mr. Joyce, who seems to be a respectable lawyer, is about to bribe a woman to help his client be released from jail. At this point of the story the external narrator introduces the idea that as Mr. Joyce has a guilty conscience over this bad deed he decides to believe that his change of attitude towards being corrupted is the result of having lived for such a long time in the colony. Moral corruption is thus perceived as a result of the exposure to the pernicious influence of the colony: “He had lived in the East a long time and his sense of professional honour was not perhaps so acute as it had been twenty years before..... He made up his mind to do something which he knew was unjustifiable...” (p.875). His way of thinking is deceptive since dishonest actions do not belong to an area; in Britain they happen on a daily basis. Finally, in “*Footprints in the Jungle*”, Maugham expresses the opposite effect that the Orient produces mainly on men. Gaze, the middle-aged head of police of the town, has seen so many abominable crimes that he has lost faith in human beings. So when he relates the Cartwrights’ personalities to the external narrator he mentions that, on the one hand, the British appear to suffer from the hot weather of the colony, which makes them deteriorate physically faster than in Europe: ““You haven’t lived out East all your life. It ages one before one’s time. One’s an elderly man at fifty and at fifty–five one’s good for nothing but the scrap–heap.”” (p. 643). On the other hand, the external narrator agrees with Gaze on the fact that these men become irresponsible for their actions: “...You know how many fellows when they come out East seem to stop growing.” (p. 645) The external narrator recognizes that the same men that give the impression of being seventy when they are only fifty behave like adolescents or children in a rebellious and emotional way: “One of the most disconcerting things to the traveller is to see stout, middle–aged gentlemen, with bald heads, speaking and acting like schoolboys.” (p. 645)

In conclusion, an outright contradiction is featured in the above-mentioned short stories. On the one hand, Maugham presents an accurate picture of the colony as a western- looking haven, a place where the British replicate their own customs and architecture. On the other hand,

the East is shown as an area that represents moral corruption and debauchery, where the British are contaminated with evil, eventually becoming unscrupulous and behaving yet more immorally than the natives who are branded as ‘savages’ by the British.

### **3.3 Vice is not determined by ethnicity**

In the previous sections, Said’s (1978) seminal contribution to the ideological configuration of the Oriental Other was reviewed. Said argues that the West discovers its personality and consolidates power through the concealment of the characteristics of the East. McLeod (2000), as indicated in the Literature Review, claims that every description made by a European about the Orient is inauthentic since it is a creation conceived by the ones who are in charge, in this particular case: the British.

In “The Pool” the external narrator shows that two different cultures should not blend. He follows the idea of that time: races should not be mixed. The fear of miscegenation appears here: the colonizer wants to keep his race pure. The fact that there can be sexual intercourse between Europeans and natives makes the colonizer fear the loss of the control of civilization in the distant land where he lives. Lawson, who used to revere the bustling city of London, starts living with the natives after marrying Ethel. At first, he enjoys nature and the natives but in the end he realizes that this situation is revolutive for him since he cannot find one positive quality in them. Moreover, he needs the help of a drink to tolerate their company:

When Lawson, after his work, went back to the bungalow he found it crowded with natives. They lay about smoking, sleeping, drinking *kava*; and they talked incessantly. The place was grubby and untidy... He fell into the habit of dropping into the hotel on his way home to have a few cocktails, for he could only face the evening and the crowd of friendly natives when he was fortified with liquor” (p. 95)



Besides, he becomes more depressed and worried when Ethel delivers his first child who resembles the natives:

“It was when Lawson first held the child in his arms that a sudden pang shot through his heart. He had not expected it to be so dark. After all it had but a fourth part of native blood, and there was no reason really why it should not look just like an English baby...” (p.90)

The external narrator infers that Lawson has always desired a white baby since he has chosen as a wife a half-caste who looked like an English lady. That is the reason why he cannot come to terms with this reality, as he acknowledges the dreadful ordeal of a creole. However, he decides to take the baby to Britain where he will have the opportunity to live a decent existence:

“He thought of the half-caste children in Apia. They had an unhealthy look, sallow and pale, and they were odiously precocious. ...And when they grew up the men accepted smaller salaries because of their native blood; girls might marry a white man, but boys had no chance; they must marry a half-caste like themselves, or a native. Lawson made up his mind passionately that he would take his son away from the humiliation of such a life.” (p.90)

The external narrator indicates that Lawson is living in denial since he does not want to face the fact that the creole is not accepted there either, so Lawson cannot prevent his son from being a pariah. Robert Young (1995) says that “hybridity became, particularly at the turn of the century, part of a colonialist discourse of racism.” Lawson’s son implies that there has been an exchange of cultures. However, at that particular time, the boy is seen as a negative result of the mixture of cultures, he is neither a native nor a British. Due to his hybrid nature, he is destined to play no part in either culture and to become a second-class citizen all his life.

The external narrator reveals the prevailing thoughts of that period in the story “*Footprints in the Jungle*”: the savages are guilty of any crime that takes place in the colony. However, the Europeans become

absolved without having to produce any kind of proof. Gaze, the sheriff of a small town where a horrible crime has happened, is convinced that the murderer is one of the natives since (he surmises) they are the ones that are capable of killing a colonizer for money: “I think a pair of Chinks might think out a trick like that, but I don’t believe Malays would. They’d be much too frightened”(p.650). Besides, Gaze states they have no values or principles:

““The scoundrels had got away with a considerable sum, but money is no good unless you spend it. I felt I knew the native temperament enough to be sure that the possession of it was a constant temptation. The Malays are an extravagant race, and a race of gamblers, and the Chinese are gamblers, too; sooner or later someone would start flinging his money about, and then I should want to know where it came from.” (p. 653)

However, in the end he has to admit that his way of thinking has been wrong and the one to blame is one of his own race, and one whose motive has been selfish. Indeed, Mr. Cartwright has killed his friend Reggie because Mr. Cartwright is having an affair with his friend’s wife and she is pregnant. The colonizer recognizes the *Others* as those who are different in terms of ‘race’ and customs, in this particular case the natives. Accordingly, they are seen as the enemy and the source of the wickedness and debauchery of the colonial setting. The narrator describes them following the typical colonial stereotypes: slothful, violent, alcoholic and with a tendency to stealing. However, he has to recognize that evil comes from his own “civilized” society: the murder has been committed by an English gentleman who seems to be polite and generous.

“Whoever had murdered Bronson hadn’t murdered him to rob and if he’d stopped to talk with someone it could only be with a friend. I knew at last who the murderer was... The man he met was Cartwright. Cartwright was pigeon–shooting. He stopped and asked him what sport he had had, and as he rode on Cartwright raised his gun and discharged both barrels into his head.” (p.657)

Maugham uses the external narrator of "*The Letter*" to follow the same kind of thread: the Chinese are greedy people who take advantage of the colonizer and are opportunistic. Mr. Joyce concludes that the Chinese woman who has been Geoffrey's mistress is looking for revenge and money after her lover has been killed by Leslie Crosbie who has been in a relationship with him too: "The Chinese woman who was living in Hammond's house...I imagine that she has a very shrewd idea of its value. I doubt if it would be possible to get hold of it except for a very large sum' (p. 874). In addition, Mr. Joyce infers that his hardworking employee, who tries to imitate the British in their accent and customs, appears to be an avaricious and unscrupulous colonized since he is the one who has produced the new piece of evidence: "Mr. Joyce looked at Ong Chi Seng for at least three minutes. The clerk bore the searching scrutiny without embarrassment. He stood in a respectful attitude with downcast eyes. Mr. Joyce knew his man. Clever fellow, Chi Seng, he thought, I wonder how much he's going to get out of it." (p. 876). Nevertheless, the external narrator does not notice that the lawyer has acted as unethically as the others since vice does not belong to a particular kind of ethnicity. Both the colonizer and the native suffer from the same kind of flaw since they are capable of bribery to obtain a letter with precious information. In this short story, the lawyer, his clerk, Mrs. Crosbie and the Chinese woman act in the same way: all of them try to take advantage of one another, they want to take control over the other and all of them abandon their principles and values.

In "*Rain*" the external narrator points out that the colonizer teaches the natives how to control their desires but the colonizer himself cannot control his own desire. Moreover, the colonizers believe they possess the religion that should help the colonized to exist in agreement with proper behaviour. Mrs. Davidson, who is a character of irreproachable values, decides to ban the natives from a custom which does not imply any kind of sin for them, and which they only perform for the sake of entertainment. However, she offers the common thought of the western society of the colonial years, namely, to proscribe the ritual practice.

Because the Europeans believe the dance is sensuous and alluring, the natives have to stop altogether:

“But among white people it’s not quite the same...though I must say I agree with Mr. Davidson, who says he can’t understand how a husband can stand by and see his wife in another man’s arms, and as far as I’m concerned I’ve never danced a step since I married. But the native dancing is quite another matter. It’s not only immoral in itself, but it distinctly leads to immorality. However, I’m thankful to God that we stamped it out, and I don’t think I’m wrong in saying that no one has danced in our district for eight years.”(p.15)

She changes the natives’ ritual practice and replaces it with her own habits. Furthermore, the external narrator implies that the character of Mr. Davidson, who is an enthusiastic missionary that prevents people from transgression, embodies the domineering idea of the Colonizer. He is the only person who has the ability to suppress his primitive desires and behave properly:

"We’ve been away for a year...The mission has been in charge of native missionaries and I’m terribly nervous that they’ve let things slide. They’re good men... They can make a stand once, they can make a stand twice, but they can’t make a stand all the time. If you leave a mission in charge of a native missionary, no matter how trustworthy he seems, in course of time you’ll find he’s let abuses creep in.” (p. 18)

Nevertheless, the external narrator criticizes religion and how the pastors and priests preach the gospel but do not follow it themselves. Corruption is a moral perversion that reaches every human being.

In “*The Outstation*”, Mr. Warburton inherited a certain amount of money when he was young and he squandered it with his friends who did not respect him but used him. In the end he was bankrupt so he did what a man in his circumstances had to do at that time. The external narrator implies that when a man has no future in the civilized society he goes to the colonies to start a new life. Therefore, the text suggests that the kind of people that were sent to the East were, indeed, the outcasts:

“He was too much imbued with the spirit of his class to hesitate in the choice of his next step. When a man in his set had run through his money he went out to the colonies... The only favour he asked of any of the great friends in whose daily company he had lived for years was a recommendation. The able man who was at that time Sultan of Sembulu took him into his service.” (p. 274)

After being in the colonies for decades, Mr. Warburton appreciates the Malays greatly and he feels comfortable surrounded by them. However, the external narrator states that Mr. Warburton is against any kind of surrender to the culture of the colonized and he also believes that the natives are clean and neat thanks to the colonizer’s teachings and that they can be considered tamed animals:

“He liked their courtesy and their distinguished manners, their gentleness and their sudden passions. He knew by instinct exactly how to treat them. He had a genuine tenderness for them. But he never forgot that he was an English gentleman and he had no patience with the white men who yielded to native customs. He made no surrenders” (p. 275)

In this short story Maugham introduces an antagonist to Mr. Warburton, Mr. Cooper, who has been treated all his life as a second-class citizen due to the fact he was born in a royal colony. The external narrator indicates that the British have that way of thinking at that moment. Not only is Mr. Cooper full of hatred towards the colonized: “He was honest, just and painstaking, but he had no sympathy for the natives...He was hard, he had no patience with the native mind, and he was a bully.” (p.281), but he also despises the arrogance of the Crown “I was born in a Crown Colony and I've lived practically all my life in the colonies. I don't give a row of pins for a lord. What's wrong with England is snobbishness. And if there's anything that gets my goat it's a snob.” (p. 280). The external narrator stresses that there is an exception here since this character who is also a colonizer offers a different point of view which indicates imperfections in the British Empire: the British who

think of themselves as flawless are actually quite the obverse. The external narrator adds that one character admires the natives and the other treats them cruelly. However, both of them agree that natives and colonizers are not equal, thereby proclaiming the superiority of the white race.

Finally, Maugham offers in "*P&O*" a meticulous description of the society in Singapore around the 1920s. This has been the place where Mrs. Hamylin has lived for a while before coming back to England after her husband deceived her. The external narrator mentions how each group behaves and which ones can be considered more competent than others. He describes Singapore at the beginning of the story -the different qualities each group of people have (the Malays, the Chinese, the Japanese, the English, etc.) and he projects the European point of view onto his description of the inhabitants of the city. William G. Sumner (1906) defines ethnocentrism as "the technical name for the view of things in which one's own group is the center of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it." Maugham infers that the best ethnic group in this city is the Europeans:

"Singapore is the meeting-place of many races. The Malays, though natives of the soil, dwell uneasily in towns, and are few; and it is the Chinese, supple, alert, and industrious, who throng the streets; the dark-skinned Tamils walk on their silent, naked feet, as though they were but brief sojourners in a strange land, but the Bengalis, sleek and prosperous, are easy in their surroundings, and self-assured; the sly and obsequious Japanese seem busy with pressing and secret affairs; and the English in their topees and white ducks, speeding past in motorcars or at leisure in their rickshaws, wear a nonchalant and careless air." (p. 734).

The writer puts into words how the colonizer sees each group of natives living there and most of the description is delivered through adjectives with a negative connotation. For example, the Japanese are introduced as deceitful and docile.

The main characters of the stories are Europeans who have a distorted perception of the East: the natives are presented as the ones who bring corruption to the colony and the colonizers are the ones that have to stop the natives from doing evil and transform them into good people. However, the external narrator of each story infers that this is an impossible mission since vice is not determined by ethnicity. It depends on how a human being has been raised and on the kind ethical principles he has absorbed from the norms and values of society.

### **3.4 Women in colonial times**

Maugham depicts an absolute dichotomy between the autonomy of the women from the Western world and the docility of the women from the East. As mentioned in the literature review, Adams (2014) and Johnson (2015) describe the attitude of the European women in the 1920s as a radical shift from traditional and deep-rooted gender roles: women lose respect for the sacred institution of marriage and they allow themselves the possibility of experiencing a sexual liberation. However, as mentioned in the previous sections, Wollacot (2014) states that the female natives suffer from a double subjugation: the colonizer and their husbands.

Maugham specifies that the colonizer sees the women from the colonies as objects to be used. In *"The Pool"* the external narrator states that Ethel's father, an old Norwegian man who has lived in the colony for forty years, practices polygamy, thereby implicitly acknowledging that female natives do not deserve the same respect as the women from the West:

"He was a little old man, knotted and gnarled like an ancient tree ... he had now nothing to live on but a small plantation of coconut trees. He had had four native wives and, as he told you with a cracked chuckle, more children than he could count."(p.86)

The external narrator of *"The Force of Circumstance"* follows the same kind of notion when he shows that it is customary in the East that

the colonizer have sex and even children with native women but when he wants to get properly married he goes back to England and chooses a white woman. Then he asks the native woman to leave him. The main character in this short story, Guy, explains to his wife how he has met the native woman who has been bothering them. He was young and he felt lonely so he is offered a young native to accompany him, but he had to buy her:

“It wouldn’t cost me very much money... her people were poor and they’d be quite satisfied with a small present... She was very young, hardly more than a child, they said she was fifteen. She was awfully pretty, and she had her best clothes on. We began to talk. She didn’t say much, but she laughed a lot when I chaffed her.” (p. 293).

So he manipulates her and her family and has no feelings for her in spite of the fact that he has children with her. However, he supports them. Guy explains to his wife that he finds it difficult to feel love for his children since they are not white as him but he will always pay for their welfare (food, clothes and a good school for them). The colonizer fulfills his duty but he does not express any kind of feelings towards the children.

In “*P&O*” Mr. Gallagher has lived with a Malay girl for many years, but now that he has decided to come back to his country he has never thought that he should take her with him, he will leave her as if she were a useless human being. So she curses him:

““you go...but I tell you that you will never come to your own country. When the land sinks into the sea, death will come upon you, an’ before them as goes with you sees the land again, death will have took you” (p. 743).

This short story builds on the prejudiced and highly superstitious belief that a native woman who has been cheated is very dangerous and if she casts a spell on the colonizer, she can even kill him. The colonial women are portrayed as evil creatures who have the power to destroy their enemy: the colonizer who sexually abuses her. The colonizer sees the native as the dark side of civilization. He surmises that the colonized



is full of negative feelings such as envy and malice but only pretends to be docile, merely awaiting the opportunity to assault the colonizer who is depriving him of his land and customs. The belief that something odd can happen in the East is also introduced in the story through Mrs. Hamlyn when she doubts whether the curse will work: 'I've lived in the East a long time...Strange things happen there.' (p. 745) Once more, the external narrator of "*The Pool*" reinforces the idea that the colonizer takes advantage of the female natives of that time. Lawson has chosen to marry a half-caste woman who appears not to have any trace of native blood: "... the half-castes as a rule have a certain coarseness; they seem a little roughly formed, but she had an exquisite daintiness which took your breath away. There was something extremely civilized about her, so that it surprised you to see her in those surroundings..." (p. 85) He selects a woman with the characteristics of the Europeans because he believes in their superiority as a race. Moreover, Lawson beats Ethel when he is drunk and she accepts the situation without complaint:

"The native women are not unused to blows. What he had done did not outrage her. When she looked at herself in the glass and arranged her hair, her eyes were shining. There was a strange look in them. Perhaps then she was nearer loving him than she had ever been before." (p. 98)

The external narrator claims that native women conceive the notion that beating is deserved when they misbehave and if their partners possess this characteristic, the female natives admire them.

In the same short stories, Maugham draws a sharp contrast between the obedience of the colonial women and the defiant Western women. In "*The Force of Circumstance*" Doris who is a determined woman but a prejudiced one decides to abandon Guy when she realizes that he has had a relationship with a native and has some children. She has a serious conversation with his husband:

'I'm not going to live with you as your wife again... My mind is quite made up. I don't want to be unkind to you, but there are some things that you can't ask me to do. I've thought it

all over. I've been thinking of nothing else since you told me,  
night and day, till I'm exhausted.' (p. 296)

She cannot stand thinking that he has had sexual intercourse with a native since Doris associates this experience with filthiness: "It's a physical thing, I can't help it, it's stronger than I am. I think of those thin black arms of hers round you and it fills me with a physical nausea. I think of you holding those little black babies in your arms. " (p. 298). The colonizer believes that natives are connected with impurity and degradation so if one of the Europeans mixes with the "savages", the civilized man changes his nature and personality, thereby turning into some kind of "savage" himself. In other words, miscegenation is the primeval way of 'going native'. This is the idea in Doris' mind after she knows the truth; his husband does not belong to the English land any more, he is part of the colony and its society. In "*P&O*" Mrs. Hamylin arrives at the same decision of leaving his husband when she discovers that he is having an affair with a European woman that is older than she is and, besides, he confesses that he loves his lover: "I shall go back to England and consult a lawyer. Nowadays these things can be managed fairly easily, and I shall throw myself on your generosity." (p.740). In this short story the external narrator also reflects on marriage and love. Through the character of Mrs Hamylin's husband, who is in his fifties, it is implied that love seems more mature at that age and life is too short to pay attention to trivialities:

"And at that age you feel that you can't afford to throw away the chance of happiness which a freakish destiny has given you. In five years it will certainly be over, and perhaps in six months. Life is rather drab and grey, and happiness is so rare. We shall be dead so long.' (p. 740)

At the same time the external narrator mentions that a young couple does not fight for their love. Mrs. Hamylin observes how Mrs. Linsell, a passenger on the boat, is cheating on her husband with a doctor and her husband seems not to care at all:

"Was it possible that he did not see that his wife and the surgeon were falling in love with one another? Yet, not so very

long ago, he must have cared. Their marriage had been romantic. They had become engaged when Mrs Linsell was still at school and he little more than a boy. They must have been a charming, handsome pair, and their youth and their mutual love must have been touching. And now, after so short a time, they were tired of one another. It was heartbreaking. ”  
(p. 741)

The western woman as strong-minded and egoistic is portrayed by the novelist in two short stories. First, the external narrator of “*The Letter*” points out that a self-controlled woman can turn into a savage because of a deep emotion. Leslie has killed Geoffrey since her pride has been wounded after he announces that he was going to leave her for her Chinese mistress. However, she does not repent her crime and confesses the crime to Mr Joyce:

“I seized the revolver and I fired. He gave a cry and I saw I’d hit him. He staggered and rushed for the veranda. I ran after him and fired again. He fell and then I stood over him and I fired till the revolver went click, click, and I knew there were no more cartridges.” (p. 882)

In “*Footprints in the Jungle*” the external narrator suggests that civilized women may be greedy and conceive a plan to kill their husbands so they can obtain their husbands’ money. Mrs. Cartwright has convinced Theo, her lover, to murder her husband who has been a generous person to her and his friend:

“Her blue eyes were large, but pale and a little tired; her face was lined and sallow; I think it was her mouth that gave it the expression which I felt was characteristic of caustic but tolerant irony. You saw that here was a woman who knew her mind and was never afraid to speak it.” (p. 640)

She does not feel guilty for her deed and she continues with her life as if this wrongdoing had never occurred. Besides, both wives have been unfaithful to her husbands without any kind of remorse and have not been punished for the crimes they have committed. This exposes in a direct way that the women of the post Great-War period behave

differently from the ones of the previous century: the increasingly empowered women of this particular period of time allow themselves to indulge their sexual desires and challenge patriarchy. Besides, the cunning women mentioned in these short stories control their lovers' minds and direct the men's actions towards their own needs.

Finally, it is significant how the external narrator highlights in "*The Letter*" that there can be exceptions to the rule: Geoffrey admits that he loves a colonial woman and this kind of relationship is not accepted by the Europeans so, if someone breaks this moral law, the Europeans do not consider that person as part of their society any more. Geoffrey faces bravely the hypocrisy of that society and he pays with his own life for this transgression.

The external narrator clearly indicates that the colonizer usually treats the native woman as a sexual object and he never thinks of her as an equal partner. Moreover, the native men use their own women in the same way: as a servile human being who has no craving for love or tenderness. However, in this story Geoffrey tells Leslie that he sees his Chinese mistress as a respectful woman and avows that his feelings towards her are genuine: "And then he acknowledged that it was true about the Chinawoman. He said he'd known her for years, before the war, and she was the only woman who really meant anything to him, and the rest was just pastime." (p. 882).

It has been observed that the female native has no possibility of an equal treatment as a partner: she is always under the control of her male counterpart. This is perhaps the only aspect in which the male colonizer stands on equal footing with the male colonized: women, whatever their origin, are meant for sexual pleasure. In turn, the civilized women see the native women as objects to be used for cleaning the house, cooking and helping with their children: the perfect servants who are always available. Nevertheless, the European women in Maugham's narrative are often at odds with the female gender stereotypes: they are thus capable of fulfilling their own desires in life and can even utilize men as sexual themselves.

### 3.5 Decadence of moral principles in the 1920s

Two themes are inextricably interwoven in these seven short stories written by Maugham: decadence and morality. The author reflects about what was happening in society in the 1920s. The idea of moral decadence implies that people show themselves as if they followed the rules of ethics but in fact they behave as if they only cared about themselves, in a completely self-interested manner. As mentioned in the literature review, Wohl (1979) expresses that individuals who participated in the Great War changed their values and showed a ruthless behaviour towards other human beings. Enthused by the social Darwinism in vogue at turn of the century, Wells (1920) identifies people with animals, in so far as the tough individuals will prevail over the vulnerable ones. Finally, Johnson (2015) defines the young British of that period as extremely self-centered.

In "*The Force of Circumstance*" Guy ill-treats the Malay girl with whom he has spent his youth and despises her while he is married; yet when his wife abandons him, he changes his mind and he asks one of his sons what he really wants:

"Tell your mother to pack up her things and yours. She can come back.'(p.300) The external narrator finds it astonishing how quickly the main character forgets his wife who has just left the house and he decides to let the native woman return to his house since he finds it unbearable to live alone: "Then Guy in deep and bitter reflection buried his face in his hands. What was the use? It was finished. Finished! He surrendered. He sat back in his chair and sighed deeply.'(p.300)

Doris, his wife, who used to love him deeply, starts to detest him when he reveals his life in the colonies with a female native. Her affection for him is destroyed and nothing will be the same again. Her husband has become impure and rotten to her and she does not feel embarrassed to tell him what she keeps in her mind: "Oh, it's loathsome. The touch of you is odious to me. Each night, when I've kissed you, I've had to brace myself up to it. I've had to clench my hands and force myself to touch your

cheek.”(p. 298). The external narrator states that the main characters share the same attitude towards other people: one of them, insensitivity to the Malay girl and the other, insensitivity to her husband. Both of them lack empathy for the other, they cannot understand this person that is so different from them.

The tone of the short story “*P&O*” is expressed at the outset when the first-class passengers of the cruise discuss whether the second class passenger should come to the Christmas party with them and it is decided that they will not since the poor will feel more comfortable surrounded by their own kind. The external narrator shows that the real idea behind this decision is that the rich do not want to mix with the common man since the first-class passengers believe in their superiority based on the power of money. The different kind of people on the ship represents the colonial high-class stratum in a small scale, as evinced in the irony-laden remark below:

“Everyone who spoke insisted that there was in his (or her) mind no idea of class distinction, no one would be so snobbish as to think there was any difference between first- and second-class passengers as far as that went, but it would really be kinder to the second-class passengers not to put them in a false position. They would enjoy themselves much more if they had a party of their own in the second-class cabin.” (p. 737)

Then, Mr. Gallagher becomes seriously ill and the only thought in the first-passengers’ mind is to leave him on land so they can continue enjoying the voyage:

“People talked little of Gallagher, but he was seldom absent from their thoughts. They examined the route map. The doctor said now that Gallagher could not live more than three or four days, and they discussed acrimoniously what was the shortest time in which Aden could be reached. What happened to him after he was landed was no affair of theirs; they did not want him to die on board.” (p. 746)

In the end, Mr. Gallagher dies and, except for Mrs. Hamlyn, all the passengers show this feeling of utter indifference towards this sad situation when they throw the Christmas party:

“The doctor got up and thanked the consul and the passengers for the kind things that had been said of him, it had of course been a very trying time, but he was authorized by the captain to say that the captain expressly wished that all the festivities to be carried out on Christmas Day as though nothing had happened. He (the doctor) told them in confidence that the captain felt the passengers had got into a rather morbid state, and thought it would do them all good if they had a jolly good time on Christmas Day.”( p. 751).

Throughout this short story, the external narrator flaunts cynicism and sarcasm in order to highlight the passengers’ heartlessness, self-centeredness and pleasure-seeking.

Maugham gives an example of evil in “*The Letter*” when Mrs. Crosbie tells the truth to his lawyer and she implies that the murder has been committed on purpose, that everything has been planned. Besides, she is depicted as if she were a savage animal, as having lost any trace of humanity:

“Her face was no longer human, it was distorted with cruelty, and rage and pain. You would never have thought that this quiet, refined woman was capable of such fiendish passion...Mrs Crosbie’s features gradually composed themselves. Those passions, so clearly delineated, were smoothed away as with your hand you would smooth crumpled paper, and in a minute the face was cool and calm and unlined.” (p. 882)

The external narrator points out that any civilized woman can have two faces: she seems gentle and tender outwardly. However, deep inside her soul, she is capable of committing a horrendous deed. This depiction of the colonizer as verging on the vicious and brutal helps call into question the rigid, untainted moral framework upon which the colonial enterprise has been undertaken and proclaimed to the world. While still

deeply embedded in colonial discourse, Maugham's narrative manages to subtly blur the colonizer/colonized dichotomy by drawing the readers' attention to the duplicitous moral agenda of the British expatriates and settlers.

In "*The Pool*" Lawson has decided to marry a half-caste and from that moment he becomes isolated from the inhabitants of the town who disapprove of the ethnic mix: "The white people gave him the cold shoulder. They were only prevented from cutting him completely by disdainful pity and by a certain dread of his angry violence when he was drunk." (p.96). So Lawson begins to be in the company of natives all the time and he, who loves the Colonizer's culture, appears to be an alien among the colonized. He suffers from this loneliness and eventually becomes an alcoholic. The Europeans and the natives do not respect him any more: "He became extremely susceptible and was always on the lookout for affront. He lived entirely among the natives and half-castes, but he had no longer the prestige of the white man. They felt his loathing for them and they resented his attitude of superiority." (p. 96). The external narrator implies that in the end he is a pariah since he does not belong to any part of both societies.

The external narrator states in "*Footprints in the Jungle*" that a good relationship can end in a betrayal. Mr. Bronson and Mr. Cartwright have been friends for a while and when Mr. Cartwright is in desperate need of help, Mr. Bronson agrees to give him a place to live and a job. Gaze explains their settlement: "When Cartwright arrived at Alor Lipis he hadn't ten cents in his pocket...I suppose Bronson had lent him a bit of money for current expenses, and he was always very civil." (p. 646) However, Mr. Cartwright does not behave properly towards his friend since he starts an affair with his friend's wife and, when she gets pregnant, she convinces him that the only solution is to murder her husband. Mr. Cartwright agrees and, when he has the chance, he kills his friend in cold blood. Gaze recollects breaking the sad news:

"I remembered... how he'd collapsed when, in order to break the news more gently to Mrs Bronson, I said Bronson was wounded and not dead. If he was only wounded he might



have been able to speak. By George, I bet that was a bad moment. The child was Cartwright's. Look at Olive: why, you saw the likeness yourself. The doctor had said that Mrs Bronson was upset when he told her she was going to have a baby and made him promise not to tell Bronson. Why? Because Bronson knew that he couldn't be the father of the child.' (p. 657).

The external narrator remarks that generosity is paid with murder and the doer has no regrets about the violent action he has performed.

In "*The Outstation*" the external narrator states that Mr. Warburton and Mr. Cooper have a distant and cold relationship since they belong to different classes and neither of them accepts the peculiarities of the other. Mr. Cooper treats the natives in a degrading way so they complain to Mr. Warburton. He has a talk with Mr. Cooper to ask him to improve this situation and Mr. Cooper argues with him telling that everyone in the village sees him as a frivolous person. After that, Mr. Warburton despises him deeply:

"He was hot with shame and misery. A snob! They all thought him a snob. And he had always thought them very good fellows, he had always been gentleman enough to let it make no difference to him that they were of very second-rate position. He hated them now. But his hatred for them was nothing compared with his hatred for Cooper. .. He sat there for a couple of hours smoking cigarette after cigarette, and he wished he were dead." (p. 288).

Moreover, Mr. Cooper avoids meeting him outside work since he believes Mr. Warburton is a superficial person who denigrates Mr. Cooper due to his origins: "You snob. You damned snob. You thought me a cad because I hadn't been to Eton...By God, I'd rather be the cad I am than the snob you are." (p.287). The external narrator illustrates absolute hatred in this short story and it is remarkable that both of them, who belong to the "civilized" world, cannot find a more pacific way to solve their differences. They act both uncouthly and viciously, in such a

way that the natives, who are considered 'savages' by the colonizers, seem to have by contrast the moral principles that both characters lack. Finally, the writer displays a cynical view of human nature in his well known short story "*Rain*". The external narrator introduces the sensuous Davidson, who always appears to have the appropriate word for each sad or problematic situation. However, as the story unfolds, his image shows flaws: he judges the different, he does not respect the minorities and he cannot identify with other human beings. He has put fines on his island in order to make sure that the natives pay for their wrongdoings and sins. However, if someone dares him, he prevents the person from selling his fish so that the person eventually finds himself broke: "They couldn't sell their copra. When the men fished they got no share of the catch. It meant something very like starvation." (p. 21). The missionary does not show the kind of sympathy towards his peers that a religious man should have. He is very proud of himself so he feels satisfied with his "good" deeds. However, the external narrator implies Davidson is a conceited man who has no self-criticism.

Miss Thompson, who is depicted as a young vulgar prostitute, is obliged to leave the island because of her dissolution and she has to suffer deeply to repent from it. However, in the meantime Davidson intends to perform some kind of brainwashing on her and tries to change her personality completely: "A great mercy has been vouchsafed me. Last night I was privileged to bring a lost soul to the loving arms of Jesus." (p.35). The external narrator shows that the missionary is someone who enjoys manipulating other people's lives and has no mercy. The missionary uses his personal contacts to force the governor of the island to do what he wants: "Our mission is not entirely without influence at Washington. I pointed out to the governor that it wouldn't do him any good if there was a complaint about the way he managed things here." (p.29). Davidson subdues the governor in a tough way so he allows the missionary to deport the prostitute. Davidson acts as if he were a tyrant whose power is limitless and can exploit other people's lives.

Finally, Davidson criticizes the town for being full of vice. However, the colonizer is the one who takes advantage of this situation. In the end

Davidson, who has been trying to save the sinner's soul, has sex with her. After that, realizing that he is a hypocrite, he decides to commit suicide. The prostitute is shown as a better person than the missionary since she is sincere and does not pretend to be pure. She is disappointed with the missionary and full of despair: "You men! You filthy, dirty pigs! You're all the same, all of you. Pigs! Pigs!" (p. 39). The external narrator expresses that the missionary who has the duty to help the vulnerable people does not fulfill his obligations and takes advantage of them.

The external narrator of each selected short stories portrays the lack of understanding and compassion of the main characters and how they act cruelly towards the Other. The dichotomous colonial discourse explicitly asserts that the colonizer owns the European "civilized" demeanor and Christian values and the natives act as the pagan savages. However, the external narrator points out that the colonizer is bereft of any moral consideration whatsoever since his ultimate deed is to humiliate the Other. It is important, nonetheless to bear in mind that this polarization (Colonizer / Colonized) is not questioned in Maugham's narrative, which is ultimately embedded in the colonial ideology. His critique does not undermine the ideological foundations of colonialism, but is only geared to point out the moral decadence of the white hegemonic elite who, brought up to righteously spread the Western high standards of culture among far-off, uncivilized peoples, ended up grotesquely resembling the Other or uncovering the Other within.

## 4. Conclusions

The aim of this paper was to discuss Maugham's presentation and implicit assessment of the colonial process in a selection of short stories published in the 1920s. Based on a postcolonial theoretical framework and a socio-historical reading of the context of production of these texts, the dissertation aimed to explore the extent to which the selected corpus evinced any form of explicit or implicit criticism of the colonial expansion and, if so, to determine on what grounds such criticism was expressed. While Maugham's writing has been traditionally regarded as deeply embedded in the colonial discourse, the short stories selected also portray the colonizers in a very negative light. Two interconnected reading hypotheses were put forward to help account for this apparently contradictory presentation: the first one states that the criticism leveled at the European settlers is grounded on the moral corruption they embody which results in an incompetent administration of the colonial empire and a grotesque portrayal of the colonists themselves; the second hypothesis argues that, despite this moral condemnation of the British colonists, there are no fundamental challenges to the mainstream colonial discourse.

The first hypothesis - Maugham's short stories level a form of criticism at the colonial venture by exposing the moral decadence of the European settlers in the colonies in the years that followed the Great War- has been verified. Several examples of this criticism have been elicited in the selected short stories.

The idea of corruption and discrimination is well in evidence in the short stories selected in the present work. For example, the first class passengers in "P&O" do not want to have a party with the second class passengers because they presume that wealth separates the members of any society. Moreover, the story denounces the British unfaithfulness to their wives, claiming that men appear to follow their instincts and lack the simple rules of civilized social conduct. In "The Outstation" Mr. Warburton does not accept his employee because he was born in a British

colony but Mr. Warburton forgets that he does not belong to the Royal Family, he came from a very poor background. He was a compulsive gambler when he was young and when he lost everything he went to the colonies. However, he thinks of himself as a better human being than the natives though. Likewise, the pastor Davidson of “Rain” portrays himself as perfect. However he is a hypocrite and corrupted man, worse than the sinners he preaches to. His mission is to save the soul of a prostitute but he takes advantages of the situation and has sex with her. Often regarded as one of Maugham’s most accomplished tales, “Rain” is a vicious attack on the hypocrisy of English missionaries who committed more sins and violations against the faith than those so-called heathens whom they had set out to convert. Finally, in two short stories, “The letter” and “Footprints in the jungle” the western woman is depicted as a person who kills due to her greed or hatred and shows no regret. Moreover, in “Footprints in the Jungle” the best friendship can be betrayed and a good friend can fall in love with his friend’s wife and then kill his friend in cold blood. In “The Force of Circumstance” the natives are depicted as impure but Guy and Doris act so insensitively and they do not have empathy towards the other.

No character in the selected texts appears to evince any kind of self-criticism. Each character assumes that they are good people doing the right thing, while they actually lack the most basic feeling of compassion towards other human beings. Maugham presents an assorted variety of human sins and moral corruption in the characters in his stories. The evidence seems to suggest that double standards and hypocrisy are rampant in the lives of these British expatriates. While there is no explicit criticism of colonialism itself, the failure and decadence of the colonial venture in the 1920s is portrayed in terms of the moral debasement of its own protagonists and their incapacity to live up to the very high moral, civilizing, edifying standards that shaped the colonial discourse in the Victorian times. The colonies have increasingly become a site of immorality and crime –which is no longer solely attributable to the natives themselves– but has seeped into and corrupted the spirit of the colonizers. The extent to which such transformation is the

result of the inner contradictions of the colonial enterprise as well as the postwar moral decadence in the West or rather the spiritual pollution of the colonizers' minds and bodies arising from their contact with the savage Other still remains unclear. However, the texts show the pernicious effects of miscegenation, 'going native' and hybridity from the colonizers' perspective. This tends to confirm the fact the colonial discourse, despite Maugham's moral indictment, remains largely unchallenged.

The second hypothesis -Despite the negative presentation of the European colonizers, chiefly couched in ethical or moral terms, Maugham's fiction is still deeply embedded in the hegemonic and overruling colonial discourse- has also been confirmed.

Following the standard depiction of the colonial space as uncivilized and potentially dangerous, the colonial settlements are considered places where evil expands itself as shown, for instance, in "P&O" where the villages built by the natives are shown as full of chaos. However the British build the settlements where they live as a replica of England – civilized and neat. There is a detailed description of Singapore and its inhabitants through the distorted colonizer's eyes. Mr. Gallagher has neglected his female woman for many years but when he decides that he wants to come back to his country he abandons her as if she had no feelings. Confined to his room and then transferred to the ship's hospital, he eventually dies onboard from his malady, reportedly the direct result of a spell cast upon him by the fat native Malay mistress he left behind. The abandoned native is stereotypically depicted as an embittered evil creature, with the power to kill through a spell. In "The Pool" after five years of marriage, Lawson becomes jealous, miserable, an object of public scorn, a drunkard; he hates himself and in the end takes his own life. Again, the intentions of the transplanted European may be valid, but in the colonies, good intentions often lead to deterioration and destruction. This presentation reinforces the stereotyped view of the colonies as potentially destructive environments for the civilized man. In "Footprints in the Jungle" a number of stereotyped elements of life in the colonies are reiterated. The British are described as making replicas of

their hometowns in the colonies in order to feel some kind of security in a strange land. Gaze the sheriff believes the murder has been committed by a native (since a British is never considered as suspect) and he even describes the negative traits of each kind of native. He also assumes that the weather in the colonies makes the men grow older before their age but at the same time makes them behave as teenagers. In “The Outstation”, a study in snobbishness and often regarded as one of Maugham’s best short stories, Mr Warburton follows the same strict routine as in England in the belief that this would reduce his chance of ‘going native’. The colony is pictured as a place where one can become insane. Mr. Cooper who was brought up with the natives since he was a child, does not respect them and treats them violently since he thinks the natives do not deserve any kind of right. He sees them as animals. Maugham tells us that the situation could have occurred only in the colonies; in England the two men would never have met. In “Rain” the objectification and domination of the native Other by the European missionaries is clearly exposed, though not fundamentally called into question. The pastor Davidson does not allow the natives to dance since he believes there is sexuality in this act, He contends that the mission in the hands of a native is lost since in the end they always sin. He makes the natives pay fines if they sin, keeps them under a strict control and shows no mercy in the punishments he inflicts on the wrongdoers. In “The Pool” and “The Force of Circumstance” the female natives are used as objects by the male and female colonizers. No one treats them with affection. The female native is even described as enjoying her husband’s brutal assaults. .Maugham weaves the piece upon the theme of a white woman’s attitude toward miscegenation and the aversion to the Other. Finally, in “The letter” there is an interracial love that ends tragically as the British society in the colonies does not forgive the one who trespasses this rule. The story stands as one of Maugham’s principal examples of the degeneration of the English colonist once he or she has settled into the isolated life. Further, the sinister Ong Chi Chen proves the agent of that degeneration, which only demonstrates the inability of natives and colonists to achieve anything close to harmony or respect for each other.

In sum, the selected stories build on and reinforce the colonial discourse in a variety of ways: by underlying the irremediable “otherness” of the native and their incapacity to become “civilized” beyond a certain point; by underscoring the stereotyped views of the colonies as ‘primitive’ sites where evil and vice play havoc with the European settlers’ principles; by strengthening the gender stereotypes and relegating the native woman as the ultimate Other. While the stories insist on the responsibility of the British settlers in their own moral corruption, the ethnocentric discourse is not openly questioned. In fact, the colonial Other is presented as the ultimate cause of the Europeans’ downfall into debauchery and corruption.

#### **4.1. Limitations of the present study and suggestions for further research**

The paper is limited in scope to a selection of short stories published in the 1920s. This means that the conclusions of the present study cannot reasonably be extended beyond the short stories under study. While scholars agree on Maugham’s colonial underpinnings in general and his conservative presentation of characters and topics in general, a more comprehensive research would be required in order to determine the extent to which the conclusions in this study can be applied to the short stories written before and after the 1920s. Moreover, the study has not taken into consideration the remainder of Maugham’s vast literary production, fictional, autobiographical and documentary. Further research is required to determine whether there are significant variations in the rest of his production.

Also the selected stories can be profitably examined from various other angles, besides the postcolonial reading adopted in this dissertation. The question of gender and sexuality as portrayed in this selection is also worth exploring further in order to determine the extent to which gender stereotypes and heteronormative presentation of social relations are reinforced or questioned in Maugham’s fiction. Moreover, the same selection of texts could be explored more thoroughly in the light of



specific postcolonial concepts such as “hybridity”, “miscegenation”, “othering”, “going native”, etc. –which were not always fleshed out in detail in the present study. Finally, a more systematic analysis of Maugham’s literary production in general is needed, especially from a postcolonial and gender theory perspective. This will enable us to better understand an author who, despite being underrated, has enjoyed immense popularity in his time.

## 5. References

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