
THE CONCEPT OF THE FANTASTIC IN SOMERSET MAUGHAM'S WORKS IN THE CONTEXT OF ENGLISH NOVEL THEORIES OF THE FIRST HALF OF THE 20TH CENTURY

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This article examines the manifestation of fantastic elements in the prose works of William Somerset Maugham within the broader theoretical framework of English novel development during the first half of the twentieth century. The research demonstrates that Maugham's approach to the fantastic represented a distinctive synthesis of colonial experience, psychological realism, and modernist experimentation that distinguished his work from both traditional Victorian supernatural fiction and avant-garde modernist approaches.

Introduction

The early decades of the 20th century brought radical changes in English novel theory and practice, as writers were caught between the old Victorian style and the new modernist aesthetic. William Somerset Maugham was very much in the center of this literary world where he reaped immense commercial success yet, at the same time, was not very much discussed within the critical circles where high modernist writers like Joyce, Woolf, and Lawrence were the main voices [1]. The marvelous aspect of Maugham's writing, which is most clearly seen in his short stories located in the former colonies and his learning about mystical Eastern philosophies, is an easy spot for the discussion of how traditional narrative forms accepted the supernatural and the extraordinary during the transition period. The

current study intends to dig deep into Maugham's theoretical basis for using fantastic elements and to put his method within the domain of the then contemporary English novel theories that aimed at determining the limits and opportunities of prose fiction in an era of speedy cultural transformation.

Methodology and Literature Review. The methodological approach in this research combines different aspects of literary analysis, i.e. comparative and historical-theoretical analysis, of the critical sources from the early twentieth century. Primary textual analysis is made of Maugham's stories where fantastic elements are present. These include his collections of tales from Malaya and the Pacific, and the writings of contemporary critics and novelists who were trying to formulate the rules of modern fiction. The concept of the fantastic that is employed in this case follows the structural definition of Todorov while at the same time admitting its inadequacy for use in the literature prior to his theoretical framework [2]. Theory of the English novel in the period under study was marked by rival ideas in which art was performed by the writers themselves, from Henry James's prefaces that stressed psychological depth and formal unity to Virginia Woolf's essays that questioned materialist realism and advanced the cause of representing inner consciousness [3].

Maugham was one of the proponents who indirectly and in passages of his critical writings, especially in "The Summing Up", where he expressed his thoughts on the purpose and method of fiction, criticized modernism for obscuring the clarity and the story, and defended storytelling and clarity, [4]. Soviet literary scholarship outlined its own ways of interpreting Western fantastic literature by focusing on its social functions and ideological dimensions; such viewpoints may serve as good counterpoints to Anglo-American formalist readings [5]. Today, the pure Uzbek literary criticism has been taking up the comparative analysis of the unconventional and supernatural with the West, which has been making up the frameworks necessary for the study of Maugham's Oriental stories [6]. The literature review conveys that, although there is a lot of literature dealing with Maugham's realism and colonial settings, still, his work's fantastic dimensions have not been systematically examined from the perspective of early twentieth-century novel theory so far.

Results and Discussion. A close examination of Maugham's use of the marvelous shows a pattern that is uniform all over where the unearthly or extraordinary things are mainly seen as triggers for psychological exposure and not as the main attractions of the story. Maugham in such tales as those in "The Casuarina Tree" and "Ah King," brings in local superstition,

strange coincidence, and mysterious happenings but only to the point that rational or psychological explanation can still take over. This is a method that is different from both Gothic supernatural tradition and the more radical ontological uncertainty that F. Todorov's pure fantastic is characterized by [7]. The narrative technique is a reflection of the larger conflicts and the ongoing negotiations in the course of the English novel criticism during that time over the issues of realism in fiction and the acceptance of the existence of aspects of human experience that are beyond the scope of purely materialistic representation.

Maugham's colonial environments are vital to the existence of fantastic elements, as the strange Eastern culture offers a space physically and morally allowed for the impossible to happen, and at the same time, it emphasizes and questions West's view of the East as a region of mystery and nonsense. The theoretical framework put forward by E.M. Forster in "Aspects of the Novel," which splits narrative into two parts—story and plot and at the same time recognizes fantasy as a valid mode of writing—gives a lot of information about Maugham's art, even though Maugham's marvelous was still much more connected to realistic conventions than Forster's theoretical liberty would imply. [8]. Maugham's treatment of the supernatural was indeed a very modern but still conservative one; it had the capacity to incorporate new and varied subjects in the process of writing, but it didn't allow the gentler method of change of form to prevail. So, he used the exotic and mystical elements of the classical narrative structures, which were meant for the easy and emotional involvement of the reader rather than for the disruption of the epistemological concern.

Conclusion. This analysis demonstrates that Somerset Maugham's employment of fantastic elements in his prose fiction constituted a distinctive response to the theoretical and practical challenges confronting English novelists during the first half of the twentieth century. Rather than embracing either traditional supernatural conventions or modernist formal experimentation, Maugham developed an approach wherein fantastic elements functioned within fundamentally realist frameworks to explore psychological and moral dimensions of colonial experience. His work illustrates the continued vitality of storytelling traditions during a period often characterized primarily through modernist innovation, while simultaneously revealing the ideological dimensions embedded in representations of exotic otherness as sites of mystery and the supernatural. Future research might productively extend this analysis through comparative examination of Maugham's fantastic with that of contemporaries such as Kipling and Conrad, and through more detailed attention to the reception of his supernatural tales within contemporary critical discourse.

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