

A Study on the Appeal of Selected Short Stories of William Somerset Maugham

唐玉玲、任世雍

E-mail: 375334@mail.dyu.edu.tw

ABSTRACT

Maugham's short stories are marked by highly perceptive observations, rich life experience, and cynical attitude toward human nature. Even though they were published half a century ago, many of them are still popular. This study is aimed to examine the factors that contribute to creating their power appeal. I will first briefly introduce Maugham's miserable childhood and rich life experience that help develop his cynical and humanitarian attitude toward his life. The first two factors to be dealt with in the first chapter are his ability to create fascinating stories and to pique interest in reading; and his ability to bring us shocking enlightenment through the sudden reversal of human nature. The third chapter is focused on investigating his narrative art that consists in his skillful use of multiple points of view, of time manipulation (shifting of the present and the past), and symmetric contrast techniques. His excellence at the depiction of the atmosphere gained from traveling abroad presents the fourth factors that help enhance his power appeal in forming a romantic story and in converting a character's personality either on the conscious level or on the subconscious level. The conclusion I have arrived at is that Maugham's ability to pique our unfading interest in reading his short stories, his skillful use of narrative art, his excellence at the depiction of the atmosphere, constitutes the factors that sustain his continuing popularity.

Keywords : power appeal, story-telling, multiple points of view, time manipulation, symmetric contrast techniques, atmosphere, sudden reversal of human nature

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