

**INVESTIGATING NARRATIVE DEVICES IN
SELECTED NOVELS OF WILLIAM SOMERSET
MAUGHAM FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF
GENETTE'S NARRATIVE THEORY**

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MAUGHAM FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF
GENETTE'S NARRATIVE THEORY**

by

HAN YANLI

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

OHB	<i>Of Human Bondage</i>
TMAS	<i>The Moon and Sixpence</i>
TRE	<i>The Razor's Edge</i>
RQ	research question
DR	distinctiveness ratio
PR	prolepsis
HOA	homodiegetic analepsis
HEA	heterodiegetic analepsis
IA	internal analepsis
EA	external analepsis
MA	mixed analepsis
SC	scene
SU	summary
PA	pause
EL	ellipsis
SN	singular narrative
RN	repeated narrative
IN	iterative narrative
ZF	zero focalization
FIF	fixed internal focalization
MIF	multiple internal focalization
VIF	variable internal focalization
NS	narrated speech
IM	interior monologue

DD	dramatic dialogue
SOC	stream of consciousness
TS	transposed speech
FL	first narrative level
SL	second narrative level
TL	third narrative level
EHEN	external heteronarrative narrator
EHON	external homonarrative narrator
IHEN	internal heteronarrative narrator
IHON	internal homonarrative narrator

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Appendix A Samples of the tagging results

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**MENYELIDIKI PERANTI NARATIF DALAM NOVEL TERPILIH
WILLIAM SOMERSET MAUGHAM DARI PERSPEKTIF TEORI NARATIF
GENETTE**

ABSTRAK

Tesis ini menyelidiki ciri-ciri naratif dalam tiga novel-novel terpilih karya William Somerset Maugham—*Of Human Bondage*, *The Moon and Sixpence*, dan *The Razor's Edge*. Ia mengkaji bagaimana Maugham menggunakan peranti naratif berkaitan dengan masa, suasana, dan suara untuk membentuk novel-novelnya, dengan menggunakan teori naratif Genette sebagai kerangka analisis. Kajian ini meneroka lima soalan penyelidikan: sejauh mana peranti naratif yang berkaitan dengan masa, mood, dan suara digunakan dalam novel-novel ini; persamaan dan perbezaan dalam penggunaannya merentasi ketiga-tiga karya tersebut; serta kepentingan peranti naratif ini dalam mentafsir gaya naratif keseluruhan Maugham. Menggunakan pendekatan kaedah campuran, penyelidikan ini menggabungkan kaedah kualitatif dan kuantitatif untuk mengenal pasti, mengkod, dan mengira peranti naratif dalam setiap bab novel-novel terpilih. Data numerik mentah dipersembahkan dalam bentuk jadual, dan nisbah keunikan dikira untuk menganalisis corak dalam strategi naratif. Nombor-nombor tersebut dihuraikan dan ditafsirkan dengan teliti untuk memberikan pemahaman yang komprehensif tentang strategi naratif yang digunakan dalam teks-teks terpilih. Melalui analisis teks yang terperinci, penyelidikan ini mendedahkan bagaimana manipulasi struktur temporal dalam masa naratif, perubahan perspektif dalam suasana naratif, dan variasi suara naratif menyumbang kepada dimensi tematik dan estetik novel-novel Maugham. Penemuan menunjukkan bahawa Maugham menggunakan peranti naratif yang berbeza mengikut ciri-ciri unik setiap novel. Selain itu, penyelidikan ini

menunjukkan bahawa pemilihan teknik naratif oleh Maugham dipengaruhi oleh niat pengarang, kandungan novel, dan jangkaan atau keutamaan pembaca. Kajian ini mendedahkan bahawa Maugham secara konsisten memperbaharui penggunaan peranti naratif, memperlihatkan kebolehan yang luar biasa untuk menyesuaikan dan memperhalusi teknik penceritaannya dalam keseluruhan karyanya. Selain itu, kajian ini mencadangkan bahawa penyelidikan antara disiplin boleh lebih meluas mendedahkan nilai karya sastera dengan mengintegrasikan perspektif dan metodologi yang pelbagai dari pelbagai bidang kajian. Dengan mempertimbangkan keseluruhan dan kedalaman teknik dan sumbangan sastera Maugham, adalah jelas bahawa kebolehan naratifnya memerlukan penilaian yang lebih objektif dan komprehensif. Penyelidikan ini mengisi jurang dalam kajian naratif yang sedia ada dengan menawarkan analisis perbandingan yang terperinci terhadap karya-karya Maugham, dengan itu menyumbang pengetahuan yang berharga kepada kritikan sastera dan teori naratif. Kajian ini menyumbang kepada penyelidikan akademik masa depan dan kemajuan pedagogi dengan mengemukakan cadangan yang relevan. Melalui pemeriksaan sistematik ini, kajian ini bukan sahaja meningkatkan pemahaman tentang strategi naratif Maugham tetapi juga menekankan kebolehlaksanaan yang lebih luas bagi kerangka Genette dalam analisis sastera.

**INVESTIGATING NARRATIVE DEVICES IN SELECTED NOVELS OF
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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the narrative features in William Somerset Maugham's three selected novels—*Of Human Bondage*, *The Moon and Sixpence*, and *The Razor's Edge*. It examines how Maugham employs narrative devices related to time, mood, and voice to shape his novels, utilizing Genette's narrative theory as the analytical framework. This study explores five research questions: the extent to which narrative devices related to time, mood, and voice are utilized in these novels; the similarities and differences in their usage across the three works; and the significance of these narrative devices in interpreting Maugham's overall narrative style. Employing a qualitative method, this research identifies, codes, and quantifies the narrative devices in each chapter of the selected novels. The raw numerical data are presented in tabular form, and distinctiveness ratios are calculated to analyze the patterns within the narrative techniques. The numbers are meticulously compared, described, and interpreted to provide a comprehensive understanding of the narrative strategies utilized in the selected texts. Through detailed textual analysis, this research reveals how Maugham's manipulation of temporal structures in narrative time, perspective shifts in narrative mood, and narrative voice variations contribute to the thematic and aesthetic dimensions of his novels. The findings suggest that Maugham employs different narrative devices according to the unique characteristics of each novel. Additionally, the research indicates that Maugham's choice of narrative techniques is influenced by his authorial intentions, the content of the novel, and the readers'

expectations or preferences. This study reveals that Maugham consistently innovated his use of narrative devices, showcasing a remarkable ability to adapt and refine his storytelling techniques across his body of work. Furthermore, the study suggests that interdisciplinary research can more extensively reveal the value of literary works by integrating diverse perspectives and methodologies from various fields of study. Considering the full range and depth of Maugham's literary techniques and contributions, Maugham's narrative ability deserves a more objective and comprehensive evaluation. This research fills a gap in existing narrative studies by offering a detailed comparative analysis of Maugham's works, thereby contributing valuable knowledge to literary criticism and narrative theory. This research contributes to future scholarly inquiries and pedagogical advancements by presenting relevant recommendations. Through this systematic examination, the study enhances the understanding of Maugham's narrative strategies and underscores the broader applicability of Genette's framework in literary analysis.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The faculty for myth is innate in the human race. It seizes with avidity upon any incidents, surprising or mysterious, in the career of those who have at all distinguished themselves from their fellows, and invents a legend to which it then attaches a fanatical belief. It is the protest of romance against the commonplace of life.

(Maugham, 1972)

1.1 Overview of the Study

As Wright (2018) noted, history has proven that artistic creations in literature need more diversity than those in any other field of society do. Yang (2022) also proposed that all the great writers and works in the history of literature established their status and confirmed their contribution with special and unique artistic creations, and their originality and novelty are often directly proportional to their artistic achievements.

Wandari (2020) observed that Maugham's ability to captivate a diverse readership sets him apart in literary history. Wright (2018) noted that Maugham's oeuvre spans three generations and encompasses nearly every major form of literary craft, excluding poetry. His extensive engagement with novels, dramas, short stories, and travel writing reflects a remarkable versatility that remains unparalleled and maintains its appeal across highbrow and popular audiences (Borg, 2022). Maugham is renowned for his distinctive narrative style and continuous experimentation with narrative techniques (Zhang, 2020). Although some critics may perceive his methods as imperfect or lacking in subtlety, their efficacy in serving their intended purpose is widely acknowledged (Mbon, 2022).

Ji (2022) and Wang (2018) have emphasized that Maugham's narrative technique is a defining feature of his novels. The present study focuses on analyzing the narrative features in Maugham's three selected novels—*Of Human Bondage* (Maugham, 1979; hereafter referred to as OHB), *The Moon and Sixpence* (Maugham, 1972; hereafter referred to as TMAS), and *The Razor's Edge* (Maugham, 1944; hereafter referred to as TRE)—composed during different stages of his career. This analysis also illuminates how Maugham's narrative techniques evolved and contributed to the distinctiveness of his storytelling.

OHB is a semi-autobiographical novel that delves into themes of freedom and human experience (Thorat, 2017). Initially published in 1915, it has been recognized as the 66th best English-language novel of the 20th century (Gao, 2019). The novel's extensive deployment of narrative devices—such as interior monologue, stream of consciousness in narrative voice, summary, scene, pause, ellipsis in narrative time, and zero focalization in narrative mood, as delineated by Genette's narrative theory—necessitates a thorough examination to appreciate its narrative complexity and depth.

TMAS, inspired by the life of the artist Paul Gauguin, explores the sacrifices made for artistic pursuit (Borg, 2022). Released in 1919, it has been translated into over 60 languages and has sold 70 million copies worldwide (Wright, 2014). Its significant impact on Maugham's literary career is underscored by its continued presence on bestseller lists (Zhang, 2019). The novel employs diverse narrative techniques, including fixed internal and external focalization, multiple narrative levels, various types of narrators, and homodiegetic analepsis in narrative time. These elements necessitate a comprehensive narrative analysis to uncover the novel's sophisticated storytelling approach.

TRE, published in 1944, examines themes of spiritual quest and personal fulfilment (Wu, 2023). Adapted into film in 1946 and 1984 (Yuan, 2020), this novel utilizes singular and iterative narrative structures within narrative time, as defined by Genette's narrative theory. It employs dual types of focalization to shape the narrative mood, and Maugham incorporates interior monologue, dramatic dialogue, and stream of consciousness in narrative voice. These narrative devices are integral to the novel's exploration of profound themes and require a meticulous analysis to reveal the narrative features and Maugham's advanced narrative strategies.

Exploring the significance of the use of these narrative devices to Maugham's overall narrative strategy involves examining his considerations during the creation process. This includes the author's content, the reader's expectations or preferences, and the novel's requirements. By analyzing these factors, this study reveals how Maugham arranges his narrative devices to achieve his literary objectives and how this impacts the reader's experience.

This study employs a qualitative methodology to achieve these objectives, focusing on close reading and textual analysis of Maugham's selected novels. Genette's narrative theory provides the theoretical foundation for this analysis.

Based on Genette's narrative theory, this study expounds on the diverse narrative devices from three aspects: narrative time, mood, and voice. It includes exploring how Maugham employs narrative devices related to narrative time, for instance, analepsis and prolepsis in time order, summary, scene, pause, and ellipsis in time duration, and singular narrative, repeated narrative, and iterative narrative in time frequency. The intricate temporal structures that Maugham utilized to weave his narratives were revealed by examining these elements. Analepsis and prolepsis, for

example, allow Maugham to manipulate the chronological flow of the story, providing background information or foreshadowing future events to enrich the narrative context and deepen the reader's understanding of characters and plot developments. Furthermore, the use of summary, scene, pause, and ellipsis in time duration showcases Maugham's ability to control the pacing of his stories, highlighting crucial moments with detailed scenes or accelerating the narrative with summaries and ellipses.

In terms of time frequency, Maugham's use of singular, repeated, and iterative narratives reveals his technique in portraying actions and events. Singular narratives focus on unique occurrences, whereas repeated narratives revisit the same events from different perspectives or times, enriching the story with multiple layers of meaning. On the other hand, an iterative narrative describes recurring actions or situations, emphasizing patterns and routines that contribute to character development and thematic depth.

The comprehensive analysis of narrative devices related to narrative time highlights Maugham's sophisticated storytelling techniques, offering deeper insights into how he constructs his narratives to engage readers and convey complex themes. By understanding these techniques, a greater appreciation for Maugham's literary craftsmanship and the multifaceted nature of his novels is gained.

Examining the use of narrative devices related to narrative mood involves identifying and interpreting different types of focalization in Maugham's selected novels. By dissecting the instances of zero focalization, fixed internal focalization or external focalization, Maugham's techniques are revealed to control the narrative perspective and influence the reader's connection to characters and events. This detailed analysis illustrates how Maugham strategically uses focalization to direct the

reader's attention, shape their emotional responses, and provide varying insight into the characters' inner thoughts and feelings. Furthermore, it sheds light on how these focalization techniques contribute to the overall development of the novels, illustrating Maugham's mastery of manipulating narrative perspectives to increase the depth and complexity of his storytelling.

Investigating the creation of narrative devices related to narrative voice in the selected novels entails analyzing the different narrative levels and narrators through which the author narrates the story, as well as the narrative speech used to unfold the narration. This involves examining how Maugham utilizes various narrative levels, such as first narrative level, second narrative level, and metanarrative level, to layer the storytelling and create a rich, multi-dimensional narrative structure. This study also digs into Maugham's use of different types of narrators, namely, external heteronarrative narrator, external homonarrative narrator, internal heteronarrative narrator, and internal homonarrative narrator, in the three selected novels. This includes looking at instances where Maugham might use an unreliable narrator to create ambiguity and tension or a more omniscient narrator to provide comprehensive insight into the characters and events.

Additionally, this study delves into the narrative speech used to unfold the narration in the selected novels, such as narrated speech, reported speech, and transposed speech, uncovering how Maugham conveys the thoughts and dialogues of characters. Narrated speech provides a clear and immediate presentation of characters' words, whereas reported speech allows for the narrator's interpretation and commentary. Transposed speech blends the character's thoughts with the narrator's

voice, offering a nuanced way to present internal monologues and subjective experiences.

By analysing these narrative levels, Maugham's strategic shifts between different narrations are demonstrated, providing diverse perspectives and depths of insight into the story. Moreover, the analysis of different types of narrators, whether homodiegetic (participating in the story) or heterodiegetic (existing outside the story), reveals how Maugham manipulates the narrator's position to influence the reader's engagement and perception. By dissecting these elements of narrative voice, Maugham's ability to craft complex, engaging narratives is appreciated. This examination shows how he skillfully orchestrates the interaction between narrative levels, narrators, and speech to create a dynamic, immersive storytelling experience. It also reveals Maugham's deliberate choices to guide the reader's understanding, evoke emotional responses, and enhance the thematic resonance of his novels.

This study begins by identifying and tagging narrative devices according to Genette's categories—time, mood, and voice—to analyze the narrative structure of selected novels. It then counts the chapters that employ each type of narrative device and calculates the distinctiveness ratios as well as the percentage usage of each device within a novel. The results are organized into tables to offer a clear and concise overview. Following this, the study performs a comparative analysis, examining the use of narrative devices both across different chapters within a single novel and among multiple novels, to uncover patterns, variations, and unique features in Maugham's narrative style. Finally, the narrative devices are contextualized within the broader framework of Maugham's literary works and his overall developmental trajectory as a writer.

With the analysis of the use of narrative devices in the selected novels from the perspective of Genette's narrative theory, this study is expected to contribute to the existing body of literature by providing a detailed analysis of Maugham's narrative techniques through Genette's theoretical framework. It enhances understanding by offering deeper insights into Maugham's narrative artistry and how his techniques engage readers and convey complex themes. By systematically examining the use of narrative devices in Maugham's novels, this research illuminates the sophisticated techniques that Maugham employs to create rich, multifaceted narratives.

This study seeks to bridge gaps in scholarship by addressing the lack of systematic analysis of Maugham's narratives using Genette's narrative theory. While many studies have focused on individual aspects of Maugham's work, few have applied Genette's framework to explore his narrative strategies in detail. This research fills this critical gap, providing a more holistic understanding of Maugham's narrative techniques and their significance in his literary oeuvre.

This study provides a model for future research by demonstrating the utility of Genette's narrative theory in analyzing literary texts. By applying this theoretical framework to Maugham's novels, the research highlights its effectiveness and encourages further studies to utilize Genette's narrative theory. This approach deepens the analysis of Maugham's work and promotes the broader application of Genette's narrative theory in literary criticism.

In conclusion, this study seeks to illuminate William Somerset Maugham's use of narrative devices, revealing his mastery of storytelling and ability to intertwine narrative form and thematic substance. By applying Genette's narrative theory, this research offers a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of Maugham's literary

contributions, enriching both academic scholarship and the broader appreciation of his works.

1.2 Background of the Study

To lay the foundation for this study, it is imperative to introduce both Maugham's works and the three selected novels. Genette's narrative theory must also be introduced to establish the theoretical framework guiding the analysis of narrative features within Maugham's novels. Therefore, this section comprehensively outlines Maugham's literary repertoire, introduces the selected novels, and elucidates Genette's narrative theory.

1.2.1 Maugham's Works

William Somerset Maugham, an English novelist and playwright, dedicated his life to his craft, producing a vast body of work that includes over 20 novels, 30 plays, and more than 100 short stories (Chelliah, 2021). Maugham's novels exhibit a wide array of themes, distinctive narrative perspectives, knowledgeable narrators, intricate plots, richly drawn characters, and complicated narrative levels (Wright, 2018). He garnered considerable admiration from readers and has been esteemed as one of the most cherished English writers since Dickens (Ettehad & Sistani, 2017). Maugham's accomplishments have elevated him to one of Britain's most celebrated authors and a literary figure of international prominence (Cody, 2017).

Maugham's works span various genres, including novels, plays, travelogues, essays, literary criticism, and autobiography, showcasing his versatility (Wandari, 2020). In fiction writing, Maugham demonstrates prolificacy in short and full-length

novels. His short stories are often characterized by wit and poignancy, frequently culminating in unexpected twists (Cody, 2017). Simultaneously, Maugham exhibits prolificacy in crafting lengthy narratives. Following the publication of his debut novel, *Liza of Lambeth* (1912), he continued to produce a string of novels, including OHB, TMAS, *The Painted Veil* (1928), *Cakes and Ale* (1925), and TRE, among others.

Fang (2023) noted that Maugham consistently positioned himself from the reader's perspective, adeptly crafting narratives that resonate with audiences. Calder (2024) further stated that Maugham's works are characterized not only by their accessible language and strong storytelling but also by their remarkable narrative arrangements and techniques in content and form. By investigating the narrative features in his selected novels, the narrative devices he employs in the three novels are revealed, his narrative techniques may be illuminated, and the artistic merits of his works may be further appreciated by researchers and readers alike.

1.2.2 Three Selected Novels

1.2.2(a) *Of Human Bondage*

The title of OHB was taken from one of the sections of Spinoza's *The Ethics* (2020), which presents a systematic and rigorous philosophical framework that seeks to understand the nature of reality, the human condition, and the pursuit of a life guided by reason and ethical principles. OHB and *The Ethics* (2020) are somewhat related, particularly in their exploration of human inner struggles, free will, and the meaning of life. *The Ethics* (Spinoza, 2020) focuses on human freedom and happiness, emphasizing attaining inner peace and fulfilment through rational reflection and

understanding of natural laws. Spinoza's ideas also delve into the impact of human emotions and desires on decision-making and the exploration of free will and innate morality (Wandari, 2020). Similarly, *OHB* delves into human struggle, the pursuit of freedom and happiness, and the moral choices individuals face in society and life (Tan, 2015). While the forms and contents of the two works differ slightly, they both focus on exploring the deeper questions of the human psyche, expressing shared concerns about freedom, happiness, and ethical morality.

OHB is set in late 19th and early 20th-century England, a time of significant social, economic, and cultural changes (Hamid, 2019). The novel captures the transition from the Victorian to the Edwardian era and the aftermath of World War I, which profoundly affected society, including shifts in gender roles, class dynamics, and attitudes towards morality and individual freedom (Thorat, 2017).

Wandari (2020) posited that *OHB* can be classified as semi-autobiographical, given the significant parallels between the protagonist's life experiences and those of the author, Maugham. Born in 1874, Maugham underwent a tumultuous upbringing characterized by the early loss of his parents (Raphael, 1977). Like Philip in the novel, Maugham was raised by a paternal uncle and subsequently placed under the care of an emotionally distant aunt (Chelliah, 2021). These childhood experiences, marked by loss, isolation, and emotional neglect, likely shaped Maugham's comprehension of human psychology and relationships, themes that are prominently explored in *OHB* (Hamid, 2019).

Long (2022) noted that this novel explores many themes, including the search for identity and purpose, the nature of love and desire, the pursuit of artistic fulfilment, and the complexities of human relationships. The motif of literal and metaphorical

bondage recurs throughout the novel, reflecting Philip's struggles with personal limitations, societal expectations, and emotional entanglements that constrain his freedom and happiness.

Maugham's inspiration for crafting OHB becomes evident from the subsequent passage, which also serves as a monologue delivered by Maugham after establishing himself as a prominent playwright:

I was but just firmly established as a popular playwright when I began to be obsessed by the teeming memories of my past life. The loss of my mother and then the break/up of my home, the wretchedness of my first years at school for which my French childhood had so ill/prepared me and which my stammering made so difficult, the delight of those easy, monotonous and exciting days in Heidelberg, when I first entered upon the intellectual life, the irksomeness of my few years at the hospital and the thrill of London; it all came back to me so pressingly, in my sleep, on my walks, when I was rehearsing plays, when I was at a party, it became such a burden to me that I made up my mind that I could only regain my peace by writing it all down in the form of a novel. (Raphael, 1976, p. 36)

The above paragraph underscores Maugham's ongoing struggle with the emotional scars of his childhood despite his academic achievements and liberation from poverty. His need to confront and alleviate these inner torments was the impetus for OHB, a semi-autobiographical work heavily inspired by his life experiences (Hamid, 2019). The trials of the protagonist, Philip, closely mirror Maugham's struggles from childhood through adulthood, including the loss of parents, unhappy years spent with a clergyman-uncle, and the challenges faced as a shy, sensitive schoolboy (Long, 2022). Maugham's emotional investment in the novel was palpable, evident in his tearful recitation of Philip's story during a reading in the United States, where he acknowledged the close parallels between Philip's suffering and inner turmoil (Wanderi, 2020). Reflecting on his literary endeavors, Maugham admitted to

finding solace and liberation from past pain, pouring his memories into his novels (Laurence, 2016).

Some scholars have examined the use of narrative devices in OHB but have focused only on a specific narrative element of Genette's narrative theory. Zhang (2019) discussed Maugham's narrative technique in OHB, highlighting the author's use of a third-person omniscient narrator. This narrative style allows readers access to the inner thoughts and emotions of the protagonist, Philip Carey, and other characters, facilitating a deeper understanding of their personal and emotional development. The novel adopts a linear narrative structure, tracing Philip's childhood to adulthood and focusing on his romantic relationships and artistic aspirations.

Wang (2016) further analyzed the narrator in OHB, noting that the narrator in this novel belongs to the external heteronarrative type. This means that the narrator exists outside the story and provides an objective account of events without directly participating in the story. Maugham employs zero focalization in the novel, offering a comprehensive depiction of the story to satisfy readers' curiosity. The narrative level is relatively simple compared with other novels, with the narrator serving as an external observer.

1.2.2(b) *The Moon and Sixpence*

The background of the novel TMAS can be examined through several interpretive lenses. Initially, its origins emerged in unique circumstances (Zhang, 2019). Against Britain's inaugural industrial revolution in the 1760s and subsequent advancements in steam engine technology, a profound transformation in travel dynamics ensued (Borg, 2022). The proliferation of improved transportation options

facilitated unprecedented mobility, affording individuals access to hitherto remote locales and broadening their horizons. Maugham astutely seized upon this burgeoning mobility, embarking on a sojourn to the South Pacific to immerse himself in its enchanting landscapes and gather artistic inspiration (Wright, 2014). Consequently, the writing of *TMAS* can be viewed as one of the tangible outcomes of this exploratory voyage.

Zhang (2018) stated that *TMAS* reflects this transition era and upheaval, exploring themes of artistic rebellion, societal norms, and personal freedom. This novel is set against the backdrop of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a time of significant cultural, social, and artistic change (Yang, 2016). This period saw the emergence of modernism in art and literature, characterized by a departure from traditional forms and a focus on individualism, subjectivity, and experimentation (Wright, 2018).

Yuan (2021) observed that this novel drew inspiration from the life of the French impressionist Paul Gauguin. *TMAS* was initially published in 1919 and later reissued in 1972. The novel's protagonist, Strickland, closely mirrors Gauguin's life trajectory (Wang, 2018). Both characters, Strickland and Gauguin, are depicted as artists with unique artistic visions who defy societal norms and expectations. Their shared pursuit of artistic freedom and fascination with exotic cultures underscores their parallel journeys. Gauguin's transition from a career in stockbroking to painting in his late twenty's mirrors Strickland's abrupt departure from his family and comfortable life to pursue art in *TMAS* (Luo & Chen, 2016). While the novel is not a direct biographical account of Gauguin, the parallels between Strickland and the real-life

artist serve to explore universal themes of artistic passion, rebellion against societal constraints, and the quest for personal freedom.

Laurence (2018) argued that *TMAS* actively delves into the ultimate meaning of life, using realistic characters as prototypes to illustrate various human responses to life challenges, unlike Maugham's earlier works, which often presented existential dilemmas without clear resolutions. Published in the turbulent period following World War I, *TMAS* resonated with readers seeking solace amidst postwar disillusionment (Yuan, 2021). Its exploration of existential struggles and the search for meaning in life remain relevant today. Through creating a vivid and distinctive protagonist, Maugham invites readers to contemplate the diverse possibilities inherent in individuals' choices when confronted with the complexities of existence.

Ma (2022) reported that in *TMAS*, the narrator is categorized as belonging to the external homonarrative type, situated at the periphery of the story's events. This narrative approach is distinct from Maugham's other works. In this first-person narrative style, the narrator is constrained to recounting only their observations without actively participating in or influencing the story's trajectory. The focalization remains external yet unique, as the detached narrator witnesses the protagonists' actions through fortuitous circumstances (Wang, 2018).

Ji (2022) observed that *TMAS* utilizes a distinctive narrative technique featuring a first-person narrator—an unnamed writer—who recounts the story of the enigmatic protagonist, Charles Strickland. Chen (2018) noted that the narrative in this novel unfolds chronologically, tracing Strickland's unconventional journey from London's middle-class life to his pursuit of artistry in Paris and Tahiti's exotic

landscapes. However, other devices in Genette's narrative theory, such as time duration and focalization, have not yet been explored and discussed.

1.2.2(c) *The Razor's Edge*

The background of TRE is set during the interwar period, marked by social and economic upheaval and disillusionment following World War I. The novel reflects the search for meaning and purpose in a world that seems to have lost its moral compass. Maugham's exploration of existential themes and the quest for spiritual enlightenment resonated with readers grappling with the uncertainties of the time.

Previous research has revealed several shortcomings in the understanding of Maugham's work. Calder (2024) commented that TRE not only looked back with cultivated nostalgia on gone Europe but also reminded victors or those who would soon be victorious of what a life without war might be like. This novel was first published in New York in April 1944 and in London in July (Rosenthal, 2024). Although the novel was set firmly in the interwar years, some accused Maugham of trying to pander to an appetite for a new faith that might sustain those whom the conventional creeds and greed of Western civilization had failed (Gao, 2019). It put in an early claim to restore civilized concerns and pacific purposes. A new novel by Somerset Maugham, never mind its subject, was palatable evidence that the war had not changed everything.

Not everyone received the novel positively. Cyril Connolly, for instance, expressed puzzlement over its uncharitable reception, questioning whether prejudice against works that capture vanished graces and challenge conventional self-esteem was to blame.

It has puzzled me, considering the sheer delight that I and all my friends have received from this novel, that it has been so uncharitably received. Are we becoming incapable of recognizing excellence when we see it?... I think prejudice is to blame prejudice against any book which so perfectly captures the graces that have vanished and against any writer who is so obviously not content with the banal routine of self-esteem and habit, graced by occasional orgies of nationalization and herd celebrations, with which most of us fidget away our one and only lives.
(Raphael, 1976, p. 93)

The excerpt above indicates that the initial reception of TRE was not universally positive, a phenomenon often observed in the literary sphere. Similar renowned works as Melville's *Moby Dick* (1994) and Thoreau's *Walden* (2004) also encountered tepid receptions upon their initial publication.

Further criticisms have been raised regarding Maugham's work. Liu (2015) noted that Maugham was never considered pure gold, even by his highbrow admirers. The voice of the Mandarin (with a dish of sour grapes before it) did not fail to speak a measure of the truth, but the weaknesses of TRE have become more, rather than less, apparent. Despite this eulogy, Connolly, as editor of a magazine, later turned down a piece that Maugham had written about a detective story (Raphael, 1976).

Zhang and Lv (2016) discovered that Maugham drew the title TRE from the Katha-Upanishad and that the sharp edge of a razor is difficult to pass over. Thus, the path to salvation is difficult. TRE was not the first time Maugham explored the contradiction between man's materialistic world and his spiritual pursuits (Calder, 2024). Dealing with popular religious issues and humans' search for genuine existence amid conformity and commercialized values, Maugham's first novel, including American characters, shows his willingness to experiment with a renewed narrative skill (Rosenthal, 2024). This innovation allows the narrator to ask his characters

questions and thus direct the outcome, a skill that decisively exhibits modernist self-consciousness.

Li (2016) argued that TRE adopts a nonlinear narrative structure, interweaving flashbacks and reflections within the primary narrative. Here, Maugham employs a first-person narrator, a friend of Larry Darrell, who narrates Larry's quest for self-discovery. Liu (2023) further demonstrated that using multiple perspectives enriches the storytelling, offering readers varied insights into events.

Li (2022) compared the narrative backgrounds of TRE and TMAS, highlighting similarities in their narrative techniques. Both novels utilize a heterodiegetic analepsis in narrative time and fixed internal focalization in narrative mood. The narrative levels blend the first and second narrative tiers, whereas the narrator types combine internal heteronarrative and internal homonarrative narrator. Additionally, both novels employ analogous strategies regarding time frequency, duration, and narrative speech.

1.2.3 Genette's Narrative Theory

Narratology explores the structures and techniques through which stories are constructed and conveyed (Fang, 2019). It emerged in 20th-century France, as Akimoto (2019) noted. While initially defined as the scientific study of narrative works, Wallace (2018) argued that this definition is insufficient, highlighting the challenge of defining the research object of narratology. The newer edition of *Dictionnaire Le Petit Robert* (1992) expands the definition to include narrative theory, structure, and narratives, indicating that narratology extends beyond mere narrative work. Despite

differences in definition, Fang (2019) and Akimoto (2019) agreed that narratology focuses on analysing the narrative structure of texts.

Unlike traditional literary analysis, which often centers on thematic content, narratology emphasizes the mechanics of storytelling, scrutinizing how narratives are framed, structured, and delivered to readers. This theoretical approach provides scholars with a framework to investigate the interplay between narrative form and meaning, offering insights into how different modes of narration influence the reader's interpretation and engagement with a text.

One of the core concerns of narratology is the distinction between the story (the sequence of events as they occur) and the discourse (the way those events are presented). Scholars in the field analyze various elements, such as narrative time, perspective, and narrator reliability, to understand how these features shape narrative meaning. By examining narrative structures, researchers can uncover deeper levels of a text, revealing how an author's choices in structuring time, perspective, and voice contribute to the overall aesthetic and interpretative experience of a literary work.

Among the many theorists who have contributed to the field, Gérard Genette's narrative theory remains one of the most influential and widely applied frameworks for studying literary narration. Genette's model, which systematizes narrative elements into distinct categories, provides an essential methodology for dissecting the mechanics of storytelling. His theory delineates three primary components of narrative structure: narrative time, narrative mood, and narrative voice. These elements serve as key analytical tools for understanding how a story is shaped through temporal organization, focalization, and the role of the narrator.

Narrative time, as conceptualized by Genette, pertains to the relationship between the chronological sequence of events (story time) and their arrangement in the narrative (narrative time). This aspect includes an analysis of time order (e.g., analepsis or prolepsis), time duration (e.g., summary, scene, ellipsis, or pause), and time frequency (e.g., iterative versus singular narration). Examining narrative time allows scholars to assess how temporal manipulation affects the reader's perception of causality and narrative coherence.

Narrative mood, another crucial element in Genette's framework, concerns the regulation of narrative information through focalization. Focalization refers to the degree of access the narrator provides to characters' thoughts and experiences, which can range from external (objective descriptions) to internal (deep psychological insight). By exploring how Maugham employs focalization, one can gain a deeper understanding of his narrative techniques in shaping character development and thematic resonance.

Lastly, narrative voice addresses the positionality and involvement of the narrator in the storytelling process. Genette's model categorizes narrators based on their level of presence within the narrative, distinguishing between heterodiegetic (narrators who exist outside the story) and homodiegetic (narrators who participate in the story). This distinction is crucial for examining the reliability and authority of narration, particularly in works that utilize complex narrative structures.

By applying Genette's narrative theory to literary analysis, scholars can engage in a more nuanced exploration of storytelling techniques, uncovering the intricate ways in which narrative form shapes meaning. In the context of W. Somerset Maugham's fiction, this theoretical framework provides a valuable lens for analyzing his use of

narrative techniques. Maugham's works, known for their sophisticated narrative structures and unique storytelling devices, offer a fertile ground for the application of Genette's model, particularly in examining the manipulation of time, focalization, and voice reliability.

Through a systematic investigation of the narrative features in the selected novels using Genette's narrative framework, this study may contribute to the broader field of narratology, offering insights into the interplay between form and content in literary storytelling. By highlighting the significance of narrative time, mood, and voice in Maugham's novels, this research not only enhances the understanding of his literary artistry but also provides a methodological approach that can be extended to the study of other literary works.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

The existing body of research on W. Somerset Maugham's literary corpus has primarily concentrated on thematic explorations, linguistic style, and structural composition, often at the expense of a rigorous and systematic examination of his narrative techniques. While Maugham's oeuvre has been the subject of extensive scholarly inquiry, much of this research has been largely confined to discussions of his philosophical underpinnings, social critique, and psychological depth, with relatively little attention devoted to the mechanisms by which he constructs and delivers his narratives. While recent critiques have explored Maugham's artistic sensibilities and philosophical inquiries—such as Thorat's (2017) analysis of existential emptiness in his protagonists and Aqeel's (2020) study on the juxtaposition of abstraction in his short fiction—there remains a conspicuous gap in the scholarly discourse regarding

his narrative strategies. This oversight disregards a fundamental dimension of Maugham's literary craftsmanship, one that significantly contributes to the distinctiveness, coherence, and enduring impact of his storytelling.

Existing research, while insightful, has largely been confined to single-text analyses, thereby precluding a broader comprehension of Maugham's narrative architecture across multiple works. Studies such as Yuan's (2021) queer theoretical analysis of *TRE* and Uygur's (2018) philosophical examination of bondage in *OHB* have provided valuable yet highly specialized insights. Similarly, psychoanalytic perspectives (Ettehadhi & Sistani, 2017) and inquiries into self-perception (Blackburn & Arsov, 2016) have illuminated the psychological complexity of Maugham's characters. However, these studies have not undertaken a systematic and comparative analysis of the techniques governing the structure, coherence, and interpretive depth of Maugham's narratives across multiple texts. This study, therefore, may bridge this gap by conducting a comprehensive narratological examination of three of Maugham's novels, thereby facilitating a more nuanced and holistic understanding of his narrative techniques. By shifting the focus from isolated case studies to a comparative framework, this study identifies and analyzes recurring patterns, structural innovations, and variations in Maugham's storytelling strategies.

A meticulous analysis of Maugham's narrative techniques necessitates the selection of an appropriate theoretical framework, one that offers a systematic and methodologically sound approach to textual examination. The field of narratology provides a diverse array of analytical models, including Propp's structuralist paradigm and Greimas's Semiotic Matrix theory, both of which have been applied to literary traditions. However, these models primarily focus on mythic structures and semiotic

oppositions rather than the nuanced narratorial manipulations that characterize Maugham's prose. Despite the breadth of available theoretical models, Genette's narrative theory, with its systematic categorization of narrative time, narrative mood, and narrative voice, remains underutilized in Maugham studies.

Wright (2018) has underscored the significance of Maugham's manipulation of temporal structures, shifts in focalization, and layered narrative voices, emphasizing these as defining elements of his literary technique. However, there has yet to be a comprehensive study employing Genette's framework in a systematic analysis of Maugham's work. Given that Genette's model provides an intricate methodology for deconstructing and analyzing the mechanisms of narration, it serves as an ideal framework for exploring how Maugham orchestrates narrative order, focalization, and narrator reliability to shape reader interpretation and textual engagement. This study, therefore, applied Genette's narratological framework to examine the interplay between temporal structure, perspective, and narrator agency in Maugham's novels.

Furthermore, much of the existing textual analysis of Maugham's work has predominantly relied on descriptive and interpretive methodologies. While these approaches have yielded valuable insights into his literary style, they often lack the systematic rigour required to quantify and objectively assess narrative structures and stylistic tendencies. In response to this methodological limitation, this study incorporated a qualitative and systematic approach, wherein narrative devices were meticulously tagged, quantified, and analyzed in terms of frequency, distribution, and distinctive usage patterns. By integrating a more empirical methodology, this research may enhance the objectivity and analytical depth of Maugham's scholarship, offering a more structured and data-driven interpretation of his narrative techniques.

By applying Genette's narratological framework to three of Maugham's novels, this study endeavoured to provide a multifaceted and granular analysis of his use of narrative time, mood, and voice. The investigation into narrative time examined how Maugham structures the sequence, duration, and frequency of events, analyzing how these manipulations create dramatic tension and thematic resonance. Through an exploration of narrative mood, this study revealed how Maugham employs variations in focalization and perspective to shape the reader's interpretative lens, thereby enhancing thematic depth and emotional engagement. Additionally, an analysis of narrative voice interrogated how different levels of narration, shifts in narrator reliability, and diegetic structures contribute to the complexities of storytelling and character development. By systematically dissecting these aspects, this research illuminated the interplay between narrative form and meaning, demonstrating how Maugham's use of narratorial techniques reinforces the aesthetic and philosophical dimensions of his fiction.

This comprehensive examination will contribute not only to Maugham's scholarship but also to the broader field of narratology, demonstrating the effectiveness of Genette's theoretical model in literary analysis. By systematically scrutinizing the variety, adaptability, and technical precision of Maugham's narrative artistry, this research will offer a more nuanced and analytically rigorous understanding of his literary contributions. Additionally, this study seeks to encourage interdisciplinary engagements that bridge narrative theory, literary criticism, and computational text analysis, thereby expanding the scope of contemporary narratological inquiry.

Ultimately, this research aspires to advance scholarly discourse on Maugham's narrative artistry, fostering a more theoretically informed and methodologically robust

appreciation of his storytelling techniques. By doing so, it will not only enrich existing studies on Maugham but also establish a foundation for future interdisciplinary research in narrative theory, comparative literature, and computational narratology. This study will further serve as an impetus for reevaluating Maugham's position within modern literary studies, asserting his significance not merely as a popular storyteller but as an innovator in the construction and orchestration of narrative discourse.

Beyond contributing to Maugham's scholarship, this research underscores the broader applicability of Genette's narratological framework in analyzing early twentieth-century literature. By applying a rigorous narratological lens to Maugham's work, this study illustrated how narrative mechanics shape literary meaning and reception, offering insights that extend beyond Maugham's corpus to inform contemporary studies in narratology and literary theory. Furthermore, by integrating a methodologically robust, data-driven approach, this study may set a precedent for future research that seeks to blend qualitative literary analysis with empirical textual methodologies, paving the way for a more systematic and interdisciplinary mode of literary inquiry.

Thus, this study not only seeks to fill a critical gap in Maugham scholarship but also to contribute meaningfully to broader narratological and interdisciplinary literary studies, reinforcing the importance of systematic narrative analysis in understanding literary artistry and textual dynamics. Through a careful and systematic engagement with Maugham's narrative techniques, this study will offer a more comprehensive, methodologically rigorous, and theoretically sophisticated understanding of one of the twentieth century's most enduring literary figures.