



**ANALYSIS OF RAIN BY WILLIAM SOMERSET MAUGHAM IN TERMS OF
POST-COLONIAL TERMS**

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ABSTRACT

This study dealt with the analysis of a short story, Rain by William Somerset Maugham in terms of post-colonial terms or elements. Before the analysis, the writer of the book was introduced and then the plot was explained so as to make readers familiar with the short story. In the analysis section, post-colonial elements or related terms such as missionary, colonial authority, the state of being subaltern, Manichean allegory, mimicry, ambivalence, surveillance, imperial hegemony, hybridity, essentialism, monolithic culture, alienation, dislocation, misuse of power, gender difference were analyzed from some of the excerpts to see how strong these concepts affect the course of the fiction. The study also aimed showing the implementation of the post colonial terms or elements in such stories especially for students of language & literature departments or related departments to understand their use.

Key Words: Missionary, colonial authority, subaltern, Manichean allegory, mimicry, ambivalence, surveillance.

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1.ABOUT THE AUTHOR

William Somerset Maugham was born on January 25, 1874, at the British Embassy in Paris France, where his father Robert Maugham was a solicitor. Though Maugham had a medical qualification, he preferred to be a professional writer and wrote more than twenty novels, thirty dramas, three travel books, one major autobiography, ninety two collected short stories and four volumes of essays. It is known that he earned \$1 million from a single short story *Rain*, which was first released under the title *Miss Thompson* in April, 1921 in *Smart Set*, the New York magazine, whose editors were George Jean Nathan and Henry Louis Mencken. In 1960-63, some of Maugham's stories were turned into dramas to show on TV for the British public. Besides, stage and screen adaptations of his stories such as *Rain*, *The Vessel of Wrath*, *The Letter* and *Lord Mountdrago* were adapted to German and French audiences via translation (Archer, 1993: 4). Maugham was mostly influenced by a German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, playwright Henrik Ibsen and writers Guy de Maupassant and Oscar Wilde in his writings. His natural settings were first based upon theatrical, literary and upper class London. However, his travels especially including colonial spaces enabled him to meet all kinds of people, which enriched the range of his writing (Meyers, 2004: 156). Maugham died in Southern France in 1966, at the age of ninety two and his ashes were taken to King's school, Canterbury and buried beneath the wall of Maugham Library (see also Curtis and Rogal for further biography.)

2.THE PLOT

Rain by Maugham takes place in the colonial period and starts with the introduction of the white travellers Macphails and Davidsons, who are on a ship to Apia. Mr Macphail is a doctor and he is travelling there to stay for at least twelve months with his wife. Davidsons are, however, missionaries, who induce natives to adopt Christian religion by imposing heavy sanctions upon them such as the prohibition of wearing traditional Lava Lava, dancing and so forth. When the ship arrives in Pago Pago, something goes wrong and the couples are informed that there is an epidemic of measles on the island. Due to the quarantine, they are not allowed to enter the harbour to make sure that no members of the crew have been affected. This means that they cannot use the schooner which is to take them to Apia and thus have to stay there for at least ten days. Under the heavy rain, they search for a shelter and find a house whose owner is a half caste with a native wife. Another passenger who goes to Apia to be a cashier named Sadie Thompson also hires one of the trader's rooms. When Macphails and Davidsons are staying there, Mrs Davidson's husband generally talks about his missionary position and boasts about it by narrating his past experiences with his wife. During these conversations, sounds of gramophone and men's voices begin to come from Miss Thompson's room. Mr Davidson considers that Miss Thompson lacks a moral behaviour and is a prostitute. He, therefore, tries to encourage the trader to dismiss the girl from his house and also talks to the governor to forcefully send her to San Francisco on Tuesday. Miss Thompson does not want to go there since she knows that she will face a three year prison term. Mr Davidson still does not pay attention to the girl's cryings. Sooner or later, the girl

seems to subjugate to her destiny and bewilderingly wishes to be forgiven for her sins. Mr Davidson voluntarily helps her and believes that her repentance is remarkable. However, it is very strange that Mr Davidson's body is found dead on the morning of Miss Thompson's departure to San Francisco. Mr Macphail gets confused but soon understands the situation. Even though what happened between Mr Davidson and Mrs Thompson is not certainly stated in the short story, it can be inferred that Mr Davidson might have been seduced by the girl or he might have raped her during the confession of her sins, which collapses his stern allegiance to the God and therefore pushes him to commit suicide.

3. ANALYSIS OF RAIN IN TERMS OF POST COLONIAL TERMS

Rain by Maugham mostly focuses on missionary activities performed by Davidsons to spread Christianity in colonies in the Pacific ocean. In *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, it is stated that the role of missionaries were important in the development of the colonization and the Christian missions became effective in the spread of Empire (2007:128). As missionaries, Mr Davidson, during his conversation with Macphails, asserts that natives are ignorant of the ten commandments of the Bible and do not know the sense of sin at all. Accordingly, he and his wife intend to teach these people Christian doctrines as their civilizing mission. In doing so, they, however, tend to deviate some religious facts and impose heavy sanctions on natives. The following quotation is a good example of this:

'We had to make it a sin, not only to commit adultery and to lie and thief, but to expose their bodies, and to dance and not to come to church. I made it a sin for a girl to show her bosom and a sin for a man not to wear trousers.' (*Rain*, 16)
(emphasis intentional)

Mr Davidson clearly says that dancing and not wearing trousers are sins. Natives who adopt Christianity are forced to accept these as the requirements of the new religion. From this perspective, it can be said that the English book or Bible implies the presence of the colonial authority and is a signifier of the colonial desire and discipline (Bhabha, 1995: 38). Mr Davidson is such an obsessed missionary that he thinks that he will save the colonized with the God's help. He indeed takes this power from his colonial authority, which is also exemplified in the following quotations from *Rain*: 'You must remember that in the last resort I could expel them from their church membership.' (*Rain*, 16) 'They couldn't sell their copra. When the men fished they got no share of the catch. It means something very like starvation.' (*Rain*, 16)

As it is obvious from Mr Davidson's speeches, the control of the church is in the hands of missionaries. Then, if Mr Davidson expels natives from the church membership, they face a problem of starvation as they are not allowed to sell copra for their livelihood. It can

therefore be said that Mr Davidson has the central position in the colony whereas the colonized represent the margin.

Another sign of the presence of the colonial power in the short story is the moment when Mr Davidson infers that Miss Thompson is a prostitute:

'Iwelei, with its sins and shame, ceased to exist on the very day we arrived. The whole population was brought before the justices. I don't know why I did not understand at once what that woman was.' (*Rain*, 22)

According to Mr Davidson, Iwelei was accepted by the most scandalous of the Pacific due to the fact that it was a place full of sins and shame. However, missionaries made great efforts to stop such hellish things and as a result women (such as Miss Thompson) working in Iwelei had to migrate through displacement or in other words dislocation. At this point, it should be noted that the displacement or dislocation in this example comes into the question under the imperial occupation and the experiences related to this event (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 2007: 65).

It would also be appropriate to state that the prohibition of the native dancing as a sin by Davidsons results from their colonial positions among the subaltern that is, historically muted native subject:

'But among white people, it's not quite the same,' she went on, 'though I must say I agree with Mr Davidson who says he can't understand how a husband can stand by and sees 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 is 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.' (*Rain*, 7)

Mrs Davidson is happy to prohibit the native dancing in the colonies under their responsibility because it is immoral to her. Although she associates it with immorality and implies that it is sin to perform it, which is also confirmed in the first quotation analyzed, she distinguishes the dancing of white society from natives. This can call to mind the applied racism by the so called superior white man over the Other. The distinction between the colonizer and the colonized or in other words Self and Other can be associated with Abdul JanMohamed's 'Manichean allegory,' which creates a binary and implacable discursive opposition between races (1985: 60). Loomba also touches upon binary oppositions between the colonizer and the colonized and asserts that colonized people are regarded by Europeans as irrational, barbaric, sensual, lazy, static and feminine whereas the latter is civilization itself, developing and marching ahead and masculine (1998:47).

Natives wear traditional lava lava to sustain their cultures. However, for mostly religious purposes, Mr Davidson defends that it should be prohibited by law. Mrs Davidson also finds it an indecent costume and says that:

'In our islands,'we've eradicated the lava lava. A few old men still continue to wear it, but that's all. The women have all taken to the Mother Hubbard, and the men wear trousers and singlets. At the beginning of our stay Mr Davidson said in one of his reports: the inhabitants of these islands will never be thoroughly Christianized till everybody of more than than years is made to wear a pair of trousers' (*Rain*, 8)

This quotation calls to mind imperial hegemony. The term describes the success of imperial power over the colonized who can far outnumber any occupying military force, but whose desire for self determination has been dominated by a hegemonic motion of the greater good, frequently couched in terms of social order, stability and advancement, each of which is defined by the colonizing power (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 2007: 107). In addition to this, Mr Davidson wants natives to wear a pair of trousers. This is related to his civilizing mission and also connotes mimicry since natives are expected to imitate their master. Mimicry appears as one of the most complex and effective strategies of the colonial power and knowledge and so as to be effective, it must be able to generate its difference. It is itself a process of disavowal and is stricken by an indeterminacy. Mimicry can also be regarded as the sign of a double articulation, discipline, regulation and a complex strategy of reform appropriating the Other as it visualizes the power (Bhabha, 1994: 126). For Bhabha, the consequence of suggestions like Macaulay's is that mimicry is the process by which the colonized subject is reproduced as 'almost the same, but not quite' (1994: 86). Then, the copying of the colonizing culture, behaviour, manners and values by the colonized contains both mockery and a certain 'menace' 'so that mimicry is at once resemblance and menace' (Bhabha1994: 86). Bhabha also states that "mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence" (1994:126), which is used in pyschoanalysis in order to describe the constant fluctuation between attraction and repulsion (Young, 1995: 161). The fact that the lava lava is still worn by a few old native men is ambivalent though many others abandon it as a result of alienation from their own customs. The resistance of the minorities is passive but they try to keep their customs alive through cultural resistance, which can also be observed in the following quotation showing the trader Horn's allegiance to his traditions: As a rule he wore shabby ducks, but now he was barefoot and wore only the lava lava of the natives (*Rain*, 45).

The following quotation is also a good example of ambivalence:

When the rain stopped and the sun shone, it was like a hot house, seething, humid, sultry,breathless, and you had a strange feeling that everything was growing with a savage violence.The natives, blithe and childlike by reputation, seemed then,with their tattooing and their dyed hair, to have something sinister

in their appearance; and when they pattered along at your heels with their naked feet you looked back instinctively. You felt that they might at any moment come behind you swiftly and thrust a long knife between your shoulder-blades. You could not tell what dark thoughts lurked behind their wide-set eyes. They had a little the look of ancient Egyptians painted on a temple wall, and there was about them the terror of what is immeasurably old (*Rain*, 30)

As is clear in this quotation, though natives are attracted by the colonizer's culture and seem to accept the cultural imperialism such as the prohibition of *lava lava*, dancing and so forth, they are mimic men and cannot be trusted all the time according to the colonizer's claim. The colonizer also believes that the temper of natives may suddenly change and thereby they may thrust a long knife between the shoulder blades or have secret plans to entrap the white man. It can accordingly be argued that emotions of the colonized are fluctuant between attraction and expulsion, which is known as ambivalence (see Bhabha).

Similarly, in the next quotation, it is seen that Mr Davidson is anxious about whether native missionaries or mission boys would do their duties or not:

'We've been away for a year' he said, walking up and down the veranda. The mission has been in charge of native missionaries and I'm terribly nervous that they've left things slide. They're good men, I'm not saying a word against them, God-fearing devout, and truly Christian men-their Christianity would put many so-called Christians to the blush- but they're pitifully lacking in energy. 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.' (*Rain*, 13-14)

In this quotation it is implied by Mr Davidson that even though native missionaries are good men, truly Christian and believe in God, they are only the exact replica of the colonizer and thus these mimic men may disturb or subvert the colonial authority over time and abuse their positions by creating ambivalent situations. At this point, it is also necessary to emphasize "hybridity". This term is generally associated with Bhabha, who defends that all cultural statements and systems are built in a space that he calls the 'Third Space of enunciation' (1994:37). Cultural identity, cultural systems and statements occur in this contradictory and ambivalent space, which, according to Bhabha, makes the claim to a hierarchical purity of cultures untenable (1994:55) which makes hybridization inevitable. In the light of this information, it can be put forward that native missionaries are hybrid. This quotation is also a good example as it reflects one of the postcolonial concepts, surveillance. Surveillance means the colonizer's keeping an eye on the colonized (Bhabha, 1995: 42). Mr. Davidson is afraid of losing his control over the Other with the thought that the surveillance of the colonizer can be reversed by natives. This technique is usually used in *Rain* since it is an exploration and travel writing.

The displacement or dislocation may also affect the colonizer who are far away from their homelands:

‘We had no one help to us. We were alone, thousands of miles from any of our own people, surrounded by darkness. When I was broken and weary she would put her work aside and take the Bible and read to me till peace came and settled upon me like sleep upon the eyelids of a child, ‘ (*Rain*, 15-16)

This quotation apparently shows Mr Davidson’s⁴ pessimism as a result of displacement from their homeland to fulfill their missionary activities. Mr Davidson complains that he and his wife suffered from solitude when they emigrated to the colony which was far away from their own people and nobody helped them there except for themselves since the only thing they did was to read Bible and feel peaceful in this way.

Another term which should be discussed in this study is essentialism. Essentialism implies that groups, categories or classes of objects have one or several defining features which are exclusive to all of the members of that category. In other words, it separates one race from another (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 2007: 73). Also, it can be associated with the presence of a monolithic culture. However many postcolonial theorists such as Bhabha, Fanon, Said, JanMohamed, Mihnha and so forth defend pluralism. Especially according to Bhabha, “cultures are never unitary” (1995:156). One of the characters in *Rain*, Mr Horn is a half caste man with a native wife and little brown children. In addition, the society comprises white and black people speaking English and native tongues. In such a setting or in other words in the Third World, it would be impossible to claim that the culture is monolithic but hybrid or in other words plural.

On the last page of *Rain*, Miss Thompson despises male society and says that “You men! You filthy, dirty pigs’ You’re all the same, all of you. Pigs! Pigs! (*Rain*, 48) due to the fact that Mr Davidson, who is a strict missionary, probably had a sexual affair with her or raped her, which pushed him to commit suicide and in a way resulted in the fall of the colonial authority. It is clear that the colonizer even makes pressure upon her own women in colonies. In addition, the fact that Miss Thompson regards all the male society as “filthy, dirty pigs” may evoke the idea of feminism. As is known, feminism is movement defending that every human being is equal or in other words women should have equal rights with men (see also www.feminism.com). Feminism has frequently been associated with the ways and extent to which representation and language are important in forming identity and in constructing the subjectivity. In feminism, language is a vehicle to subvert patriarchal and also imperial power (Aschroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 2007: 93).

⁴ Mr. Davidson and his wife, although they perform missionary activities in the Pacific ocean, can also be regarded as diasporal characters as a result of the displacement from their homeland.

4.CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it can clearly be stated that *Rain* by Maugham is an exploration or travel writing which takes place in the colonial period and through which the colonizer's missionary activities are narrated. Also, throughout the story, the oppression of the Self (colonizer) over the Other (colonized, in other words the exploited one), the inevitable resistance of the colonized though it is limited and seemingly passive, gender difference even in the colonizer's culture, alienation, dislocation, misuse of power which, for instance, prohibits native dances and the traditional lava lava by forcing the so-called childlike or blithe natives to adopt Christian religion are richly emphasized.

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