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THE BINARY OPPOSITION OF THE CONCEPTS "EAST/WEST" IN THE LIGHT OF WESTERN IDENTITY IN W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM'S SHORT STORY THE FORCE OF CIRCUMSTANCE

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Annotation: In this article, the depiction of the binary conceptual opposition "East/West" in the short stories of W. Somerset Maugham is analyzed within moral and cultural contexts. The study examines the ways in which Western values are represented through the author's distinct modality. Through the portrayal of characters, the stories construct the portrait of a new type of English identity—one born "on the edge of the empire" and possessing a typical history of marriage. The article extends the discussion of social issues beyond the mere phenomenon of misalliance, highlighting the future of children born from such marriages and their problems of identification, as well as the issues raised from the perspective of cultural and social differences between the characters.

Keywords: "East/West" opposition, ritual, identification, moral values, social status ("English"), the problem of half-blood children, mentality, literary psychology.

Introduction. W. Somerset Maugham's "Eastern Tales" cycle represents a mosaic of various themes connected with the destinies of the English living in the East. Although many literary critics have accused the writer of being apolitical and neglecting social issues, the sharp conflicts presented in these works suggest that the author often addressed the problems generated by the colonial system on the islands: the identification of the characters, the future of children born into "mixed families," and their social status. The typical nature of the conflicts in Maugham's stories is undoubtedly confirmed by numerous real "life events" that occurred among English officials and various specialists who were sent to Eastern countries for long-term service. The writer creates a distinct type of English protagonist born "on the edge of the empire." This type encompasses several variations:

- The colonial gentleman, the resident—who, even "on the edge of the empire," maintains order, attire, and habits just as in his homeland (for instance, in the short story "The Outstation").
- The English protagonist in the East who fails to withstand his own vices (such as drunkenness) and falls into degradation (as in "Before the Party" and "The Pool").
- A new social stratum of the colonial era—individuals born on the islands, whose mentality differs from that of genuine Britons. The above-mentioned types can be examined within the context of the "East/West" binary opposition from various perspectives—social, hierarchical, moral, and others.

Main part. In "The Force of Circumstance", the author examines the "East/West" binary opposition in the context of the moral and normative incompatibility between husband and wife, which arises from their differing identities. Sociologists (A. B. Etuev, W. M. Wallerstein, V. N. Latipova, V. S. Slepovich, L. M. Dubossarskaya) classify such protagonists conditionally, stating: "Ethnic and cultural adaptation is the process of an individual's adjustment and integration into a new culture and with another people." The conceptual analysis of the "East/West" binary

opposition would be incomplete without considering the issue of cultural identification of the characters, particularly as illustrated by the conflict in "The Force of Circumstance".

According to V. G. Zusman, a concept is a "microsystem," a "concept is meaning," which supplements the "macrosystem" of literature and signifies that "an artistic concept is the unity of the writer's worldview in artistic representation." Hence, the semantic scope of an artistic concept must necessarily include the segment of "identification."

V. A. Maslova has identified the following characteristics of the artistic concept: "First, its fundamental connection is based on association; second, the artistic concept contains not only the potential to reveal images but also various emotional meanings; third, the artistic concept gravitates toward images and incorporates them."[2:34] Therefore, in this story, two images reflecting Eastern and Western mentalities can be distinguished, which in turn give rise to different identities. It should be emphasized that Guy's biography is directly linked to the colony. He was born in the province of Sembulu, had known the Malay language from childhood, and considered himself a patriot of Malaya. Guy confesses to his wife: "After all, England's a foreign land to me," he told her. "My home's Sembulu."[5:48]

His wife Doris, on the other hand, is a typical Englishwoman. It should be noted that Maugham creates this contrast not in a rigid manner, but rather through associations embedded in the narrative, in order to reveal the heroine's character: "She gave you the impression of a girl of spirit and you felt sure that the member of parliament for whom she worked had in her a very competent secretary." [5: 51–52] The first, the author establishes Doris's high level of education and professional skills. Second, the profession of a secretary requires qualities such as organization, responsibility, propriety, as well as patience and politeness in various situations. Third, Doris's employment as a secretary to a member of parliament in her youth indicates that her character was shaped by a strong sense of self-esteem.

All of the above ensures that Doris's image corresponds to the concept of the "Englishwoman" in The Force of Circumstance: "…artistic concepts are individual, personal, indeterminate, and psychologically complex; they constitute an ensemble of notions, representations, feelings, emotions, and sometimes even volitional manifestations, arising on the basis of artistic associativity. The richer the poet's cultural and emotional experience, the deeper and broader his concepts will be." [3:35]

Discussions/Results. Maugham's own life experience does not allow him to act in contradiction with artistic reality, nor to construct a conflict in the diverse identifications of the characters without deeper foundations: "This is the central quality of the person, manifesting his or her integral connection with the surrounding social and cultural world." [2:23] At the beginning of the story, Doris's happy domestic life, her acceptance of a "new homeland," her efforts to learn the Malay language, and her admiration for the surrounding nature are highlighted: "And now it was her home too." Her English identity is manifested in the orderliness of the household, her reading of the English press, and her acceptance of the resident's status as a wife. The conflict begins with the appearance of the local woman and her child, who serve as a living, silent reproach for Guy.

Knowing the realities of life in Malaya, Maugham does not turn the protagonist into a figure of dreadful moral corruption, but rather emphasizes the everyday nature of his actions: "The old Sultan didn't think it was a white woman's country. He rather encouraged people to keep house with native girls."[5:51] The conflict begins with Guy's ordinary reaction and Doris's sharp response to her husband's cold and indifferent remark about the future of his half-caste children. For Guy, the problem of the children is not a moral issue but one that can be resolved materially: "…a man generally sees that there's enough money to have them decently educated. They get jobs as clerks in government office."[5:50] The author stresses that Guy, almost in advance,

rationally and without emotion, assigns his sons a secondary place in his life merely on the basis of their birth. It should be noted that the writer repeatedly refers to the indifference — or even a certain remoteness — of English parents toward their "non-English" children (for example, in "The Pool", Lawson acknowledges the unpleasant discovery that his son is "black"). Guy likewise admits that he does not feel a natural paternal affection for his children: "I should have been if it had been white." [5:94]

Importantly, Maugham introduces the notions of "white" and "black" people, thus clearly defining different identifications from the English perspective. At the beginning of the story, this contrast is presented as a matter of fact, not as a negative modality from Doris's point of view. The author intensifies the "white" woman's reaction only when the issue affects her personally, thereby giving the conflict several stages of development. Doris observes that the village boys were "a little darker than the others," while she perceives the woman not with hostility but even with a certain appreciation: "What a pretty sarong she's got…. her skin was dark but she was pretty."[5:55] She even notes her elegance and beauty: "…her hands and feet. She might be a Duchess." [5:55]

2. Maugham justifies the psychological intensity of the conflict by showing how it develops over time. A week after the first encounter, Doris comes to the defense of the same woman when, at Guy's command, the servants rudely drive her out of the house. Observing her husband's depressed state of mind, Doris attempts to uncover the underlying causes, urges him to speak openly, and expresses sympathy—conveyed through supportive gestures: "…she put her hand gently into his." The author conveys the heroine's inner tension through the story she hears.

3. We believe that Maugham outlines several motivational directions to bring about an insoluble conflict. The first of these is comparison. Guy's story is that he paid two hundred Malay dollars to the mother of a fifteen-year-old "doll" and then lived a family life with her for ten years. For Doris, this is a profound insult to her dignity as a person. His marriage to her is perceived only as part of a strategic plan: "I told her I was going to marry a white woman."[5:63] The writer emphasizes that Guy fears astonishing his wife by acknowledging the truth, yet he himself regards his "cohabitation" as something natural. For Doris, however, his story constitutes a threefold insult—to her as an individual, as an Englishwoman, and as a wife.

Firstly, she is classified as an ordinary "white" woman, one to whom officials may propose marriage, yet not as a true heroine of a romance, even if Guy convinces himself of his love for her. Second, Doris is hurt by the fact that her husband disregarded her dignity and concealed from her an unpleasant truth: "Don't you think it would have been only fair to give me a chance of judging for myself?"[5:63] Thirdly, her European identity protests against the situation in which she becomes a second wife and takes the place of the former woman: "That bed I slept on, is that the bed in which she had her children?"[5:67] The author emphasizes not Guy's firmness but Doris's determination; Guy, by contrast, attempts to resolve the conflict through half-measures: "I'm not going to live with you as your wife again."[5:67]

At first glance, Maugham seems to transfer the conflict from a social to a physiological plane. Doris continues to perform the role of a caring lady, repeating that she does not feel anger toward Guy and does not blame him. Yet internally she senses herself becoming "alien," an "outsider": "…the 'own' and the 'other' manifest themselves as modes of the intentional activity of emotional consciousness."[4:119] Maugham returns Doris to the familiar European world, where collective moral values and customs close to her prevail. Despite her tolerant attitude toward the local people, she cannot accept the "black wife." The long-standing presence of the house itself becomes for Doris a personal affront: "I think of those thin black arms of hers round you and it fills me with a physical nausea" [5:71]

For the author, it is important to convey Doris's disgust toward "that woman" as also directed at Guy, as a part of the local world, even though the heroine blames herself and her own "hysteria." M. L. Dubossarskaya generalizes that personal identity is formed and consolidated on the basis of social identity: "…only by realizing his or her 'we,' the commonality with a certain group, can a person emerge as an independent 'I' separated from that community; the individual is shaped in the process of interacting with others."[1:174] Doris's identity belongs to the Western world, and her conflict is largely internal rather than external, since she does not accuse Guy.

Conclusion. Guy returns to the former Eastern order of life—he "loses": "he put on a loose native jacket and a sarong"—that is, he materializes his national identity through clothing and reclaims his "dark-skinned wife." Thus, it can be concluded that Maugham raises the pressing problem of the "East/West" conceptual opposition within the framework of the protagonists' identities. This opposition manifests itself as a category of thought and emotion, since the emergence of the conflict is explained by Doris's inability to accept the "ordinary" aspects of life in the East. In the heroine's consciousness, the gradation of Western axiological values is associated with the impossibility of living in the East.

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