Orientalist Discourse in William Somerset Maugham's Writings about the British Imperial Power in the Far East

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Abstract

This paper seeks to examine William Somerset Maugham's writings about the Far East as a sample of Britain's Orientalist discourse. These writings express Britain's imperial quest in the Malay Archipelago through two Orientalist methods. First, the writer associates knowledge about the natives with the imperial power. As a result of Maugham's experience of the Malay Archipelago, his writings participate in what Edward Said calls in ***Orientalism*** *the dialectic of power and knowledge, which considers knowledge of the natives as a prerequisite for the imperial domination. Second, he consolidates the English imperial power in Malaya through the articulation of this power within his texts and the ideological accompaniment to it. This is a second dimension of the Orientalist discourse which aspires to dominate the Orient by the Western imperial power. These two aspects of the Orientalist discourse as they are developed in Maugham's fiction make his writings about the Far East part and parcel of the culture of imperialism.*

Key words: *imperial power, Orientalism, discourse, knowledge and power, Maugham, the Malay Archipelago*

Abbreviations: CT: *The Casuarina Tree,* ***OHB****: Of Human Bondage,* ***VW****: "The Vessel of Wrath",* ***NC****: The Narrow Corner,* ***GP:*** *The Gentleman in the Parlour*

ملخص

يقترح هذا المقال دراسة كتابات **وليام سومرست موم William Somerset Maugham** حول الشرق الأقصى و هي تعد كعينة من الخطاب الاستشراقي البريطاني. هذه الكتابات تعبر عن السعي الامبريالي البريطاني في أرخبيل الملايو من خلال أسلوبين اثنين للمستشرقين. أولا، يعتبر ويليام سومرست موم معرفة الأهالي كوسيلة فعالة للسيطرة عليهم. نتيجة لتجربته في أرخبيل الملايو و ساكنيه فإن كتاباته تشارك في ما سماه إدوارد سعيد 'جدلية السلطة والمعرفة'و التي مفادها أن معرفة الأهالي هي ضرورة قبلية للهيمنة عليهم . ثانيا، موم يعزز قوة

الإمبراطورية الإنجليزية في ماليزيا من خلال صياغة هذه السلطة في نصوصه و كذا الأيديولوجية المرافقة لها. هذا هو البعد الثاني من الخطاب الاستشراقي الذي يطمح للسيطرة على الشرق من قبل السلطة الإمبريالية الغربية. إن هذين الجانبين للخطاب الإستشراقي المتجلي في خيال ويليام سومرست موم يجعلان كتاباته حول الشرق الأقصى جزء لا يتجزأ من الثقافة الإمبريالية البريطانية.

Résumé

Cet article a examiné les écrits de William Somerset Maugham sur l'Extrême-Orient comme un échantillon représentatif du discours Orientaliste britannique. Ces écrits expriment la quête impériale britannique dans l'archipel malais à travers deux méthodes orientalistes. Tout d'abord, Maugham considère que le savoir accumulé sur les indigènes sert la domination coloniale. En raison de l'expérience que Maugham a eue de l'archipel malais et ses habitants, ses écrits participent à ce qu'Edward Said appelle dans ***L'Orientalisme*** *'la dialectique du pouvoir et du savoir', qui insiste sur l'idée que 'connaitre' les indigènes est une condition préalable à leur domination. Deuxièmement, l'auteur consolide le pouvoir impérial anglais en Malaisie en articulant ce pouvoir au sein de ses textes et en proposant un accompagnement idéologique à celui-ci. Il s'agit d'une deuxième dimension du discours Orientaliste qui aspire à dominer l'Orient par la puissance impériale occidentale. Ces deux aspects du discours Orientaliste tels qu'ils sont développés dans la fiction de Maugham font que ses écrits sur l'Extrême-Orient font partie intégrante de la tradition impérialiste britannique.*

Introduction

The turn of the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries witnessed an increase in Britain's imperial quests in the Orient. As a matter of fact, a new kind of literature was produced to provide an accompaniment to Britain's imperial interests. Edward Said (1978) coins this literature the discourse of Orientalism, and its central aim is the articulation and consolidation of the imperial power over the Orient within discourse. Every kind of writing by the British about the Orient could be deemed Orientalist as long as it articulated directly or indirectly Britain's imperial power there. As the British Empire gathered its greatest power during this period, literature became complicit with its proponents. Though William Somerset Maugham is less notorious among imperial authors like Rudyard

Kipling, his writings are no less interested in Britain's imperial quest in his reference to the Malay Archipelago.

Not many studies have been conducted on Maugham's place within the British Orientalist tradition. Selina Hastings (2009) has devoted some part of her study to his colonial writings. She states that Maugham is for the Malay Archipelago as Kipling is for India and the Raj, so he is an engaged writer of the British Empire in this area, where British indirect rule prevails. (2009: 270) However, his vision of the empire is different from Kipling's in that it is being weakened by the decline of "confidence of the British in their innate superiority by and large as unaccepted by the ruled as by the rulers" (Ibid. 271). Though the imperial agents in the Federated Malay States have managed to establish a prosperous empire, there is yet a sense of isolation that impacts on their lives and careers. And this isolation is one of the problems from which the British rule there suffers. There is no denial that Hastings does not ignore Maugham's interest in the British Empire. However, how far Maugham is engaged as a professional writer about the British rule in the Malay Archipelago remains to be studied, for she only considers this interest in empire as a biographical element while, in fact, his colonial experience is more important both to his fiction and his British readers as it brought lively views about their extending empire in the Orient.

Another study is conducted by the French critic Jean-Paul Chaillet. He points at the writer's focus on the decline of enthusiasm in the British imperialist agents of the Far East (2009: 84), and Maugham disapproves of this attitude. He would have preferred agents that served their empire more efficiently for themselves and the people they ruled. Again, like Hastings's, Chaillet's analysis is limited in its consideration of Maugham's Orientalist intent. The fact is that Maugham wants to expose this lack of interest in imperial matters to the British public and show that it may lead to a loss of an important part of the British Empire. This is a committed attitude on the part of Maugham that can be considered as the result of his influential experience of the imperial affairs. Both Chaillet and Hastings do not ignore the fact that Maugham is interested in the Malay Archipelago as

part and parcel of the British Empire, but how far his writings constitute a sample of the British Orientalist discourse remains to be studied.

Issue and Working Hypothesis

This paper places William Somerset Maugham among the writers who consolidate Britain's imperial quests in the Orient within discourse. His writings express Britain's imperial quests in the Malay Archipelago through two Orientalist methods: (1) the association of knowledge and power over the natives as the direct outcome of the writer's experience of the Orient and empire and (2) the consolidation of the English imperial power in Malaya. In the first place, as a result of Maugham's experience in this area his writings participate in what Edward Said coins the "dialectic of information and control" (Said, 1995: 36) which insists on the idea that knowledge about the colonized people facilitates their domination and the perpetuation of the imperial tradition. In the second place, his writings consolidate Britain's imperial quests in the Malay Archipelago through the elaboration of the imperial power within his fiction and the ideological accompaniment to it. This is a second dimension of the Orientalist discourse which aspires at "dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (Ibid. 3). In ***Culture and Imperialism***, Said develops the Orientalist discourse and integrates the novel and short story into the consolidation culture of empire which celebrates the imperial power and provides an ideological accompaniment to it.

Maugham's Far Eastern tales constitute an integrative part of Britain's imperial canon, which is the direct outcome of his experience there. As a literary traveller, he visited the outposts of the British Empire in India and the Malay Archipelago. He was also a secret agent from 1916 to 1919 in the South Seas. These two elements enabled him to experience the empire and the imperial relations as well as enjoy the privileges of being an English writer in British Malaya. Maugham writes that the British Empire "will have been in the world's history a moment not without grandeur" (GP: 15), so any historian who would

attempt its evaluation should do it with "sympathy, justice, and magnanimity" (GP: 15). It follows that the post-colonial reading of Maugham's Far Eastern tales like the collection ***The Casuarina Tree*** (1926) would show that they express Britain's imperial quests in the Malay Archipelago in the same way as Rudyard Kipling's does for the British rule in India.

Results and Discussion

The post-colonial study of Maugham's Far Eastern tales shows that his texts constitute a sample of the British Orientalist tradition. In his texts, he confirms to the Orientalist idea that the Oriental man and woman need to be studied in order to be better controlled. This is conducted in the framework of Orientalist expertise on the Orientals. The epistemic quest is closely related to the will for power over the natives so that Maugham also foregrounds the disempowerment of the Orientals and the empowerment of the British representatives of empire judged to be more considerate in the use of power for the advancement of civilisation. Thus, every representative of the English imperial power in Malaya is viewed as more technologically, culturally and intellectually equipped to rule over the people of the Orient.

- **Orientalist Expertise and the Imperial Power**

One central feature of the Orientalist discourse is what Edward Said coins the dialectic of knowledge and power. This concerns the appropriation of knowledge about the Orientals and the relations between the coloniser and the colonised for the implementation of the imperial power and its perpetuation. In his Far Eastern tales, Maugham considers that it is fundamental for the British imperialist to know the natives in order to perpetuate Britain's imperial interests there. For instance, he considers that the ethnological knowledge of the Malays is necessary to avoid clashes with them. This kind of knowledge is at work in "The Outstation" where Mr. Warburton poses as an Orientalist expert in his use of his knowledge about the Malays to continue his power over them. Warburton *knows* that harmony with the Malays requires sympathy towards them, and this knowledge allows him their obedience. He *knows* that they

are "very sensitive to injury and ridicule [and they] are passionate and revengeful" (CT: 140). Therefore, he advises Cooper, his novice assistant, to "remember in the future that good masters make good servants" (CT: 130). Mr. Warburton calls a good master the one who respects his servants and a good servant the one who obeys his master.

In the story, Maugham performs a kind of experiment in order to show the importance of displaying respect of the natives. When Cooper's superior decides to go up river, he does exactly the opposite of what he is advised to. Because he is conceited and arrogant, he misses to respect his servant Abas, whom he regards as "a nigger […] a dirty, thieving rascal" (CT: 141). Abas is insulted by his master when he does not accept his request of going home for a moment. He also accuses him of robbing him some clothes, "and when the boy denied the theft he took him by the scruff of the neck and kicked him the steps of the bungalow" (CT: 143). The accusation of robbery coupled with his refusal to allow Abas visit his family are insulting to the Malay boy. Mr. Warburton *knows* that when the Malays feel insult they are dangerous. Consequently, Cooper is found dead in his room, and Abas is immediately suspected of the murder. Hanging is the customary sentence for murders in the colonies, but Mr. Warburton decides on another option as a compromise to avoid clashes with the natives. "The provocation was very great. Abas will be sentenced to a term of imprisonment" (CT: 147). The compromise Mr. Warburton chooses is meant to avoid clashes with the natives if he decides to hang him. It is a liberal attitude that aspires to maintain the status quo in the station, namely the coloniser/ colonised dialectic. The kind of knowledge Warburton has gathered on the natives stems from his ethnographic expertise, and ethnography was one form of the knowledge established within the framework of the "survey modality" (Cohn, 1996: 7) the British imperialists devised so as to study the natives.

There is an intertext between Maugham's writings and other figures in the British imperial tradition. He refurbishes the same imperial strategies developed by Joseph Conrad in ***Lord Jim*** and Rudyard Kipling in ***Kim***. Mr. Warburton is Maugham's

equivalent for Colonel Creighton in Kipling's novel and Stein in Conrad's novel. The three figures have expert knowledge about the natives and the imperial relations, and they transfer this knowledge to their successors and/ or apprentices. Cooper is Warburton's successor. He is almost similar to Kipling's Kim and Conrad's Jim. They all receive knowledge that is considered crucial for Britain's imperial power in India and the Malay Archipelago.

A second element about the Orientalist expertise concerns the Orientalist's knowledge about the flaws within the imperial structure. In "The Outstation", Maugham deals with problems related to the behaviour of the imperial agents which does harm to the affairs of the empire. It is thanks to his numerous travels to the outposts of Britain's colonies that he observes and reports these flaws. For instance, the spirit of class is a serious impediment to the harmonious relations between the colonisers and the colonised. He contrasts between the first generation imperialists and the second generation ones. For him, one of the impediments to the efficient control of the natives is to abstain from being sympathetic with the natives because of the transposition of domestic class struggle to the imperial context. "The Outstation" is set in an isolated trading station in Borneo. It is commanded by Mr. Warburton. Cooper comes to assist him in his task of commanding the station. Warburton is a kind of ideal ruler in his dealings with the natives, keeping his dignity and respect without offending them. He "was inclined to be sarcastic with white people, but with the Malays he had a happy mixture of condescension and kindliness. He stood in the place of the Sultan. He knew perfectly how to preserve his own dignity, and at the same put a native at his ease" (CT: 119). Maugham's sarcasm with the white imperialists is directed towards the members of the upper classes, who tend to be snobbish as well as the lower classes, who project their feeling of inferiority upon the natives. When Cooper arrives, he says "I was born in a Crown Colony, and I've lived practically all my life in the colonies. I don't give a row of pins for a lord. What's wrong with England is snobbishness" (CT: 123). Warburton does not accept arrogance in the colonies while Cooper's

imperial behaviour is modelled on it. He "looked upon himself as every man's equal [and] should look upon so many others [the natives] as his own inferiors" (CT: 125). Even if he is capable of commanding the natives, his lack of indulgence and sympathy for them is a problem that worries Mr. Warburton.

As a result of the flaws within the imperial structure, the expertise of the Orientalist brings about solutions to them. This is the case with Maugham who insists on the importance of equality, "the democratic feeling" and justice (CT: 94) in the imperial context. They are three elements which not only express Maugham's attitude towards the manner through which the Empire ought to be held but also to his philosophy of life. For Maugham, people are born and die equal, so gender, class or race distinctions should not prevail over the freedom of the individual or be serious impediments to the harmonious relations among people. Though the coloniser/ colonised distinction is fundamental to the continuity of the British Empire and is advantageous for each side of the coin, there is the need for the democratic feeling and the idea of justice. In order to maintain harmonious relationships, equality before law, justice for all and the democratic feeling are fundamental. The colonising people should not bully the 'natives' on the grounds that they are their subalterns. There should be established relationships where understanding and sympathy are the leitmotivs. It has to be noted that the importance Maugham grants to sympathy and understanding with the natives is comparable to Edward Morgan Forster's interest in tolerance and sympathy with the Indians in ***A Passage to India***. Warburton is similar to Fielding in Forster's novel. They are both tolerant and sympathetic with the natives for the sake of Britain's imperial power in India and the Malay Archipelago, respectively. Cooper, on his part, is similar to Roony Heaslop in their adherence to the jingoist creed of the Conservative imperialists.

- **The Consolidation of the English Imperial Power in Malaya**

Another central feature of the discourse of Orientalism is the consolidation of the imperial power. This is expressed through the dichotomous distinction between the inferior Oriental and the superior Westerner, the elaboration of the imperial power within the text and the ideological accompaniment to this power. In his Far Eastern tales, Maugham conforms to these Orientalist categories. First, the inferiority of the Oriental is contrasted to the superiority of the colonising race, a superiority which expresses itself through different aspects. The English or any other white subjects in the Malay Archipelago are always superior to their Malay counterpart. In the beginning of "Before the Party", Harold is depicted as a responsible imperial agent who has precedence over the Malays. Mr. Sampson considers that he "understood the natives as well as any man in the country. He had the combination of firmness, tact and good humour, which was essential in dealing with that timid, revengeful and suspicious race" (CT: 33). Harold is viewed as an appropriate agent in his district, for he has the capacities to manage the 'natives'. At first, he starts with brilliancy to perform his tasks to the extent of becoming the pride of his family and missionaries in Borneo and the British Empire as a whole. However, because of his penchant for drinking, he starts to be more negligent of his tasks and duties as an agent, husband and father. At Harold's death, his wife uses the word ***tuan*** to announce it to his native servants saying, "[t]he Tuan's killed himself" (CT: 46). This expression denotes the extent to which Harold has been a powerful imperial agent being the *tuan* or the lord of the natives. This is reminiscent of Lord Jim in Conrad's novel of the same title. Harold's white blood allows him to become the lord of the natives of the district under his charge. In "The Outstation", Mr. Warburton uses the words *butler* and *chief* as metaphors for white persons who would serve another one, but the two words denote an elevated status. However, he uses negatively the word *servant* for any Malay or Chinese who would serve the white people. He tells his assistant that if he carries on treating the natives badly they will no longer respect

or obey him. "Allow me to tell you that you have no more chance of getting Malay or Chinese servants here now than you have of getting an English butler or a French chief" (CT: 131). Through his European characters, especially the English, Maugham displays a Eurocentric attitude as "his writings dramatise the life of Europeans while the natives, who appear, if at all, are often peripheral to the plot" (Tay, 2011: 53).

The superiority of the English entitles them to establish their rule in the Malay Archipelago. This power becomes "elaborated and articulated in the novel" and short story (1994: 97) as part and parcel of the Orientalist tradition. In the opening story of ***The Casuarina Tree***, the imperial power is articulated through the workings of a Resident and an Assistant Resident who care after the affairs of their district. Harold is the Resident. The English people around him are proud of the "fluency with which he spoke […] the multifariousness of his duties and the competent way in which he performed them" along with "the combination of firmness, tact and good humour, which are essential in dealing with that timid, revengeful and suspicious race" (CT: 27). Harold and his Assistant Simpson do not obey any dictates of the Sultans. However, they obey with pride the dictates of the Governor. They do inspection work around their district to ensure the good working of the English rule, they collect the taxes, and they administer justice for all according the English law. It is at a tour of inspection around his district that Harold caught malaria. On his return, he tells his wife that there are certain sacrifices for "a man to be an empire builder" (CT: 35). The implication is that Harold is one of the devoted empire builders.

The official titles bequeathed on the imperial agents of the British Empire and the reference to the Queen and the Crown are proofs of the overwhelming presence of the British Empire in ***The Casuarina Tree***. This is to show that the Malay Archipelago is an inherent part of this Empire notwithstanding the fact of indirect rule. Right at the beginning of the collection, there is reference to Queen Victoria (CT: 18). Queen Victoria's prestigious reign has also known the glorious moments of the British Empire, reaching its zenith in the last decade of her

reign. The expression "Crown Colony" (CT: 123) metonymically stands for the British monarchy and its Empire while it also refers to those colonies that enjoyed semi-independence but were tightly linked to the Empire. The administrative work performed by these servants of the Empire does not stand alone since they make sure that trade follows the flag. By the time the affairs of the Malay States are in the hands of the English administrators, the English flag is implemented. This is followed by the control of trade and other economic activities in the area. In "Before the Party", Mr. Gray is one of the secretaries for the Resident. Knowing about Harold's problem of alcohol, his wife convinces Mr. Gray "to prevent whiskey being sent from Kuala Solor, but he [Harold] got it from the Chinese" (CT: 40). This sheds light upon the fact that trade in the Malay Archipelago is controlled by the English. They decide on which products to sell and which to forbid. Of course, whiskey is just one example of the products that are not due to be imported to the district by the Malays. This idea of trade is importantly emphasised in "P. O.", "The Outstation" and "The Letter". All of these stories deal with men and women engaged in commercial activities in the Far East. In "P. O", one of the passengers of the ship back home is a man who has enriched himself thanks to the rubber boom. Mr. Gallagher,

> *had been in the Federated Malay States for twenty-five years, and for the last managed an* ***estate*** *in Selantan. It was a hundred miles from anything that could be described as civilisation and the life had been lonely; but he had made money; during the rubber boom he had done very well, and with an astuteness which was unexpected in a man who looked so happy-go-lucky he had invested his savings* ***Government*** *stock.*
> *(CT: 58, emphasis added)*

It was customary that English people led lives of retreat in the most isolated of places in the outposts of the Empire to serve their profits and those of their mother country. Though Mr. Gallagher had made personal fortune through trade, his investments in government make him participate in the strengthening of his imperial nation.

It follows from the encroachment of the British indirect rule in the Malay Archipelago that there is a *denial* of the natives' capacity to govern themselves or supervise any work. Edward Said writes, "authority […] means for 'us' to deny the autonomy to 'it'" (1995: 32). In "The Outstation", Maugham claims that it is not convenient to let a native rule over his own people. He says that in the absence of the English residents when touring for supervision, "it had been inconvenient to let leave the station in the hands of a native clerk" (CT: 103). These words imply a kind of semi-allegory of the British power in the Malay Federated State. Maugham empowers the British representatives of empire and disempowers the natives. The native clerk represents native rulers, and the absence of the Resident, in this case Mr. Warburton, stands for the British rule and the importance of its continuity. As it is inconvenient to let the natives alone under the supervision of their own rulers so is the need to perpetuate the British indirect rule.

The implementation of the English imperial power in the Malay Archipelago needs ideological support. In order to consolidate this imperial authority, a set of "ideological formations that include notions that certain territories and people *require* and beseech domination" (Said, 1994: 8) are devised by the imperialists and transferred into the texts by the Orientalist writers like Maugham. This is linked to the missionary impulse, the evolutionary thought and other such ideologies. Maugham does this mainly through the missionary creed of the English. The medical mission is consciously emphasised in "The Vessel of Wrath" where Mr. Jones, the representative of the Christian mission adds "a tiny hospital" where his sister was "matron, dresser and nurse" (VW: 817). When cholera strikes in the island, the Jones, Mr. Gruyter and Ginger Ted have undertaken an extensive work to decimate it and spare the lives of the natives. They bring "drugs and disinfectants", "distributed food and medicine" and "everything possible was done to localise it" (VW: 845). The measures taken in the face of the epidemic have paid, for in the end "out of a population of eight thousand only six hundred died" (VW: 845). This shows the extent to which the work of the white agents is efficient. Since the hospital is

established "on [the] initiative" (VW: 817) of Mr. Jones rather than the Dutch agent Mr. Gruyter, it is obvious that Maugham is celebrating the missionary work and consolidates the British indirect rule in the Malay Archipelago.

In ***The Narrow Corner***, Maugham develops the imperial narrative of Dr. Saunders who seizes the missionary impulse as an opportunity to practise his craft in the Far East. Such Far Eastern regions as Takana and Java had no doctors so that he has become the most needed person in the area the sooner he establishes himself there. "There was no doctor on the island and on his arrival such as had anything the matter with them seized the opportunity to consult him" (NC: 11). Chinese worthies, too, come to be examined by him because the Chinese traditional medicine is unable to cure them. For instance, Kim Ching, who "had heard how the doctor, by what looked like a **miracle**, caused the blind to see" (NC: 11; emphasis added), came to visit the doctor and get himself cured by his miracles. Dr. Saunders echoes Philip's dream of going to the Far East to practise medicine in ***Of Human Bondage*.** For him, a "doctor was useful anywhere. There might be an opportunity to go up country in Burmah, and what rich jungles in Sumatra or Borneo might he not visit?" (OHB: 602) This implies the missionary idea that the Orientals are in need of Western doctors to heal their diseases. Dr. Saunders's presence in the Far East is regarded as vital. This confirms Philip's initial desire to go there for the same purpose. The fact that none but Dr. Saunders in ***The Narrow Corner*** and Miss Jones and her brother in "The Vessel of Wrath" can provide health care for the natives shows the extent to which the latter are dependent on the missionary work. The native traditional medical treatments cannot face disease so that only Western modern medicine can help them. Rev. Jones and his sister are depicted as saviours for these people. They are invested with the mission of converting the purported pagans into Christianity, dispensing education and especially providing health care for them. Mr. Jones

> *was the only qualified doctor in the group and it was a comfort to know that if you fell ill you need not rely on a Chinese practitioner, and none knew better than the*

> *contrôlleur how useful to all Mr Jones's skills had been and with what clarity he had given it. On the occasion of an epidemic of influenza the missionary had done the work of ten men and no storm short of a typhoon could prevent him from crossing to one island or another if his help was needed.*
> *(VW: 816)*

This quote shows how important Jones's missionary work is in the islands. Neither the Chinese nor the Dutch government could do what Mr. Jones does, for he is devoted to his missionary work. Maugham conforms to the imperialist ideology that "Britain's moral superiority, and medical knowledge, made it possible for the British to blunt the impact of [Oriental] disease upon themselves, and even, so they believed, to instruct their [Oriental] subjects in how better to preserve their own health" (Metcalf, 1994: 174).

Through Miss Jones, Maugham develops another ideology, namely the taking of the English education to Malaya. She is a teacher in the "mission school" (VW: 817), and as such she participates in the British missionary impulse by spreading the blessings of Western education there. Maugham models the missionary work of the Jones on the work of a priest he personally met in China. The white priest "at least could give them something" (GP: 99). In fact, the hill Shans have confidence in the priest to the extent that "they let their children come to him only because he **clothed**, **lodged**, and **fed** them" (GP: 100; emphasis added). The work of the priest in the name of the Christian mission is also important to the civilisation of the world. After some time spent benefiting from the services of the priest, they would return to their native zones. While some would "revert to the savage beliefs of their fathers, others would retain the faith he had **taught** them and by their influence perhaps lighten the darkness that surrounded them" (GP: 100; emphasis added). Therefore, teaching these children the civilised ways has the vocation of making 'savage' ones disappear gradually in this region. Not only is the priest a kind of imperial agent but he is also a devoted philanthropist who "gave the people his heart and made no more fuss about it" (GP: 105). This denotes the extent to which the British as represented by the priest do really serve the people they colonised.

Obviously, William Somerset Maugham adheres to the British Orientalist tradition. He reproduces the Orientalist strategies of control and imperialist ideologies in order to provide support to the British Empire. Arguably, it is pertinent to provide a post-colonial interpretation of the title of Maugham's collection of short stories ***The Casuarina Tree***, which is a symbol that bears more than one Orientalist meaning. He explains his choice of this title by one of the popular beliefs concerning the Casuarina tree:

> *Of the Casuarina tree they say that if you take in a boat with you a piece of it, be it ever so small, contrary winds will arise to impede your journey or storms to imperial you life. They say also that if you stand in its shadow by the light you will hear, whispered mysteriously in its dark ramage, the secrets of the future. These facts have never been disputed; but they also say that when in the wide estuaries the mangrove has in due time reclaimed the swampy land from the water the Casuarina tree plants itself and in its turn settles, solidifies and fertilises the soil till it is ripe for a more varied and luxuriant growth; and then, having done its work, dies down before the ruthless encroachment of the myriad denizens of the jungle. (CT: v)*

First, the *casuarina tree* stands for the British rule in the Malay Archipelago. The implementation of this rule in this area has the vocation of serving the natives in the same way as the casuarina tree "plants itself and in its turn settles, solidifies and fertilises the soil till it is ripe for a more varied and luxuriant growth". The tree's power to fertilise the soil and solidify denotes the English intellectual capacities and technological means of transforming the lives of the Malays from *deprived* and *deplorable* to lives full of ease and abundance and improve their environment. The English are supposed to be in Malaya for the benefits of the Malays. Maugham reminisces about the Casuarina tree as follows:

> *And I remembered that the Casuarina tree stood along the shore, gaunt and rough-hewn, protecting the land from the fury of the winds, and so might aptly suggest these planters and administrators who, with all their short-comings, have after all brought to the peoples among whom they dwell tranquillity, justice and welfare. (CT: vi)*

Second, the tree also denotes the sacrifice of the English in their

missionary work in the Orient. As the tree is considered as a bearer of bad fortune, so are the English imperilled in their missionary work. In fact, throughout ***The Casuarina Tree***, Maugham emphasises the dangers that happen to the English in the Malay Archipelago. Of course, Maugham explicitly intends the use of the casuarina tree as "a symbol of [the] exiled lives" of the English. In addition to exile, they cope with a myriad of problems that arise out of the colonial contact: the dangers of the climate such as malaria, the dangers of the jungles, the problems that spring out of the cultural clashes and so on.

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