

Rain Study Guide

Rain by W. Somerset Maugham

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Plot Summary

The short story *Rain* relates the events transpiring within a two-week period between a small group of English and American travelers in the South Pacific island of Tutuila. The primary plot details how one of the characters, an arrogant and self-righteous Christian missionary, attempts to reform another character, whom he mistakenly assumes is a common prostitute. The missionary uses his considerable political influence to control the situation and eventually spends several days alone with the alleged prostitute, cleansing her soul of sin. In the end, the woman seduces the missionary, who subsequently commits suicide rather than facing a suddenly uncertain future.

Dr. and Mrs. Macphail are traveling to Upolu by ship. They are accompanied on the long voyage by Mr. and Mrs. Davidson, missionaries returning to their designated area which includes some islands in the South Pacific. The ship is unexpectedly detained at Tutuila for a fortnight due to a case of infectious disease. The passengers find lodging in the expansive house of a local trader named Horn. At the house they pass the time in conversation and other so-called proper activities while other residents pursue smoking, gambling, and dancing.

One of the other residents, Miss Sadie Thompson, is a younger woman with unrefined manners and over-stylish dress. Thompson is traveling to a distant island where she has secured a job as a cashier. Davidson is particularly troubled by Thompson's lack of what he considers decent and moral behavior and in an apparent epiphany he decides that Thompson is a prostitute. Although Davidson is probably incorrect, Thompson's actions do not convince him that she is not a prostitute. Davidson attempts to have Thompson turned out of the house but there is no other lodging available. He then seeks to enforce his own standards of behavior on Thompson by pressuring various island inhabitants. Davidson is largely successful in cowing Thompson who, who determines to pass the time as quietly as possible to avoid further angering the politically powerful missionary.

Davidson is not satisfied, however, and convinces the island's governor to deport Thompson on the next ship leaving the island - b. By accident, it is bound for San Francisco. Thompson then seeks to have Davidson allow her to leave the island destined for any location other than San Francisco. Davidson, in an apparent second epiphany, decides that Thompson must be facing a prison sentence in San Francisco. Thompson seems to confirm Davidson's belief and states that she faces a three-year prison term if she is returned to San Francisco. To Dr. Macphail's surprise, Davidson is firm in his resolve to have Thompson deported to San Francisco.

Realizing that Davidson has mastered the situation and her fate, Thompson becomes despondent and then seeks forgiveness by repenting of her life of putative sin. She begins a prolonged ordeal of weeping, praying, and reading the Bible, e - assisted all the time by Davidson. For four days they are shut up together in Thompson's room while she grovels in her pajamas and begs him to counsel her.



On the morning of Thompson's scheduled departure Davidson is found dead on the beach. He has used a razor to slit his own throat. After a difficult few hours the Macphails and Mrs. Davidson return from the mortuary to find Thompson playing loud music, chatting up a sailor, and once again dressed in all her gaudy style. The penitent woman has evaporated with Davidson's suicide and Thompson is once again in her original guise. As a shocked Mrs. Davidson rushes to her room Thompson laughs and spits at her. When Dr. Macphail remonstrates with Thompson, she confronts him and tells him that all men are filthy pigs. In perhaps the only real epiphany of the narrative, Dr. Macphail realizes that Thompson's deliberately crafted behavior has led to the seduction and subsequent suicide of the stern Davidson.



Lines 1 - 47

Lines 1 - 47 Summary

The story begins aboard a passenger ship steaming in the South Pacific Ocean, about twelve hours from Pago Pago Harbor on the island of Tutuila. Passengers aboard the ship include Dr. and Mrs. Alec Macphail, traveling to Apia on the island of Upolu, and Mr. and Mrs. Davidson, traveling missionaries returning to their designated proselytizing area of several small Samoan islands north of Tutuila. The reserved Mac hails and the ascetic Davidsons have formed a friendship of propinquity, while the remainder of the passengers aboard the ship spend their time gambling, smoking, drinking, and otherwise enjoying themselves in the ship's smoking-room. Mrs. Macphail is flattered that the Davidsons, who, whom she views as very respectable, feel comfortable with her presence.

The evening before the ship arrives at Pago Pago, Dr. and Mrs. Macphail sit in their cabin and discuss the Davidsons. Dr. Macphail comments that Davidson is quite particular about his company and seems judgmental in his treatment of others. When Mrs. Macphail responds that, perhaps, the doctor is being harsh in his judgment of Davidson, Dr. Macphail unfavorably compares Davidson's attitudes to those espoused by Jesus Christ. The Macphails then go to sleep.

Lines 1 - 47 Analysis

The introductory scene sets the scene in the South Pacific and establishes the theme of the story as one of values and perceptions. Four of the principle characters are introduced and provided with an adequate background and development. The experienced and educated Dr. Macphail is pleased that he has gained the esteem of Davidson but he, but he is simultaneously somewhat repulsed by many of Davidson's prejudicial views. The general time of the story can also be established by inference - . Dr. Macphail is recuperating from a war wound, thus the action takes place sometime after the conclusion of the Great War, perhaps c. 1919.



Lines 48 - 179

Lines 48 - 179 Summary

In the morning Dr. Macphail goes on deck and sees the island in the distance. He stands by the ship's railing and speaks to Mrs. Davidson. She tells him that the approaching island of Tutuila is, in her opinion, full of notoriously immoral natives, and she thanks God that she has not been called to serve as a missionary there. Dr. Macphail recalls how earlier on the voyage Mrs. Davidson had spent an evening regaling Mrs. Macphail with tales of the putatively immoral marital practices of natives untamed by Christianity. Mrs. Davidson informs Dr. Macphail that her husband has caused all dancing to be eliminated from their missionary district. Mrs. Macphail then joins her husband on deck and they enter the harbor. Mrs. Davidson continues to complain about the natives, noting their traditional dress which she considers immoral, and stating that Davidson has practically eliminated the native style of dress in his district. The ship reaches land and the passengers disembark in a rain shower.

Lines 48 - 179 Analysis

As the ship approaches the harbor and finally reaches land Dr. Macphail and Mrs. Davidson have a conversation which establishes their respective characters. Dr. Macphail appears to be a respectable, educated, and reasonable man who, who views the world with professional interest and a sort of live-and-let-live attitude. On the other hand Mrs. Davidson appears to be prudish and judgmental, and holds native customs and mores in contempt. She is proud that she and Davidson have caused the native populations in their missionary district to change marital and sexual habits and to adopt European dress and stringent Christian social values.

Lines 180 - 259

Lines 180 - 259 Summary

Once on shore, the Macphails and Mrs. Davidson wait under some shelter while the rain continues. They are soon joined by Davidson who, who informs them that an outbreak of measles has occurred and their ship is confined to Pago Pago for at least ten days. There is no hotel in Pago Pago but the various travelers find rooms for rent at a local trader's expansive store. The trader, Horn, and his native wife and children live above their store. The rooms rented by Horn are nearly devoid of furniture and comfort and, while the rain continues to pour down, the passengers make themselves as comfortable as they can. The Macphails seem somewhat disoriented, and Mrs. Davidson takes charge of their situation and orders them about.

Lines 180 - 259 Analysis

The scene establishes the primary location for the remainder of the short story - . It's the environs of Pago Pago centered on the store of the trader Horn. The sense of place is quickly and strongly developed, and the characterization of the Macphails and the Davidsons continues. It becomes evident that the Macphails know little about living on a tropical island, while the Davidsons, as to be expected, are clearly much more experienced.



Lines 260 - 305

Lines 260 - 305 Summary

On the advice of Mrs. Davidson, Dr. Macphail leaves the room to go to the wharf and secure his heavy luggage. Downstairs, he becomes engaged in a conversation between the quartermaster of the ship on which he arrived, a Mr. Swan, Horn, and a woman named Thompson. Mr. Swan is arguing with Horn, trying to secure a reduced rate for Thompson. Horn wavers and, under Thompson's direct insistence, agrees to the reduced rate. Thompson then invites the men into her newly rented room to have a drink of whisky. Dr. Macphail declines her offer and proceeds to the wharf in the pouring rain. On the way, he notes several natives who, who are dressed in traditional native clothing - . This is contrary to Mrs. Davidson's statements, that the natives are polite.

Lines 260 - 305 Analysis

This brief transitional scene introduces Thompson, the last major character in the story. She is described as plump and pretty in a coarse way. She is dressed in a contemporaneously modern fashion and speaks with a glib sort of slang, referring to money as 'beans' and alcohol as 'hooch.' Mr. Swan is clearly enamored of her, and Horn's reaction to her suggests that he perceives her to be a woman of questionable morality - . It's a trait not particularly troublesome to Horn. Dr. Macphail admires her spirit of determination and her effrontery, though he is clearly not infatuated with her fairly blatant sexuality.



Lines 306 - 509

Lines 306 - 509 Summary

Dr. Macphail returns to his room and has supper with his wife and Mrs. Davidson. Davidson has gone to meet the island's governor. The three characters make small talk and Horn, while overseeing their food service, mentions that another guest has taken a room for rent. Dr. Macphail tells his wife and Mrs. Davidson that the new guest is Thompson, and both women comment unfavorably upon her behavior, noting that she appears to have rather loose morals. Supper concludes and the characters turn in for the evening.

In the morning, as the rain continues, Davidson returns. He has unsuccessfully argued for an early release from the quarantine, and announces they will likely be forced to stay at the trader's shop for a fortnight or more. Davidson then worries that, under the care of native missionaries, the mission area will have various non-Christian abuses occurring. Davidson recalls some brief facts about his past - he had been a Christian missionary in the Solomon Islands for five years and then, attending a missionary congress held in Boston, he had met Mrs. Davidson who, who had just returned from a Christian mission to China. They quickly wed and were then assigned to their current mission area. Davidson's work requires him frequently to travel to distant islands by canoe or small water craft, which is particularly unsafe and requires a great deal of courage and determination. Mrs. Davidson often worries for his safety. Dr. Macphail, a timid man, is impressed by Davidson's steely resolve and calm nerves.

Davidson remarks upon the difficulty he and his wife had first encountered in their new mission area. They had felt isolated and unwanted and had become discouraged but had never faltered. They had derived peace from reading the Bible and had gradually instilled in the native population a sense of sin and guilt, which led them to change their behavior and eventually convert many of them to Christianity. Davidson had established various monetary fines for behaviors, which he considered to be sinful; t. The fines had gradually worked to change behavior.

Dr. Macphail asks how the levied fines had been enforced, and Davidson explains that those failing to satisfy their fines were expelled from the local church which also controlled the local economy and distribution of food and supplies - t. Thus, expulsion from the church was equivalent to a life of starvation and privation. Davidson recalls how Fred Ohlson, a local trader, had ignored the church - . Davidson had broken the trader and caused his financial and physical collapse, finally sending him back to Australia as a broken and ruined man.

The conversation is interrupted by the sounds of a gramophone and laughter. They the sounds of dancing and drinking can be heard. Mr. and Mrs. Davidson surmise that Thompson is behaving poorly and, although it is still early, determine to retire for the



evening so they can spend time studying the Bible. Although Mrs. Macphail disapproves, Dr. Macphail spends the evening playing cards.

Lines 306 - 509 Analysis

This section of the story continues to develop the primary characters and set the tone. Davidson is a man who is used to getting his own way, and is distraught that he has been unable to convince the island's governor to make an exception to the medical quarantine. He also reminisces about several harsh techniques he used to dominate the people in his mission area. The techniques he utilized are more akin to fascism than Christianity though only Dr. Macphail seems to understand this. Davidson is established as an imposing, forceful, and tyrannical individual. Mrs. Davidson clearly idolizes and emulates her husband - f. For example, when he compliments her she blushes, casts down her eyes, and is unable to speak. Mrs. Macphail is impressed with the Davidsons and wishes, in return, to impress them with her piety and social diligence. Dr. Macphail, himself a timid man, admires Davidson's forceful personality and courage although he begins to see Davidson as oppressive and un-Christian in his dealings with others. The central conflict of the story begins to develop as the upstairs conversation is interrupted by Thompson's music and party noises from below. The section concludes the third day in the story's primary timeline.



Lines 510 - 662

Lines 510 - 662 Summary

In the morning the Macphails retrieve their luggage, visit the local hospital, and make a social call on the governor. When they return to the house they greet Thompson and hold a very brief conversation with her. Mrs. Macphail, later, comments that Thompson is common and not particular about her company. In the evening the Macphails and the Davidsons have high tea in their room. They are again interrupted by the sounds of Thompson's gramophone and several male voices along with her own loud voice. Davidson comments on her inappropriate behavior, and then the foursome tries to ignore the noise and continue polite conversation. Then Davidson leaps to his feet and announces that he has just realized that Thompson must be, in fact, a prostitute. He recalls how Iwelei, the so-called red-light district of Honolulu, had been forcibly closed at the time the ship had visited Hawaii, and concludes that Thompson is therefore a prostitute who is seeking another working locale. He is furious and storms out of the room, determined to take decisive action.

Davidson storms into Thompson's room and demands she desist her behavior. He throws the gramophone to the floor and attempts to drive the men from the room. Instead, he is forcibly ejected and he then returns to his room where Mrs. Davidson joins him. Dr. and Mrs. Macphail are amazed to hear the gramophone music start up again, and the singing and loud voices continue into the night.

Lines 510 - 662 Analysis

This section details the activities which occur on the fourth day of the story's principle timeline. The Macphails are despondent at the prospect of spending many days with nothing particular to do, while the Davidsons determine to develop a daily regimen of study, exercise, and productive activity. Thompson is characterized as a woman with a zest for life who, who is somewhat unconcerned by social values or Christian morality. While Thompson is, in fact, en route to a job as a cashier her behavior causes Davidson to conclude that she is a prostitute - his conclusion being nearly certainly erroneous. He foolishly assumes he is correct based only on his slight knowledge of purported facts, and rushes off to somehow correct the situation. Instead he is met with physical resistance by Thompson's party guests and is forcibly ejected from her room. This insult to his pride further inflames his determination to quell Thompson's offensive behavior.



Lines 663 - 831

Lines 663 - 831 Summary

On the next day Mrs. Macphail and Mrs. Davidson walk together through the village. They encounter Thompson on two occasions, and both times she calls at them insultingly. Mrs. Davidson feels they must have Horn turn her out of the house. It begins to rain again, and everyone returns to the house, Davidson coming in late and drenched. At lunch he sends the serving girl to ask for an appointment with Thompson. Thompson agrees to meet with him, and he determines to speak with her. Mrs. Davidson believes it to be a waste of time, but Davidson is determined to extend Thompson the full mercy of God as he perceives it. He proceeds downstairs and spends a quiet hour with Thompson. Upon his return he is visibly agitated and angry - Thompson has rejected his offer. Davidson paces and becomes nearly violent, stating that as she has rejected repentance she is an evil woman and must be punished severely. He then storms out of the room.

Later in the day Dr. Macphail accidentally meets Horn near the house. Horn says that Davidson has demanded that Horn enforce civil behavior in his house by preventing Thompson from having any visitors. Dr. Macphail feels that Davidson is perhaps overstepping his authority, but Horn explains that if a trader gets on the wrong side of the missionaries, his business will suffer and fail. Thus, Horn has instructed Thompson to refrain from having visitors. That evening Thompson indeed does not have visitors, but she does play her gramophone for several hours. The Macphails, in bed, hear Davidson through the thin wall - he is praying at length, asking for mercy for the soul of Thompson.

Lines 663 - 831 Analysis

This section details the activities which occur on the fifth day of the story's principle timeline. The central conflict of the story is fully established - the Christian Davidsons are appalled by Thompson's perceived effrontery and demand that she cast off her evil ways and change her life. Thompson has, of course, been erroneously judged, though the fact seems rather more to amuse her than to anger her. In any case, she either does not try to challenge Davidson's aspersions or else he disregards her when she does. Davidson begins to tell others that Thompson is a harlot and begins to demand that others, for example Horn, assist him in his persistent discrimination of the supposedly unrepentant sinner. Dr. Macphail seems to see the stupidity of the situation but his timid nature prevents him from forcibly establishing his own opinion - h. He even allows his wife to believe that he wholeheartedly supports Davidson.



Lines 832 - 959

Lines 832 - 959 Summary

Over the next three days whenever the Macphails or the Davidsons encounter Thompson, she is aloof. In the evenings, Thompson takes no visitors but continues to play her gramophone. On Sunday, she begins to play her gramophone and Davidson, and Davidson complains to Horn about the impropriety of music on the Sabbath. Horn insists that Thompson discontinue the music. Davidson spends his time away from the house and Horn, and Horn, Dr. Macphail, and Thompson all get the feeling that he is concentrating his attention on some plan, though they do not know what it could be about. Horn tells Dr. Macphail that the rain will continue to be steadily heavy for the foreseeable future; t. The area receives about three-hundred inches of rain every year. Dr. Macphail becomes despondent at the weather and the sultry heat and begins to feel that the forces of nature are savage and violent, and he begins to feel that the natives are lurking about with evil intent.

Dr. Macphail and Davidson, and Davidson one evening discuss Thompson's behavior. Dr. Macphail timorously questions Davidson's perception of Thompson's evil, noting that opinions as to right behavior sometimes vary. Davidson forcefully responds, comparing Thompson to gangrene. Just then Thompson herself bursts into the room in a rage, announces that the governor has notified her that she will be deported to San Francisco by the next available boat - , in five days' time, - and blames Davidson for meddling in her affairs. Davidson, triumphant, declares that such harsh treatment is only right and expected. A heated exchange ensues and after Davidson repeatedly and subtly insults Thompson, she rushes out of the room. Davidson then laments the obstinacy of the governor, noting that he was forced to threaten political actions if the governor did not comply with his wishes to have Thompson deported.

Lines 832 - 959 Analysis

This section details an indeterminate time period of a few days, spanning one Sunday. Davidson, once rebuffed directly, sets about behind the scenes and uses his apparently considerable political influence in Washington, D.C., to threaten the governor with political difficulties if the governor fails to act in censuring Thompson. Even though Thompson has acquiesced completely to the behavioral strictures placed upon her by the pressured Horn, Davidson is not satisfied - his wounded pride and conviction that Thompson is an evil woman drives him to demand she be punished. Davidson's persistently dogged behavior here is reminiscent of his prior behavior as a missionary - he alone is capable of determining what is right, and he feels compelled to enforce his own standards of morality on all others.

The conversation about the weather between Dr. Macphail and Horn is interesting - , along with several other passages, it imbues the persistent rain with a malevolent intent.



Nature is portrayed as savage and irresistible. This imagery continues throughout the story and becomes highly significant near the conclusion. The construction of this section is also complex - t. There is a brief first-person narrative intrusion, coupled with some second-person commentary, wrapped in the story's typical third-person omniscient point of view. This shift in perspective is not unique to this section, but is particularly noticeable here.



Lines 960 - 1120

Lines 960 - 1120 Summary

The next day Thompson tries, unsuccessfully, to officially meet with the governor. She then waylays him outside his home and tries to assert her rights. She easily convinces him to allow her to take any boat from the island that she desires, instead of consigning her to the San Francisco steamer. She then returns to the trader's house and causes Horn to summon Dr. Macphail on the pretext that she is ill. She then asks Dr. Macphail to intercede on her behalf with Davidson and gain his agreement that instead of leaving on the next departing ship, headed for San Francisco, she can remain for a few extra weeks and take a ship destined for Sydney, Australia, where she claims she will be able to easily find gainful and legitimate employment.

The timid Dr. Macphail does not speak to Davidson directly, but instead asks his wife to speak to Mrs. Davidson and request Mrs. Davidson to speak to Davidson. This roundabout communication quickly proceeds, and Davidson comes directly to Dr. Macphail and the two men begin to argue; . Davidson quickly refuses Thompson's request. Dr. Macphail's ire is aroused and he tells Davidson he is being tyrannical and harsh. He then leaves the house, on the way stopping to inform Thompson that Davidson will not accede to her wishes.

Dr. Macphail, his anger aroused by the way Davidson has been treating him, proceeds to see the governor. He begins to present Thompson's case, but the governor cuts him short and informs him that she will be leaving on the next ship. When Dr. Macphail tries to continue, the governor states he will not discuss official business with the doctor and, admitting that he does not particularly regard Davidson with esteem, indicates that he will not change his position on the matter. Dr. Macphail returns to the trader's house and has supper with his wife and the Davidsons. Davidson is jovial and in a triumphant good humor. Dr. Macphail realizes that, somehow, Davidson knows of his visit with the governor. After supper Davidson takes exercise while Horn, the Macphails, and Mrs. Davidson sit in the parlor.

Lines 960 - 1120 Analysis

The conflict continues to develop as it spreads beyond Thompson and Davidson. Dr. Macphail is not particularly interested in Thompson, personally, but he does feel that her treatment is overly harsh and unjust. However, when he tries to reason with Davidson he is promptly corrected. His personal anger thus aroused he attempts to intervene directly with the governor. The governor's reluctance, however, to even discuss the issue reveals to Dr. Macphail just how seriously Davidson is able to influence the politics of the island through his religious connections in Washington, D.C. Thompson is devastated by Dr. Macphail's failure, though Horn seems unsurprised.



Lines 1121 - 1246

Lines 1121 - 1246 Summary

Presently there is a knock on the door and Thompson enters and speaks to Davidson. Thompson's entire demeanor is changed - s. She appears a broken and frightened woman. She apologizes, admits she is powerless against Davidson's decisions, and asks him to allow her to leave the island bound for anywhere except San Francisco. Davidson, in an apparent epiphany, concludes that Thompson is wanted for some crime in San Francisco, and announces that if she returns there she will be sent to the penitentiary. Thompson, weeping, confirms that she has a three-year sentence upon her. Davidson, now more resolute than ever, declares she must return to San Francisco and serve her prison sentence. Thompson, frantic, collapses - Dr. Macphail assists her to her room and gives her an injection to calm her down.

When Dr. Macphail returns to the room he strangely finds his wife and the Davidsons in exactly the same positions and attitudes they occupied when he left them. Davidson insists that they all kneel and pray for the soul of Thompson. After Davidson offers a long and passionate prayer, he causes them all to repeat the Lord's Prayer. Dr. Macphail complies, but finds the episode confusing. Several minutes later Thompson sends for Davidson, and he quickly answers her summons. Thompson announces that she has decided to repent of her evil ways.

Lines 1121 - 1246 Analysis

This scene occurs on approximately the eight day of the story's primary timeline and sets up the central action that will occupy the remainder of the narrative - that is, the 'repentance' of Sadie Thompson. Thompson has by now exhausted all means of countering Davidson's plans for her future - she has ignored him, asked his acquaintances to intervene with him on her behalf, and even spoken directly with the governor, but all to no avail. Davidson has ensured that Thompson will be returned to San Francisco on the next ship. Thompson therefore meets personally with Davidson where her concern over being returned to San Francisco is evident. She implores Davidson to send her anywhere but San Francisco. Davidson's apparent epiphany appears to be correct - h. His earlier decision that Thompson was a prostitute was potentially not correct; . Thethe narrative states she is on her way to Apia to work as a cashier. Yet, Thompson herself seems to confirm Davidson's second insight by stating that she does, in fact, face a prison sentence in San Francisco. Dr. Macphail, still unaware of Davidson's demeanor, wrongly assumes that this information will cause Davidson to relent - i. In fact, the effect is just the opposite.



Lines 1247 - 1328

Lines 1247 - 1328 Summary

On the next day Dr. Macphail checks in on Thompson to assess her health. He finds her room in disorder and her person is drab and bedraggled. Although he is concerned for her health, she claims to only want to see Davidson. For three entire days, Davidson spends virtually all of his time cloistered with Thompson. Mrs. Davidson confides to Dr. Macphail that her husband has been having strange dreams, notable about the mountains of Nebraska. Dr. Macphail silently recalls that the mountains reminded him very much of women's breasts. Davidson himself becomes increasingly agitated and Dr. Macphail finds him to be intolerable. Davidson is enraptured by the apparent transformation of Thompson's soul, and exults that Thompson has acquiesced to return to San Francisco and face the penalty for her crime - , or sin, as Davidson characterizes it. Dr. Macphail and Davidson briefly argue about the necessity of Thompson serving a prison sentence; . Davidson assures Dr. Macphail that not only is incarceration necessary, but desirable.

Lines 1247 - 1328 Analysis

This series of scenes continues to develop the apparent resolution of the narrative. Under Davidson's careful and pervasive tutelage Thompson appears to come to a sense of her sin and guilt. For Davidson, Thompson's awareness of her putative sin and her remorse for it are insufficient for a complete resolution - s. She must also pay a price to society, and she must desire to pay the price as evidenced in her apparent desire to return to San Francisco to be incarcerated for three years. Dr. Macphail feels that this approach is ridiculous although, as usual, he fails to act in any decisive way to prevent it.

The imagery of Davidson's dreams is apparently vivid but the single scene actually described in the narrative is telling - . Davidson dreams of the gently rolling mountains of Nebraska which, Dr. Macphail recalls, are strangely reminiscent of women's breasts. This type of foreshadowing allows a careful reader to realize that Davidson's profession of love for Thompson are not far from the mark, and Davidson's 'love' is not particularly Christ-like love. In any case, Thompson's distraught behavior absolutely convinces Davidson of her penitent nature.



Lines 1329 - 1377

Lines 1329 - 1377 Summary

For four days Thompson agonizes over her apparently sinful life while Davidson remains at her side throughout as a confidant and confessor. Although the days become an agony of unnatural excitement for the inhabitants of the trader's house they appear to have a profound effect on Thompson. Her entire demeanor changes and her physical person becomes disheveled and drab. She remains in her night-dress for four days and does not wear stockings. Meanwhile the driving rain continues unabated and the mosquitoes begin to thrive.

Dr. Macphail is particularly strained by the bizarre ritual being enacted between Davidson and Thompson. Although he feels Thompson is being treated grossly unfairly, he yearns for her departure such that a semblance of normalcy can return to his life. Mrs. Davidson also worries that her husband is exerting himself beyond his strength. On the evening before Thompson's planned departure, Mrs. Macphail comments privately to her husband about the apparently profound change that has come over Thompson. Dr. Macphail does not at first understand, and then makes no reply.

Lines 1329 - 1377 Analysis

Although Thompson's ordeal lasts four days in the narrative's principle timeline it is only briefly described. She spends the entire four-day period in a slovenly state of partial undress, weeping, praying, and reading the Bible with Davidson - the two characters generally shut up in her room, alone. Mrs. Davidson and the Macphails spend the time together, worrying about Thompson's behavior and Davidson's health. Outside the pounding rain continues. On the night before Thompson is to sail for San Francisco a government official arrives to advise her to be prepared - Davidson says he will see that she is ready. Dr. Macphail, alone, seems to doubt somewhat that Thompson's behavior is completely sincere.



Lines 1378 - 1507 (End)

Lines 1378 - 1507 (End) Summary

Horn awakens Dr. Macphail in the early hours of the day on which Thompson is scheduled to depart for San Francisco. Horn quietly and quickly escorts Dr. Macphail to the beach where he finds a group of natives standing around an object at the water's edge. As Dr. Macphail approaches he is horrified to realize the object is the body of Davidson. Dr. Macphail inspects the body and discovers that the throat is cut from ear to ear, and the razor is still clutched tightly in Davidson's dead hand. Davidson has been dead for several hours. The two men stand and smoke cigarettes and wait for the police. Horn wonders aloud why Davidson would have committed suicide. Dr. Macphail is noncommittal in his response. After the police arrive Dr. Macphail returns to the house to inform Mrs. Davidson. He meets Mrs. Macphail and learns that Mrs. Davidson is already distraught about her husband - she heard him leave Thompson's room during the early morning but has not seen him since, and she fears the worst. Dr. Macphail informs his wife of the suicide and sends her to inform Mrs. Davidson.

The Macphails then escort Mrs. Davidson to the mortuary. Mrs. Davidson is pale but composed. She views the body alone and then the trio returns to the trader's house. Upon approaching the house, they are amazed to hear Thompson's gramophone playing loud and harsh ragtime music. As they enter the house they see Thompson chatting with a sailor. Thompson's entire demeanor has changed markedly - she is no longer a cowed drudge but is dressed in white finery with her hair arranged and her face painted. Thompson breaks into a loud jeering laugh when she sees Mrs. Davidson, and then spits at the widow. As Mrs. Davidson flees to her room, Dr. Macphail storms into Thompson's room and stops the gramophone. He harshly denounces Thompson and she stares at him with contemptuous hatred and states that all men are dirty, filthy pigs. Dr. Macphail gasps and, finally, fully understands.

Lines 1378 - 1507 (End) Analysis

The narrative concludes with a surprise twist. Instead of the expected departure of Thompson, the suicide of Davidson occurs. Thompson, evidently, will not be departing for San Francisco. The description of Horn bears a close reading - the supposed ally of the missionaries is here presented as heavily tattooed, nearly savage, and dressed in the lava-lava. Dr. Macphail does not seem particularly disturbed by Horn's transformation, but it would surely have been distasteful to Davidson, were he alive to see it. As usual, Dr. Macphail finds that he is incapable of direct action and instead insists his wife inform Mrs. Davidson of her husband's demise. The visit to the mortuary proceeds as might be expected under the circumstances. Mrs. Davidson apparently there realizes that her husband had committed suicide.



The final meeting with Thompson provides the surprise twist which has made the narrative so enduring - instead of the penitent sinner she has, once again, entirely transformed. She is once again the brazen woman flirting with sailors and dressed showily, her prior anguish of soul having simply evaporated with her troubles. The inference, of course, is that Davidson found her act of moral devastation and wholesome repentance beyond irresistible - a fact which the canny Thompson obviously recognized as her only leverage. Through one of the strangest seductions in literature Thompson succeeds in destroying Davidson's moral center and his resultant collapse leads to solitary suicide on the shores of the island in the early morning hours.



Characters

Dr. Alec Macphail

Dr. Macphail, a medical doctor, is 40- years-old, thin, and has pale blue eyes, thinning red hair, and red, freckled skin. He speaks with a light Scots accent and is recovering from a wound received in the Great War. He is traveling on the ship, accompanied by his wife, to the town of Apia where he looks forward to being professionally engaged for a one-year period. In the narrative Dr. Macphail serves as an ineffectual counterweight to Davidson's weighty and misguided opinions. Aptly named, Dr. Macphail never misses an opportunity to fail to act. In his capacity as a doctor he is competent and professional, but as a human being he is indecisive, introverted, and incapable of defending his opinion. Dr. Macphail is particularly bothered by the incessant rain and eventually comes to feel that the raw nature of the South Pacific is savage and uncompromising.

Mrs. Macphail

Mrs. Macphail, the wife of Dr. Macphail, is accompanying her husband on his trip to the town of Apia. She is enamored of the apparent prestige of the Davidsons and grows particularly close to Mrs. Davidson during their ocean voyage. The two women spend most of their free time together throughout the narrative. Mrs. Macphail's interpretation of events usually varies from that of her husband, although he never establishes this and she fails to notice it. Mrs. Macphail is generally enlisted to perform unpleasant social duties that are actually the responsibility of her husband. Although she is present for most of the scenes in the narrative she is a fairly minor character.

Mr. Davidson

Davidson is a missionary returning to his designated proselytizing area - a group of islands north of Samoa. He is polite but largely unsociable and spends much of his time alone, reading. He is described as silent and sullen and affable only insofar as he, as he perceives it to be his Christian duty. Davidson is tall and thin, nearly gaunt, and has a slightly cadaverous look to him, aside from full lips - a strangely sensual but highly significant physical detail. He wears his hair long and has large, dark eyes. His personage exudes a suppressed energy that others easily detect. Davidson enjoys considerable political influence through his connection with a missionary group in Washington, D.C., and he uses this political influence to cow local governors and enforce his own vision of how things should be arranged.

Although Davidson professes to hold a Christ-like outlook on life he is actually harsh and tyrannical and exemplifies the "hellfire-and-brimstone" approach to Christianity. He is referred to by all, including his wife, as Mr. Davidson and attempts to subordinate his personality to his self-perceived duty to stamp out immorality and sin wherever he finds



it. The self-righteous Davidson is emphatic, pedantic, and incapable of allowing faults in others which he does not perceive in himself. As the central protagonist in the narrative, Davidson is a particularly unlikable but subtly complex character.

Mrs. Davidson

Mrs. Davidson, the wife of Davidson, is accompanying her husband as a fellow missionary on his trip to Pago-Pago. She typically dresses in black and wears a gold chain from which dangles a cross. She is a small woman with dull brown hair which she usually arranges in an elaborate manner. She has blue eyes, wears glasses, and her face is described as "long, like a sheep's" (p. 8). She is usually very alert and speaks in a high monotone voice which most listeners find to be irritating. In appearance she is described nearly as a caricature of a spinster. She clearly dotes upon her husband, whom she calls Mr. Davidson, and mistakenly sees in him the perfection of Christianity. Like her husband, Mrs. Davidson is stern, uncompromising, and unable to see beyond her own narrow interpretation of the world.

Horn

Horn is a trader, or local businessman, who owns and operates a large house which simultaneously serves as his shop, a rudimentary hotel, and his residence. The house is at least two stories and is apparently very large, and serves as the primary setting for most of the action described in the narrative. Horn is described in general terms as a fairly typical man apparently of English extraction, though he is referred to several times in the narrative as a 'half-caste.'. He is married to a native woman. Horn, while a fairly minor figure, serves as a partial bridge between the European and American characters and the native characters in the harbor of Pago Pago. During the day, Horn wears duck pants and otherwise looks and acts European. In the evenings, however, he wears a traditional lava-lava and behaves more like a native. His body is covered by tattoos which are not visible when he is fully dressed. Thompson's initial behavior is of no concern to Horn. However, Horn is aware of the financial ruin that Davidson could bring upon him, and therefore upon Davidson's request causes Thompson to alter her behavior whilst a guest at his hotel.

Miss Sadie Thompson

Thompson is a young, single woman who is traveling by ship to Apia, where she has secured a job as a cashier. She is described as somewhat fat and apparently attractive, and usually dresses in stylish clothing, including high boots and showy hats. Thompson usually wears her face painted and her hair carefully arranged. Thompson easily makes friends with the sailors in and around the harbor of Pago Pago, and takes up temporary residence in Horn's house following the unexpected delay of her ship to Apia.

Thompson's behavior, consisting of playing music, smoking, drinking, dancing, and loud laughter, irritates Mr. and Mrs. Davidson and, to a lesser extent, Mrs. Macphail.



Davidson determines that Thompson must be, in fact, a prostitute - . Davidson is probably in error - and meets with the governor, who decides that Thompson must be deported from the island on the next ship, bound for San Francisco. Thompson apparently faces a prison sentence if she returns to San Francisco, and she unsuccessfully attempts to change Davidson's decree. When Thompson realizes that Davidson is resolute, she apparently collapses into a sense of her own enormous guilt and begs him for forgiveness. Over a period of several days, Davidson guides Thompson through a process of penitence and prayer. Thompson uses this opportunity to seduce Davidson and thus remove him as an obstacle from her path. Thompson is the primary antagonist in the narrative and is, by far, the most interesting and vibrant character presented. It is worth noting early printings of the story were entitled 'Miss Thompson', not 'Rain.'.

The Governor

The unnamed governor of Tutuila, a relatively minor character in the story, is the ultimate political power and is able to determine what happens on the island through his control of the local police force. At the time of the story, the island is home to a major United States of America naval base. As such, American politics have a strong influence on the governor. Davidson uses the threat of political action in distant Washington, D.C., to sway the governor to declare the deportation of Thompson - . It's a decision that the governor is unwilling to alter.

Mr. Swan

Swan, a minor character in the story, is a sailor aboard the ship that is temporarily quarantined at Tutuila. On the voyage, he has been befriended by Thompson, and Swan therefore uses his local connections to secure Thompson a reduced rate for lodging at Horn's house.

Fred Ohlson

Ohlson does not actually appear during the narrative, but is referred to in a conversation between the Davidsons and the Macphails. Davidson explains that Ohlson had been a trader in the Davidsons' mission area. Ohlson had refused to comply with several demands made by Davidson. Davidson thereafter used his considerable influence to financially ruin Ohlson and then forcibly drive him away from the missionary area.

Sadie's Sailors

Several unnamed sailors and soldiers spend time dancing, drinking, and smoking with Thompson during the first few days of her stay at Pago Pago. These sailors apparently are particularly troublesome to Davidson who considers them to be inferior individuals.

At Davidson's request the proprietor of the house forbids Thompson to have visitors - the sailors and soldiers thereafter stay away from Thompson.



Objects/Places

Apia

Apia is a town located on the island of Upolu in the South Pacific. Apia is the terminal destination of Dr. and Mrs. Macphail and Thompson. Dr. Macphail has a one-year medical appointment in the city and Thompson has a job as a cashier waiting for her. The characters do not reach the town within the timeline of the narrative.

Davidson's Mission Area

The Davidsons are Christian missionaries who are assigned to an unnamed group of South Pacific islands which are referred to as being North of Tutuila by some distance - there area would therefore not include Upolu. The Davidsons have heavily influenced the local mores in their mission area, where they have attempted to stamp out what they perceive as immoral behavior, including the native forms of dress.

Davidson's Razor

Davidson uses his personal razor to commit suicide by drawing it across his throat from ear to ear. When Dr. Macphail inspects Davidson's corpse, he discovers the razor still firmly grasped in Davidson's hand. Suicide by using a razor to slit one's own throat is, needless to say, indicative of an iron will and steely determination - coupled with, in Davidson's case - a realization that one's life has become an intolerable mockery.

Horn's House

The trader Horn owns a large house which serves as the principle setting for most of the action in the narrative. The house is at least two stories high and apparently quite expansive. The house serves, simultaneously, as Horn's private residence, his business storefront, and as a semi-official hotel for the harbor town. Horn rents out rooms for somewhere between one and two United States of America dollars per day and, for those who desire, provides food as well.

Thompson's Gramophone

Thompson's luggage contains a gramophone and several musical recordings - , apparently mostly ragtime music. Thompson irritates Davidson by playing music for hours on end. Davidson is particularly irked, when Thompson begins to play the gramophone on Sunday - . Davidson quickly causes Horn to forbid the playing of music on Sunday. Thompson's gramophone is not used throughout the middle portion of the story, but she again switches it on after Davidson has committed suicide.



Thompson's Kid Boots and Elaborate Hat

Thompson typically dresses in showy white glacy kid boots, white stockings, a white dress, and a large showy white hat. Her appearance is therefore compelling and outlandishly stylish. This immediately sets her apart from the austere Davidsons and rather common-appearing Macphails. Thompson later abandons her outfit for an unwashed nightshirt, while she seeks forgiveness for her putative sins. Once Davidson commits suicide, Thompson immediately returns to her kid boots, elaborate hat, and fancy outfit. Thompson's clothing is thus an external physical symbol of her internal state of mind.

Lava-Lava

A traditional Polynesian article of clothing, the lava-lava consists of a calico or printed rectangle of material which is worn around the waist. The lava-lava is particularly suited to the tropical climate of Samoa. The Davidsons view the lava-lava as a sinful and immoral outfit, Mrs. Davidson even suggesting it is simply a small strip of cloth worn around the loins - . It's a characterization that is not particularly correct. Davidson has caused the lava-lava to be largely eliminated from his mission area, instead substituting Western clothing such as trousers. In the short story, the lava-lava is a symbol of native culture and behavior and contrasts with Thompson's elaborate clothing and the Davidson's austere missionary garb.

Pago Pago ("Pago-Pago")

Pago Pago is a harbor city on the island of Tutuila in the South Pacific, and is the general setting for nearly the entire short story. Pago Pago is inhabited primarily by Samoans, referred to as 'natives' in the narrative, who live in grass houses clustered around small white churches. The harbor is said to draw in an inordinate amount of rain, which falls nearly ceaselessly throughout the narrative. At the time of the narrative the United States of America has established a naval base in and around the harbor and therefore American sailors are common minor characters. Pago Pago historically receives hundreds of inches of rain every year and is generally overcast.

Rain

The rain falls nearly ceaselessly throughout the entire narrative. Within moments of going ashore to Pago Pago, the characters are driven inside by the rain. The rain pounds down throughout most of the scenes in the narrative and stops, finally, only when Davidson has killed himself. Dr. Macphail seems particularly troubled by the persistent rain and comments "'If it would only stop raining for a single day it wouldn't be so bad'" (p. 42), indicating how wearing the continual downpour becomes. The rain is symbolic of the power of nature and also of the ceaseless turmoil of Davidson.



Shipboard Living

All of the characters in the narrative are traveling great distances by ship, and the narrative opens aboard ship. Because of a possible outbreak of infectious disease, the characters are forced to land for a fortnight while they wait for their next ship voyage. For the primary characters the passage is spent in becoming acquainted - t. Thus, the Macphails and the Davidsons are well-acquainted when the narrative begins, while Thompson has met and befriended several sailors. The period of shipboard living is a pleasant calm before the storm of emotions and events that will occur on the island of Tutuila.



Social Sensitivity

The short story "Rain" illustrates Maugham's inclination to satirize middle- and upper-class Englishmen, especially when they find themselves in an exotic setting. In this story, two professionals, a doctor and a missionary clergyman, are stranded briefly in Samoa owing to a quarantine of their ship. The English sense of propriety, order, and social class are objects of gentle, minor satire in the story.

More significantly, the story represents an instance of character as destiny, with the life of the clergyman ending tragically. Of the professionals in Maugham's fiction, medical doctors come off rather well, perhaps because Maugham himself studied medicine and identifies with them. More probably, however, he concludes that the clinical detachment necessary to their occupation colors their overall thinking about life, endowing them with a generous measure of tolerance, and this Maugham finds appealing. Lawyers come off somewhat less well, although they are generally favorably depicted.

Clergymen, on the other hand, like Mr. Davidson in "Rain," are almost invariably objects of satire, more often than not, depicted as extremists.

Techniques

Relying heavily on dialogue, the narrative is presented from the third person omniscient point of view. The narrative voice intervenes on occasion with commentary, yet the story develops primarily through the eyes of the characters. Maugham relies upon the tolerant, cosmopolitan Dr. Macphail to serve as his rational spokesman, to provide a perspective that is analytical, reasonable, and tolerant.

Themes

Themes

The colonial theme is prominent in numerous stories and novels by Maugham, who sought in his travels to find eccentric and interesting colonials to serve as models for fiction. Usually such characters seek to retain and advance English standards and mores while living in lands far different from their homeland. In "Rain" Maugham demonstrates that the efforts made by colonial settlers have brought significant disadvantages to people living in the South Pacific. Mrs. Davidson emphasizes to the skeptical Dr. Macphail that Mr. Davidson had great difficulty bringing a sense of sin and guilt to South Sea islanders. A related theme concerns the inability of Europeans to retain their cultural values in an exotic setting. By presenting the clergyman as a rigid extremist on sexual morality, Maugham prepares the reader for his lapse. For readers this outcome represents high irony, not without comic overtones. But for Mr. Davidson the fall is so devastating that suicide seems his only recourse.

Perverse Desire

Thompson is reputed to be a woman of loose morality, although her behavior does not particularly indicate this to be certainly the case. In any event, she does enjoy music, smoking, drinking, and dancing - . She's a common enough person by nearly any standard. Davidson, however, sees in Thompson a woman of ill breeding and, worse, a degraded and debauched sinner. He determines, through faulty logic, that Thompson is in fact a prostitute seeking a new work locale. Davidson thereafter sets about destroying Thompson. Once he has succeeded, Thompson appears to crumble and seeks Davidson's guiding light out of her putatively sinful situation. Thompson becomes despondent, disheveled, and unkempt. Her saucy attitude changes to humility, her stylish dress changes to unwashed nightclothes and stocking-less feet, and her raucous habits change into prayer, weeping, and Bible study. Thompson as the penitent sinner inspired, in Davidson, a profound love - at. At one point, he claims to love her as his wife or sister - , and then, a perverse desire. Thompson becomes the epitome of the Christian penitent, seeking only to pay for her sins and redeem her soul. This new Thompson becomes irresistible to Davidson who becomes seduced and enthralled. Whether Davidson and Thompson consummate their bizarre relationship physically is of no importance - w. When Davidson realizes what has happened, he commits suicide. and Thompson, seemingly unaffected by the entire experience, once again emerges as the stylish wag with a sharp tongue and a fancy hat.

Christian Values are not Universal

The Davidsons are Christian missionaries working in the South Pacific among native peoples. They strive to not only convert the natives to their religious beliefs, but also



seek to enforce upon them their self-perceived correct values and mores. Mrs. Davidson pontificates at length upon her husband's work to stamp out immoral behavior, native customs, and native dress. She proudly announces that in 'their' mission area, the natives no longer wear the lava-lava but have converted to a civilized habit of dress. Of course, the Davidsons' fundamental error is to have equated Christianity with American customs. Instead of delivering their message of Christian love and tolerance, they seek to compel the native populace to conform to their own sense of propriety. Dr. Macphail shrewdly compares Davidson to Jesus Christ, noting that Davidson is not particularly Christian. Indeed, Davidson's inability to display true Christian charity forms the basic conflict of the narrative.

The historical time period of the narrative is also worthy of note in that the Davidsons are preaching Christianity in an area of the world recently forcibly conquered by Western nations and only months after the conclusion of The Great War, where millions of soldiers and civilians, nearly all Christian, killed each other in the trenches of Europe. This historical perspective is reflected in the story when, when Dr. Macphail is noted to be recovering from a serious war wound received some months before the narrative begins, and also by the presence of large numbers of United States of America soldiers and sailors on the island.

Davidson's inability to be truly Christian, coupled with his failure to even tentatively separate religion from social concerns, makes him a particularly stern character and a particularly unlikable individual. It also, in Mrs. Davidson's opinion, makes him a particularly successful missionary because he, because he is able to unfailingly enforce his opinions on others through concerted and sustained action.

Dr. Macphail is Aptly Named

The characters in the narrative are aptly named. Dr. Macphail is a man of inaction. He is professionally competent, morally aware, and fairly insightful. Yet, yet he is a man dominated by his inability to act in difficult situations; , dominated by his constant failure. He recalls his fundamental failure to act in his military service days and he fails to act decisively in the narrative. Instead of being a positive force in the lives of the other characters he becomes, through his inaction, merely an observer and, by extension, an abettor.

The Davidsons name is reminiscent, of course, of the offspring of David, the Old Testament king and supposed ancestor of Jesus Christ. Like their namesake, however, the Davidsons are righteous but not particularly stringent in their observance of the spirit of Christianity. While King David allowed himself to be seduced by Bathsheba, Davidson allows himself to be seduced by Sadie Thompson, ending in his own death.

Finally, Sadie Thompson is presented as a middle-class, common woman - a 'Tom's son,' if you will, or a typical American woman without pretensions and seeking only to make a living and have some fun doing it. The name Sadie, homonymous with sadist, reminds one of her cruel streak, yet has as its root meaning 'princess.' Within her



element, she is without equal. One wonders whether Sadie Thompson carefully constructed the destruction of Davidson, simply seized the opportunity to destroy him, or was largely an ignorant and, fleetingly, sincere participant in his sudden decline.



Style

Point of View

The narrative is generally related from the third-person, omniscient, point of view but has surprisingly complex second-person observations intermingled throughout the text. For example, after describing a scene in traditional third-person point of view the narrative structure will shift, briefly, into the second-person to establish tone or mood, and then quickly return to the third-person. Although the unnamed and distant narrator is omniscient, character motivation is not exposed except through action and dialogue. The point of views used, and their method of implementation, are enjoyable and provide a strong narrative structure which is highly accessible and engaging.

Nearly all of the narrative describing action and dialogue is related from the standard third-person point of view. The second-person point of view narrative departures are generally limited to descriptions of the environment. For example, the third-person is used to describe how Dr. Macphail watches the rain and becomes irritated and somewhat frightened of the unrelenting downpour. The narrative continues from the third-person to describe the physical nature of the rain, and then changes to second-person to describe the effects that one might feel in such a situation.

The mingling of disparate points-of-view allows the effects being experienced by characters to be made to seem universal. For example, the narrative indicates that any reader would feel about the rain as does Dr. Macphail - "Dr. Macphail watches the rain. It was beginning to get on his nerves...It did not pour, it flowed...It seemed to have a fury of its own. And sometimes you felt that you must scream if it did not stop...you were miserable and hopeless" (p. 27.). It is also interesting to note that the changes in point of view are also usually accompanied by a subtle shift in tone and tense.

Setting

The narrative begins aboard a ship but quickly moves to the harbor town of Pago Pago on the island of Tutuila in the South Pacific. The island and town are concisely described and materially assist in setting the tone and texture of the narrative development. The island setting serves several purposes within the narrative structure. First, it is an isolated and small location which allows several characters of disparate background to plausibly be assembled together for a fortnight. Second, it provides a tone of isolation and self-sufficiency. Finally, it provides a texture of setting that is simultaneously exotic and somewhat unfamiliar - t. The American and British characters are out-of-place and beyond their traditional environments. Thus, their behavior becomes scrutinized and the companionship of the various characters becomes unavoidable.



The South Pacific island setting is further focused in and around the house of the trader Horn, where all of the primary characters take up temporary residence. Horn's house, a spacious structure simultaneously used as a storefront, a personal residence, and a hotel, provides a familiar 'American' feel to the central narrative events. The characters are guests at a hotel and, after all, a hotel is a common enough experience. However, minor intrusions consistently occur to remind the characters that they are not at a traditionally American hotel. Thus, Horn's house serves as an intermediate setting, which bridges the exotic island and the more commonplace American expectation of place.

The setting is dominated by natural forces, particularly incessant rain, which begins to seem, to many of the characters, as unnaturally savage and strangely ominous. The driving rain finally ceases when, when Davidson kills himself. The rain is accompanied by other appropriate physical manifestations of place, such as intense and persistent heat, brilliant sunshine filtering through heavy clouds, and references to foliage and geographical features.

Language and Meaning

The narrative is presented in English with a very few words in native language included - . They are words, generally, that have been adapted to English. All of the primary characters speak English, while there are some minor references to speaking in a native language. The effect of the focus on English and English-speaking characters allows the narrative to present a scene of European and American characters behaving inappropriately within a setting of South Pacific islands and mores. For example, Dr. Macphail dresses 'properly' and notes that he is extremely hot and uncomfortable even as he, as he comments that the local dress is suited to the environment. Mrs. Davidson responds that the local dress is immodest and immoral.

The language used to construct the narrative is accessible and simple and allows the story to be told without being cluttered with excessive descriptions or overly-complex constructions. Indeed, the simple and intelligible narrative structure contributes materially to the enduring nature of the story.

Dialogue is particularly strong and well-crafted to fit the individual speaker. For example, Thompson usually speaks using a light-hearted structure full of slang expressions and incomplete or incorrect structure, whereas Davidson speaks using complete, proper, and definitive statements. Horn and Swan, minor characters, speak using a commonplace vocabulary and typically simple construction. Interestingly, Thompson's entire dialogue construction changes as she appears to undergo a dramatic change during the latter portion of the narrative.

Structure

The 40-page narrative's structure is simple and chronological. Events are related as they occur and the primary narrative timeline covers a period of approximately two

weeks. Events that happen outside of the primary timeline are related through dialogue and their timing is clearly evident. The narrative is not divided into sections, but when a new day begins, it is noted in the text. Thus, the narrative's primary timeline is quickly intelligible. The concise structure is easily accessible and particularly appropriate to the short-story nature of the narrative.

Events unfold at a rapid but measured pace. Characterization and the establishment of tone and setting are strong and provided through traditional fictional elements and typical construction. Dialogue is particularly strong and contributes materially to characterization and the establishment of tone. The primary themes of the short story are strongly supported by direct statements and by appropriate symbolic elements. In addition, the principle themes are strengthened by frequent repetition of symbolic elements. For example, the consistent rain and raw force of nature are noted repeatedly throughout the narrative - , and yet are not focused upon to the point of monotony.

In short, the brief narrative displays a precisely-craftedprecisely crafted and appropriate structure whichstructure, which supports the development of the themes and plot. The straightforward timeline and the balance of fictive elements all contribute materially to enable easy access to the short story.



Quotes

"Between the Macphails and the Davidsons, who were missionaries, there had arisen the intimacy of shipboard, which is due to propinquity rather than to any community of taste. Their chief tie was the disapproval they shared of the men who spent their days and nights in the smoking-room playing poker or bridge and drinking." (p. 7)

"'I'm glad we're not stationed here,' she went on, 'They say this is a terribly difficult place to work in. The steamers' touching makes the people unsettled; and then there's the naval station; that's bad for the natives. In our district we don't have difficulties like that to content with. There are one or two traders, of course, but we take care to make them behave, and if they don't we make the place so hot for them they're glad to go.'

"Fixing the glasses on her nose she looked at the green island with a ruthless stare." (p. 9)

"Men and women wore the lava-lava.

"'It's a very indecent costume,' said Mrs. Davidson. 'Mr. Davidson thinks it should be prohibited by law. How can you expect people to be moral when they wear nothing but a strip of red cotton round their loins?'

"'It's suitable enough to the climate,' said the doctor, wiping the sweat off his head.

"Now that they were on land the heat, though it was so early in the morning, was already oppressive. Closed in by its hills, not a breath of air came in to Pago-Pago.

"'In our islands,' Mrs. Davidson went on in her high-pitched tones, 'we've practically 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 every boy of more than ten years is made to wear a pair of trousers.'" (p. 11)

"'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 let 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 at home 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.'

"Davidson stood still. With his tall, spare form, and his great eyes flashing out of his pale face, he was an impressive figure. His sincerity was obvious in the fire of his gestures and in his deep, ringing voice.



"I expect to have my work cut out for me. I shall act and I shall act promptly. If the tree is rotten it shall be cut down and cast into the flames." (p. 16)

"Say a word to her,' Dr. Macphail whispered to his wife. 'She's all alone here, and it seems rather unkind to ignore her.'

"Mrs. Macphail was shy, but she was in the habit of doing what her husband bade her.

"I think we're fellow lodgers here,' she said, rather foolishly.

"Terrible, ain't it, bein' cooped up in a one-horse burg like this?' answered Thompson. 'And they tell me I'm lucky to have gotten a room. I don't see myself livin' in a native house, and that's what some have to do. I don't know why they don't have a hotel.'

"They exchanged a few more words, Thompson, loud-voiced and garrulous, was evidently quite willing to gossip, but Mrs. Macphail had a poor stock of small talk and presently she said: 'Well, I think we must go upstairs.'" (p. 21)

"...Dr. Macphail watched the rain. It was beginning to get on his nerves. It was not like our soft English rain that drops gently on the earth; it was unmerciful and somehow terrible; you felt in it the malignancy of the primitive powers of nature. It did not pour, it flowed. It was like a deluge from heaven, and it rattled on the roof of corrugated iron with a steady persistence that was maddening. It seemed to have a fury of its own. And sometimes you felt that you must scream if it did not stop, and then suddenly you felt powerless, as though your bones had suddenly become soft; and you were miserable and hopeless." (p. 27)

"I think you're very harsh and tyrannical.'

"The two ladies looked up at the doctor with some alarm, but they need not have feared a quarrel, for the missionary smiled gently.

"I'm terribly sorry you should think that of me, Dr. Macphail. Believe me, my heart bleeds for that unfortunate woman, but I'm only trying to do my duty.'

"The doctor made no answer. He looked out of the window sullenly. For once it was not raining and across the bay you say nestling among the trees the huts of a native village.

"I think I'll take advantage of the rain stopping to go out,' he said.

"Please don't bear me malice because I can't accede to your wish,' said Davidson, with a melancholy smile. 'I respect you very much, doctor, and I should be sorry if you thought ill of me.'

"I have no doubt you have a sufficiently good opinion of yourself to bear mine with equanimity,' he retorted.

"That's one on me,' chuckled Davidson." (p. 34)



"Davidson's restlessness was intolerable even to himself. But he was buoyed up by a wonderful exhilaration. He was tearing out by the roots the last vestiges of sin that lurked in the hidden corners of that poor woman's heart. He read with her and prayed with her.

"'It's wonderful,' he said to them one day at supper. 'It's a true rebirth. Her soul, which was black as night, is now pure and white like the new-fallen snow. I am humble and afraid. Her remorse for all her sins is beautiful. I am not worthy to touch the hem of her garment.'

"'Have you the heart to send her back to San Francisco?' said the doctor. 'Three years in an American prison. I should have thought you might have saved her from that.'

"'Ah, but don't you see? It's necessary. Do you think my heart doesn't bleed for her? I love her as I love my wife and my sister. All the time that she is in prison I shall suffer all the pain that she suffers.'

"'Bunkum,' cried the doctor impatiently.

"'You don't understand because you're blind. She's sinned, and she must suffer. I know what she'll endure. She'll be starved and tortured and humiliated. I want her to accept the punishment of man as a sacrifice to God. I want her to accept it joyfully. She has an opportunity which is offered to very few of us. God is very good and very merciful.'

"Davidson's voice trembled with excitement. He could hardly articulate the words that tumbled passionately from his lips." (pp. 41-42)

"With her sins she had put aside all personal vanity, and she slopped about her room, unkempt and disheveled in her tawdry dressing-gown. She had not taken off her night-dress for four days, nor put on stockings. Her room was littered and untidy. Meanwhile the rain fell with a cruel persistence. You felt that the heavens must at last be empty of water, but still it poured down, straight and heavy, with a maddening iteration on the iron roof." (p. 42)

"He went up to it and tore the record off. She turned on him:

"'Say, doc, you can that stuff with me. What the hell are you doin' in my room?'

"'What do you mean?' he cried. 'What d'you mean?'

"She gathered herself together. No one could describe the scorn of her expression or the contemptuous hatred she put into her answer.

"'You men! You filthy, dirty pigs! You're all the same, all of you. Pigs! Pigs!'

"Dr. Macphail gasped. He understood." (p. 46)

Adaptations

Maugham's novels and short stories have been widely adapted as dramas and movies, usually with commercial success. Although Maugham's attitude toward women is at best ungallant, he has been fortunate in the actresses eager to perform in his works. The short story "Rain" was the basis for a drama and three movies (1928, 1932, 1953). The role of Sadie Thompson has been well portrayed by Gloria Swanson, Joan Crawford, and Rita Hayworth. As in the movie adaptations of his other short stories, it was necessary to lengthen and complicate the narrative somewhat, and the screenwriters solved this problem by expanding the roles of minor characters. In 1944, a musical based upon this story held the stage for only two months.

Topics for Discussion

The narrative is set in real geographic locations and refers to real-world places. How does this help establish the tone of the story?

The rain begins, when the characters go ashore, and only ends when Davidson commits suicide. Describe how the rain is linked to Davidson. What element of Davidson does the rain represent?

Mrs. Davidson is presented as nearly a caricature of the over-zealous, sexless Christian matron. What elements, if any, of her characterization allow her to become a real person within the narrative?

The trader Horn is described as a 'half-caste', yet he somewhat successfully is able to bridge the differences between his American-and-European guests and the local natives. For example, in the concluding scenes of the narrative, Dr. Macphail is surprised to notice that Horn's body is covered with tattoos. Describe how Horn carefully straddles the gap between the two worlds presented in the narrative.

Why did Davidson kill himself? He left Thompson's room around two in the morning and was found dead a few hours later. Dr. Macphail believed Davidson had been dead for several hours by the time he was found, indicating that Davidson did not spend more than a very few minutes contemplating suicide before killing himself. What do you think Davidson was considering during his final few moments alive?

What do you imagine Mrs. Davidson will do in the following days and months? Will she return to the United States, continue on at Pago Pago, or continue her missionary work in her mission area? Or, do you think she will pursue another avenue?

Consider Sadie Thompson - d. Did she knowingly and carefully construct the downfall of Davidson? Or, was she an ignorant prostitute, who sincerely tried to repent of her sinful ways only to discover that Davidson was just another lecherous man intent on possessing her?

Literary Precedents

For his numerous books and short stories set in the South Pacific and Asia, Maugham had the precedents of Joseph Conrad and Rudyard Kipling, who discovered that fiction with exotic settings gave the writer an abundance of fresh themes and enhanced public acceptance. Maugham lacks, however, the somber concern with the East-West cultural conflict found in Conrad and the frank enthusiasm for colonialism found in Kipling. His interest centers on characters whose remoteness from civilization has given rough edges and quirks and whose natural eccentricities have been allowed to develop free from the restraints of sophisticated society.



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