

“Neither Innocent, nor Guilty”: the Scapegoat in the Ironic Short Stories of William Somerset Maugham

Maria Klečková

ABSTRACT

This article aims to examine several short stories of W. Somerset Maugham in terms of ironic victimization. Northrop Frye's claim that a pharmakos or a scapegoat is a typical ironic victim inspired my idea of dissecting a number of characters in Maugham's stories as pharmakoi. In the analysis two types of pharmakoi characters were discovered: primary and secondary ones, with each implying a different targeting of irony. Primary pharmakoi are disguised as scapegoat characters, but it is through the contact with them that the real victim of irony is revealed. The stories these characters are featured in are usually more complex, and the irony is built either on a stereotype or an archetype. The stereotype proposes the thematical background on which the irony is built, while the archetype – here a structural model – is based on the readers' subconscious expectations. In secondary scapegoat stories, irony is targeted at one of the characters or the community they stereotypically represent. Several short stories are analysed in the article: “The Mother,” “The Fall of Edward Barnard,” “The Alien Corn” and “Rain.”

KEYWORDS

W. S. Maugham, irony, scapegoat, pharmakos, victimization

A general notion of what comprises irony is understood by most people, yet it is “curiously indefinable.”¹ Dated since the time of Socrates, the meaning of the term has changed considerably, and marched into the 20th century as a mark of all good literature.²

Its field of reference has expanded to include wit, humour, and the comic, as well as what we now call dramatic and tragic irony, situational irony, and the irony of fate. And then there is Socratic irony - with its broad range of associations - plus the influential reflexive mode labelled Romantic Irony. In the twentieth century, in some critics' views, irony has even come to stand for all that is complex and thus positive about art itself.³

Yet all modes of irony are united by one general principle: a contrast or a paradox, as “irony is a device of both mind and language for acknowledging the gap between what is expected and what is observed.”⁴ The wider the gap is, the greater impact the irony has. The most common classification of irony represents its division into verbal, situational and dramatic. Verbal irony represents an incongruity between what is said and what is meant; situational irony occurs when a final result of a situation drawn up in the story is different from what the readers expect. When dramatic irony is introduced, readers share the knowledge about the character's present and future, but the character himself is kept in ignorance of it. “In that situation, the character

1 Claire Colebrook, *Irony* (London: Routledge, 2004), 1.

2 Wayne Clayton Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1975), ix.

3 Linda Hutcheon, “The Complex Functions of Irony,” *Revista Canadiense de Estudios Hispánicos* 16, no. 2 (1992): 219.

4 Raymond W. Gibbs, Jr., and Herbert L. Colston, “Preface” in *Irony in language and thought: a cognitive science reader*, ed. Herbert L. Colston and Raymond W. Gibbs, Jr. (New York: Taylor & Francis Group, LLC, 2007), ix.

unknowingly acts in a way we recognize to be grossly inappropriate to the actual circumstances.”⁵ Thus, this paradox lies in the very core of any instance of irony. It is incorporated by authors both through the words or thoughts of the characters and narrators as well as other structures such as setting, historical and thematical background. These parts are interconnected and enhance one another, establishing a stable structure with a potential for irony. Once such a structure is achieved, “the slightest pressure of attention on the part of the reader precipitates an ironical effect.”⁶ If the readers misinterpret the ironic intentions of an author (or vice versa when irony is read where it was not implied), this results in the unintentional victimization of the reader. This aspect will not be further analysed in this article, since readers are able to understand that they failed to interpret irony and have thus become its victims only when openly compared to others’ interpretations.⁷ Instead, here the intentional victimization of a reader will be addressed.

Readers may become victims of irony not only when they have failed to notice an ironical paradox, but also when irony is deliberately targeted at them. According to Richter, this is possible in two cases: either an author does not present enough hints for the readers to reject the literal meaning of some utterances, or he obscures his actual beliefs so the readers cannot unequivocally recognize that the author is being ironic.⁸ Hoax is the basic form of ironic victimization. The ironist here, Richter continues, creates a persona whose beliefs are in contrast to the ironist’s. A well-known example of this technique is illustrated in Daniel Defoe’s political pamphlet “The Shortest Way with the Dissenters.” A similar technique is a “reverberatory irony” or a “double-bind.” In this case, a writer generates hints which provoke the reader to make false inferences about the author’s beliefs and, as the result, to misinterpret irony.

It is equally important to clarify that the expression “a victim of irony” may seem to carry a strong negative connotation, yet in literature dedicated to the study of irony it is perceived as a neutral literary term. D. C. Muecke uses the word “victim” explicitly in his work *Irony and the Ironic* and presents the victim as an antagonist to the ironist. Analogous ideas are expressed by Katharina Barbe, who identifies three participants in an ironical situation: a speaker or ironist, a hearer or victim, and an audience or evaluator. She also recognizes the victim of irony as either an ignorant or an innocent person.⁹ Northrop Frye also exploits the term “the victim of irony” in his work *Anatomy of Criticism*, and additionally differentiates between a tragic and an ironic victim. According to the theorist, a tragic victim is an absolute victim, while an ironic one is “unlucky, selected at random or by lot, and no more deserving of what happens to him than anyone else would be.”¹⁰ He calls such a figure a typical victim – a pharmakos or a scapegoat, “who is neither innocent, nor guilty.”¹¹ The present article owes its inspiration to Frye’s claim, as it triggered the idea of dissecting several characters in Maugham’s stories as pharmakoi.

5 Meyer Howard Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 7th ed. (Boston: Heinle & Heinle, 1999), 137.

6 Cleanth Brooks, “Irony as a Principle of Structure,” in *Literary Opinion in America*, 3rd rev. ed., ed. Morton Dauwen Zabel (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 736.

7 David H. Richter, “The Reader as Ironic Victim,” *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 14, no. 2 (Winter 1981): 135.

8 Richter, “The Reader,” 137.

9 Katharina Barbe, *Irony in context* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 1995), 16.

10 Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 41.

11 Frye, *Anatomy*, 41.

The notion of pharmakos comes from Ancient Greece, where ritual scapegoats were expelled from a city at moments of crisis. It was believed that this banishment would help the city clean itself and the rest of the population would be saved. Stories involving mythical pharmakoi can be united under a scapegoat pattern, beginning with a kind of a disaster, after which the figure of a scapegoat is introduced, or one of the characters undergoes a decline to the lowest castes of the society. Usually a character of a much higher status than of a scapegoat is also presented to highlight the “worseness” of a pharmakos. The motif of death or a descent (at least symbolic) is the traditional ending of a pharmakos story. The presence of a considerable number of these themes allows the examined character to be identified as a scapegoat. A simplified list of themes found in the stories depicting pharmakoi derived from a work by Compton M. Todd is presented here with my minor comments in the italics:¹²

Themes Used in Pharmakoi Stories

1. Ritual pollution. *The first imbalance, often caused by crime.*
2. Communal disaster. *Such as plague, famine, invasion, cyclic period of infertility, or any combination of the above.*
3. Oracle. *Often involved in interpreting and prescribing a remedy for the disaster.*
4. The Worst. *The pharmakos is a beggar, slave, or criminal.*
5. The Best. *A person chosen to be a pharmakos is dressed in beautiful clothes and is well fed as if he were aristocracy.*
6. Peripety. *The scapegoat can undergo a peripety from best to worst; the well-fed and clothed pharmakos suddenly finds himself a hated outcast.*
7. Procession.
8. Expulsion. *Pharmakos is always expelled from the city; it is a key theme.*
9. Death. *Without exception, pharmakos dies, at least symbolically.*
10. Sacrifice.
11. A hero cult.

Since pharmakoi legends have appeared from Ancient Greece until today, the motif of a scapegoat is very strong and through time it became an archetype. According to Katharine Quarmby, it is one of the most powerful archetypes preserved till today.¹³ Hence, irony in scapegoat stories arises from the paradox of the reader expectation of the scapegoat’s inevitable fall and the contrary evolvment of the story. The present analysis of Somerset Maugham’s short stories facilitated the identification of two types of pharmakoi characters: primary and secondary ones, each implying a different targeting of irony.

12 Todd Merlin Compton, *Victim of the Muses: Poet as Scapegoat, Warrior and Hero in Greco-Roman and Indo-European Myth and History* (Washington, DC: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2006), [online], accessed November 27, 2018, <https://chs.harvard.edu/CHS/article/display/4912.part-i-greece-1-the-pharmakos-in-archaicgreece>.

13 Katharine Quarmby, *Scapegoat: Why We Are Failing Disabled People* (London: Portobello Books, 2011), 21.

The Primary Scapegoat

The primary scapegoat is a character who possesses several objective features of *pharmakoi*, such as presence in an under or lower class, deviant behaviour, unacceptance by the rest of the community as well as its attempt to expel the *pharmakos* from the society. This type of character can be found in the stories "Rain," "The Vessel of Wrath," "Before the Party," "The Mother" as well as in other stories. "The Mother" will be analysed in a greater detail as an example of how Maugham deftly constructs irony on the basis of the scapegoat archetype as well as on a powerful stereotype.

"The Mother" depicts a woman called La Cachirra, who murders her son's loved one due to jealousy. At the story's outset the reader and the members of the community where La Cachirra comes from discover that she is a recently released prisoner who served seven years sentence for a murder. The figure of a scapegoat is usually the one from the outcasts of society, precisely like a former inmate. Even today ex-convicts are often not welcomed into a community, so the attitude towards La Cachirra is quite comprehensible. The woman worsens the situation by voluntary isolating herself from her neighbours and blatantly rejecting any attempt at communication. Another frequently presented feature is a disability or the ugliness of the *pharmakoi*. La Cachirra's appearance is as unappealing as her personality, and Maugham depicts this explicitly: "haggard and very thin, with bony hands and fingers like a vulture's claws," "teeth that were pointed like those of a best of prey," "her eyes [...] shone fiercely," "Her face bore an expression of such ferocity that no one dared come near to speak with her."¹⁴ Thus, an easily recognizable figure of a scapegoat is drawn: an ugly old woman and a former prisoner unwelcomed by a community.

As the story develops, such a negative image is contrasted with her position of mother when her son visits her. The author emphasizes the reaction of the people observing the scene by showing the contradiction as if through their eyes:

The woman threw her arms round his [son's] neck and kissed him passionately. She fondled him and with a loving gesture stroked his face with both her hands. The girl and the mother who watched would never have thought her capable of such tenderness.¹⁵

From this moment of motherly affection onwards, readers are likely to hesitate before drawing negative conclusions concerning La Cachirra's behaviour. A woman who is indifferent to her son would provoke a much more negative reaction than one who is excessively caring and loving. Still, mixed feelings in the reader and confusion are provoked. Maugham does not emphasize this stereotypical image by highlighting motherly feelings the character has towards her son apart from this one small instance. On the contrary, La Cachirra's uncivilised, bestial jealousy is accentuated: "she could not bear him to look at a woman and she writhed at the bare idea that he might pay court to some girl,"¹⁶ "when she saw Rosalia's provoking glance and Currito's answering smile, rage leap to her throat,"¹⁷ "stood [...] with fury gnawing at her heart,"¹⁸ "her eyes glowed like coals

14 William Somerset Maugham, *The World Over: The Collected Stories* (London: The Reprint Society), 237.

15 Maugham, *The World Over*, 239.

16 Maugham, *The World Over*, 240.

17 Maugham, *The World Over*, 240.

18 Maugham, *The World Over*, 240.

of fire and she felt them burning in the sockets; but no one noticed her, and she gave a groan of rage,”¹⁹ etc. Providing more than enough linguistic hints for the readers to doubt their anticipation of the character’s subsequent action, Maugham enlarges the gap between the readers’ expectations and the reality which he is drawing, showing the potency of the stereotype borne by the reader.

Yet even if the position of mother is left aside and La Cachirra is perceived solely as a woman, her actions would still be recognised as unanticipated. Women are stereotypically portrayed as weak, depended, passive creatures who are not capable of committing an act of true violence, for “an aggressive woman is not a ‘normal’ woman.”²⁰ The historical stereotype that, unlike women, men are naturally aggressive, has prompted researches to neglect the phenomenon of female aggression as such.²¹ A plausible reaction of ordinary readers to the story’s ending is consternation as the stereotype is deconstructed. Thus, the irony of “The Mother” is presented in its purest form – a paradox which is composed of the reader expectations about the character created on the basis of strong gender bias.

Another type of irony can be identified if the position of the scapegoat is considered. The ending of classic pharmakoi stories includes their eviction from the city, or their murder by the rest of the community, i.e. eternal expulsion. However, the scapegoat in “The Mother” reverses these roles and, ironically, she becomes a violent perpetrator herself. Not only does La Cachirra *not* regret committing the crime, but she exults over her victory: “her eyes shone with triumph.”²² A similar theme of a woman committing an aggressive act is developed in the stories “The Unconquered,” “Before the Party” and “The Footprints in the Jungle,” all of which feature a homicide. “The Footprints in the Jungle” represents the only short story selected here in which a woman is not a murderer herself, although a female character is the one who organizes the plan of the killing, an act which is still inconsistent with a traditional image of a non-aggressive woman. Patriarchy that existed in the majority of the societies and arguably is still present in many had led to the unequal representation of men and women in a community. Men are traditionally perceived as the strongest, the smartest, simply, the best, while women are their weaker, more imperfect counterpart. “The first sex, man, defining everything from his point of view, from his interests and wishes, finds it favourable to conceive of women as friendly, virtuous and giving, and caring for man’s needs, while he himself is brave and aggressive.”²³ Therefore, it is quite within reason to suggest that by employing irony Maugham challenges two stereotypical images which ordinary readers have: of an innocent, weak woman, not capable of violent behaviour, and of an outcast, who wanes under the burden of society.

Another feature that primary scapegoat characters have is the expression of sinister features long before the events described in the stories occur. La Cachirra comes to the city after having served seven years in prison, hence, she became an outcast long before the narrative starts.

19 Maugham, *The World Over*, 243.

20 Diederik A. Stapel and Willem Koomen, “When Stereotype Activation Results in (Counter)Stereotypical Judgments: Priming Stereotype-Relevant Traits and Exemplars,” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 34, no. 2 (March 1998): 144.

21 Jacquelyn W. White and Robin M. Kowalski, “Deconstructing The Myth Of The Nonaggressive Woman: A Feminist Analysis,” *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 18, no. 4 (December 1994): 487.

22 Maugham, *The World Over*, 247.

23 Kaj Björkqvist and Pirkkko Niemelä, “The Myth of the Nonaggressive Female,” in *Of Mice and Women: Aspects of Female Aggression*, ed. Kaj Björkqvist and Pirkkko Niemelä (San Diego, California: Academic Press, Inc., 1992), 5.

Sadie Thompson in “Rain” has been offering her services to men on other islands before she comes to Pago-Pago, where the story unfolds. Ginger Ted behaves outrageously from the very first day he comes to the island of Baru, as narrated by the Reverend Mr. Owen Jones in “The Vessel of Wrath.” Harold is a drunkard before he meets Millicent in the story “Before the Party;” his vice merely escalates, leading to the catastrophe of the story’s plot. The conflict arises when these characters change their location, as do Miss Thompson and La Cachirra. They become a part of a new populace which does not accept them. The relocation is customarily taken due to the problems which beset the characters in their original community.

The Secondary Scapegoat

A change of location is a feature which primary and secondary pharmakoi characters have in common. However, secondary scapegoats are not members of an underclass, as are typical primary pharmakoi characters. On the contrary, secondary scapegoats are representatives of at least the upper-middle class. They undergo a rapid decline (peripety) and become a disgrace to their original community in the course of the story. This transformation is again commonly caused by a change of location, especially when a European arrives at an exotic region and is “infatuated with the place” and “succumbed to evil influences.”²⁴ These lines are uttered by Bateman Hunter – a character who embodies the stereotypical values and ideals of an industrial man in a story “The Fall of Edward Barnard.”

The story starts with a case of a communal disaster – a tragedy which forces the expulsion of the scapegoat. Edward’s father becomes a bankrupt overnight and shoots himself, leaving his son penniless. In an attempt to rectify the situation, the young man voluntarily expels himself from the community. He decides to move to Tahiti to earn a fortune, which will allow him to marry his fiancé Isabel, a girl from an aristocratic Chicago family. In the course of two years he changes his mind and does not want to leave Tahiti. He is fully satisfied with his peaceful, slow-paced life, and does not want to return to the rat race of Chicago. When his friend Hunter comes to visit him, he cannot comprehend Edward’s metamorphosis. For Hunter, remaining in Tahiti is “nothing less than suicide.”²⁵ He is portrayed as “a caricature of a civilized man”²⁶ and this hyperbolised image is ironically humorous. Hunter perceives himself as a person whose mission is to cure Edward from alien vices which forced him to betray his principles, thus, Hunter is set as The Best to show contrast to The Worst pharmakos Edward.

Yet the narrator’s tone and the small puns deftly set throughout the story encourage the reader not to treat Hunter seriously. For instance, when first seeing Edward, Hunter notices that “he was certainly better-looking than ever”²⁷ and yet disapproves a jauntiness of his walk and “a gaiety about nothing in particular.”²⁸ Later when Hunter is not capable of comprehending

24 Maugham, *The World Over*, 57.

25 Maugham, *The World Over*, 62.

26 Richard A. Gordell, *Somerset Maugham: A Biographical and Critical Study* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1961), 169.

27 Maugham, *The World Over*, 49.

28 Maugham, *The World Over*, 49.

Edward's new-found attitude towards wealth he exclaims: “Do you mean to say you don't want money, big money, money running into millions? Do you know what you can do with it? Do you know the power it brings?”²⁹ Even when that does not work, “in a masochistic gesture of self-sacrifice,”³⁰ Hunter offers Edward a place at his firm to help him start over. These and many other instances aid to create cases of comic irony. The paradox emerges from the contrary mindsets and behaviour of Hunter and Edward. The iterative inability of Hunter to accept his friend's reconsidered standpoint and the obstinacy with which Hunter denies the obvious signs of it is comic and transmits a single impression of humour to the story. The readers presumably stand on the side of Edward, who is not afraid to challenge the traditional pillars of society and recklessly fights for his own contentment. The image of a person favouring life in a remoted and quite place over living in a hectic metropolis is very acute and modern. “Many readers fancy that they would be content to “fall” as well,” claims Gordell.³¹

As in “The Mother,” the scapegoat ironically becomes the winner, as he is able to stand the criticism and misunderstanding of his friend and to defend his own happiness. The scapegoat pattern is preserved towards the story's end: the pharmakos is expelled from his original community and it cleans itself from his malady. Once reunited, Isabel and Hunter are able to ennoble themselves, commiserating for their lost friend:

And as he held her in his arms he had a vision of the works of the Hunter Motor Traction and Automobile Company growing in size and importance till they covered a hundred acres, and of the millions of motors they would turn out, and of the great collection of pictures he would form which should beat anything they had in New York. He would wear horn spectacles. And she, with the delicious pressure of his arms about her, sighed with happiness, for she thought of the exquisite house she would have, full of antique furniture, and of the concerts she would give, and of the *thés dansants*, and the dinners to which only the most cultured people would come. Bateman should wear horn spectacles. “Poor Edward,” she sighed.³²

“The Alien Corn” seems to be the only *true* scapegoat-pattern story – the pharmakos is the victim of irony and he suffers from the eviction from the community. It is also one of the most challenging stories for the readers: the hints provided by the author are rather inconsistent. Towards the story's end, readers may find themselves confused and hesitant regarding what ending to expect.

The physical description of the main character is more than praising: “George was so tall and slim, his curly hair, of a palish brown, was so fine, his eyes were so blue, he was the perfect type of the young Englishman. He had the engaging candour of the breed.”³³ Yet his actions and ideas are not approved of by representatives of the most basic and oldest type of a social institution – the family. The character is positioned as a pharmakos for not following the traditions and customs of his small community. George did not enter the army despite his parents' wishes, and he wasn't interested in politics though the diplomatic service was planned for him. On the whole, “he's been

29 Maugham, *The World Over*, 59.

30 Stanley Archer, *W. Somerset Maugham: A Study of the Short Fiction* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993), 26.

31 Gordell, *Somerset Maugham*, 169.

32 Maugham, *The World Over*, 64.

33 Maugham, *The World Over*, 405.

a little troublesome.”³⁴ One synonym for a scapegoat in a family is the “black sheep,” an apropos term not only due to genetic closeness of sheep and goat. Analysing the family backgrounds of criminals, Cormier points out that a black sheep is a person who does not abide by the rules and norms of a family.³⁵ This scapegoat is subsequently rejected by his family or voluntarily abandons it, becoming an outcast: “He sometimes turns out very well in a different environment. The family may nevertheless continue to regard him as the black sheep.”³⁶ George is indifferent to all the classic interests and aspirations of aristocracy. “He didn’t want to hunt. He didn’t want to shoot. He didn’t want to be a Member of Parliament. He didn’t want to be a millionaire. He didn’t want to be a baronet. He didn’t want to be a peer.”³⁷ Instead, young man wishes to become a pianist, a choice which is seen as a disaster for his family, and goes to Germany to study there. Still, as with Edward Barnard, readers presumably favour George in his high aspirations to become a pianist despite his dissent from his original community.

As pointed out, George is placed in the status of the Best as a part of aristocracy and the physical embodiment of such. Yet the hints and details marked by the narrator show disproportion between the external image and George’s mindset. This can be construed as an Oracle phase, as the readers can already begin assuming that this fragile balance will be violated. Later, George undergoes a peripety from The Best to The Worst. When the narrator visits him in Germany, he remarks that the man has stopped resembling a neat English boy in a costume. He has gained a lot of weight and is not clean shaven. Although the narrator’s tone remains neutral, the reaction of George’s original community is accentuated: his mother’s eyes are filled with tears as she speaks of him; his father is immensely resentful and rejecting of him. “It was all very strange. I wondered what had happened to the charming, so typically English boy I had seen only a few months before” remarks the narrator.³⁸

A series of negotiations between George and different members of his family follows, which could be labelled as the Procession phase, as this leads to him back to England, where the main conflict occurs. The family decides that George should give a concert to a critic who would estimate whether he has true talent or not. After the critic announces that she does not see any talent in the man, George retreats to a gunroom and puts the bullet through his heart. Thus, the procession is followed by the death of the scapegoat, i.e. his eternal expulsion from the community. The family may now place all of their aspirations and hopes on his older, more “English” brother Harry to fulfil their expectations and lead the family tradition: thus the scapegoat rectifies a disruptive imbalance he had caused initially.

Readers may become victims of irony if they anticipate a positive outcome of this story despite several paradoxical observations made by the narrator. For instance, listening to George playing, the narrator notes that he “play[s] with vigour” and yet that “the two hands did not exactly

34 Maugham, *The World Over*, 404.

35 Cormier M. Bruno, Miriam Kennedy, Anton Obert, Jadwiga Sangowicz, Michael Sendbuehler, and Andre Thrffault, “The Black Sheep,” *Canadian Journal of Corrections* 3, no. 4 (1961): 456.

36 Bruno et al., “The Black Sheep,” 456.

37 Maugham, *The World Over*, 414.

38 Maugham, *The World Over*, 412.

synchronise” and afterwards adds that “[the narrator is] ignorant of these things.”³⁹ Bombarded with contradictory hints, the readers find themselves on a periphery, not able to decide what ending they should anticipate. Presumably, they sympathize with George and his aspiration to follow his dream despite the values of the society, which is a common theme in literature at least since the Renaissance. Readers may as well become victims of irony if, having read several scapegoat stories by Somerset Maugham, they expect that the pharmakos will once again rebel and triumph over society.

In the secondary-scapegoat stories irony is targeted either at one of the characters (George in “The Alien Corn”) or the community they stereotypically represent (Hunter in “The Fall of Edward Barnard”). Apart from the mentioned examples, this technique may be traced in the stories “The Pool,” “Before the Party” and a number of others. Such irony is not used to mirror the reader’s stereotypical perception of the world: the rigidity of the society and its inability to grasp the changed perception of its own members is criticized. The reader is expected to have an emotional reaction towards irony: pity, humour, sadness, shock, etc. Thus, irony is incorporated into the stories in order to facilitate a translation of a single impression effect.

“Rain”

Sometimes Maugham’s stories are so complex that they encompass both primary and secondary scapegoat characters and thus enable two targets of irony. The presence of the primary scapegoat pushes the readers into a situation in which they become the victim of irony. The secondary scapegoat, on whom another irony is targeted, aids to evoke emotions in the readers. One such story is one of Maugham’s most wellknown – “Rain.”

The first case of irony which can be found in the story is situational: although the characters do not want to stay at Pago-Pago, they are urged to do so due to an epidemic of measles on the island they intended to go in the first place. At the same time, a natural disaster is taking place: rain starts to fall in torrents with no signs of stopping. Both instances recreate the Communal disaster phase of a typical scapegoat story.

An embedded tale incorporated in the beginning of the “Rain” sets the roles for the characters typical of the pharmakos story. Reverend Davidson tells the story of Fred Ohlson – a Danish trader who had been on the Davidsons’ islands for a long time before the missionaries came. Ohlson is described as an unfaithful to his native wife drunkard and a corrupt man. Mr. Davidson says that the man was given a chance “to mend his ways”⁴⁰ but refused. From the next extract it is obvious that the Reverend has found the means of making Ohlson change:

In two years he was a ruined man. He’d lost everything he’d saved in a quarter of a century. I broke him, and at last he was forced to come to me like a beggar and beseech me to give him a passage back to Sydney.⁴¹

39 Maugham, *The World Over*, 422.

40 Maugham, *The World Over*, 12.

41 Maugham, *The World Over*, 12.

The character of Fred Ohlson represents a scapegoat. This is explained not only by his status of The Worst but his wish to leave the city – a voluntary expulsion. Mr. Davidson is explicitly shown as a person of much higher status, The Best, which highlights the contrast between him and the pharmakos. Moreover, Davidson is the person who forces the man into the position of a scapegoat by making conditions unbearable for him. The embedded tale fulfils the function of the Oracle phase of a classic scapegoat story, as this short flashback reveals the methods which the Reverend uses and predicts a similar pattern of behaviour targeted now at Miss Thompson – a prostitute, who represents The Worst and whose behaviour is believed to be destructive for the community.

In some scapegoat stories, pharmakoi are treated kindly before the expulsion; they are dressed in beautiful clothes and well fed. No physical improvement in Miss Thompson takes place, but from Mr. Davidson's point of view the woman undergoes a great change of soul. His reaction suggests that Miss Thompson is proceeding to The Best phase. The rituality of the process is stressed by the narrator: "The whole household, intent on the wretched, tortured woman downstairs, lived in a state of unnatural excitement. She was like a victim that was being prepared for the savage rites of a bloody idolatry."⁴² As this process lasts for some time and links the phases of Peripety and Expulsion, it could also be labelled as the Procession stage.

In sight of the presence of the embedded tale, the initial position and subsequent changes which are seen in the woman as well as the expectations arising in a scapegoat archetype, readers may anticipate that Miss Thompson will be expelled from the community soon. To highlight the inevitability of this step, the author includes several unsuccessful attempts of another character, Dr. Macphail, to persuade the Reverend not to send Miss Thompson away. The very night before Miss Thompson was to be sent back, the process of the expulsion is "interrupted" by death – ironically, not of a scapegoat, but its antagonist – Mr. Davidson. This character represents the real victim of irony in "Rain" and, thus, is a secondary scapegoat.

Throughout his life Mr. Davidson has cleaved to the principles of saving souls with any tools which may work. The Reverend believes that a missionary from the West is in a way vaccinated from sinister thoughts and vices, apart from a native one: "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."⁴³ The Reverend's erroneous idea of a Western person being better, stringer and wiser than a native man is his downfall, thus another small irony targeted at this character is incorporated. When Mr. Davidson comes to see himself in his true nature, i.e. one who possesses the same vices that he tried to extricate in other people, it is so horrifying and shameful for him that he sees no other way than to end his own life. Robert Gish proposes that Mr. Davidson was "forced to see his true self in the ironic virtue of his antagonist."⁴⁴

Mr. Davidson sees his vocation in curing the vices of others, yet he fails to see that he possesses the sin of lust, a proclivity which metamorphoses from a desire for power to a sexual craving towards the story's end. This transformation is prompted by the author throughout the

42 Maugham, *The World Over*, 32.

43 Maugham, *The World Over*, 9.

44 Robert Gish, "The Exotic Short Story: Kipling and others," in *The English Short Story, 1880–1945*, ed. Joseph M. Flora (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1985), 21.

story. Applying Richter’s differentiation, Maugham uses the basic strategy of turning readers into victims of irony by not providing them with some hints, but not enough to completely doubt the veracity of the text.⁴⁵ The first hint is hidden in the description of Mr. Davidson, a character who possesses a feeling “of suppressed fire.”⁴⁶ This description ends with the words “He was not a man with whom any intimacy was possible.”⁴⁷ Upon re-reading the story, the reader cannot think of this phrase without ironic undertones which would not come to the fore during a first reading. A common image of a person devoted to religion is of an individual who has chosen to refrain from sexual contact. If Reverend Davidson’s holiness and high morality were called into question right at the outset of the story, the ending of it would be no surprise, which is an effect that Maugham wanted to create. A strong supporter of stable narrative structure, he believed that in the story “everything contributes to the conclusion, which should not be expected but in retrospect should seem inevitable.”⁴⁸

Thus Mr. Davidson is a secondary scapegoat, as he undergoes a shift from The Best to The Worst stages in course of the story and is expelled from the community in the end. He is a victim of irony, one which readers are expected to respond to emotionally as well as, assumingly, in consternation. As he takes his life voluntarily, this could also be construed as the stage of Sacrifice – a scapegoat who willingly expels himself from the community to cleanse it. Contrarily, Miss Thompson is set as a primary scapegoat throughout the whole story. The reader believes that she is the one who is going to be expelled and penalized, an expectation which the writer fosters at first, then turns around in the climax. With this reversal, readers become the victims of irony as well.

Conclusion

As shown, a number of Maugham’s characters in these stories have clear traits of pharmakoi: they are outcasts who are not accepted by the rest of the community, their expulsion is a key theme, with all the events in the story leading to this ending. In these stories, a death or a descent (at least symbolic) is the traditional and anticipated ending. The repetitive use of pharmakoi story structure and characters support the identification of primary and secondary scapegoats. Yet the effect these characters produce on the reader is different than of classic scapegoat stories. First of all, the structure of the traditional scapegoat narrative is violated: while a pharmakos should be either expelled or killed, pharmakoi in Maugham’s stories often revolt and triumph over society, except for George. In stories featuring primary pharmakoi, the irony only *seems* to be targeted at the scapegoat, whereas it is merely through contact with the figure that the real object of irony is revealed. Maugham brilliantly builds up his irony using either stereotypes or archetypes, sometimes blending both. The use of stereotypes sets up the thematical background for irony to be built, while the use of archetypes seems to be based on the readers’ subconscious expectations. Irony represents paradox: readers expect one outcome, and the fictional reality thwarts this expectation. The paradox facilitates the dramatic impact stereotypes and archetypes exert on the readers.

45 Richter, “The Reader,” 137.

46 Maugham, *The World Over*, 5.

47 Maugham, *The World Over*, 5.

48 Archer, *W. Somerset Maugham*, 9.

Secondary scapegoat stories are not so complexly structured; the irony is established within the story and is targeted at one of the characters or the community they stereotypically represent. Readers thus stand on the same side as the narrator and are provoked towards an emotional reaction. Here, Maugham's great talent as an observer was made the most of, for only a few hints set throughout the story contribute to the deep psychological representation of the characters in an effect which evokes various yet always strong emotions in the reader. Ironic elements may be introduced at any point in the story, after which they repeated several times. These elements may be incorporated as a twist in the end, or they may be hidden within a frame narrative to be revealed and guided with the help of central or peripheral characters. Irony may represent a simple and obvious paradox or may be built upon the readers' putative stereotypical expectations, affecting them on a subconscious level. Victims of irony may be either characters or readers, or both with the same story. Various types of irony are introduced which intersect and support each other. Although many patterns of incorporation and uses of irony have been revealed by many commentators since Maugham's first novel was published at the end of the 19th century, new readings of this author in terms of irony remain possible.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abrams, Meyer Howard. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. 7th ed. Boston: Heinle & Heinle, 1999.
- Archer, Stanley. *W. Somerset Maugham: A Study of the Short Fiction*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993.
- Barbe, Katharina. *Irony in context*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1995.
- Björkqvist, Kaj, and Pirkkko Niemelä. "The Myth of the Nonaggressive Female." In *Of Mice and Women: Aspects of Female Aggression*, edited by Kaj Björkqvist and Pirkkko Niemelä. 3–46. San Diego, California: Academic Press, Inc., 1992.
- Booth, Wayne Clayson. *A Rhetoric of Irony*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1975.
- Brooks, Cleanth. "Irony as a Principle of Structure." In *Literary Opinion in America*, 3rd rev. ed., edited by Morton Dauwen Zabel. 729–741. New York: Harper & Row, 1962.
- Bruno, Cormier M., Miriam Kennedy, Anton Obert, Jadwiga Sangowicz, Michael Sendbuehler, and Andre Thrffault. "The Black Sheep." *Canadian Journal of Corrections* 3, no. 4 (1961): 456–463.
- Compton, Todd Merlin. *Victim of the Muses: Poet as Scapegoat, Warrior and Hero in Greco-Roman and Indo-European Myth and History*. Washington, DC: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2006. [Online], accessed November 27, 2018, <https://chs.harvard.edu/CHS/article/display/4912.part-i-greece-1-the-pharmakos-in-archaicgreece>.
- Colebrook, Claire. *Irony*. London: Routledge, 2004.
- Frye, Northrop. *Anatomy of Criticism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957.
- Gibbs, Raymond W. Jr., and Herbert L. Colston. Preface to *Irony in language and thought: a cognitive science reader*, edited by Herbert L. Colston and Raymond W. Gibbs, Jr., ix–x. New York: Taylor & Francis Group, LLC, 2007.
- Gish, Robert. "The Exotic Short Story: Kipling and others." In *The English Short Story, 1880–1945*, edited by Joseph M. Flora, 1–37. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1985.
- Gordell, Richard A. *Somerset Maugham: A Biographical and Critical Study*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1961.

- Hutcheon, Linda. “The Complex Functions of Irony.” *Revista Canadiense de Estudios Hispánicos* 16, no. 2 (1992): 219–234. <https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/handle/1807/10251>.
- Maugham, William Somerset. *The World Over: The Collected Stories*. 2 vols. London: The Reprint Society, 1954.
- Muecke, Douglas Colin. *Irony and the Ironic*. London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1970.
- Quarmby, Katharine. *Scapegoat: Why We are Failing Disabled People*. London: Portobello Books, 2011.
- Richter, David H. “The Reader as Ironic Victim.” *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 14, no. 2 (1981): 133–151. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1344849>.
- Singh, Raj Kishor. “Humour, Irony and Satire in Literature.” *International Journal of English and Literature* 3, no. 4 (October 2012): 65–72. <https://www.academia.edu/4541187>.
- Stapel, Diederik A., and Willem Koomen. “When Stereotype Activation Results in (Counter) Stereotypical Judgments: Priming Stereotype-Relevant Traits and Exemplars.” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 34, no. 2 (March 1998): 136–163. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0022103197913469>.
- White, Jacquelyn W., and Robin M. Kowalski. “Deconstructing The Myth Of The Nonaggressive Woman: A Feminist Analysis.” *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 18, no. 4 (December 1994): 487–508.

Maria Klečková is an MA student at the Department of English and American Studies at the Faculty of Arts of University of Pardubice. Her bachelor’s thesis was also devoted to the short stories of Somerset Maugham in terms of irony from the perspective of narratology. She currently teaches English and Czech for foreigners as a private tutor and engages in teaching practice at an elementary school in connection with her master’s studies. Her MA thesis research will focus on the potential role of student’s books in the development of the critical thinking skills of learners at elementary schools.

