

**TRENTON SUNDAY TIMES
3 MARCH 1957**

MAUGHAM

**"The Magician," by W. Somerset Maugham;
Doubleday and Company. \$3.75.**

W. Somerset Maugham wrote "The Magician" nearly fifty years ago when he was just beginning to emerge from the ranks of those who write and pass on. It is hardly a book that he would have written in a later day but at the same time it is not to be shunted aside with a nostalgic shrug. Black magic is dealt with here in relationship to a pretty woman, and the villain of the piece was based on a certain gent that Maugham had met in a Paris cafe in around the time that Maugham was about to write the book.

He tells about this singular experience in a foreword which he calls a fragment of biography. The novel was published in 1908 and when his publishers expressed a wish to reissue it, he felt he should read it again.

"Nearly fifty years had passed since I had done so, and I had completely forgotten it," he writes. "Some authors enjoy reading their old works; some cannot bear to. Of these I am. When I have corrected proofs of a book, I have finished with it for good and all. I am impatient when people insist on talking to me about it; I am glad if they liked it, but do not much care if they don't. I am no more interested in it than in a worn-out suit of clothes that I have given away.

"It was thus with disinclination that I began to read 'The Magician.' It held my interest, as two of my early novels, which for the same reason I have been obliged to read, did not. One, indeed, I simply could not get through. Another had to my mind some good dramatic scenes, but the humor filled me with mortification, and I should have been ashamed to see it republished.

"As I read 'The Magician,' I wondered how on earth I could have come by all the material concerning the black arts which I wrote of. I must have spent days and days reading in the library of the British Museum. The style is lush and turgid, not at all the sort of style I approve of now, but perhaps not unsuited to the subject; and there are a great many more adverbs

and adjectives than I should use today. I fancy I must have been impressed by the *écriture artiste* which the French writers of the time had not yet entirely abandoned, and unwisely sought to imitate them."

The sinister character in "The Magician" is one Oliver Haddo. The man who served for the model of Haddo was a chap by the name of Aleister Crowley. Maugham speaks frankly of him as, of course, he speaks of many other things. "He was a fake, but not entirely a fake," he writes, pointing out that among other accomplishments he had been a chess champion, a climber of difficult mountains and a passable poet whose verse was "not entirely without merit."

At this particular time Crowley was dabbling in Satanism, magic and the occult and he told fantastic stories of his experiences. This gave Maugham, presumably, an idea and into the book went Crowley, magic and all.

But as Maugham points out, he made the character of Oliver Haddo "more striking in appearance, more sinister and more ruthless than Crowley ever was. I gave him magical powers that Crowley, though he claimed them, certainly never possessed. Crowley, however, recognized himself in the creature of my invention, for such it was, and wrote a full-page review of the novel in *Vanity Fair*, which he signed 'Oliver Haddo.' I did not read it, and wish now that I had. I daresay it was a pretty piece of vituperation, but probably, like his poems, intolerably verbose."

There is a little final touch to the proceedings. Years afterward, Maugham received a telegram from Crowley who pleaded for him to send twenty-five pounds. "I did not do so," Maugham notes, "and he lived on for many disgraceful years."