

THE GAZETTE
MONTREAL, QUEBEC, CANADA
12 JANUARY 1957
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The Literary Scene.

The Early Maugham.

The Magician. By W. Somerset Maugham. British Book Service; 233 pages, \$3.75.

Originally published in 1908, "The Magician" was the third novel by a then "promising" young writer names Somerset Maugham.

That Mr. Maugham, even at the age of thirty-four, should choose Aleister Crowley as a model for his fictional magician Oliver Haddo, came as a surprise, to put it mildly. In 1908, Crowley had acquired a reputation not only as a dabbler in the "black arts," but as a degenerate of the worst order. He boasted of being the "worst man in the world," and having read some of his personal papers, it is not difficult to believe. Crowley's biography is one volume that this reviewer confesses to having put aside unfinished.

In an introduction to the present edition, Mr. Maugham tells how he met Crowley at the Chat Blanc, a café on the Paris Left Bank, frequented by contemporaries like Clive Bell and Arnold Bennett. He says that Crowley at once repelled and intrigued him, but claims that Oliver Haddo, the magician of his book, is a far more ruthless and sinister figure than Crowley ever was. This we are inclined to doubt.

Crowley was influenced by the works of Joris Karl Huysmans, as Mr. Maugham in his return undoubtedly was. Some of the more esoteric portions of "The Magician" are so suggestive of "La Bas" and "Au Rebus" that they might have been plucked from the Belgian's work wholesale.

Storywise, the ploy concerns the magician Oliver Haddo, an immense gross individual whose eyes "never converged upon the object of their gaze but stared out parallel." Haddo has the heroine under a Svengali-like spell and makes her the subject of his unholy experiments. The characters are stereotyped. The heroine is the essence of virtue, the hero a muscular Christian, and the other characters fall into the traditional pat-

tern. There are séances and spells, settings of darkness and storm, with the forces of evil and the magician getting their comeuppance in the end. The subject may have been more acceptable in 1908, when the topics of the occult and spiritualism were more faddish than they are today.

The story is melodramatic in tone, and Mr. Maugham confesses in his introduction to a style that is lush and turgid. The most interesting phase of the work is the contrast between it and his later writings. One realizes the long way the old master has travelled in achieving the splendid polished style manifest in "Of Human Bondage," "The Moon and Sixpence" and a host of others.