

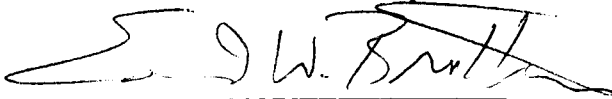
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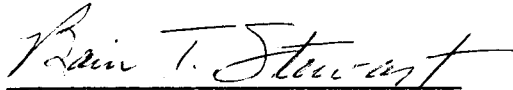
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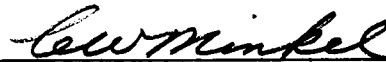
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THE RAZOR'S EDGE: ANALYSIS AND COMPARISON OF
SOMERSET MAUGHAM'S NOVEL (1944) AND
TWENTIETH CENTURY-FOX'S FILM (1946)

A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Arts
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Robert Paul Holtzclaw

December 1985

ABSTRACT

The Razor's Edge is the title of a 1944 novel by Somerset Maugham and the novel's 1946 film adaptation, directed by Edmund Goulding. An analysis and comparison of these two works involves consideration of each version separately as well as both versions together.

Following an introductory chapter in which some historical and critical background information is presented, the initial focus falls on Maugham's novel. Specific elements of the work examined in detail include plot, characterization, setting, point of view, themes, and style.

A formalist analysis of the film, examined without reference to the novel, begins the next chapter. Drawing from Bordwell and Thompson's formalist framework for cinema study, this section explores the film's mise-en-scene, cinematographic properties, editing, and use of sound. This analysis of cinematic style is followed by a look at the film's narrative. In this portion of the chapter, the film and novel are compared, and significant alterations, deletions, and additions are discussed. The effects of these changes on the film's development of plot and characterization are also considered. When ascertainable, possible reasons for some of the changes are introduced.

The analysis concludes with a brief examination of The Razor's Edge's value in a more general study of novels, film, and the adaptation process. Two appendixes provide narrative overviews of the individual works.

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INTRODUCTION

The process of developing a film from another source is both an interesting and challenging one. Similarly, attempts to study and analyze such a process can provide challenges and yield interesting information as well. Throughout film history, ideas and general plot structures for many films have been culled from short stories, plays, and other literary sources. The most common source for film adaptations has been the novel.

A successful novel is no guarantee of a subsequent successful film adaptation. While the diversity of critical opinion surrounding most major literary and film works makes "successful" a difficult word to define from a critical standpoint, success can be measured in terms of public reaction, specifically book and ticket sales. A best-selling novel may be adapted into a film that fails miserably at the box office, or a mediocre novel may be transformed into a hit film. When a financially successful novel is followed by a financially successful film adaptation, the characters and general story line have managed the difficult task of finding public favor in two quite distinct art forms. Such is the case with the 1944 novel and 1946 film adaptation of W. Somerset Maugham's The Razor's Edge.

Financial success is a rather dry subject for analysis, a subject not particularly ripe for study or interpretation. Sales figures can be quoted and chart positions can be reported, but very little can be done in the way of subjective analysis of these objective facts. More interesting and rewarding is the task of critically analyzing the three components of a successful novel and its film adaptation--the novel itself, the film itself, and the process of changing and reworking that transforms the story on paper into the story on film.

Such a three-part critical analysis will be the focus of this exploration of the novel and film versions of The Razor's Edge. Following a brief look at the novel and film in terms of their development, critical reception, and performance in the public arena, attention will shift to more detailed studies of the two works as individual and self-contained projects. This analysis will be followed by an examination of some of the major changes that become evident when the two versions are compared. Either version of The Razor's Edge, novel or film, can be experienced alone with no insurmountable problems of understanding or appreciation. In comparison, however, the most valuable and interesting information and insights can be gained. The world inhabited by the characters of The Razor's Edge is a fascinating and revealing one. Prepare to enter.

CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND, CRITICAL AND PUBLIC RECEPTION:

NOVEL AND FILM

Before launching into an analysis of the structure and the strengths and weaknesses of these two versions of The Razor's Edge, it may be helpful to build a foundation for the discussion by examining the details surrounding the release and reception of the two works. Just as no work of art or literature should be seen as existing in a vacuum apart from the historical context that helped to shape its creation and subsequent reception, no thorough analysis of such a work should ignore these facts and their value in helping to ground a critical discussion in the real world from which it emerged. These factual ties need not be restrictive bonds--instead, they are flexible tethers that help to launch and control subsequent forays into the critical world of greater interpretive freedom and accompanying responsibility.

"Larry Darnell [sic], a flier in the first World War, renounces the comfortable life awaiting him on his return to roam the world searching for a faith above and beyond human mortality."¹ This three-line blurb in Publisher's Weekly, highlighted by the misspelling of the main character's name, announced to the world the imminent publication of Somerset Maugham's The Razor's Edge. The date was early March 1944, and Maugham had recently celebrated his seventieth birthday. Already quite well-known and prolific, Maugham published The Razor's Edge 47 years after the release of his first

¹Publisher's Weekly 1 Apr. 1944: 1373

novel. While The Razor's Edge can (and does) stand on its own merits, the background of the book's publication is incomplete without a brief sketch of the author's long and varied career.

During Maugham's long life (January 25, 1874–December 16, 1965), his published works included 19 novels, 24 plays, 9 collections of short stories, and many other books of travel observations, literary criticism, and painfully candid autobiographical material (Naik 217). Information of interest and value may be found in all of these diverse elements of Maugham's writing, but this overview will focus on his career and accomplishments as a novelist. Maugham's novels brought him his greatest recognition and financial rewards, and they are, of course, directly related to the specific issue under consideration in this report.

Of Maugham's early novels, only Liza of Lambeth (1897) and Mrs. Craddock (1902) found any degree of financial and critical success. His first major success as a novelist came in 1915 with the publication of what is, today, his most famous work, Of Human Bondage. The next ten years were Maugham's peak years in terms of popularity and creativity, as he enjoyed the success of two additional novels and eight plays in this period. One of these novels, The Moon and Sixpence (1919), is regarded today as one of his best. Critical acclaim continued with the 1930 release of Cakes and Ale, another novel that enjoys favorable attention years after its publication. This peak period, capped by the popularity of Cakes and Ale, was, in biographer M. K. Naik's words, "a victory followed by a disastrous relapse" (72). The relapse--the final phase of Maugham's writing career--included the publication of seven additional novels. Two of these seven, Christmas Holiday (1939) and The Narrow

Corner (1932), are considered to be marginally significant portions of Maugham's total literary output, but neither work received the critical attention or sales success accorded during the peak years. Only The Razor's Edge (1944) emerged from this final stage of Maugham's career with significant sales and continuing critical evaluation.

Coming near the end of Maugham's lengthy series of novels--it is, chronologically, the 17th of his 19 works--The Razor's Edge is often viewed in terms of its connections and similarities to some of the earlier books. Although there is certainly enough original and innovative material in the novel to distinguish it as a self-contained work, tracing some of its threads back to their earlier influences does help to develop the foundation for study of The Razor's Edge and to place it in perspective in the overall structure of Maugham's career. The novel is obviously a logical outgrowth and continuation of some of the stylistic and thematic concerns of his earlier works.

One major relationship between The Razor's Edge and some of Maugham's previous novels concerns the use of a detached narrator--a person who participates in the story and interacts with other characters while remaining essentially apart from the intricacies of the fundamental plot. This detachment allows the narrator to color the events he describes from a less emotional and less involved perspective. In two of Maugham's most notable earlier novels, The Moon and Sixpence and Cakes and Ale, this type of narrator is present under the name of Ashenden. In The Razor's Edge, however, the same basic character is given Maugham's own name, acknowledging what many had suspected all along--this worldly, self-effacing Ashenden is really a thinly disguised version of Maugham himself.

In addition to this similarity in style of presentation, ties in thematic areas can also be easily discerned. Important aspects of Larry Darrell's past, as well as the nature of his quest, are similar to themes and characters Maugham had previously explored. As Maugham biographer Ted Morgan states, "Maugham felt comfortable with the theme of the returning veteran whose life can never be the same, having already used it in 'The Hero'" (480). Similarly, the complex issue of undertaking a quest in search of life's meaning was a theme already addressed in earlier work. In Of Human Bondage, for example, Philip, a younger protagonist, is searching for answers to philosophical questions much like those that trouble Larry. Philip's eventual conclusion, that "there was no meaning in life, and man by living served no end" (559), is decidedly different from the conclusions Larry draws, but the idea of a questing hero in search of elusive answers to complex questions is clearly present in this novel which preceded The Razor's Edge by almost 30 years.

A final tie between this novel and Maugham's earlier works, again focusing on the main characters, has been noted in Karl Pfeiffer's observation concerning The Razor's Edge, The Moon and Sixpence, and Cakes and Ale:

The hero of each novel is a striking personality, a genius of sorts, and the narrator, a person everyone confides in, happens to know him. The narrator is busy leading his own life, but fortunately for us his path and the hero's cross at just the right moments for him to learn all he needs to know in order to interpret the hero for us. (93)

There are, of course, other thematic, narrative, and stylistic devices carried over from previous Maugham novels into The Razor's Edge, but these three rather substantial ones help to illustrate Maugham's career movement and development over the years leading up to the specific

event to be focused on now--the publication of the subject of this analysis, The Razor's Edge.

Doubleday, Doran and Co. published The Razor's Edge on April 20, 1944, at a retail price of \$2.75 per hardcover copy. Prepublication word of mouth concerning a new Somerset Maugham novel, this one featuring a religious theme, had helped create a great sense of anticipation for the new book, and it was chosen as a Literary Guild "Book-of-the-Month" for May. Coming out just at the end of World War II, and on the heels of such spectacularly best-selling novels with religious themes as The Keys of the Kingdom, The Robe, and The Song of Bernadette, the publication timing was superb. The first-edition printing was comprised of 375,000 copies (of which the Literary Guild took 170,000), an extremely large initial run even for an author of Maugham's stature (Morgan 480). Maugham's first novel, Liza of Lambeth, had a first-edition printing of only 2,000 copies, and one of his succeeding novels, Christmas Holiday, published only five years before The Razor's Edge, sold a total of only 44,751 copies in the United States (Morgan 480). The difference five years, a war, and a "religious theme" (as The Razor's Edge was described prior to publication) could make was incredible, and incredibly profitable for Maugham and Doubleday.

The Razor's Edge jumped onto the Publisher's Weekly "Best Sellers of the Week" chart at a strong #4 for the week of May 20, 1944. The novel advanced to #2 the following week and remained at that position in every weekly chart for the next 4½ months. Lillian Smith's controversial Strange Fruit, banned in Boston and Detroit and the subject of several lawsuits, remained at #1 throughout the period. The Razor's Edge slipped

to #3 in sales for the month of October, #8 for both November and December, and fell from the chart in January 1945. In the Publisher's Weekly year-end chart, The Razor's Edge was listed as the #5 fiction best seller for all of 1944, with reported sales of 232,500 in stores and 827,728 through the Literary Guild. Book club sales were not counted in the Publisher's Weekly charts, so the strong performance of The Razor's Edge was based solely on the 232,500 copies sold in stores.² Doubleday, Inc. reported total United States sales for The Razor's Edge to be 1,367,283 (Morgan 555-6), and Bookseller magazine, in a 1961 article on Maugham's career-long sales history, reported worldwide sales for The Razor's Edge at nearly 5,000,000 copies (June 24, 1961). The book was a hit.

On the critical horizon, the reception wasn't nearly as enthusiastic. Most magazines and literary journals in the business of reviewing books offered opinions on Maugham's latest work, and while reviews varied, the majority were not favorable. A sampling of the reviews will help to recapture the climate in which The Razor's Edge enjoyed its sales success:

far from required reading in days when time and paper are precious (Library Journal April 15, 1944)

unbelievably cheap and trifling (Commonweal April 28, 1944)

deserves to rank after Of Human Bondage and The Moon and Sixpence as one of his three major novels (Time April 24, 1944)

Mr. Maugham, by even very lax critical standards, has turned out an inferior job. (New Yorker April 22, 1944)

well-bred and readable as its predecessors (Newsweek May 1, 1944)

²Sales and chart material in this paragraph taken from issues of Publisher's Weekly between 20 May 1944 and 13 Jan. 1945.

Mr. Maugham's familiar cocktail, with a dash of holy water that doesn't change its flavor one of Maugham's weaker novels (New Republic May 1, 1944)

As this quick tour illustrates, the few kind words from major publications were outnumbered by negative and disappointed reactions to the work. And, inevitably, Hollywood geared up for a film adaptation.

The film rights to The Razor's Edge were purchased for \$250,000 by Twentieth Century-Fox in the fall of 1944. A script was prepared during early 1945, but studio executives, particularly Twentieth Century-Fox president Darryl Zanuck, were not satisfied with the final product. When George Cukor, who was slated to direct, read the script, he found it so objectionable that he informed the studio he would direct only if Maugham came to Hollywood and revised the screenplay. Arrangements were made, and Maugham spent June and July 1945 at Cukor's house, rewriting the script. Zanuck expressed public approval of Maugham's revision, but he indicated privately that he believed the script was too verbose and lacked visual appeal (Arce 162). Eventually, none of Maugham's work was actually included in the final shooting script, and he is not listed in the film's screenwriting credits. Instead, Zanuck gave Maugham's script to Lamar Trotti, who rewrote it 12 times before the studio was finally satisfied. By this time Cukor had become disillusioned with the project and was involved in directing a film for another studio (Raphael 95; Morgan 490-1). Cukor later expressed his views on the final Lamar Trotti-authored screenplay in this way:

It had what the studio called entertainment, which means dancing and country clubs and all that crap. Nothing to indicate you were supposed to sit down and listen to what was being said. Whatever important things this script retained were sandwiched between all kinds of nonsense. (qtd. in Lambert 229)

Having finally acquired an acceptable script, Zanuck began to make further preliminary shooting plans in late 1945. The end of World War II brought with it many returning actors who had served during the conflict, and Zanuck delayed filming until these returning stars could be considered and approached for roles in the production. Finally, Tyrone Power was signed to play Larry Darrell--Power's first film role after serving three years as a marine aviator. The major female role, that of Larry's girlfriend Isabel Bradley, went to Gene Tierney, fresh from an Academy Award nomination for her performance in Leave Her to Heaven and a starring role in the hit movie, Laura. Clifton Webb, Oscar-nominated as Miss Tierney's co-star in Laura, was cast as Elliott Templeton, and Anne Baxter, featured in The Magnificent Ambersons and The North Star, portrayed Sophie MacDonald. Herbert Marshall was signed to play Somerset Maugham--Marshall's third appearance as the narrator in an adaptation of a Maugham novel. Other cast members included John Payne as Gray Maturin, Lucile Watson as Louisa Bradley, Elsa Lanchester as Miss Keith, and Frank Latimore as Bob MacDonald. Edmund Goulding, veteran director of dozens of films including Grand Hotel and Claudia, was hired to replace Cukor in the director's chair.

Actual filming began in March 1946, and the studio boasted that 100 shooting days, a record number, were spent on the production. Twentieth Century-Fox craftsmen and carpenters built 89 sets costing \$641,800, and production personnel gathered \$800,000 worth of props. Additionally, an orchestra was hired to play on the sets during rehearsal, thus creating the proper mood. A total of nearly \$4,000,000 was spent on the production before it ended on July 23, a week under the four month shooting schedule

(Arce 166-71). Even if allowances are made for possible studio exaggeration, the grand scale and expense surrounding the filming of The Razor's Edge remains impressive.

Released in November 1946, the movie was an immediate box office hit. Audiences were eager to welcome Tyrone Power back to the major-movie world after his tour of duty, and the current popularity of Gene Tierney and Clifton Webb added to the cast's appeal. The fact that the film was based on a best-selling novel by a well-known author added even more impetus to the strong financial showing. The film peaked in popularity during the Christmas season and early 1947, and it remained on Variety's list of "Top Ten Grossing Films" for over four months.³ By November 1947--one year after its release--The Razor's Edge had earned \$6,032,781 for Twentieth Century-Fox, making it the most successful studio picture of the year (Morgan 513-4; Arce 172). In addition to this financial success, the film was nominated for three major Academy Awards: Best Picture of the Year (losing out, along with Henry V, It's a Wonderful Life, and The Yearling, to The Best Years of Our Lives); Best Supporting Actor (Clifton Webb's performance losing out to Harold Russell in The Best Years of Our Lives); and Best Supporting Actress (Anne Baxter winning the Oscar for her performance, over Ethel Barrymore and Lillian Gish, among others).

The \$6,000,000 gross and Academy Award recognition came in spite of almost unanimously unfavorable reviews by critics at the time of the film's release. Unlike the mixed opinions that greeted the book's release, reviews of the film adaptation in almost every major magazine and

³Chart material taken from issues of Variety between 2 Dec. 1946 and 14 Apr. 1947

newspaper agreed on one thing--the film was not to be recommended. Among the typical pans:

an earnest, overlong, impressively glossy, frequently dull movie . . . a pretentious thud. The Razor's Edge dawdles away several million dollars trying to make a great philosopher out of W. Somerset Maugham and a great actress out of Gene Tierney. (Time December 9, 1946)

The characters are a singularly lifeless lot who wander around and intone about life and love but seldom do anything concrete about it. Some of the scenes are phony to the point of being comical Tyrone Power and Gene Tierney struggle along in the principal roles. (Newsweek December 2, 1946)

Nobody in The Razor's Edge seems to be very agile mentally. . . . the cast moves about in a vague, somnambulistic manner. Gene Tierney is so handsome that it is almost possible to overlook her utter lack of animation. (New Yorker November 30, 1946)

The Razor's Edge was directed by Edmund Goulding in a careful, stagey, \$4-million style which somehow becomes more like pantomime than real life. Larry Darrell (Tyrone Power) . . . is inclined to ruminate profoundly about things like "the dead look so dead when they're dead." (New Republic December 9, 1946)

Anne Baxter's performance received scattered praise, as did, to a lesser degree, those of Clifton Webb and, in a bit part, Elsa Lanchester. Some reviewers felt the movie did the best it could with an inherently unfilmable story, but many reviews contained nothing positive about any aspect of the film.

The Razor's Edge--in both its forms--can be seen as a story that found public approval and interest despite widespread critical disapproval and skepticism. The sales figures, box office receipts, and capsule book and film reviews presented in this chapter represent the objective side of this analysis of The Razor's Edge, the historical foundation upon which subjective opinions and interpretations can be introduced and explored. This exploration begins in the next chapter.

CHAPTER II

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE RAZOR'S EDGE:

THE NOVEL

There are many ways to approach a critical analysis of The Razor's Edge, or of any novel. Conversely, no single method will necessarily address every significant element of the book; indeed, literary criticism is a richer and more rewarding endeavor for writers and readers because of this lack of one set formula for all critical inquiry. Different aspects or shadings of a novel can be stressed, and others can be excluded, so that no two investigations of the same novel will ever reach precisely the same conclusions. With these facts in mind, the structure of this foray into the world of Maugham's The Razor's Edge can be outlined.

The history of The Razor's Edge has been briefly laid out in the previous chapter. The next sound and logical step is to move into the novel and begin, to use the term championed by Wellek and Warren in Theory of Literature, an "intrinsic" method of literary analysis. Wellek and Warren build a strong and convincing case for the fundamental importance of this text-oriented method of study:

The natural and sensible starting point for work in literary scholarship is the interpretation and analysis of the works of literature themselves. . . . But, curiously enough, literary history has been so pre-occupied with the setting of a work of literature that its attempts at an analysis of the works themselves have been slight in comparison with the enormous efforts expended on the study of environment. (139)

As was stated at the beginning of the first chapter, no work of literature should be seen as completely unaffected by the historical context that surrounded its creation. However, a critical mistake is made

if this historical context is allowed to assume too much importance and, in effect, overwhelm the actual creative work that is ostensibly being studied. Somerset Maugham certainly led a long, colorful, and interesting life--the type of life that attracts biographers at a rapid clip.

Numerous biographies have delved into his education, his travels, his sexual proclivities, and, occasionally, the actual works of literature that helped create his fame and reputation. There is certainly room and need for both literary analysis and biographical study of great and famous authors, and many of the Maugham biographies are worthwhile and well-written. However, The Razor's Edge ranges far beyond the circumstances of the life of its creator, and the novel stands as a fully independent and self-contained work that can be read and interpreted even if a reader has no knowledge of the life or times of Somerset Maugham. Extrinsic factors were certainly influential in Maugham's creation of this novel, just as these external forces exert varying degrees of influence on all artists and creative works. But, turning to Wellek and Warren once again, "The actual problems begin when we evaluate, compare, and isolate the individual factors which are supposed to determine the work of art" (73). The placement of too much importance on influences outside an author's own imagination and creative process can result in a misleading shift in the direction and emphasis of literary study.

Many factors, such as the success of other novels with religious themes, the war, and various people Maugham knew or had heard about, may have had a bearing on certain aspects of The Razor's Edge. Ultimately, however, all these extrinsic qualities were filtered through Maugham's mind and either discarded or worked into the final product. This final

product, The Razor's Edge, is the supreme expression of all that may or may not have come into play during the creative process. There is much to be explored and studied within the confines of its 250 pages.

In the section of their book dealing with this intrinsic method of literary analysis, Wellek and Warren present specific divisions for the structure of such a study. These divisions, in use under the same or similar terms in many other critical approaches, are still quite applicable today:

Analytical criticism of the novel has customarily distinguished three constituents: plot, characterization, and setting. The last . . . becomes, in modern theories, atmosphere or tone. It is needless to observe that each of these elements is determinant of the others. (216)

The final sentence in this excerpt is a very important one, for it helps to minimize the danger inherent in any study of a novel in which the book, as a unit, is broken down into separate components for individual analysis. This process of breaking down is a necessary part of intrinsic literary study, but the person performing the study, as well as its subsequent readers, must remember that all the parts are actually elements of one large whole. Boundaries between elements are not always clear, and the influence one may have on another is often substantial.

Turning to The Razor's Edge itself, this analysis will be structured along the general dividing lines mentioned above by Wellek and Warren, with some modification and expansion. Specifically, the novel will be viewed from six vantage points: plot, characterization, setting, plot exposition/point of view, thematic concerns, and style. While the focus in each section will be on the comparatively limited area covered by the topic under consideration, the relationship of these divisions to the

novel as a whole will also be considered when such information is appropriate and enlightening. In this way, the details of each section can be explored for their own merit as well as for their place in the framework of the novel's overall structure. With this explanation and rationale completed, the actual analysis can now begin.

Plot

The first step in an analysis of the plot of The Razor's Edge is a review of the chain of events that actually constitute this narrative. A detailed account of the sequence of events can be found in Appendix A at the end of this report, and it may be helpful to refer to this appendix for elaboration or clarification both now and as events are mentioned in the course of this analysis. The information in the appendix will also be useful in the coming comparison to the film version's narrative structure. In addition to this appendix, a paragraph of plot summary within the text can help set the stage for the following discussion.

The novel's action centers around Larry Darrell, a young World War I veteran. As the story begins, Larry is struggling with a newfound questioning of his priorities in life, a questioning brought about by a brush with death during the war. Returning to Chicago, he finds himself unable to live the nine-to-five life others expect of him, and he bolts from his girlfriend, Isabel Bradley, and her family (particularly her disapproving Uncle Elliott) in order to seek answers to his complex questions through travel and study abroad. After much travel, searching, and contemplation, his trek reaches its climax in India, where he receives illumination from a Supreme Being and finds that his restless confusion is finally

subsiding. Soon he moves to Paris and finds that Isabel and her husband, Larry's friend Gray Maturin, have also settled there. Also in Paris is Sophie MacDonald, a childhood friend who has been driven by tragedy to a life of liquor, drugs, and promiscuity. Larry seeks to marry Sophie in order to save her from impending self-destruction, but the jealous Isabel's sly intervention keeps the marriage from occurring. Eventually Sophie is murdered, Isabel and Gray return to America, and Larry continues his life of quiet kindness and tranquil, but dedicated, good will.

This short summary omits some important characters and events, but it does reflect the general plot outline of Maugham's sprawling narrative. Spanning 16 years and 3 continents, the action in this novel is ambitious in its construction and level of interweaving.

The plot of The Razor's Edge, and of any work that reaches novel length, is composed of a series of smaller episodes or incidents which, when taken together, comprise the overall development and movement. These individual episodes must be examined in order to come to a true understanding of the plot construction of the novel as a whole. Breaking the novel down into chapters, or even smaller divisions, is the simplest method of conveying the flow of events, and thus this is the method used in the accompanying appendix. However, in order to actually analyze plot as a component of The Razor's Edge, a different method of organization will be introduced.

Instead of working with the plot in the order the events are presented in the book, or even in strictly chronological order, this analysis will segment the plot into individual sections based on the major subplots that unite to form the narrative as a whole. Segmentation is a concept

that has been successfully applied to the study of novels and films, and it therefore seems especially useful in this comparison of works from the two different forms. Bordwell and Thompson, in their book Film Art: An Introduction, discuss the value of segmentation as an analytical tool and use the concept in their analysis of Citizen Kane (60-70). While the two media--novels and films--are quite different in many respects, the approach to narrative study need not be substantially varied. In both cases, segmentation provides an efficient and effective way of isolating the major plot strands and concentrating analytical effort on them. For this study of The Razor's Edge, three of the novel's plot areas will be examined: Larry's quest, Larry and the women in his life (Isabel, Sophie, and Suzanne), and Elliott's life and death. There are, of course, numerous incidents in the novel that do not fit easily into any one of these three divisions yet remain elements of the plot. No analysis of reasonable length can explore every twist and turn of Maugham's intricate narrative. These three plot segments, however, encompass the majority of the novel's episodes and are the most memorable elements of The Razor's Edge.

Larry's Quest

An analysis of the scenes dealing with Larry's quest, the major sub-element of the novel's overall plot, must begin with a look at the events that preceded the quest--specifically, the explanation of the motivation for Larry's decision to undertake this monumental spiritual, mental, and physical journey. The trouble that intermittently plagues this plot strand throughout the novel begins with this earliest and most fundamental element. The key scene in a completely successful exposition of this motivation--Larry's brush with death and eventual survival through the

sacrifice of another soldier--is never provided. There are, of course, allusions to this life-changing war experience after the fact, most notably Suzanne Rouvier's account of what Larry told her about the experience.⁴ Passing references to the event are also included at several points in the novel, along the lines of this vague observation offered by Dr. Nelson, a family friend: "'The war did something to Larry. He didn't come back the same person that he went. . . . Something happened that changed his personality'" (22). The actual scene, however--the precise explanation of what changed Larry and lit this questing fire beneath him--is absent. Instead, the narrator offers this reason for its exclusion:

I do not want the reader to think I am making a mystery of whatever it was that happened to Larry during the war that so profoundly affected him, a mystery that I shall disclose at a convenient moment. I don't think he ever told anybody. (42)

Since Maugham, the author, is actually creating the lives of his characters and the twists of his plot, he clearly could have provided an explanation if he had chosen to do so. After all, Larry is his invention. Despite the narrator's protestations to the contrary, a mystery is made about the impetus for Larry's quest. The lack of a solution to the mystery hampers the development of this important subplot.

Once the quest does begin, for whatever mysterious reason, some marvelous scenes are presented. Larry's time in Paris, reading and attending lectures while dodging Elliott's social invitations, is played

⁴Somerset Maugham, The Razor's Edge (Garden City: Doubleday, Doran and Co., Inc., 1944) 42-3. All subsequent references to this novel will be indicated with parenthetical page references within the text. The author or title may or may not appear in the sentences preceding the reference, but the source of the material will be clear.

up for comedy, particularly in the depictions of Elliott's exasperation over Larry's lack of social enthusiasm. Wisely, Maugham plays down the details of Larry's intellectual and spiritual pursuits in the city, no doubt imagining how dull a lengthy account of Larry's studies and attendance at speeches could be.

After Larry leaves Paris, and the heart of the novel's narrative, for a temporary excursion to more remote lands, Maugham allows his narrator to speculate on the reasons for Larry's strong desire to travel and learn. Perhaps realizing that the reader is as full of questions about Larry as Larry is about himself, Maugham introduces several conversations about the questing Mr. Darrell into the narrative surrounding his sudden departure. In London after the termination of her engagement, Isabel asks the narrator some of the questions the novel's readers yearn to hear answered: "'What do you make of it all? . . . Is it anything more than plain selfishness? . . . What's the good of knowledge if you're not going to do anything with it?'" (72). Maugham's answers don't appease her, nor should they. This narrator, as he has stated earlier, lacks the ability to explain the mysterious Larry and his motivations.

The heart of Larry's own account of his quest comes in the novel's third chapter. Here, Larry narrates his adventures in the mines near Lens, France, and the countryside and farmhouses of Germany. These scenes contain some excitement, some sex, some tangible evidence that Larry is really out there questing, and they are fast-moving and enjoyable to read. At the end of the reminiscence, however, insight into the meaning of all this activity is once again absent. This exchange between Larry and Maugham (who has been listening to Larry's recollections) is typical:

"And did you get anything out of your experience, at the mine, I mean, and on the farm?"

"Yes," said Larry, nodding his head and smiling.

But he didn't tell me what it was (94)

Larry reappears in Paris after five more years of questing, this time in India. Upon his return, his scenes with old acquaintances Gray, Isabel, and Maugham are interesting and rife with undercurrents of tension, but the power of these scenes does not come from the occasional discussions concerning what Larry actually did in India. He is quizzed, but his answers are again vague and enigmatic. Several characters notice a change in Larry, a new sense of serenity and calm, and Larry does acknowledge that his exploits enabled him to find "'peace'" (125). No additional detail is offered, and, for the moment, this development is not particularly bothersome. Other plot strands--primarily Isabel's scheming reactions to Sophie's re-entry into the group--take precedence in both Maugham's writing and reader interest.

Chapter Six, after a brief treatment of Isabel and Gray's problems and plans, is devoted entirely to Larry's explanation, to Maugham, of some of the spiritual, emotional, and philosophical changes he underwent during his years of travel and intense contemplation. Maugham's short introduction to the chapter is so clever and intriguing that it must be examined briefly before discussion of the bulk of the chapter begins:

I feel it right to warn the reader that he can very well skip this chapter without losing the thread of such story as I have to tell I should add, however, that except for this conversation I should perhaps not have thought it worth while to write this book. (194)

This odd prefatory statement both jars and piques. Several critics have offered opinions on the statement, with Frederic Raphael doing perhaps the best job of analyzing the conflicting emotions the words evoke:

This supercilious deference to a public whose powers of attention he suspected to be so derisory is not only unflattering but unworthy. . . . On the other hand, it might be said that there is no better device for getting a man to read something than to suggest that he may not be up to it. (92)

The challenge works, and the reader is drawn in.

The chapter provides a rather detailed account of Larry's time in India, time that had been, until this point near the novel's end, largely unexplained. This portion of the questing plot is, therefore, more satisfactorily presented than most of the other segments of quest narrative due to the mere fact that it is discussed with some depth. Larry alludes to his World War I experience and then jumps to his stay at the monastery in Alsace before finally coming to his Indian adventures. He speaks of Hinduism, of the Absolute, of the transmigration of souls, and of the philosophical belief system known as Vedanta. There is little or nothing that Maugham could have done to inject action or suspense into this introspective section, and, to his credit, he does not try. By this point, if the reader is still reading this chapter after having received the author's own permission to skip over it, the desire to learn precisely what is at the heart of Larry's journey and transformation must be strong. Larry talks, Maugham listens and occasionally asks questions, and the tale unfolds.

At the crucial moment when Larry is about to explain the cornerstone experience of his entire ten year quest--the illumination--the vagueness and after-the-fact nature of his reporting become troubling. As was the case with the inception of the quest, Larry's war experience, this ultimate moment of the quest's zenith suffers from a lack of direct or thorough description. As soon as Larry begins his account of this

supreme experience, it is clear that he will not be able to recapture the moment in its transforming radiance and glory: "'I have no descriptive talent, I don't know the words to paint a picture, I can't tell you, so as to make you see it, how grand the sight was that was displayed before me . . .'" (220). He follows this self-deprecating introduction with an attempt at description, an attempt that includes some lovely pictorial language but that fails to convey a clear sense of what transpired during this particular sunrise at the mountain retreat. Finally, he winds down with an almost apologetic reassertion of his inability to capture the transcendent feeling in words: "'How can I tell you what I felt? No words can tell the ecstasy of my bliss'" (220). This lack of descriptive ability is a believable and acceptable trait in Larry's personality, and the intensely personal and mystical nature of the illumination would make it a difficult experience for anyone to convey in words. Nevertheless, the lack of clarity and specificity in Maugham's presentation of this vital moment frustrates any attempt to comprehend fully the nature and meaning of Larry's quest.

The conversation between Maugham and Larry continues and gradually moves into less esoteric territory as Larry explains some changes in his personal philosophy brought about by the insights gained at the Indian ashram. He no longer values money, seeing it as a bondage, and he plans to give his all away and live off the proceeds of pay he will receive for actual physical labor. Previously living off of a modest inheritance, he sees the dispersal of his material accumulations as a way of becoming closer to the purity and simplicity of a truly rewarding life. Maugham offers a glimpse of Larry's possible future as Larry speaks of a desire to

return to America and work, possibly as a taxi driver. Soon the conversation ends, Larry goes off to do some more research, and the novel's treatment of his quest is concluded. Larry reappears briefly after Sophie's murder, and Maugham offers final-page assurance that Larry probably is doing precisely what he had hoped to do, but the Chapter Six conversation marks the end of the questing subplot in The Razor's Edge.

This plot strand is, of course, one of the most important and memorable elements of the novel. Highly original for its time, the consideration of Eastern philosophy and religion allowed Maugham to explore ideas and issues uncharted in the best-selling novels of his contemporaries. Ultimately, however, Larry's quest raises more questions than it answers. Detailed descriptions of crucial scenes are missing, as discussed previously, and little insight is provided into the mental process and struggle that must surely accompany such a deep and heartfelt quest and transformation. The physical facts surrounding Larry's journeys are laid out in detail, but the spiritual elements--the heart of the quest--are never satisfactorily explained.

Larry and the Women in his Life

The second specific plot element to be analyzed concerns the novel's development of Larry's relationships with the three most prominent women he encounters in the narrative: Isabel, Sophie, and Suzanne.

Along with the quest, Larry's relationship with Isabel Bradley Maturin is one of the major strands of The Razor's Edge's overall plot. The reader is introduced to the two characters, as a couple, as their most harmonious period together is ending. The courtship and wooing are over,

and the breakup is near, before Maugham arrives in 1919 Chicago.

Maugham observes the depth of Isabel's feelings for Larry the first time he sees the couple, noting, "Unless I was mistaken she was madly in love with him . . ." (16).

The first glimpse into the actual inner workings of the relationship is provided when Isabel gives Maugham an account of a stormy picnic she and Larry had a few days earlier. As is the case with many of the novel's important scenes, the picnic is described in reflection, filtered through the memory of only one of the event's primary participants. In spite of this detachment, the presentation of the scene works well dramatically and is essential to the introduction of the basic conflict that will drive Larry and Isabel apart. By the time the picnic is over, Larry has informed Isabel of his plans to go to Paris.

Together for a visit in Paris the following spring, the couple sees their relationship deteriorate even more. The big confrontation is wonderfully dramatic, ending with the ultimate act of separation--Isabel's removal of the engagement ring from her finger. In marked contrast to many of the major scenes in Larry's quest, these important scenes in the plot concerning his relationship with Isabel seem concrete and realistic. Substantive, identifiable issues are discussed, and the composition of, and motivation for, the scenes is direct and easily discernible. The struggles of love and commitment in competition with the urge to pursue individual goals and dreams are widely identifiable conflicts, and the accounts of this relationship benefit from such strong familiarity.

Ten years and seventy pages later, after Isabel has married and

Larry has journeyed, the couple are reunited in Paris. In keeping with their new commitments to other people and other ideals, they rarely have time alone for their traditionally direct and highly-charged discussions, but the relationship resumes and continues to evolve--or untangle. Maugham allows Isabel to declare bluntly that her love for Larry is still intact, as this exchange between Maugham and Isabel illustrates:

"Are you very much in love with Larry?"
 "God damn you, I've never loved anyone else in all
 my life."
 "Why did you marry Gray?"
 "I had to marry somebody." (131)

Clearly, this plot strand will not suffer from vagueness or the author's unwillingness to have those involved express their precise feelings.

A chilling, marvelously written scene without dialogue further reinforces Isabel's profession of love and the extent of her desire to move her relationship with Larry to another level. Maugham's narration of his own observations creates an indelible image and emerges as a cornerstone in the understanding of the intensity of Isabel's feelings for Larry:

It was on the return from one of these jaunts that I witnessed a scene that somewhat startled me. . . . Larry sat with his arm stretched out along the front seat [of the car]. . . . Something in Isabel's immobility attracted my attention, and I glanced at her. She was so still that you might have thought her hypnotized. Her breath was hurried. Her eyes were fixed on his [Larry's] sinewy wrist . . . and I have never seen on a human countenance such a hungry concupiscence as I saw then on hers. It was a mask of lust. (151)

This is Maugham at his descriptive and evocative best, in a masterfully composed and paced scene. The obsessive nature of Isabel's bond to Larry, reciprocal or not, glares through in a white-hot beam of desire.

Isabel finds a new obstacle in the way of her plan to regain some type of hold on Larry when Sophie MacDonald returns to the narrative. Isabel's frantic and jealous reaction to news of Larry and Sophie's impending marriage is captured in another of the novel's best scenes, a desperately comic session featuring an overwrought Isabel confiding in a typically bemused Maugham. She grows increasingly angry as Maugham refuses to support her wild denigrations of Sophie's character and her plan to stop the marriage, and she finally allows all her envy and anger to rush out. She explains how she sacrificed herself nobly, for Larry's sake, and when Maugham doesn't buy this new saintly image she is casting for herself, she springs into action. As Maugham says, "The words were hardly out of my mouth when a plate of bread and butter came flying at my head" (166). The dry and unemotional reporting of the episode, delivered, as usual, by Maugham, adds to its impact narratively and comically. It is an important scene--setting the stage for Isabel's subsequent destruction of Sophie--but it is also a funny and well-written one.

Larry and Isabel's final meeting in the novel takes place at the Ritz. The entire cast of characters is assembled and the scene's focus is more on other relationships, but as the last episode in the Isabel and Larry subplot, the Ritz meeting merits a brief look. Sophie is the center of attention at this gathering, and most conversation is either about her or directed to her. However, one poignant and understated exchange between Larry and Isabel does serve to underscore the continuing presence of Isabel's strong feelings for her former fiancé. When Sophie, responding to a question, states that she and Larry will be honeymooning in Greece, the following exchange occurs (with Maugham, as narrator, providing the commentary):

"I've been trying to get there for ten years," said Larry, "but somehow I've never been able to manage it."

"It ought to be lovely at this time of year," said Isabel, with a show of enthusiasm.

She remembered, as I remembered, that that was where Larry proposed to take her when he wanted her to marry him. (171)

Isabel's attempts to remain cheerful and upbeat at the Ritz luncheon do not seem cloying or out of character, appearing instead to be the natural reactions at this stage of her relationship with Larry. One sign of Maugham's skill as a writer is that all the various interplay at the luncheon is fully realized and nothing seems artificial or out of place. When the luncheon ends, Larry and Isabel part for the final time. She will continue to influence his life--in a major and dramatic way very soon--but their relationship is over.

Sophie MacDonald's impact on Larry's life is less sustained and enthralling, but their relationship is a major element of the novel's plot and an aid in the understanding of the two individual characters. The character analysis will be explored in the next section of this chapter, but Larry and Sophie as subplot can be considered now.

Although Sophie is introduced quite early in The Razor's Edge, she does not become an important influence on Larry's behavior and life until her reappearance in Paris early in Chapter Five. A chance meeting sparks Larry's memory and here, nearly two-thirds through the novel, he reveals the special closeness they had shared: "'I used to go up to her grandfather's and we'd sit under a great elm they had there and read to one another'" (159). Suddenly and subtly, through this and other wistful comments, Larry introduces into the plot the notion that Sophie's return will be more than a brief sidelight. Isabel has just updated those

assembled (and the reader) with the facts of Sophie's life since she disappeared several years ago, and now Larry has added emotion and a personalizing sense to these sad, but distant, facts.

Significantly, there are no scenes of Larry and Sophie alone after this accidental encounter at the Rue de Lappe. Larry informs Gray (Isabel's husband) that he has seen Sophie several times, but these meetings are not included in the novel. Suddenly, friends of the couple hear that they plan to be married, but Maugham declines to provide a glimpse into the inner workings of this surprising decision to wed. Part of the reason for this exclusion of scenes can certainly be attributed to logistical problems of having the narrator exposed to such private conversations (problems with this narrative method will be discussed later in this chapter), but the ingenious Maugham could have worked the scenes in somehow had he so chosen. The only scene featuring Larry and Sophie together after the Rue de Lappe meeting occurs at the watershed Ritz luncheon discussed earlier. They are not alone and, consequently, not inclined to discuss the personal aspects of their unexpected engagement, but some clues are provided. The perceptive Maugham, one of the many luncheon guests, reports his observation of a nonverbal exchange between the two that is the most direct sign given concerning the true nature of the odd relationship:

. . . I asked myself if Larry wasn't putting her to a strain greater than she could support. If as I suspected she had doped as well as drunk, the sudden deprivation must have worn her nerves to a frazzle. Sometimes I intercepted a look between them. In his I saw tenderness and encouragement, but in hers an appeal that was pathetic. (171)

Since readers are not allowed to see the actual development of the

attachment between Larry and Sophie, the speculations of other characters concerning this topic seem especially significant. Maugham's comments, made in conversation with Isabel before the Ritz luncheon, seem especially insightful and probably correct. He doubts that Larry truly loves Sophie, believing instead that Larry is "'enthralled by one of the most powerful emotions that can beset the human breast'"--self-sacrifice (167-8). As is the case with so many of the plot ideas surrounding Larry and Sophie, this line of discussion remains underdeveloped.

The only full-scale scene devoted to rigorous treatment of Larry and Sophie's relationship is also one of the novel's best and most touching scenes, and a hint of what could have been presented had sketchy details offered elsewhere been fleshed out. This scene takes place after Maugham has learned, thirdhand, of Larry's behavior after finding that Sophie had disappeared before their wedding. Maugham hears from Elliott that Larry was rather upset, but the important and potentially revealing description of Larry's actual behavior is glossed over in one short paragraph. Finally, nearly a year later, Maugham meets Sophie at the port of Toulon, and they have a direct and fascinating discussion about the unusual engagement and its mysterious termination. The scene, long overdue, is well-written in its slow build from generalities, through specifics of Isabel's cruel temptation of Sophie, to a pathetic account of Sophie's current life as a "sailor's girl," addicted to hard drugs and rough men. At last, Maugham is allowing one of the principals in the relationship to speak candidly about its inception and true nature, and Sophie's blunt appraisal is fascinating and provocative: "'Darling, when it came to the point, I couldn't see myself being Mary Magdalen to his

Jesus Christ. No, sir'" (176). Missing the chance to hear Sophie's reactions to Larry's initial attempt to rescue her, as well as all the events that followed, remains one of the most disappointing features of the novel. Her comments on the end of the relationship, included in all their color and ambivalence in this scene at Toulon, only emphasize how much her observations are missed elsewhere in the narrative.

Larry, too, is eventually allowed to discuss his feelings briefly, after the engagement to Sophie is broken. His comments, made to Maugham after Sophie's death, surprise Maugham and raise questions about the true extent and nature of his courtship with Sophie: "'The only woman I've met whom I could have married was poor Sophie. . . . She had a lovely soul, fervid, aspiring, and generous. Her ideas were greathearted'" (236). Maugham is surprised that Larry hasn't mentioned Isabel as a woman he could have married, but the subject changes quickly and Larry soon leaves. Larry has hinted that his attachment to Sophie ranged beyond the confines of pity or self-sacrifice, but the issue receives no further development. The conversation with Maugham is Larry's final appearance in the novel, and the questions remain even after he has gone. .

Suzanne Rouvier's relationship with Larry is easier to summarize and, when compared to Maugham's underdevelopment of Larry's relationship with Sophie, much more fully realized. Suzanne and Larry are discussed in detail in only one scene, but the scene features Suzanne herself as the source of the information, and she is able to explain the parameters of the relationship, and the reason for the story's inclusion in the novel, in clear terms. By allowing her to narrate a straightforward account of the time she spent with Larry, Maugham adds to the positive aura of her

portrayal and avoids many of the problems of vague development and unanswered questions that plague other plot strands. There are no great mysteries in this relationship.

Larry's affair with Suzanne is important for two primary reasons: it humanizes Larry in an important way, and it provides one of the rare examples of Larry's much-discussed goodness in actual practice. The humanization of Larry in this segment comes through the fact that his time with Suzanne finally brings sex into his life as a facet of his characterization. Larry has mentioned sexual attraction before, and the role of sex in his character development will be discussed in a future section, but Suzanne's discussion of the sexual aspect of their attachment helps to remove the halo of unbelievable goodness and purity that threatens to make Larry seem completely unreal. He is, after all, a human being, and it is refreshing to see him respond in a human way to some of the temptations and pleasures of life.

Conversely, Suzanne's account also makes the saintly aspects of Larry's personality more vivid and palatable. Her recollection of Larry's altruistic behavior provides one of the rare times in the novel in which Larry is actually shown doing something genuinely caring and selfless. Other characters often speak of his goodness, but his benevolent intervention into Suzanne's life and his rescuing of both her and her child from illness and poverty are fully developed examples of this generosity of spirit in action. Such tangible evidence is infinitely preferable to the continual vague praises of some inherent general goodness, and reader perception of Larry can only be positively influenced by this first-person account of his sincere and giving nature.

Suzanne, too, benefits from Maugham's excellent writing in this exposition of her relationship with Larry. The gratitude and love Suzanne expresses in her reminiscence seem heartfelt and important to her, and the wilder or less acceptable elements of her way of life are tempered by this glimpse of her tender side. Maugham, wisely, displays restraint by not overplaying Suzanne's memories in this scene. The dialogue is composed in a smooth and flowing fashion and is naturally motivated by events occurring at this time in Suzanne's life. She finishes her fond remembrance, Maugham has accomplished his two-fold illumination of Larry's character, and this subplot is concluded.

A short summary of the conclusions concerning Larry's relationships with the women in his life reveals varying degrees of success within the three individual elements of this plot. The scenes featuring Larry and Isabel are generally well-written and vibrant, faring much better than the scenes revolving around the other major plot, Larry's quest. Most important scenes in this relationship are discussed by one or both of those involved. Scenes dealing with Larry and Sophie offer excellent potential for depth and narrative excitement, but the plot is ultimately left underdeveloped. The inclusion of one good scene provides a tantalizing hint of what could have been accomplished had more attention been focused on the minds of these two characters. Finally, the affair between Larry and Suzanne is strengthened narratively by complete and economically developed scenes that are smoothly written and of natural interest to readers. This relationship never reaches the level of importance achieved by the other two, but its depiction remains a solid accomplishment. These three women, interacting with Larry in a variety of situations and

circumstances, provide much of the novel's drama and interest. Each woman has a life outside of her strong attachment to Larry, but each woman does find her life tied to Larry's in some important way.

Elliott's Life and Death

The third and final plot strand to be analyzed concerns Elliott Templeton, Isabel's uncle. To many readers and critics, he is the most memorable element of the entire novel. His story, played out from the early pages of the novel until his dramatic death near the narrative's end, is one of The Razor's Edge's major subplots. Much of the success and vividness of this plot element is due to Maugham's masterful characterization of Elliott, a creation to be discussed in the next section. Another key ingredient, however, involves the construction of Elliott's scenes. This plot analysis involves critical discussion of that construction.

Elliott Templeton's world lies just outside that of the novel's main characters, and his periodic appearances and disappearances during most of the story secure his spot as an important, but ultimately tangential, character. His witty asides and one liners help to develop the reader's perception of his personality, but his role in the primary plot remains secondary. His one big scene--the scene that thrusts him firmly into the limelight and the hearts and minds of readers--occurs on his deathbed. This scene provides Elliott's graduation to the center of The Razor's Edge.

The episode begins with a description of Elliott in his bedroom, attired in his blue silk pajamas with the embroidered initials and count's

crown, an insignia that also appears on the matching sheets (181). After presenting this striking visual image, Maugham moves into the specifics of Elliott's demise.

From the standpoint of composition, these final scenes of Elliott's life contain a proportionately high amount of dialogue as opposed to narrative summary or commentary. The meetings between Maugham and Elliott, two men who never seem at a loss for words, move at a fast pace while hitting several humorous highs and emotional lows. As the days wear on and Elliott's health wears down, accounts of the banter between the two men are replaced largely by Maugham's observations concerning Elliott's appearance, behavior, and the behavior of others who come to visit. Maugham is, in a sense, pulling the reader away from Elliott and shifting the view of the dying man from a personal to a more distanced perspective. The effect is appropriate and convincing.

Maugham's final visit to Elliott's bedside, after the Bishop has come and gone, provides Elliott with enough incentive to rally from his serious state and, temporarily, return to his old form. Maugham resumes his concentration on dialogue for the reporting of this emotional final scene, and his last memories of Elliott are enhanced by his decision to present them in Elliott's own words: "'I have always moved in the best society in Europe and I have no doubt that I shall move in the best society in heaven'" (191). Elliott's death scene is appropriately dramatic (as he undoubtedly would have wanted it), and his final words are both comical and pathetic. After uttering a last-second refusal to a party invitation he had desperately sought, he chuckles, says, in a loud voice, "'the old bitch,'" and sinks into a coma (192). Maugham is saddened, he reflects

on the ultimate futility and triviality of Elliott's life, and the scene is soon concluded.

The power and economy of these scenes make them, by general consensus, among the novel's best. Expertly constructed and filled with humor, pathos, and despair, Elliott's death scenes are more than just a tossed-off way of killing one of the novel's ancillary characters. They serve to cement the reader's perception of Elliott, to add depth to the perception of Maugham, and, through the mention of Elliott's will, to set in motion subsequent events. The deathbed scene parallels Larry's moment of illumination in its depiction of the supreme moment of a long and involved quest, although Elliott's quest for the ultimate social status is far removed from Larry's intensely personal explorations. Important to the overall plot structure of the novel and satisfying as an entertaining and engrossing subplot, the tracing of Elliott's journey through life is one of The Razor's Edge's most accomplished features.

Characterization

This second primary area of exploration involves Maugham's creation of individual characters. Six of these characters will be discussed in some detail--Larry, Isabel, Elliott, Sophie, Suzanne, and Maugham himself--and these analyses will be followed by briefer examinations of three interesting minor characters whose lives swirl around the plot's center. Maugham presents a wide variety of characters in this novel, and his creations achieve different levels of success. Some reach full development, others remain one-dimensional, but all are worthy of further study.

Larry Darrell

Larry is both the main character in The Razor's Edge and the most difficult to characterize. At several places in the novel Maugham admits that he is unable to capture the essence of this man on paper, and on the book's final page he looks back at the job he has done with this remark:

I am of the earth, earthy; I can only admire the radiance of such a rare creature, I cannot step into his shoes and enter into his inmost heart as I sometimes think I can do with persons more nearly allied to the common run of men. (250)

Similarly, Suzanne Rouvier, one of the few people in the novel who actually seems to have known Larry on a truly personal and substantive level, says of him: "'You might as well fall in love with a reflection in the water or a ray of sunshine or a cloud in the sky'" (145). Clearly, Maugham is refusing to attempt to completely define Larry Darrell, choosing instead to offer intriguing and sometimes confusing insights without wrapping these insights into a coherent and fully developed whole. As Maugham scholar M. K. Naik has observed, "The discerning reader may murmur ruefully that Maugham has once again fenced with his problem, instead of grappling with it boldly" (97).

Two of the major problem areas in Larry's characterization occur, as might be expected, in the area of his dramatic quest. Specifically, these problems involve Larry's depiction as he is making the change to a more spiritual value system and his behavior, in terms of benevolence and self-giving, after he returns from India.

Some weak points concerning the quest as a primary subplot have been discussed previously, but there are related difficulties that plague

this equally important area of Larry's development as a character. In particular, Larry is not fully and believably developed because he is never shown to be struggling as he makes what would be, for anyone else, an arduous and trying transformation to the spiritual life and philosophy of Vedanta. He seems to end his relationship with Isabel, both in Chicago and later in Paris, with very little emotional hardship or regret. Similarly, Maugham never allows Larry to show any manifestation of the seemingly endless cycle of anguish, struggle, temporary setbacks, self-doubt, and other conflicting emotions that certainly must accompany such a significant shift in one's basic philosophy of life. Perhaps Larry is naturally saintlike and already in possession of most of the identifying qualities, but, if that is the case, why bother with the lengthy philosophical and mystical passages at all? He might just as well be trekking across the globe in search of the perfect tan if the importance and difficulty of his quest is based on the amount of inner turmoil and need for change it brings about in him. Some sense of the struggle would have helped to humanize Larry, to increase reader identification with him, and to add drama and power to the questing sequences.

Once Larry has returned to Paris with his new outlook on life, some tangible proof is needed of his supposedly deeply felt and even outwardly visible change. The strongest demonstration of this new saintliness provided by Maugham, however, is Larry's ability to cure Gray's migraine headache--hardly a feat to ponder and perceive as the indication of a great inner transformation. Many of the other characters comment on Larry's new air of calmness and serenity, and his sketchily developed attempt to rescue Sophie has the potential to reflect his newfound

spiritual essence, but the fact remains that the reader never really sees Larry doing anything to reinforce all the words about his selfless behavior. The magic coin he uses to mysteriously remove Gray's headache is the closest Maugham chooses to come to an actual demonstration.

One final area of Larry's characterization remains to be explored-- Larry and sex. Maugham describes Larry early in the novel as "neither handsome nor plain" (14), but during the rest of the story he is described in increasingly favorable physical terms. Isabel, obsessed with jealousy, continually asserts her belief that Larry is still a virgin, even ten years after they have broken their engagement. Maugham provides enough facts to indicate that this is not the case, although it is also clear that love and romance do not play an important role in Larry's plans for his own future. Nevertheless, women find him attractive, he succumbs to two of them over the course of the novel, and Isabel, not one of the lucky two, is seen at novel's end to be holding fast to her opinion: "'I know all about Larry's sex life. There isn't any'" (244). Suzanne Rouvier, however, provides the most authoritative, and cleverest, comment on the subject. In the midst of one of Maugham's best-written passages of the novel, she says: "'He was like a man so preoccupied that he forgets to eat, yet when you put a good dinner before him he eats it with appetite'" (149). The entire subject of Larry and sex is handled well in the novel and is one of the strengths of Maugham's characterization. The topic provides some humor, some zest, and a valuable humanizing element, yet it never seems overstressed.

There can be endless speculation concerning a character of Larry's complexity, but the fact remains that Maugham presents little in the way

of concrete information. Larry's outside is described in several rather detailed physical accounts, but his inside remains vague and remote. He has the makings of a fascinating character and Maugham obviously intended him to be the center of the novel, but the author lacked either the ability or the inclination to bring him fully alive.

Isabel Bradley Maturin

Isabel, in contrast, is brought fully alive, and she is a complex and marvelous creation. She develops (or deteriorates) as the story progresses, yet her every action seems in character and true to some imagined overall framework for her behavior. Critics and scholars have compared her to leading female characters in other Maugham works--and there are similarities--but she remains a self-contained original. She cannot be easily described, nor is there one categorical reader reaction to her. Tracing her development over the course of the novel can help bring the brilliance of her creation into focus.

Isabel is introduced early in the novel with one of Maugham's characteristic paragraphs of physical description and narrative impression. Among the adjectives he uses in this description are "comely," "sparkling," "vivacious," "radiant," and "playful" (13). These spirited initial impressions are important factors in Isabel's early appearance as a likeable and sympathetic character.

No fault is assigned by the narrator in Isabel and Larry's breakup, and neither character appears exceptionally evil or unreasonable. Isabel's love for Larry, as she expresses it directly to him and in conversation with Maugham, seems genuine, and Larry's desire to seek answers to life's questions, though unfocused, seems sincerely felt and revealed

without malice. For the moment, Maugham is not requiring the reader to choose sides, and a gentle sympathy surrounds Isabel as Larry leaves for Paris.

Reunited in Paris the following year, Isabel retains her sense of patient desperation—but the wear begins to show. In the tense scene at Larry's apartment she tries logic, shame, patriotism, and even love to convince Larry to return to America with her. In failure, she remains strong and identifiable, but the hurt and unhappiness she is trying to hide are pushing her toward a less favorable course of action.

Isabel's behavior on the last night of her stay in Paris is the first clear sign that this accommodating, vibrant girl may be edging toward a scheming deviousness that will cast her in a much more evil light. Discussing the eventful night, and her attempted seduction of Larry, with her confidante Maugham, Isabel's outspoken nature reveals a more conniving side of her personality. She admits that she thought Larry would "knuckle under" during the showdown at his apartment, saying, "'I knew he was weak. . . . I could always do anything I wanted with him'" (76). The more she talks, the worse she sounds. Her plan to trap Larry into returning to America, even though she finds herself unable to go through with it, falls on the wrong side of the line separating acceptable tactics a jilted lover can use from those that are simply too underhanded. Her spirit remains admirable, but she can no longer be seen in the same light after this hint of the lengths to which she may be willing to go in order to win Larry back.

Unfortunately, no scenes are provided to detail Isabel's subsequent decision to marry Gray. Given this exclusion, it is impossible to know

if she truly intended to give up on Larry or if she married Gray solely for financial security and public standing while, deep inside, intending to find a way to return Larry to her life. Whatever the case, Larry's re-entry into the Paris scene ten years later demonstrates that Isabel's desperation, possessiveness, and jealousy have plummeted to new depths and seem almost beyond her conscious control. Her envy and determination to keep Larry to herself are obvious and very nearly comical when Sophie enters the picture as a perceived rival for Larry's affections. Isabel has refused to admit to herself that Larry may have had other romantic flings during the ten years they have been apart, and she now bristles with jealousy when another woman can put a gleam in Larry's eyes--even if the gleam is really the result of fond recollections of a young girl who no longer exists in the emotionally scarred body of the present-day Sophie. Isabel tries to pass off Larry's loving reminiscences as jokes in an attempt to defuse his growing attachment to Sophie, and she denigrates Sophie to all who will listen. She feels threatened and seems intent on striking back, and these newer personality traits are not attractive or favorable.

Fortunately for readers, some of the most enticing characters in all of fiction are not attractive or favorable. As Isabel increases her hostility toward Sophie, she becomes more interesting and fully developed. Her scene with Maugham after she has learned of Larry and Sophie's upcoming wedding, discussed earlier, is an excellent blend of comedy, serious undertones, and character delineation. The tense undercurrents at the Ritz luncheon, contrasted with Maugham's continuous praise of Isabel's "good behavior," remind readers of how sweetly sociable Isabel

can appear on the surface, no matter what manner of evil may be brewing inside. The Ritz scene also provides the idea for the most unforgivable of all of Isabel's machinations--her use of the zubrovka to chase Sophie out of Larry's life.⁵

Isabel's manipulation of Sophie is ingenious, but unpleasant to contemplate. It is a heartless act, made even worse by her subsequent denial of responsibility and, when finally forced to admit the truth, her complete lack of remorse. This exchange with Maugham shows Isabel at her absolute worst and is one of the most chilling scenes in all of Maugham's fiction:

"You cut her throat as surely as if you'd drawn the knife across it with your own hands."

"She was bad, bad, bad. I'm glad she's dead." She threw herself into a chair. "Give me a cocktail, damn you."

I went over and mixed another.

"You are a mean devil," she said as she took it from me. Then she allowed herself to smile. Her smile was like a child's that knows it's been naughty, but thinks it can wheedle you by its ingenuous charm not to be cross. (241)

Isabel seems totally inhuman in this scene, a conscienceless, self-absorbed, spoiled psychopath. Her tears come moments later, when she learns that Larry has left for America. She sheds no tears for Sophie.

Isabel is a fascinating character--a complex mixture of beautiful sincerity and calculated artificiality, of tender, genuine love and unfathomable coldness of heart. Appropriately, since he created this interesting amalgam, Maugham provides a simple and accurate final appraisal of Isabel Bradley Maturin: "'You lack only one thing to make you completely enchanting. . . . Tenderness'" (243).

⁵Zubrovka is, as Elliott explained to those at the Ritz, "the Polish form of vodka but in every way vastly superior" (172).

Elliott Templeton

Isabel's Uncle Elliott is generally regarded as the star of The Razor's Edge, the scene-stealer who absconds with all the best lines and all the attention Maugham intended for Larry. Elliott is not a deep or complex character, and he goes through none of the soul-searching changes or evolution that characterize the lives of many of his associates in the novel. He is a social climbing snob who lives from one party to the next, yet he is also a generous and affectionate lonely old man. Perhaps his characterization is not so simple.

Despite the antagonism between them--from one side at least--and their strikingly different outlooks on what is important in life, Elliott and Larry share one significant trait. Both men felt the need or desire to flee from America and its system of societal values in order to search for a way of life more in tune with their own individual philosophies. The roads they choose to follow could hardly be more different, but this fact does not diminish the existence of the bond. The success of Maugham's characterization of Elliott only intensifies the perception that the other traveler, Larry, is not satisfactorily developed. As Maugham biographer Ted Morgan states, "Some critics felt that the snob's progress was better charted than the pilgrim's" (482). Maugham does, indeed, seem more comfortable in his presentation of Elliott, and the result is a more incisive portrait of a more believable man.

Many of Elliott's lines and scenes are, in a word, funny. He is an outspoken and single-minded man, continually astonished at others' breaches of etiquette or good taste. His report of Larry's shockingly gauche behavior in Paris is hilarious: "I couldn't believe that any

young fellow in his senses could come to Paris without evening clothes'" (44). Beyond the value as humor, however, this remark and others like it also reveal a great deal about Elliott's own personality and outlook on life.

Though he has managed by the novel's opening scenes to ascend to a precarious position atop the social ladder, he remains loyal to his hopelessly provincial sister, Louisa, and her daughter Isabel. His interest (or meddling) in Isabel's romantic affairs is comical, but it also demonstrates his genuine concern for her, her future, and, more self-servingly, the family's reputation. Living in France, "'which after all is the only civilized country in the world,'" as Elliott repeatedly points out, he sees nothing wrong with arranging a marriage between Isabel and her eager and more economically suitable pursuer, Gray Maturin (24). As the world's values and customs march inexorably forward, Elliott clings to the vestiges of the aristocratic past.

Maugham, as narrator, mentions Elliott's generosity and kindness several times, but it is most memorably demonstrated in actual deed by Elliott's assumption of responsibility for the support of Isabel, Gray, and their children following Gray's financial and mental collapse during the throes of America's depression. Elliott installs the family in his Paris apartment and moves himself to the Riviera, in search of greener social pastures. His explanation, to Maugham, of this generous act is laced with humor, provided unintentionally through Elliott's high sense of what is and is not socially acceptable: "'They live like pigs, Isabel without a maid, no governess for the children . . .'" (108). Thus, while skillfully using these comic lines to prevent Elliott's generosity

from becoming overwhelmingly sweet, Maugham is able to show this warm and caring side of the social gadabout. His acts of kindness are not surrounded by the aura of total goodheartedness that permeates Larry's charitable deeds, but they are equally important and at least equally convincing. This juxtaposition of Elliott's generous side with his more prominent socially obsessive side works quite well throughout the novel.

Elliott's death scene, discussed earlier, is justifiably praised in many studies of Maugham's work. The folly of Elliott's concentration on parties and social position is made clear as he pulls himself out of bed, looking ghastly and pale, in order to be seen at the season's big social events. While Maugham could have made Elliott into a caricature and poked fun at his silly behavior, he chooses instead to engage the reader in a more substantive emotion: genuine pity. When Elliott finally delivers his immortal exit line and dies, Maugham takes a moment to reflect on the man, his life, and the warm feelings that existed between the two cronies: Elliott was "an old, kind friend. It made me sad to think how useless and trivial his life had been" (193). Elliott provides the moments of greatest humor in The Razor's Edge, but he also evokes the greatest sadness. Kinder than Isabel, more human than Larry, he emerges, for all his buffoonery, as the most likeable of the novel's major characters. The memory of his funniest lines remains long after the novel is completed, but so do the haunting words of his own deathbed recognition of the futility of his life:

"They've eaten my food and drunk my wine. I've run their errands for them. I've made their parties for them. . . . And what have I got out of it? Nothing, nothing, nothing. There's not one of them who cares if I live or die." (184)

Sophie MacDonald

Sophie is such an incidental character in her early appearances in The Razor's Edge that, until her reappearance, she has been completely forgotten by the other characters and the novel's readers. Her later scenes are full of nervousness and despair, with Larry's reflections of her gentler past serving as the only counterbalances to her meteoric rush to death. Sophie is not a fully developed character. She functions primarily as a method of injecting some decadence and violence into a novel that may otherwise collapse under its own religious and mystical weight. Whatever the limits of her development and function, she remains worthy of brief analysis.

Maugham, in his first mention of Sophie, calls her a "shy drab girl" (18). She is obviously not intended to stand out in her early scenes in the novel, serving primarily as an answer lady for the narrator's questions about people and relationships at the introductory party. Her role in this initial plot exposition is an important one, but she seems destined to fade away as the action shifts to Paris.

Shy and drab could never describe her when she turns up at the seedy Rue de Lappe some 12 years later. Maugham will soon explain, vaguely, how she came to this unfortunate physical condition and geographical location, but for now he provides a description of a girl with brightly bleached hair, colorful and criminally overdone make-up, and "a bold-faced shamelessness." She had "a certain vicious attractiveness about her," and "looked more of a slut than any woman there" (154). This Sophie is definitely not destined to be forgotten.

Intent on characterizing Sophie through outward appearance rather

than allowing her to express her inner feelings, Maugham next describes her look at the Ritz luncheon. Larry's attempts to reform her have taken all the color out of her appearance, and she is now pallid, drab, and devoid of the "basely alluring" appeal that had been so prominent at the Rue de Lappe. During the luncheon Maugham observes that Sophie has little to say and seems as lifeless and washed-out within as she appears from without. She is definitely not flourishing under Larry's tutelage.

After Isabel's zubrovka ploy and Sophie's escape from marriage to Larry, Maugham the narrator meets up with Sophie in Toulon and she is given a rare chance to deliver her own insights and opinions concerning the dramatic events that have led her to this place and pathetic state. The scene, discussed earlier in the plot analysis, begins with another of Maugham's reports on Sophie's clothing and grooming habits, as he informs the reader that she was "as heavily made up as when we had run across her at the Rue de Lappe" (176). Fortunately, she is allowed to speak freely, and her character, though pitiful, seems more real and vibrant at this sad juncture than at any other moment in the novel. She happily informs Maugham of the availability of good opium and good men in this port town, and she offers a sampling of her own philosophy of life. After losing her husband and baby and being pushed away from Larry, her view of life has come to this: "'Life's hell anyway, but if there is any fun to be got out of it, you're only a god-damn fool if you don't get it'" (179). In spite of Isabel's continued insistence--delivered to anyone who will listen--that Sophie is weak, bad, and deserving of whatever misfortune she has brought upon herself, Maugham's characterization of Sophie elicits compassion, not condemnation. As the meeting between

Maugham and Sophie ends, the narrator offers an unsettling foreshadowing of the impending demise of this seemingly doomed young woman:

"You like 'em tough, don't you?"
 "The tougher the better."
 "One of these days you'll get your throat cut."
 "I wouldn't be surprised," she grinned. "Good
 riddance to bad rubbish." (179)

Her plight need not be romanticized or elevated to a level beyond its secondary importance to the novel as a whole, but such a relentlessly unfortunate existence must be acknowledged and, ultimately, pitied. In the unusual love triangle of Larry, Sophie, and Isabel, Sophie is the only true victim.

Sophie's characterization in the novel never develops into a dynamic or fully rounded portrayal, but her presentation is both important to the plot and interesting in itself. She is not one of Maugham's most satisfying literary creations, yet she remains an involving and memorable part of this story.

Suzanne Rouvier

Suzanne, though less prominent than even Sophie in the overall flow of The Razor's Edge's narrative, emerges as both an interesting character and a useful tool in the novel's analysis. Her freewheeling lifestyle and ability to overcome personal setbacks and tragedy provide a welcome contrast to the downswing in fortunes of Elliott and Sophie. The success she enjoys at novel's end is especially upbeat and refreshing.

Suzanne's way of life seems appealingly bohemian. Maugham describes her as "not beautiful; in fact she was rather ugly" (137), yet she uses her own stamina and persuasive powers to establish a life in the Parisian

artists' colony as a model and mistress. Though she falls upon hard times physically, financially, and emotionally, she exhibits a resolve and inner strength that are especially admirable in this novel full of weak, immature, and occasionally evil characters.

Although she has served her purpose, in terms of plot advancement, by the middle of the novel, Maugham chooses to reintroduce her very near the story's end. Her final conversation with Maugham shows her to be the closest The Razor's Edge comes to a genuine, unaffected, hard-working inhabitant of the real world. She is never developed to a degree that would repay detailed speculation and study, but she remains a warm example of the use of initiative, luck, and perseverance to overcome hardships that flatten many others. She is, above all, a survivor. Sophie could have used her as a friend.

Somerset Maugham

It is often difficult to separate the author of a work from his first-person narrator, but when the two people share the same name, occupation, and general personality, the task becomes even more forbidding. Nevertheless, Maugham as narrator is an integral part of this story. His performance as the reader's eyes and ears will be examined in the section concerning plot exposition/point of view, but facets of his characterization merit brief discussion here.

At all times and in every way, Maugham appears every inch the urbane and unflappable observer who is drawn into the assorted problems of his friends and acquaintances without ever becoming a part of them. He shares traits with some of his fellow characters, feels pity for the misfortunes of others, but remains outside the quest, the love triangle, and the

varied twists and turns these lives take. He is present during some key moments in the drama (such as the Rue de Lappe encounter with Sophie and the Ritz luncheon), hears about most of the other events second- or thirdhand, and does, on occasion, actually do something to affect the plot in a minor way (his trip to Princess Novemali's house to secure a party invitation for the dying Elliott). Professions of love, hatred, despair, confusion, and countless other emotions are hurled at him nearly everywhere he goes, but he maintains his aloofness and composure through it all. At times he offers insightful character analysis, as when he teasingly interrupts Larry's explanation of how the Indian experiences have changed him with, "'You ought to be shut up, Larry. You're as crazy as a loon'" (226). At other times he hears remarkable outbursts from his acquaintances, such as Isabel's confession of her role in Sophie's downfall, yet he remains curiously unaffected. His reactions often guide the reader's own responses to events and characters and, playing a writer, his constant interpretation and observation seem quite natural.

Other characters' impressions of Maugham himself are almost nonexistent. His detachment and clearer perspective make him much in demand as a confidant, and much of the information and secrets he hears seem very nearly forced upon him. Isabel, particularly, values his opinions and his perceived influence on Larry, and she sometimes pleads with him to assume a more active role in the proceedings (165). Elliott, for all his snobbishness, also uses Maugham as a sounding board and finds comfort, even though he doesn't always agree, in his friend's opinions. Maugham's characterization is decidedly flat in development, but this static nature is appropriate for his role as commentator, not focus of reader attention.

Other Characters

In a novel of this size and scope, many secondary characters contribute color, help to advance a specific element of the plot, or provide some other function in the overall structure of personalities and events. Three of the most interesting will be mentioned here.

Gray Maturin. As his name suggests, Gray is a drab character, already quite mature and ready to settle down while his friend Larry remains overwhelmed with the desire to travel, study, and learn. Gray is likeable in an earnest and simple way, and Isabel, though lost in her love for Larry, does appreciate her husband's kindness and genuine love for her. Gray is very success- and career-oriented and very American--a perfect contrast to Larry's anti-materialism and Elliott's global outlook. His complete mental collapse after being suddenly bankrupted reveals a darker side of his character, but Maugham chooses not to investigate this underside in any great depth. Thus Gray remains, even at his worst, the all-American boy, existing in a simpler world than that inhabited by his wife and her circle of family and friends.

Paul Barton. A disfavored protégé of Elliott Templeton, Paul is so like Elliott that Elliott comes to despise him. Impossible as it may seem, Paul is even more obsessed with the social hierarchy than is his mentor. He has used Elliott to gain an introduction into the high life and then dumped him once a self-sufficient status has been achieved, and Elliott is now bitterly angry and envious of Paul's youth, brashness, and splashing success. Paul is never an actual speaking character in the novel, but his presence haunts Elliott as life slips away. As Elliott

lies on his bed and contemplates the end of his own life and the wide-open vistas still remaining for Paul, his bitter jealousy is painfully obvious:

"Whenever I wake up in the night and hear a mouse scratching away in the wainscot I say, 'That's Paul Barton climbing.' Believe me, my dear fellow, he'll end up in the House of Lords. Thank God, I shan't be alive to see it." (183)

Kosti. Larry's mystical Polish friend, encountered while he is working with Larry at the mine in Lens, is important to The Razor's Edge because of his role in opening Larry's eyes to the world of mysticism and the possibility of union with a Supreme Being. Kosti's physical bulk and brash exterior camouflage a sensitive and unsettled soul, and the revelation of this spiritual undertone helps Larry focus his own yearnings. The two men leave the mine to wander in the countryside together, ending up in Germany before they finally separate. The precise system of Kosti's beliefs is never explored, but he remains a colorful and lively minor character. He is one of the few people encountered during Larry's quest who actually has some recognizably human qualities.

These nine character sketches of The Razor's Edge's most interesting and important inhabitants illustrate the diversity and the complexity of the various components of Maugham's novel. The author's most challenging creation, Larry Darrell, is never fully realized, but Maugham does develop some well-drawn and multifaceted personalities in other portraits he provides. His attempts at characterization are sometimes ambitious, and the ultimate partial failure of some of the attempts is still preferable to a world of static and shallow creations. Taken as a group, the characters represent a commendable creative effort.

Setting

This term refers to the actual role of location in a literary work and, to quote Wellek and Warren, the use of "description as distinguished from narration" (220). Setting can be an aid in the establishment of characterization and can also, as mentioned previously, help to express the atmosphere or tone of the work. This examination of the role of setting in The Razor's Edge will examine the topic from both of these perspectives. The role of Paris as a setting--specifically its use in advancing the plot and the development of characters--will be investigated first, followed by a more general look at the use of descriptive passages to augment the narrative and help create the novel's mood and tone. In ways that can be pinpointed and in ways that are harder to define, setting is an important contributor to The Razor's Edge.

As the novel unfolds, the city of Paris begins to assume an importance equal to that of many of the characters. Even without development or substantial description, the introduction of Paris as a setting for much of the action injects an exotic and somewhat otherworldly atmosphere into the proceedings. Beyond this general ambience, however, Maugham uses Paris to strengthen some of his character portraits and to aid in the logical development of his plot.

The fundamental philosophical and social differences between Larry and Elliott--differences that serve both to develop character and to propel certain strands of the narrative--are delineated by the two men's views of, and lives in, Paris. When Larry informs Isabel of his plans to move to Paris in search of answers to the questions that trouble him,

his vision of the city is clear, simple, and inviting. He envisions his time in the city as a calming influence and a chance to explore his inner feelings and desires:

"I know no one there. There'd be no one to interfere with me. I went to Paris several times on leave. I don't know why, but I've got it into my head that everything that's muddled in my mind would grow clear. It's a funny place, it gives you the feeling that there you can think out your thoughts to the end. I think there I may be able to see my way before me." (40)

Elliott, however, sees Paris as the social center of the civilized world, and he seeks to impose his view of Paris on the grandiose plans for Larry's arrival:

"I understand that he got a glimpse of Paris during the war, and I can't blame him if he was captivated by the only city in the world fit for a civilized man to live in. . . . I'll keep an eye on him. I'll introduce him to the right people . . . I can guarantee to show him a side of French life that very few Americans have a chance of seeing." (33)

Obviously, one of these incompatible plans must give, and the defeated Elliott sulks for the rest of the novel over Larry's unpardonable lack of social grace and desire.

Once in Paris, the contrast between the two men is made even more noticeable by the surroundings in which they place themselves. They are both living in Paris, but Maugham provides portraits of two quite different cities. Larry's Paris is best described when he takes the visiting Isabel to see his apartment for the first time. Isabel, staying with her Uncle Elliott in his large and swank apartment and attending all the season's most prestigious parties, is unprepared for the side of Paris Larry now shows her. Maugham describes Larry's apartment as small and sparsely furnished; a drab view of another apartment building is the only sight of Paris visible from its two windows. Isabel's initial

reaction is one of disgust. "'It's awfully sordid,'" she says, and her ties to Elliott's way of life are brought clearly into focus (54). Larry and Elliott are both being enriched by some of the things they encounter in Paris, but the differences in the types of enrichment they seek are too great for even Isabel to bridge.

Paris aids in Elliott's characterization in yet another way. As he grows older, and the social world grows younger, his increasing feelings of disillusionment are reflected in his changing views of the city he had once loved so dearly. The Paris of the mid 1920's, awash with post-war cynicism, had no room for leftovers from Elliott's era, and he comes to realize this unfortunate fact with increasing bitterness. He begins to lament what he perceives to be the tragic deterioration of the Parisian social order, and he eventually moves out of the city in his own quest for personal fulfillment. Although he rebounds to the top of the social scene when he settles on the Riviera, his exile from the changing Paris marks a shift in his characterization in the novel. He is no longer just a shallow and social climbing snob, good for some comic lines and to play against Larry. These oddly endearing qualities remain intact, but they are joined by an increasingly prominent aura of sadness.

On a more general level, Maugham's use of description does indeed help to establish the atmosphere and tone of the work. Maugham is a storyteller, and while his forte in this novel is dialogue and fairly rapid narrative advancement, there are also descriptive passages that work well. Almost every major character is introduced with a paragraph of physical description, often accompanied by the narrator's first-impression evaluations of what these physical traits may mean in terms of personality and

demeanor. Larry's walk through France and Germany (with Kostî) is also sprinkled with accounts of the scenery and people he encountered, inclusions that do little to advance the actual plot but add a richness and depth to this important segment of Larry's odyssey. Finally, the somber scenes at Elliott's deathbed are strengthened with periodic descriptions of Elliott's appearance and his elegant, yet ultimately meaningless, surroundings. Here, the references to ornate furnishings and royal-crested bed linen help to underscore the depiction of the final, irrevocable superficiality and triviality of Elliott's life. The surroundings are lush and beautiful, but they are of little comfort when mortality makes an unwelcome visit.

While achievements in plot and characterization are perhaps the most clearly evident elements of The Razor's Edge, setting plays an important role as well. Maugham uses the qualities of setting to aid in plot exposition, character definition and contrast, and to reinforce his creations of separate moods and tones for individual scenes.

Plot Exposition/Point of View

First-person narrators are fairly common in fiction, but rarely do they cause as many problems in plot exposition as are encountered in The Razor's Edge. By forcing himself to provide, within the story space, a method for having access to every event and thought he presents, Maugham paints himself into a corner from which he is unable to satisfactorily escape. Maugham cannot place his readers within the mind of any of his characters, and, particularly in Larry's case, this exclusion looms as a major problem. The novel is not ruined by this approach to plot

exposition, but there are awkward moments, glaring omissions, and a general sense that the same material could have generated much greater power with a less restrictive narrative approach. The specific problems are related, stemming from essentially the same source, but they can be broken down into distinct areas:

1. Key scenes are missing because the narrator was not present when they took place or was unable to get a participant to talk about them. Some of these have already been mentioned at relevant points in the plot or character analysis, but their impact as a group merits additional exploration.

2. Nearly every major scene that is reported is filtered through a participant's memory. Very few of the important scenes were observed by Maugham himself. Instead, the reader hears of them after the fact and through the subjective recollections of an involved party.

3. The most fully developed characters turn out to be those who spend a lot of time talking to Maugham. Isabel and Elliott excel as character portraits because they reveal all their thoughts and secrets to Maugham at every available moment. The more reticent characters, particularly Sophie and Larry, suffer in the depth and quality of their portrayals because of their unavailability for these revealing talks.

4. Maugham can attribute motive only when it is apparent to the narrator as a detached observer. Since he is unable to report the inner workings of the characters' minds, the actual thought processes that spur these people into their often surprising actions usually remain hidden. Any motives that are reported are based on information other characters tell Maugham, not on objectively observed information.

From the first page, Maugham presents The Razor's Edge as a true story, with the names changed "to save embarrassment to people still living" (1). "I have invented nothing" (1), he says, and the reader is drawn into the illusion of a true story that Maugham claims to have observed and experienced. With such a beginning, Maugham has no choice other than to present the facts as he subsequently does. He could, however, have been more thorough.

To expand on the four problem areas mentioned previously, the first two can be seen as primarily concerned with plot while the remaining pair deal with character development. In the area of plot, M. K. Naik has made this observation:

It is significant, again, that Maugham's old technique of the detached observer telling the story is, once more, responsible for the lack of depth and power in The Razor's Edge. The crucial moments in the story, which are fertile in emotional intensity, are reported rather scrappily, and thereby lose much of their power. (96)

Truly, the novel, for all its merits, is filled with missed opportunities for more gripping presentations of many of the plot twists. The night at the Rue de Lappe and the luncheon at the Ritz come alive, as many other scenes do not, because Maugham was present and is able to offer his own interpretation of what transpired at these important meetings. Elliott's death scenes would be much less memorable and effective if they had been reported secondhand and, consequently, without the value of Maugham's observations concerning the undercurrents of meaning surrounding Elliott's behavior. Isabel and Larry's stormy picnic in Chicago and equally emotional scene in Larry's Paris apartment are both reported by Isabel to Maugham and, while still vital to the plot, are distanced by the lapse

in time and the extra interpretation her reporting entails. There is no reasonable way Maugham could have overheard these conversations (unless he hid in the bushes or in the closet), but this fact only supports the general assertion that his chosen method of plot exposition raises unnecessary problems and provides additional hindrances to the novel's effectiveness. The weaknesses in both the questing subplot and the story line involving Larry and Sophie's relationship need not be discussed in further detail here, since they have previously been explored. However, it should be clear that the reasons for these weaknesses can, in large part, be seen to be related to this almost unworkable narrative straitjacket imposed by the use of a narrator/participant. Missing and underdeveloped scenes could have been incorporated quite smoothly into the narrative flow if these restrictions had not been in place.

Characterization involves similar problems. Since Maugham is unable to present the actual thoughts of anyone but his narrator, reader's impressions of the other characters must be formed by their conversations in the narrator's presence, secondhand reports of other conversations, or speculation based on opinions offered by friends and enemies. When an important meeting or conversation takes place involving characters who don't generally tell all to Maugham--such as Larry and Sophie's private meetings after he has found her at the Rue de Lappe--there is no workable method of including the scene in the novel. Consequently, the characters who do volunteer information to the narrator are the characters who receive the fullest development.

At times, Maugham does take extraordinary measures to include information that will not logically flow through his narrative structure. This

type of effort is most evident in Chapter Six, which is composed almost entirely of Larry's reflections on his quest and the lessons he has learned. The narrator is present to overhear and guide Larry's comments--as he must be if the observations are to be included in the novel--but the chapter belongs to Larry. Although the conversation is a detour from the progression of The Razor's Edge's plot and is introduced as such, Maugham considered some peek into Larry's mind to be essential to the novel as a whole. The information emerges as too little, too late, but it is a welcome and partially successful attempt to explore the complexities of Larry's mind and understand his motivation. No other character is afforded the chance for such a soul-baring soliloquy, however, as Maugham concentrates on plot and provides most of his characterization through action, not in these lengthy sidetracks for more concentrated character development.

On the plus side, this method of plot exposition does occasionally provide an interesting or delayed twist in reader perception of an event or character. This success is displayed most prominently in the episode involving Isabel's use of zubrovka to knock Sophie off the wagon and back out of Larry's life. The event is discussed three separate times, through the eyes of three different people. Since Maugham was not present in Isabel's apartment when the deed actually took place, he can only report and interpret the accounts of others. This lack of narrator knowledge, however, causes a slow unfolding of the truth that is infinitely more enjoyable than a straightforward account would have been.

The first version of the incident is reported to Maugham by Elliott. Elliott was not present at the apartment on that fateful day either, and

he is actually only passing on information provided by Isabel. His brief summary of the episode is both matter-of-fact and quite critical of Sophie: "'She couldn't stick it out; she went on the booze again'" (175). Though Maugham has vague doubts that the incident is really so simple, he has no easy way to check on the accuracy of Elliott's account and the novel moves on to other matters.

Nearly a year later--but only two pages later--Maugham sees Sophie and, in her one truly revealing conversation in the entire novel, she offers the second account of that afternoon in Isabel's apartment. Sophie reveals that Isabel was conveniently absent when she arrived, and the zubrovka was in plain sight on a coffee tray. There are no overt accusations of Isabel's conscious complicity in Sophie's temptation and downfall, but the possibility is subtly planted in Maugham's, and the reader's, mind. Sophie's account is wonderfully underwritten, and the insinuation, whether intentional or unintentional, lingers.

Finally, near the end of the novel, the pieces fall together. Meeting Isabel, after Sophie's death, Maugham tells her of his Toulon visit with Sophie and the dead woman's account of being left alone with the vodka and the allure of its siren song:

"'I've thought of her story a good deal since then and the more I've thought about it the more convinced I am that there's something fishy about it. I've lunched here twenty times and you never have liquors for luncheon. . . . Why should there have been a bottle of zubrovka on the tray with the coffee cup?'" (239)

Under Maugham's rather relentless questioning, Isabel finally admits that she arranged to be absent and explicitly ordered the zubrovka to be left out for Sophie to see. The revelation is disturbing, but not wholly unexpected, and it creates a large and negative shift in reader perception

of Isabel's conduct and morality. The truth has been revealed in a suspenseful manner, aided by the use of multiple reports and lack of narrator knowledge. Unfortunately, this is a rare instance of positive results arising from Maugham's severely limited expository method.

Events in the novel are presented in haphazard order--not chronologically, but not always in order of their appearance to the narrator either--and at least five different characters are sources of the stories Maugham reports. The author often received praise for his use of a detached narrator, including Anthony Burgess' observation in The Listener:

Here again was something that English fiction needed--the dispassionate commentator . . . the man at home in Paris and Vienna but also in Seoul and Djakarta, convivial and clubbable, as ready for a game of poker as for a discussion on the Racine alexandrine, the antithesis of the slippered bookman. (qtd. in Morgan 258)

The praise is justified, to a degree. Maugham's narrator is an interesting and enjoyable character, and the narrative method is challenging and, at times, an asset. However, when a method of exposition begins to undermine a literary work's potential, and a restricted outlook places limits on a writing achievement that could otherwise have reached greater heights, the praise should be reconsidered and tempered. Very little would have been lost from The Razor's Edge if the narrator was included as just another character and an omniscient narrator was free to roam into characters' psyches and to observe any important scene. A first-person narrator with limited perspective works very well in many novels, but the limits imposed by this narrative method should be weighed against the demands of the plot. In a novel like The Razor's Edge, where so much happens internally and a knowledge of the characters is imperative, the

limits are often too restrictive. The Razor's Edge survives the problems associated with its approach to plot exposition/point of view, but the damage is noticeable.

Themes

A discussion of themes in The Razor's Edge involves a shifting of focus away from specifics of plot and toward a more general impression of overall subject matter. Several themes are addressed in this novel, and four of the most prominent merit brief analysis.

The most ambitious and fully developed thematic concern in the novel involves the religious and mystical concepts of Vedanta, Hinduism, and related beliefs. Used for much of the story as a vague catalyst for dramatic action--we know that Larry is roaming the world in search of something of a spiritual nature--this philosophic outlook receives elaboration and a much clearer focus in Chapter Six. It becomes clear at this point that Maugham wants Larry's quest to be perceived as more than just another plot strand. Larry explains the structure and rationale for his beliefs and, suddenly, some basic tenets of Eastern philosophy have worked their way into a best-selling novel. The accuracy of Maugham's representation of these beliefs is a matter for determination by someone far more qualified in the study of Eastern religions, but it is clear that the author did do some background research before launching into the intricate world of the Hindu belief system. In addition to extensive reading in such subjects as Vedanta and non-attachment, Maugham journeyed to India in 1938 and, while there, combined personal exploration with additional reading (Morgan 480).

The effect of this research and interest on The Razor's Edge itself is mixed. The talk in Chapter Six drifts, at times, toward obscurity: "'I'm not only my spirit but my body, and who can decide how much I, my individual self, am conditioned by the accident of my body?'" (211). Still, the total effect of the chapter is a welcome illumination into some of the specifics of Larry's strange behavior. His goodness and near-saintliness can still stretch the limits of credibility, but the appearance of some sense of justification for his actions does help to anchor his portrayal in more accessible and acceptable fashion.

From a thematic standpoint, it is unlikely that a troop of disciples will spring up to follow Larry after reading his philosophical explanations. And, to be fair, it is equally unlikely that Maugham intended to accomplish any such conversion. What the religious/mystical theme does accomplish is the portrayal of one of the early predecessors of a generation of young people who would turn their backs on parental expectations and material goods in order to search for a belief system that would stand up to the eternal questions of life's meaning. Larry is, for all his vagueness, the most genuinely good character in the novel, and the positive depiction of his assimilation of Eastern values is an endorsement of this type of earnest and committed searching for a workable philosophy of life. The novel is not meant to be a religious tract--sex, alcohol, and a throat-slashed murder victim provide healthy doses of sin and intrigue--but Maugham is presenting a message that ranges beyond the boundaries of just another plot element. His decision to allot 35 pages of a 250 page novel to an uninterrupted discourse on these tenets of Hindu philosophy is evidence of his more lofty intention. Maugham

realizes that this section, coming just before the story's conclusion, may prove frustrating to anxious readers, and, as mentioned previously, he offers his permission to "skip this chapter without losing the thread of such story as I have to tell" (194). Still, the chapter is there, dense but readable and interesting, and Maugham has managed to provide character delineation and philosophical speculation in one unusual and fascinating extended conversation. As a theme, it remains the most prominent and uncommon aspect of The Razor's Edge.

Other themes also play important supporting roles in the structure of this novel. From this varied group, three themes emerge as especially interesting, relevant, and integral to the story's total construction and message. Loosely defined, the three can be categorized as capitalism and materialism, America/Europe, and obligation/freedom. Their presence as thematic underpinnings is never as explicitly acknowledged as the religious theme, but their impact is measurable.

Capitalism and materialism can be used as broad terms to encompass many related characters and concepts in the novel. Several characters who emerge as contrasts to Larry's asceticism are portrayed as having strong ties to a capitalist outlook on life or a devotion to materialism and the endless pursuit of status and position.

Gray, Isabel's husband, is held up to Larry as an example of what he (Larry) should be--a conscientious, work-oriented capitalist who seeks success in the business world rather than chasing personal dreams or solutions to the perplexities of life. Gray commits himself to capitalism, and he is nearly destroyed when his economic support system gives way under the pressures of the depression. When Gray does fall apart after

financial misfortune, Maugham demonstrates that such a concentration on monetary goals for security can be both fragile and dangerous. Gray is a decent man, brought up to follow in his father's corporate footsteps, but he is unprepared for any curves life may throw in his direction. Wisely, Maugham refrains from portraying Gray as a callous or money-grubbing business tycoon. Instead, he seems to be a typical junior executive, and the unsteady nature of his sustenance in life is presented more convincingly as a result. Through Gray, Maugham shows that while capitalism is not evil, an overdependence on it--to the exclusion of substantive self-examination--can be disastrous.

Isabel, though she will never be caught actually working for a living, reflects another strain of this capitalist mentality. Her dominant trait might be better termed materialism, as she places security and possessions above love and the uncertainty and excitement of adventure. Her refusal of Larry's spur of the moment marriage proposal in Paris may have been prudent, but it was also motivated by her unwillingness to spend a portion of her life in a lower economic state. As she says in declining his offer of marriage, "'I want to go to parties, I want to go to dances, I want to play golf and ride horseback, I want to wear nice clothes'" (58). There is, of course, nothing wrong with wanting these things, but Isabel must realize that in making this decision, she is saying, in effect, that her love for these material pleasures is more important to her than her love for Larry. Later in the novel, when talking with Maugham, she tries to paint her decision not to marry Larry as a noble act of self-sacrifice. The astute Maugham, however, sees through her whitewash to the heart of the matter:

"D'you think I sacrificed myself to let Larry fall into the hands of a raging nymphomaniac?"

"How did you sacrifice yourself?"

"I gave Larry up for the one and only reason that I didn't want to stand in his way."

"Come off it, Isabel. You gave him up for a square-cut diamond and a sable coat." (165-6)

In the end, Isabel and Gray regain their material wealth, but she is left unfulfilled inside, still loving Larry and unable to will the love away. Like Gray, she has learned that economic comfort cannot erase deeper desires and problems.

Finally, Uncle Elliott represents yet another variation on this capitalist and materialist theme, as he devotes his entire life to one mad pursuit of ultimate social prestige and position. While his character has been explored earlier in this analysis, it is important to note the superficiality of his life and his concentration on appearances and material worth. Elliott's rise to the unsteady pinnacle of social status is accomplished through his enterprise and acumen in the art business, and, once there, he will suffer any indignity to remain on top. He will invite anyone, even people he detests, to his incessant parties--if they are currently in social vogue. His business skill has allowed him to accomplish his primary goals in life, and he is voracious in his determination to maintain his hard-fought victory. Ultimately, however, the lifelong dream turns hollow. Echoing the point made in his depictions of Gray and Isabel, Maugham shows, through Elliott, how unfulfilling this style of life can be. Elliott is left a bitter and lonely old man, discarded as no longer socially useful by the other disciples of his social-climbing faith. Maugham's views on these issues of capitalism and materialism emerge as an important element of the novel.

The contrasting of America and Europe, while not as fully explored as the two previous themes, is another interesting pattern developed in The Razor's Edge. This novel was Maugham's first to feature Americans as the main characters (Morgan 480), and the Americans all end up spending much of their time in Europe. Elliott, of course, disdains America, feeling he was destined to live in the shadows of his royal ancestors in the infinitely more civilized lands of Europe. Larry sees Europe as one particularly inviting segment of a whole world ripe for exploration. Sophie also seeks to escape America, running from the memories of her tragic past and hoping to lose herself in the underworld of faraway Paris. Isabel and Gray, after seeing Europe as a vacation spot to visit for pleasure, soon find themselves living there out of necessity. And all these Americans are observed by the bemused, quintessential European, Somerset Maugham.

Despite the European backdrop for most of the novel and the inability of any of the major characters to find continued personal satisfaction in America, Maugham does not seem anti-American in this work. Indeed, by story's end, Isabel and Gray have returned to America, refinanced and ready to resume their search for the American dream. Similarly, Larry is back in the United States, ready to demonstrate, by example, the advantages of his new way of life and system of beliefs to a country full of the uninitiated. Before returning, he has a revealing conversation with Maugham that deals with this America/Europe issue. Maugham begins the exchange:

"And are you under the impression that America is a suitable place to practice the particular virtues you mentioned?"

"I don't see why not. You Europeans know nothing about America."

.
 "But can you for a moment imagine that you, one man, can have any effect on such a busy, lawless, intensely individualistic people as the people of America? You might as well try to hold back the waters of the Mississippi with your bare hands." (224)

Rather than taking a firm stand on one side or the other, Maugham, as writer, allows his characters to present and discuss the best and worst of both sides of the Atlantic. Answers can be found in either place and dreams, of whatever nature, can be pursued as well. In The Razor's Edge, as in the real world, it often takes a lifetime to come to this realization.

The concepts of obligation and freedom are a final important theme in the novel. This conflict deals with the pressure to follow the crowd or conform to others' expectations as opposed to the desire to pursue one's own dreams and goals. Larry is the supreme example of someone who ignored the pattern for his life set out by others and listened, instead, to his inner wants and needs. In Maugham's scenario, this decision to explore rather than compromise leads to ultimate self-satisfaction and happiness. The suppression of these urges, demonstrated through the lives of many of the novel's other characters, leads to frustration and a sustained sense that something is missing from even the most materially prosperous life. Larry's female counterpart in living one's life according to personal goals and desires, Suzanne Rouvier, achieves financial independence and a deeper artistic fulfillment after years of struggle and continued refusal to conform to society's expectations. Clearly, the courage to take risks and admit the possibility of temporary failure is preferable, in Maugham's world, to the safe and ultimately shallow life

of submerging personal yearnings in the face of public pressures and obligations. This theme is a variation on the related concept of the inherent disappointment in a life devoted to material accumulation, yet it also expands the scope of that previously discussed aspect of The Razor's Edge to encompass the folly of any life in which personal needs and interests are subservient to a desire to conform and succeed according to society's dictates.

The strength of Maugham's presentation of all these themes lies, in part, in the eternal nature of the themes themselves. Forty years after the publication of The Razor's Edge, these issues remain important considerations in the life choices made by most of the world. The spiritual questing prefigured the turn to Eastern mysticism of the 1960's, and the other themes join this search for inner fulfillment as concepts and questions that are directly relevant to issues in today's society. It is easy to identify with the sources of many of Larry's questions, even if his actions seem a bit improbable. Sophie, Isabel, Gray, and other characters also seem recognizable, again because of the innate comprehension of much of their behavior and motivation. The enduring and universal nature of many of the themes of The Razor's Edge is a key point in the ultimate understanding of the novel's power, message, and appeal.

Style

Somerset Maugham's strong suit is not stylistic virtuosity, especially in this novel. He creates a strong and often compelling narrative, weaving his shifting locales and plot segments into a larger and usually coherent whole. In his determination to deliver a well-crafted story, he plays

down the stylistic flourishes used, with varying degrees of success, in the novels of many of his contemporaries. The Razor's Edge is eminently readable, with a decidedly informal style. The novel contains no heavy doses of simile or metaphor, no shadows of symbolism lurking over events and objects, and no allegorical or epic aspirations. This list of what the novel lacks is not intended as denigration or criticism--the direct and unencumbered way Maugham tells his story is refreshing and welcome. Moments of murkiness and occasional lapses of clarity do exist in the work, but the overall economy of language increases the novel's impact.

As might be expected, most of Maugham's stabs at figurative language and imagery come in his attempts to capture, on paper, the elusive essence of Larry's Far Eastern adventures. "'The sun caught the lake through a cleft in the heights and it shone like burnished steel,'" Maugham has Larry say (220), and the perception of the image is aided by this, and similar, comparisons. These flights of fancy are rare, however, and not all seem necessary or helpful.

One of the most enjoyable and useful instances of fanciful comparison occurs at the Ritz luncheon. Here, Isabel uses simile in a malicious way, deliberately trying to incite Sophie's curiosity and desire by spouting rapturous for the zubrovka that has been brought to the table:

"It's like mother's milk. I've never tasted anything so good. . . . It smells of freshly mown hay and spring flowers, of thyme and lavender, and it's so soft on the palate and so comfortable, it's like listening to music by moonlight." (173)

As the narrator notes, Isabel is "gushing inordinately" (173), and this sudden explosion of imagery is made even more striking by the fact that it is so uncharacteristic of the plainspoken Isabel or, indeed, of the

entire novel. When Sophie later describes her fateful decision to drink the zubrovka at Isabel's apartment, she recalls all this comparison as the reason she was so tempted to try the vodka: "'You'd all raved about how good it smelt and I was curious'" (177). Carried away by her memories of the experience, she even lapses into the descriptive mode herself: "'It's funny, its colour is just like its smell. It's like that green you sometimes see in the heart of a white rose. I had to see if it tasted like that . . .'" (177). All this evocation of nature's beauty serves to invest the zubrovka with an almost magical aura--an aura that, understandably, proved to be too alluring to Sophie.

Beyond this occasional use of stylistic flourish in dialogue spoken by his characters, Maugham is very sparing in his use of such devices. In narrative description, for example, the typical method in this novel is to modify a noun with one or two adjectives ("the small, dark room," "her youthful, direct gaze," etc.) in a continually direct style. There are no extended metaphors or long discursions into subject matter only vaguely related to the matters at hand. "I want to be read and I think I am justified in doing what I can to make my book readable," Maugham says with disarming frankness early in the novel (2). While the whole of Chapter Six is considered by some to be nonessential and a barrier to easy reading, it is generally consistent, stylistically, with the rest of the work. On the whole, The Razor's Edge's unobtrusive style makes for uneventful analysis (witness this attempt), but the informality is an asset to the novel. Maugham wrote for the enjoyment of his reading public, not for critical evaluation or stylistic depth and appreciation, and his skill in crafting a story emerges as the foremost element of this

novel's lasting impression and popularity. He took few stylistic chances, but he also refused to allow word play to overshadow the advancement of his narrative. Taken on its own terms, The Razor's Edge stands as a stylistically successful novel.

Summarizing these 60 pages of analysis of Maugham's novel is both unnecessary and impossible, but a final, brief overview is in order before shifting attention to the film version of Larry Darrell's adventures. There are problems with The Razor's Edge as a novel--at times Maugham's goals seem beyond his achievement, there are moments of underdevelopment and lapses of clarity, and assorted other difficulties crop up as discussed in the chapter itself--but, to generalize, the novel deserves praise more than condemnation. The characters are intriguing, the story is a well-crafted mixture of romance, philosophy, sex, and other enticing concerns, and the themes and messages of the novel range beyond the confines of the story alone. Not perfect, but solid and engrossing, The Razor's Edge is enjoyable to read and repays the time and effort expended in its analysis.

CHAPTER III

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE RAZOR'S EDGE:

THE FILM

Two equally important approaches exist in the study of the film version of The Razor's Edge, or of any film adaptation. The film should be examined as a freestanding creation completely independent from its original source, but it should also be compared and contrasted with the literary work that occasioned its creation. These dual viewpoints are important because they represent the two pervasive ways in which an audience sees a film--some people will see the movie with no previous exposure to its literary source, while others will see it as a result of their reading, anxious to see the story and characters transferred to the screen. Both audience experiences are valid, and both are integral parts of any final measurement of a film's success or worth. In addition, both make for interesting analytical experiences.

These two approaches to The Razor's Edge are not mutually exclusive. After all, the film being viewed or examined in each approach is exactly the same. Instead of being exclusive, the approaches are actually two components of one interpretive process. Stylistically, a film uses creative processes all its own--such things as camera angles, editing, acting styles, and music have no true source within the literary work being adapted. On a narrative level, however, film and literature are similar. Some films are amazingly faithful to the story and method of presentation used by their literary source, while others make numerous

and significant changes. Many films fall somewhere between these two extremes. The process of analyzing a film adaptation falls naturally into this style/narrative division.

The style of The Razor's Edge, with style being a term to be specifically defined and divided within the analysis, will be the first segment of this exploration. This section will include few references to the original Maugham novel, because few are relevant. Film style is inherent and self-contained within the world of film, functioning as an important element in conveying a movie's ultimate value or effectiveness. The narrative analysis will follow this stylistic appraisal. Here, naturally, Maugham's novel will come into play as an important reference point. The film and novel share the same basic story, and the bulk of this narrative section will consider the alterations, additions, and deletions made in the adaptation from printed page to celluloid. These two distinct approaches will be explained in greater detail in the brief introductions to their respective presentations, but one important piece of general information must precede both.

An overview of the film version of The Razor's Edge, like that of the novel, begins with a narrative summary. A restatement within the text is not necessary, as the broadest components of the novel's narrative structure remain intact in the film adaptation. Appendix B, however, offers a more detailed account of the precise events included in the movie, in their order of presentation. Once again, it may be beneficial to refer to this appendix both now and as specific scenes are discussed in the forthcoming analysis. Subsequent references to scenes within the film will often be identified by their placement in Appendix B, in a manner

to be explained at the appropriate time. The appendix presents, with some necessary omissions, a general sense of the construction of the film's narrative.

David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, in their collaboration Film Art and in other writings, have developed a solid and thorough system for film analysis. Their work begins with a broad critical approach, that of "film form," and works toward increasingly specific divisions within that form. In Film Art, Bordwell and Thompson define film form as "the overall system of relationships among elements that make up the whole film" (27). This form is then separated into two subsystems, cinematic style and narrative--the divisions that will help structure this analysis of The Razor's Edge.

Before elaborating further on these divisions of formalist film analysis, it is important to introduce another factor that will play a part in this study. In her book Eisenstein's Ivan the Terrible, Kristin Thompson advances a neoformalist film theory--an approach to film scholarship that combines the tenets of formalism with a consideration of relevant material from the film's historical context. While the idea is not totally new with Thompson's presentation, she does explain and justify the neoformalist theory with a convincing degree of expertise and clarity. Her argument, in simplified terms, is for a combination of formalist analysis--the thorough investigation of the stylistic and narrative properties of the film itself--with a recognition of the occasional importance and influence of contextual factors from outside the film. Thus, the study of film is expanded to include information from beyond the two

components of formalist analysis, and this consideration of contextual factors can sometimes help to support, challenge, or explain specific elements of cinematic style or narrative. This broader neoformalist approach can be useful in a variety of film study methods, as Thompson explains:

Neoformalism does not propose the elimination of auteur, genre, or any other kind of film study. Rather, it would change the traditional emphasis of such approaches by breaking the closed limits of contextualist study. (Eisenstein 20)

These possible historical influences need not be sought out, nor should they be relegated to a separate section of scholarship, equal in emphasis and length to the analyses of cinematic style and narrative. Instead, when information from a film's historical context can be helpful in the explanation or justification of some aspect of this formalist study, it should be introduced and integrated into the discussion. When done correctly, as in Thompson's neoformalist study of Ivan the Terrible, the result is a thorough exploration of a film's plot and style that does not ignore important information from beyond the confines of the film itself. This careful integration of relevant historical information is one of the aims of the following neoformalist analysis of The Razor's Edge--an analysis that is divided into the two aforementioned subsections, cinematic style and narrative.

Cinematic Style

This division of film form is further broken down into four smaller categories which, when taken together, cover all aspects of any film's cinematic style. These four categories, to be examined individually in

the following pages, are: mise-en-scene, cinematographic properties of the shot, editing, and sound (Bordwell and Thompson 74). Further definitions and explanations will be provided within each of these subsections.

Mise-en-scene

This term, borrowed from the French, refers to "those aspects [of a film] that overlap with the art of the theater: setting, lighting, costume, and the behavior of the figures [acting styles]" (Bordwell and Thompson 75). These four divisions of mise-en-scene encompass the elements of a film that are visible to a moviegoer within a film frame.

Setting. Within the mise-en-scene subdivision of setting, aspects of The Razor's Edge to be discussed include locales (indoor/outdoor), constructed sets, and the use of props. As was stated in the opening chapter of this analysis, Twentieth Century-Fox executives took great pride in their preparation in the area of set construction and prop acquisition for this film. Their construction of 89 sets, and expenditure of more than \$1.4 million on sets and props, certainly must be seen as a sizeable pre-release investment. A look at the effectiveness of all this work is best accomplished through a systematic study of noteworthy set design and prop usage in the film.

The sumptuous detail to be found in many of the sets is evident from The Razor's Edge's opening scene, a lavishly appointed and densely populated outdoor party. Numerous extras swirl about the dance floor, and the entire scene helps to establish the upper-class and socially obsessed atmosphere which will seem so unappealing to Larry. This grand scale and extravagant attention to detail is maintained in similar party

scenes throughout the movie. Larry and Isabel's final night out in Paris, for example, is portrayed in a series of three scenes, featuring very little dialogue, set in various clubs around the city.⁶ The camera soaks up the ambience and frantic activity in each nightspot as Larry and Isabel observe the throngs of people dancing, dining, drinking, and watching the wild acrobatic floor shows. Conversation between the two principals is unnecessary, as the overwhelming crush of people and noise shows Isabel to be clearly in her element--and Larry clearly out of his. There are other high society scenes as well, most noticeably the impressively gaudy wedding scene featuring newlyweds Gray and Isabel (3,a), and these scenes are uniformly convincing in scope and excess. The necessity of all the expensive detail is debatable, but it does accomplish the desired effect. In a movie that features a spartan view of material accumulation as a philosophical tenet, these overblown soirees offer a curious contrast.

Unfortunately, the settings in which Larry plays out his quest are much less convincing. The Himalayan backdrop at the ashram in India is distractingly fake, making the scene appear to be filmed on a high-school stage with painted backdrops provided by the tenth-grade art students. With all the money that was poured into the Parisian party scenes, viewers should expect, and do deserve, a similar standard of believability and care in these more intimate and presumably important scenes. A similar problem of disconcertingly unreal background settings plagues Larry's

⁶This scene can be found in Appendix B as sequence 2, scene d. Subsequent scene references will be indicated parenthetically within the text, as (sequence number, scene letter).

subsequent scene in the Indian mountain cabin (7,b). The cabin itself is convincingly dark, messy, and remote, but, once the camera moves outside, the illusion of reality is shattered. As a reviewer in Newsweek magazine noted shortly after the film's release: "Some of the scenes are phony to the point of being comical, notably one on a mountain top in India which looks very much like the fadeout in a Grade-B western" (December 2, 1946). The task of making Larry's quest and illumination seem believable and real would be difficult enough without such distractingly bogus settings. This additional problem comes close to sinking any attempt to keep this section's credibility afloat.

Elsewhere, the big budget for settings is used with a generally praiseworthy degree of effectiveness. Sophie's low-class hangout, the Rue de Lappe, looks genuinely seedy and disreputable, as does her smoky, basement-level opium den. The right side of the tracks is presented clearly in Elliott's opulent and spacious Paris apartment, tastefully decorated in understated elegance. Larry's Paris apartment, so sordid and shockingly dingy to a disillusioned Isabel (2,c), looks well-kept but decidedly substandard. All in all, there are no failures as obvious or important as the botches in setting that threaten to ruin the film's depiction of Larry's adventures in India. The money could buy, and the assembled extras could populate, convincing scenes of wealth and social nightlife, but quietly authentic depictions of the inspiring power of nature were apparently beyond the grasp of this production team. Two big mistakes in setting don't ruin a film, but they are memorable deficiencies. India never looked so phony, and the image remains even after the memory of more triumphant settings has faded.

Lighting. This second division of mise-en-scene is usually a more subtle element of the film frame, a part of the picture that is not even noticed by many moviegoers until an unusual use (or absence) of it brings it to the forefront of perception. This subtlety is maintained for most of The Razor's Edge, as the lighting remains unobtrusive and generally predictable. Most shots of the film's characters are illuminated by the traditional Hollywood method of three light sources: key light, fill light, and backlight (Bordwell and Thompson 84). Beyond this adherence to general rules of lighting, a conformity that should not necessarily be seen as a negative quality, the film does contain some interesting uses of light and shadow in a few of its scenes. Four of the most noteworthy will be examined here.

Isabel's final night in Paris, to be spent with Larry, is a very important evening to her. She is developing a scheme to trap Larry into marriage, and she wants to appear as irresistible as possible on this crucial evening. When she does emerge from Elliott's apartment to meet Larry, her stunning appearance is a triumph of natural beauty and seductive dress, but it also owes no small debt to lighting. As she descends the stairs, Larry greets her by saying, "I've never seen you so beautiful" (2,d). The camera lingers on her face and, indeed, she is gorgeous. Although she is quite attractive throughout the film, a special radiance is achieved here that reflects the depths of her desire to find a way--any way--to hold on to Larry. The glow that hovers around her face in this scene comes about through an adjustment in the lighting, a subtle but effective shift in the intensity of the three light sources mentioned above. The key light appears to be angled slightly above her face, and

the increased intensity joins with this shift to focus an especially flattering and alluring light on her face. The effect is wonderfully understated, and her breathtaking appearance seems a total triumph of her own dedicated preparation.

Another innovative and well-executed use of lighting as an aid to story development occurs later that same evening. Returning to Elliott's apartment with Larry, Isabel finds she is unable to go through with her seduction plan. She sends Larry away, turns out the light, and stands in the vast darkness of the lonely room. A faint stream of light trickles in from outside, framing her in a mournful gray. She walks toward this dull light and notices a stronger stream of artificial light emanating from an adjoining room--Elliott's room. The artificial light has been visible on the film frame throughout the scene, tucked away in a right-hand corner of the screen, but it seems of little importance during the torrid action going on in the parlor room before Isabel asks Larry to leave. Now, as Isabel walks toward the light source and notices that the door to Elliott's room is ajar, she realizes, as does the viewer, that the light indicates someone is in the next room and has overheard the dramatic scene. The use of weak natural light to reflect Isabel's blue mood, coupled with the stealthy intrusion of artificial light to indicate her solitude is not really intact, is an example of an effective and memorable lighting sequence.

Larry receives the "radiant glow" lighting treatment in one of his own important scenes later in the film (7,b). His face, held in tight close-up as he explains his illumination experience to a visiting wise man, seems to be bordered by an iridescent light that vaguely suggests

a halo. The effect is understated, but it remains for the duration of his explanation and provides visual support for the account of his inner transformation. The increase in backlight that causes this border of light to frame Larry's face differs from the method used to highlight Isabel's face in the instance mentioned previously, but both are strong examples of unusual lighting used to support character behavior and development.

A final interesting use of lighting technique occurs near the movie's end, when Maugham and Larry visit the deceased Sophie's apartment and look through some of her personal effects (9,b). Larry finds a book that contains a Keats ode he used to read to Sophie and, overcome with sentimentality, he begins to read it aloud. As he recites the ode, his face filling the frame in close-up, shadows of plants hanging in one of the apartment windows begin to play across his visage. This lighting device will affect different viewers in different ways, but the shadows create an eerie quality that is both unsettling and poignant. The poetry reading and the allusion to nature represented by the images of leaves and vines suggest a return to the happier days of Sophie's youth, when she and Larry would sit among the plants and trees and read to one another. At the same time, the darkness of the room, and the circumstances of this reading of the poem, give the shadows a more somber and depressing meaning. The lighting in this scene is just a minor touch, but it adds a complexity and ambiguity that is thought-provoking and effective.

Costuming. The third area of mise-en-scene is another big-budget item in Twentieth Century-Fox's production of The Razor's Edge. Here,

the film features no major mistakes, perhaps because providing Gandhi-like robes for the ashram inhabitants was easier than providing a mountain range for their backdrop. The movie actually includes some excellent uses of costuming, particularly in the area of clothing as an aid in characterization. Three of the film's characters who seem to reap especially valuable benefits from costuming are Isabel, Elliott, and Sophie.

Isabel's numerous gowns, designed by French-born fashion designer Oleg Cassini, both flatter her and reinforce the social-centered personality she exhibits throughout the film. Cassini's creations reflect Isabel's fashion consciousness, her upper-class lifestyle, and the attractiveness that makes Larry's decision to leave her in Chicago seem especially difficult to understand (1,b). From among her many stylish outfits, the black gown and accessories she wears on her much-anticipated last night with Larry are particularly noteworthy. Uncle Elliott describes the gown perfectly when he says, "Pretty dress she had on. I hadn't realized it was cut quite so low" (2,d). The dress is quite seductive and serves to stress the determination Isabel has to appear completely irresistible on this all-important night. This gown, and others, solidify Isabel's position as a predecessor of the beautiful but ruthless and scheming clotheshorse so prominent in nighttime television today. Her clothes are a part of her character, not just an afterthought.

Elliott is also defined, in part, by his costuming in the film. His dapper appearance, whether in his elegant smoking jacket or dressed to the nines for a social engagement, reflects his almost total absorption in the world of style, surface, and the comings and goings of the smart

set. He does, indeed, look sophisticated and well-bred in his tailored suits and perfect accessories, and it is easy to envision his early success in ascending the social ladder. Staying on top, however, seems to trouble him, and this problem is also cleverly illustrated through the use of costuming. His fussy behavior in the tailor's shop (8,a), observed by the quietly amused Maugham, is both funny and revealing. He is in a frenzy of anger over the incorrect placement of his "recently restored" royal crest on his underwear, and he fails to see what there is in the situation that so entertains Maugham. The scene is played for laughs, but underneath the comedy is the disturbing hint of insecurity that will plague Elliott's final years. On his deathbed, wearing a robe with the prestigious crest prominently displayed, he finally understands the shallow nature of his life's endeavors. Throughout the film, costuming is one of the major factors in the development of Elliott's personality.

At the opening scene party in The Razor's Edge, Sophie makes her first appearance--in a dress she has borrowed from Isabel. Never quite as rich, or glamorous, or self-confident as Isabel, Sophie is seen immediately as a little below her friend in all these areas. She is not unattractive, and she looks nice in the dress, but in their scenes together at the party, Isabel shines and Sophie just reflects the light. This image is extended at Isabel's wedding to Gray (3,a), where a beautifully attired Isabel greets the poor but happy Sophie. In both of these scenes, Sophie's costuming helps to reinforce the character portrait the film is presenting. The biggest change in Sophie's appearance, and in her character, comes with her visit to Isabel's table at the Rue de Lappe (8,d). Her little-girl cuteness has been replaced by a weary and pathetic look

of fundamental sadness that has hardened her features, with the help of some severe alcohol and drug ingestion. Her dress is drab and ill-fitting, providing additional visual proof of how far she has fallen. The most effective use of costuming in Sophie's characterization occurs in her visit to Isabel's Paris apartment (8,h). Lured there by the promise of a shopping trip at Isabel's expense--an odd parallel to the borrowing and subsequent gift of clothing in the film's opening scene--Sophie is wearing the same outfit she wore at the previous day's Ritz luncheon (8,g). This reappearance of the same dress suggests that it is the only presentable dress Sophie owns, another indication of her poor lifestyle and, now, her attempt to reform her errant ways. And what an outfit it is--hard to describe, but a dress and jacket that doesn't quite hang correctly and doesn't quite seem to fit in with the style of clothing worn by Isabel and other women at the Ritz and other places in Paris. Wearing the dress, Sophie looks like a down-and-out girl trying too hard to appear respectable. In other words, her costuming is an exact reflection of her true situation at this point in the film. She is, after all these years, still trying to fit into Isabel's world. In these scenes at the Ritz and at Isabel's apartment, as well as in the scenes mentioned previously, Sophie's costuming provides a great visual reinforcement for the struggles and changes she undergoes in the film's narrative.

Acting styles. The final element of mise-en-scene is, in many ways, the most difficult to analyze. Unlike the other three divisions, this area offers no tangible materials for observation, such as sets, clothes, or lighting effects. Instead, an analysis of acting styles is based on

highly subjective personal reactions to an actor's performance and believability in the delivery of dialogue and the on-screen expression and movement. In spite of this greater difficulty, discussion of acting style remains a very important component in the stylistic analysis of a film. Bad acting can ruin the best-written script or the most costly production, while good acting can survive against formidable writing or production obstacles. If an actor performs in an appropriate and believable manner in the context of his or her function in the film, "the actor has given a good performance---whether or not he or she has behaved as a real person might in such circumstances" (Bordwell and Thompson 85). Judging a performance on this level is a challenging, but ultimately rewarding, segment of stylistic analysis.

The clearest and most thorough way to analyze the acting performances in The Razor's Edge is to point out strengths and weaknesses in each performance, always bearing in mind that such observations should be based on the context of the film and the demands of each particular role. In this way, critiques of these actors are properly limited to these specific performances and are not presented as broad praise or criticism of the actor's general ability. As with the other elements of mise-en-scene, the success or failure of an actor's performance depends upon the demands of the film.

Tyrone Power has the male lead with his portrayal of Larry Darrell, and he does a decent job with a difficult role. The construction of Larry's character requires Power to be rather vague and dreamy in the early parts of the film, and aloof after his return from India. He is rarely given the opportunity to display such normal human emotions as

laughter, anger, or fear, existing instead in a dreamlike world above everyday joys and sorrows. Whether due to genuine talent or a lack of talent, Power does convey the appropriate vacancy and detachment--he seems to be functioning on a different wavelength. His expressive eyes are perfect for reflecting his determination as he quests, and the faraway look he often gets is appropriate at times but unsettling at others. His scenes with Gene Tierney, as Isabel, lack a convincing sense of genuine romantic attachment, but he does better as Sophie's fiancé and father figure, especially during his scenes at the Ritz luncheon. The questing segments in *Lens* and *India* are definitely inferior, but Power's performance in them is no worse than the material he is required to spout. On the whole, Tyrone Power's performance is uneven, with the more reserved and distant elements of his portrayal coming across better than those requiring overt displays of romantic interest, anger, or humor. Power is a handsome man and he makes a dashing Larry, a fitting recipient of Isabel's obsessive desire. He also creates a believably troubled Larry, a man who seems most comfortable observing the behavior of his companions while remaining aloof and lost in deeper thoughts. Tyrone Power's Larry seems to come from a different world than that of his fellow characters in The Razor's Edge. Ultimately, this is as it should be.

Gene Tierney's performance as Isabel Bradley Maturin was sharply criticized by a majority of movie critics when the film was released, but her work is not the weak link these reviews paint it to be. Miss Tierney begins unsteadily, and her scenes with Larry in Paris, before she marries Gray, are not well-performed. The argument and breakup in Larry's apartment (2,c), unconvincingly acted by both participants, is especially

disappointing in its inability to sustain a true sense of emotion or involvement from either actor. Fortunately, Miss Tierney's performance improves as her character becomes more evil and frustrated in her love for Larry. Her facial expressions, criticized as "wooden" in some reviews, are actually quite animated and appropriate and add interesting nuances to several scenes, especially as she reacts to news that Larry has returned to Paris after an absence of many years (8,c). Her comical scene with Maugham (8,f) is very well-played, and she displays a surprising sense of comic timing and some interesting line delivery. The good writing in this scene helps, but her performance adds to the writing and is her best work of the film. By this point in the movie Isabel is just a spoiled girl willing to do anything to get what she wants, and Miss Tierney wisely chooses not to play the role for sympathy. She appears cold and calculating at the Ritz luncheon and with Sophie back at her apartment (8,h), and her big confrontation with Larry after Elliott's death (10,e) is much more believable than their big scene mentioned above. This is, indeed, a flawed performance, but there is more to praise than to criticize. Miss Tierney is unconvincing as a young debutante, but her later years are well-played for their ruthless, as well as occasionally comic, potential.

Anne Baxter, as Sophie MacDonald, received a great deal of praise, and an Academy Award, for her work in this film. The praise is justified. Miss Baxter has little to do, and is not especially memorable, in her early scenes in the movie. Indeed, her scene at the opening party with her boyfriend, Bob, is rather irritating in its sweetness. From her hospital scene (6,a) on, however, Miss Baxter plays the role of Sophie with an intensity that is scene-stealing without being overplayed. Her

performance in the hospital is heartbreaking, as her sad and helpless cries never seem excessive or unrealistic. She appears, as she should to establish the foundation for her subsequent decline, completely devastated by the tragic deaths of her husband and daughter. Her next appearance, at the Rue de Lappe, unveils a physical transformation that is startling, and Miss Baxter shows that significant changes have taken place inside her character as well. There is a desperation in her every word in this scene, and even in the way she looks at her old friends, that indicates the depths of Sophie's problems--and the pain of her sorrows. Larry's determination to help his old companion is understandable. Miss Baxter excels again at the Ritz, playing Sophie in a quieter, but still intense, manner. Her insecurity is clear just by the look on her face, and her conflicting emotions--gazing longingly at the zubrovka, then at a compassionate Larry--are conveyed wordlessly. Sophie is a difficult character to bring alive on screen, with a number of traits and emotions that must be presented credibly if the portrayal is to succeed. Miss Baxter meets every challenge, and the result is the best acting performance in the film.

The role of Elliott Templeton brought considerable acclaim, and an Oscar nomination, to Clifton Webb. Once again, the favorable recognition was deserved. The role Webb was asked to play was not as difficult as the assignment given Miss Baxter (or even those given Power or Miss Tierney), but the actor's achievement within these less demanding boundaries is close to perfect. Blessed with the film's largest number of clever lines, Webb brings welcome doses of comedy to an occasionally too-earnest movie. His performance is more than comic relief, however, as he provides

a dimension of depth for the character and is genuinely moving in the famous deathbed scene. Webb played this type of character in other films as well (Laura is a prime example), but Elliott is his most sympathetic and accomplished portrayal. The deliciously funny and truly considerate Elliott is brought to life as an even more interesting character than Larry, the focus of the entire tale. Credit must go to the writers and to Clifton Webb for this memorable success. If any actor in The Razor's Edge was born to play his or her part, Clifton Webb's incarnation of Uncle Elliott must be seen as that predestined match. His face, his voice, his incredulous stares and his disbelieving double takes are all perfect screen embodiments of Maugham's snobbish expatriate.

In smaller and less demanding roles, supporting characters turn in performances of varying success. Herbert Marshall, by now typecast as the narrator in film adaptations of Maugham's novels, does very little with a role that doesn't offer much to begin with. Unfortunately for Marshall, one critic was right on the mark with this cruel but clever assessment: "Herbert Marshall . . . plays Mr. Maugham with such weariness that he frequently seems in desperate need of a couple of weeks in an oxygen tent" (New Yorker November 30, 1946). There is nothing wrong with underplaying a role of this type, but Marshall hardly plays the role at all. He reacts in the same way--not at all--to every person he sees and every piece of information he hears, good or bad. He apparently understood that his role was to support the other actors, not to vie for the audience's attention during his time on the screen, but a few signs of life would have enhanced his performance considerably. As it stands, his portrayal of Maugham is neither believable nor interesting.

John Payne is engaging as the affable Gray Maturin. His most difficult scene, the miraculous headache cure (8,c), is handled with admirable aplomb, considering the silliness of the entire situation. Payne is no rival to Power in magnetism or on-screen personality in this film, and this too is in keeping with the status of his character when compared to the alluring Larry Darrell.

Lucile Watson is best remembered for her bizarre voice and infectious laugh as Isabel's mother, Louisa Bradley. She functions primarily as Elliott's foil for his pro-Europe jokes and assorted other observations, and she handles her duties well. Frank Latimore is generally nondescript as Sophie's boyfriend (and, later, husband), Bob. His two scenes in the film are hampered by the cloyingness of his dialogue and his lack of anything to actually do. He should have been given at least one short emotional farewell scene before his off-screen death, to invest his character with a little personality and to atone for his shabby treatment by the writers. Elsa Lanchester turns in a wonderful performance as Miss Keith, Princess Novemali's secretary. Her on-screen time is quite limited, but her scene with Tyrone Power (10,c) is a joy to watch. She is refreshing and lively, making the most of her very few lines and stealing the scene from the star.

The acting performances in The Razor's Edge are representative of the entire spectrum of believability and interest, ranging from superb to uneven to mediocre to bad. Fortunately for the film's overall impact, the major roles are handled with at least adequate skill and many of the most important scenes sparkle with displays of real talent. The movie is longer than most commercial films (it lasts 149 minutes), and to

sustain interest and tension for such a stretch of time requires performances of a special nature. With a few exceptions, the goods are delivered.

Cinematographic Properties of the Shot

The second of the four subdivisions of cinematic style, this imposing term refers to the way a shot is presented on the screen. If the first subdivision, mise-en-scene, can be seen as an exploration of what is filmed, then this cinematographic category can be defined as how it is filmed. As Bordwell and Thompson explain: "This consists of control over three features: (1) the photographic qualities of the shot; (2) the framing of the shot; and (3) the duration of the shot" (99). This section will examine how The Razor's Edge handles these three areas.

Photographic qualities. The Razor's Edge offers little in the way of innovation or surprise with respect to photographic qualities. The film uses the standard Academy ratio of 1:1.33, introduced in the early 1930s and widely used in Hollywood films of The Razor's Edge's era.⁷ The film was shot in black-and-white, still the dominant form even though color films (for example, Gone With the Wind and The Wizard of Oz) had been released successfully during the decade preceding 1946. As film historian David Cook noted: "In 1947, only 12 percent of American feature films were made in color" (413). Thus, the black-and-white filming was in keeping with the majority of contemporary releases. Other aspects of

⁷This ratio, widely used throughout the world, represents the length of one side of the film frame as compared to the length of the frame's top or bottom.

The Razor's Edge's photographic qualities are similarly typical of Hollywood releases of the era. The film contains no manipulations of camera speed (fast or slow motion, time-lapse photography), no noticeable uses of camera filters, and the camera's focus is generally standard. One effective use of deep focus occurs when Larry has left the bar in Lens, after his conversation with Kostî (4,a). Standing outside in pouring rain, Larry is seen from inside the bar. He is clearly in focus, but the stretch of dark and rainy road behind him is also focused. This use of deep focus helps to stress Larry's desire for travel and the sometimes lonely nature of the path he has chosen.

Framing. A more complex area of cinematography than the photographic qualities just discussed, framing can be divided into three sections: camera angle, camera distance, and camera movement. The Razor's Edge offers some interesting moments from each of these viewpoints.

Although camera angles in the film are usually the typical straight-on type, the inclusion of a few variations does provide some more unusual perspectives. Most common, and impressive, in this category of variations are the high-angle shots that appear in several scenes involving the acting principals and numerous extras. The crowds of people and the wild atmosphere in some of the Parisian clubs visited by Larry and Isabel (2,d) are made clearly visible through the use of these all-encompassing shots from the rafters. There are assorted other high-angle shots, along with at least two shots from lower than average angles, but they seem to have been shot in this manner for no particularly important or discernible reason.

Camera distance provided director Goulding with some creative opportunities that he used in an advantageous way. Close-ups are his forte in this area of framing, as the tension and emotion in several of the film's scenes is highlighted through skillful use, but not overuse, of some tight close-ups of the actors' faces. The best of these scenes is the Ritz luncheon (8,g), where the wordless interplay between Maugham, Isabel, Sophie, and Larry is communicated through a series of expertly arranged facial close-ups. Viewers can feel the tension between the characters in this scene, due in part to the placement of the camera (and, consequently, the audience) in the midst of all the stares and glares. The sense of confinement brought about by this tight camera placement echoes the confinement that Sophie must have been feeling as she sat at the table and felt her friends' eyes upon her. Close-ups are also well-used in the scene involving Gray's headache (8,c), although the scene as a whole is less effective. Some tension is developed in this scene as the camera jumps from Larry's earnest gaze to Maugham's skeptical countenance to Isabel's confused stare, and this decision to use close-ups is probably the best directorial decision made in this difficult and unbelievable scene. Elsewhere in the film, close-ups soak in Isabel's beauty, reflect Sophie's degeneration, and heighten the emotion at Elliott's death. They are rarely ill-used and contribute greatly to the movie's success. Long shots are used with less frequency, but they do provide some nice moments. The extreme long shot of Larry standing on the Indian mountaintop (7,b), though hampered by the clumsy and melodramatic scene composition, setting, and music, is a genuine attempt to contrast the vastness of the heavens with the valiant quest

of this one man. Long shots are used more effectively in scenes that seek to draw attention to material achievements, especially when these long shots are coupled with the high-angle camera placement mentioned previously. The nightclub scenes gain particular benefit from this combination of camera angle and distance.

Camera movement, the final element of framing, is, in this film, the most interesting and innovative of the three sections. Pans and dolly shots are used extensively, almost always with positive results. The film opens with a pan, as the camera moves across the sky and into the midst of the dinner party at a very deliberate pace. This slow movement allows the narrator to deliver his voice-over introduction before the party action picks up, while still providing visual appeal for the viewer. Panning also helps the camera absorb the lavish detail in the nightclub scenes, joining with the high angle and long distance to make the most of these lushly appointed scenes. Director Goulding has been called a "women's director," and The Razor's Edge a "women's picture"--one of a genre of "romantic melodramas designed to appeal to female audiences and constructed around a popular female star" (Cook 401). While the validity of such an assertion need not be proven or disproven for the purposes of this analysis, it is clear that Goulding's cameras lavished special attention on the women in this film. Isabel's descent of the staircase (2,d) is observed by an appreciative Larry--and an appreciative camera. The camera pans Isabel's long walk down the stairs, from Larry's viewpoint, and the length and unremitting focus of the camera's stare invest the scene with an almost worshipful quality. The camera, and the director, clearly adore Isabel in this scene, and the use

of a panning movement helps to express this admiration in the finest Hollywood tradition. The film's most memorable dolly shot occurs at the Rue de Lappe (8,d). After the camera waits impatiently for Sophie to stumble down her staircase and into the frame (there will be no loving pan of this grand entrance), a dolly shot follows her unsteady progress through the smoky mire of the club. This shot allows the viewer to see how sordid the Rue de Lappe really is, how far Sophie has fallen in life, and her inebriated state as she approaches her friends' table with stumbling steps. Clearly, camera movement aids in viewer perception of the two key women in this "women's picture." The film contains other examples of artful and functional camera movement as well, but those mentioned in this analysis are among the very best.

Duration. This final element of cinematography deals with the length of time each shot remains on the screen. As might be expected in light of the preceding discussion of pans and dollies as major camera movements in The Razor's Edge, the film also features a large number of long takes. Within a scene, Goulding often prefers to move the camera during a shot (thus creating a pan or dolly) instead of cutting from place to place. The result is, of course, longer takes. The film contains some notable exceptions to this tendency, to be discussed in a moment, but a quick look at Goulding's use of long takes can help to characterize his work on this project. One especially long take constitutes the entirety of a very important scene--Larry and Isabel's argument at his apartment (2,c). The scene is relatively long, packed with dialogue (as opposed to action), and not particularly well-acted. Goulding, however, chooses

to follow the actors as they move dramatically and strategically around the apartment, rather than cutting from one actor to the other. The unfortunate effect of this directorial decision is that it makes the scene seem even longer and more forced. The same problem plagues all of Larry's questing scenes as well (4,a; 5,a; 7,a; 7,b), as already heavy and lethargic on-screen time is lengthened by one droning, never ending shot after another. A faster pace, initiated by shorter takes, would have been infinitely preferable to these continuous loops. The long takes do work passably well when they are unveiling new visual information, as in the nightclub scenes, or when they are used in scenes that contain some humor and excitement, but these talky and dense scenes of extended conversation are not the place for shots of such long duration.

Much more effectively used are the quick-cut short takes, often found in conjunction with the close-up camera distance discussed earlier. These scenes--the Ritz luncheon, the curing of Gray's headache, Larry's memories of Sophie after he leaves the Rue de Lappe, and others--generate a real sense of tension and credibility, due in part to the use of short takes. Characters' reactions can be quickly compared, individual faces can be shown repeatedly for impact or to illustrate sudden changes in expression, and lengthy passages of dialogue can be visually enhanced by this quicker pace. The psychological impact on the viewer must also be considered--in a long and verbose movie such as this, short takes create an illusion of speed and movement that is often sorely missed. With the characters assembled in a taxi after leaving the Rue de Lappe (8,e), the camera jumps from a misty-eyed Larry, lost in his memories of Sophie, to a jealous and newly-threatened Isabel. As Larry continues his moving but lengthy

recitation of these fond reminiscences, the camera cuts back and forth between the two stars of the scene, occasionally cutting to the face of Maugham, who is watching Isabel's reactions with fascination. The effect of these short takes is to heighten the tension and underscore the importance of Larry's words, a result that is both interesting and valuable to the film as a whole. Some of the other scenes, dragged down by long takes, could have used a similar treatment.

Editing

This third division of cinematic style is concerned with three elements of "the coordination of one shot with the next" (Bordwell and Thompson 151): editing devices, editing relations, and the establishment of continuity through editing. These areas will be explained in the following discussion of editing in The Razor's Edge.

Editing devices. A look at editing devices involves an exploration of the specific methods used to connect adjoining shots. A cut is the simplest and most common editing device, and, as expected, it is used most often in this film. Fades to black are also fairly common in The Razor's Edge, used at times to indicate that a span of weeks or months has passed but used at other times to introduce scenes that occur soon after their predecessors. Dissolves are the third type of editing device used in this film, and it is in the use of dissolves that a few minor problems arise. Many of the dissolves are both appropriate and artistic, and they deserve praise for being effectively presented and a change of pace from the glut of cuts and slow fades to black. However, Goulding falls into a pattern with some of his dissolves that becomes both

distracting and unintentionally comic. An appropriately technical name for this pattern is the "walk to the window and stare outside" dissolve.

The structure of the pattern follows this general form: as a scene winds down, the actors walk to a large window that is always in every room, intone some prediction or deep comment, and turn to stare through the window to the scenery outside. The camera follows their gaze, then stops on the ocean or lake or grove of trees, and the picture slowly dissolves into the opening of the next scene. The first time this occurs, as Maugham and Elliott discuss Larry's upcoming trip to Paris (1,c), the device seems a bit dramatic but of no great concern. By the fifth appearance of this dissolve pattern, however, the impression is that some strong magnetic force is pulling the actors from the middle of the room toward the windows. This type of dissolve was in standard use during the studio era of The Razor's Edge's creation, and it is, indeed, an effective stylistic way to reinforce narrative continuity. However, five uses of this device, including two that come in adjoining scenes less than five minutes apart (2,d; 3,a) and one at the end of the film's final scene, is at least four uses too many. Such a criticism is of minor consequence in the framework of the film as a whole, but Goulding falls into a reliance on this self-consciously stagey type of dissolve that could easily have been avoided. Other, more creatively handled transitions between scenes were most certainly within his grasp.

Editing relations. This term refers to the type of bond or rationale that ties one shot to the next. According to Bordwell and Thompson, these relations can be divided into four categories: graphic, rhythmic, spatial,

and temporal (154). The most innovative or effective uses of editing in The Razor's Edge will be examined from the perspective of their placement within one of these four categories.

One of the film's most strikingly edited transitions gains much of its power from the director's use of graphic relations as a link between shots. The dissolve from Larry's scene at the Indian ashram to Sophie's hospital scene (5,a; 6,a) is simple and understated in its structure, yet its use of a strong graphic tie illustrates the creative tools director Goulding had at his disposal. The final shot in the ashram scene ends with a slow zoom to a close-up of the table where Larry and the wise man have been sitting. Their conversation has been dull, but soothing, and mystical music has swelled up in the background as their talk has come to an end. As the shot fades with this tight close-up of the table, viewers may be lulled into a relaxed sense of quiet calm. Just as the fading picture begins to dissolve, however, a loud siren drowns out the music and the table subsequently becomes a stretcher, matched perfectly in shape and distance from the camera to the preceding shot. The siren screams, the stretcher is wheeled into a hospital, and the effect of this use of graphic relations between shots is quite jarring. The serenity of Larry's faraway world has been shattered by the intrusion of Sophie's tragedy into the viewer's mind, and it becomes clear that, although Larry may have escaped to a remote and peaceful setting, the real world is still very active in the lives of the film's other characters. The juxtaposition of the table and the stretcher is a key component in the delivery of this message, and it is a nice creative touch.

Another interesting use of graphic relations to link shots comes

through an artistic, though less thematically important, dissolve that takes place earlier in the film. Here, the graphic tie is based more on "direction or speed of movement" (Bordwell and Thompson 155) than on the construction within the film frame itself, but the effect is impressive. The adjoining shots are Larry's talk with Isabel in a Paris park and the couple's entrance into his apartment building (2,b; 2,c), and the graphic relation is a rapid downward movement by the camera that begins in one scene and ends in the next. At the end of their park scene, Larry and Isabel are leaning against a wall. The camera pans rather rapidly down the wall, into blurred darkness, and then continues to move downward as the next shot shows the roof of Larry's apartment building and descends to show the rafters, the window above the door, and, finally, the door itself as Larry and Isabel enter. Time must have elapsed to enable the couple to reach the building, and there is no deep symbolic or thematic reason for connecting the shots in this uninterrupted way, but the device can be appreciated for what it is--a change of pace from the predictable editing practices and a graphic relation that causes the viewer to take notice.

Elsewhere, the film observes perfectly acceptable, but not especially exciting, editing practices. The use of rhythmic relations to link shots is best reflected in the Ritz luncheon scene (8,g), where a sequence of short takes heightens tension. Long takes during Isabel and Larry's night on the town (2,d) are also rhythmically related, as the leisurely pace of this series of shots reflects the languid tone of the couple's final evening together. Editing based on temporal relations is not particularly noteworthy in The Razor's Edge, as the movie contains no flashbacks or

flashforwards, even at times when events suggest such devices might have been of value. Larry's poignant thoughts of a young Sophie (8,e; 9,b), for example, could have been enhanced by the use of flashbacks to provide visual reminders of her former vitality and freshness. Instead, Goulding chooses to present the scenes and events in strict chronological order. The film does contain numerous temporal ellipses, however, which is quite fortunate for the audience since the story's events are spread over 11 years of actual time. Spatial relations, the fourth subcategory of editing relations, will be discussed in the following section.

Continuity editing. The meaning of this term, as well as the role of spatial relations in its operation, is explained most succinctly in this excerpt from Bordwell and Thompson:

The basic purpose of the continuity [editing] system is to control the potentially disunifying force of editing by establishing a smooth flow from shot to shot. . . . Since the continuity style seeks to present a narrative action, it is chiefly through the handling of space and time that editing furthers narrative continuity. (163-4)

The film's straightforward presentation of temporal relations has already been mentioned, but the use of space to reinforce narrative continuity deserves brief exploration.

Establishing shots and breakdown shots, so named because of their function in the creation of a viewer's perception of the space of a film, are clearly in evidence in The Razor's Edge. From the opening party scene, through all the scenes at Elliott's Paris apartment and, later, his house in Nice, the directorial style adheres to the standard use of this establishment/breakdown pattern. Large, expansive rooms are introduced with long or medium shots and are then subdivided with closer shots of the

room's inhabitants. The additional use of such cornerstone continuity editing conventions as the eyeline match (dramatically presented in the film's opening scene, when Maugham sees Larry for the first time) and the 180 degree rule⁸ are also basic elements of the film's editing structure. Reaction shots, a typical continuity editing device, can be seen throughout the movie, most prominently in such scenes as the Rue de Lappe meeting and the Ritz luncheon. In both of these scenes, much of the cutting from shot to shot is motivated by this natural desire to see how characters are reacting to the unfolding events. The Razor's Edge follows the path of most of its Hollywood contemporaries in this heavy reliance on the conventions of continuity editing and spatial relations, but the clarity of exposition provided by this system makes it worthwhile in spite of its predictability.

Two final editing devices, one spatial and one temporal, enhance two of the film's best scenes. Crosscutting, or parallel editing, is used only once in The Razor's Edge, but it is well-used in an important and entertaining exchange. Isabel's phone call to Larry (8,f) is filmed with continual crosscuts between a calm and happy Larry and an incredulous Isabel. Watching Isabel's reaction to the news of Larry's impending marriage is fascinating, but seeing Larry as he delivers the news is also of considerable interest. The problem is solved with this parallel editing technique--a wise and well-executed decision.

⁸The 180 degree rule is a continuity editing convention in which a scene's action "is assumed to project along a straight line." Mise-en-scene is arranged, and the camera is placed, to "establish and sustain this line. The camera can be put at any point as long as it stays on the same side of the line" (Bordwell and Thompson 164).

A montage sequence is another of the film's highlights, providing plot exposition and narrative continuity through the use of temporal ellipsis and clever organization. As Elliott explains, in voice-over, his grandiose social plans for Larry's stay in Paris, a montage of shots shows Larry's actual behavior in both the city and the French countryside (2,a). The sequence of shots reveals that Larry's adventures in Paris are much more bohemian and lower class than Elliott's pronounced wishes, a contrast that is played for great comic results through the use of Elliott's words and the totally contradictory images of Larry's more rudimentary life. Through this montage, the viewer understands that months have passed, that Larry is now in Paris, and that the clash between his social notions and Elliott's blue-blooded expectations for him has not been reconciled. Months and years are often passed over without explanation in this film, but this early montage illustrates the passage of time in an entertaining manner while also reinforcing the continuity of the narrative.

Thus, as a whole, editing in The Razor's Edge offers some unusual and interesting approaches while generally maintaining the practices adhered to by most Hollywood films of the period. With a few exceptions, the film does not call attention to its own artiness or creative capabilities, focusing instead on a smooth and flowing exposition of its sprawling narrative. In this respect, The Razor's Edge was only echoing the customs of its time. Problems for the Hollywood movie industry were just around the corner, but, in 1946, "it seemed that Hollywood's most lucrative path lay in maintaining the pre-war status quo" (Cook 398). Stylistically, particularly in terms of editing technique, The Razor's Edge

followed this advice by taking few chances. The standard formula for Hollywood film style, well-established by 1946, was good enough for Edmund Goulding and, more importantly, his bosses at Twentieth Century-Fox.

Sound

The fourth and final element of cinematic style is the one non-visual component of the process--what the filmgoer hears to supplement, explain, or contradict what he or she sees. The three forms of film sound, as defined and divided by Bordwell and Thompson, are language/dialogue, sound effects, and music (193).

Language/dialogue. This element of sound offers very little to warrant particular notice in The Razor's Edge. All of the film's dialogue is diegetic (arising from within the story space), and it is presented as external dialogue (as opposed to internal, which is the inclusion of dialogue that is heard only in a character's mind). Voice-over narration is used three times in the film: Elliott's ironic narration over the scenes of Larry in Paris (2,a), discussed in the previous section; and two, more typical, narrative voice-overs by Maugham (1,a; 9,a). Since the narrator is an actual character in this film, and not just a disembodied voice, his dialogue in voice-over is still considered diegetic. The only other item of note in the category of language/dialogue is the fact that French is spoken on several occasions in the movie, adding an authentic touch to some of the scenes in Paris. Although many viewers will not understand all or part of what is being said in these instances, the visual clues within the scenes prevent any unsettling confusion.

Sound effects. The Razor's Edge encounters success and failure in its use of this second division of film sound. Some of the movie's sound effects add a welcome touch of atmosphere, such as those included in the scene at Larry's apartment in Paris (2,c). As Larry and Isabel enter the lobby of the apartment building, the visual depiction of a squalid and second-rate location is supported and enhanced by the barrage of sound effects: a loud buzz of conversation, construction noises from a few blocks away, and the crying of a baby there in the lobby. The contrast between Larry's world and Isabel's more ordered and stately expectations is evident even before the couple climb the stairs to Larry's apartment and their own argument and breakup. A much less successful use of sound effects occurs in the cliché-ridden scene between Larry and Kostî at the bar in Lens (4,a). As a storm rages outside, Kostî explains some of his background in religious and mystical studies. Seeking to aid Larry in his quest, Kostî asks: "Have you ever thought of going to the East?" Just as he says "East," a loud crack of thunder roars across the sky (and the film's soundtrack) and Larry quickly looks out the window in the direction of the heavens. The effect is extremely melodramatic, an unnecessary and distracting attempt to draw extra attention to this "life-changing" question. The scene has enough problems without this sudden burst of inspiration charging down from the sky--right on cue. Elsewhere in the film, sound effects are much more unobtrusive and, in general, they function well as reinforcements for the on-screen action and dialogue.

Music. Music, too, has its good and bad uses in the film. The least successful aspect of Alfred Newman's musical score is its overuse at predictable times. Larry's scenes at the ashram and in the nearby

mountains, already in danger from unconvincing dialogue and substandard acting, are completely washed out by the swell of over-orchestrated music that attempts to impose some sense of great importance on what has just transpired. The music at the end of these scenes (5,a; 7,a; 7,b) is too loud (when compared to the volume of the dialogue), too dramatic, and much too predictable. Again, Goulding and his associates were following the conventions of Hollywood films of the era, but the music in these scenes is overdone even when viewed within this historical context.

Music with its source in the film's story space fares much better than Newman's background orchestrations. The Razor's Edge contains many nightclub scenes, ranging from the ballrooms of the social elite to the circus-like dancing clubs and down to the bottom of the barrel, the sleazy Rue de Lappe. The music played by the bands inside these nightspots is sufficiently different from club to club, covering the distance from elegant to buoyant to seedy. Whether coming from a 45-piece band, a hot jazz group, or an assortment of drugged and drunken misfits, the diegetic music adds spice and atmosphere to the film's big social scenes.

And, finally, the best use of music, both diegetic and nondiegetic, centers around the character of Sophie. The musicians are playing a song on the "stage" of the Rue de Lappe when Sophie first enters the room (8,d), and the music is heard as the camera follows her progress across the room to Isabel's table. This song becomes an unofficial theme song for Sophie, and it is heard, at different tempos and both diegetically and nondiegetically, at four other times in the film. The song makes its next appearance in the film's next scene (8,e), as Isabel, Larry, and their companions talk about Sophie on their way home from the surprise encounter at the

Rue de Lappe. Seized by a sudden impulse, Larry asks the driver to stop, jumps out of the car, and begins walking back to the club. As he does this, the "theme music" begins to play softly as nondiegetic accompaniment. This scene is so close to the previous appearance of the song that the musical link is established rather easily, and the tune is now, indeed, Sophie's song. A well-executed reappearance of Sophie's song occurs in the bridge between two important scenes (8,h; 8,i). In the first of these scenes, Sophie is left alone with the lavishly extolled zubrovka in Isabel's apartment. As the scene ends, Sophie looks at the bottle, pours herself a glass, walks to a window, and begins to drink. While she is doing this, the song from the Rue de Lappe fades in, obviously running through her mind as she contemplates falling off the wagon. This shot fades to black as she drinks, but the music continues through the fade and into the next scene, as Larry charges into the Rue de Lappe in search of the now-missing Sophie. Obviously, time has elapsed between the two scenes, but the continuous music, shifting from internalized to externalized without missing a beat, is an effective and creative link. Sophie's song makes its final appearance in a slower, quieter, but still recognizable form. As Larry reads the Keats ode in memory of his now-deceased friend (9,b), the music fades in in a mournful and moving arrangement. Sophie's memory and downfall are evoked subtly as Larry reads, and the music aids greatly in this evocation. The five appearances of Sophie's song are a unifying force in the delineation of Sophie's character, a not overused creative tool, and a pleasingly artistic touch. If a similar degree of restraint and creativity had been used with the presentation of the music in the quest scenes, perhaps that area of the film could have

benefited as well. Music, when used judiciously, has the power to reinforce a film's development of its characters and creation of an atmosphere or mood. The scenes featuring Sophie's song provide subtle, but imaginative, reminders of this capability.

As this discussion has indicated, examples of success and failure can be found in all four stylistic areas of The Razor's Edge--mise-en-scene, cinematographic properties, editing, and sound. The many strong moments the film contains are somewhat frustrating, as well as pleasing, because they hint at what could have been accomplished had greater consistency been attained. Risk-taking and artistic innovation were not in vogue in 1946 Hollywood, and this film should not be dismissed because of a lack of cinematic breakthroughs. As a cohesive stylistic unit and as a reflection of many of the moviemaking trends of its era, The Razor's Edge achieves a measurable degree of success. Nevertheless, a tendency to look at the high points and wish for more is both natural and fitting.

Narrative

The relationship of The Razor's Edge to its original source, Maugham's novel, comes into significant play in an analysis of the film's narrative. The novel has been mentioned only rarely in the preceding discussion of cinematic style, but it returns to the forefront in this section. These two versions of The Razor's Edge share the same general narrative outline, and many specific details as well, as a comparison of their plot structures indicates.⁹ A lengthy analysis of the film's plot structure and character

⁹A glance at Appendixes A and B will reveal many of these similarities, and some will be discussed in the text.

development is unnecessary, as much of the material has been examined, in some depth, in the preceding chapter's exploration of the novel. The differences between the two versions of The Razor's Edge, however, are both numerous and interesting. For assorted reasons, some apparent and others more mysterious, significant and often revealing changes were made in the transfer from novel to film. A discussion of these changes can help to explain the film's narrative form, contrast it with the plot of Maugham's novel, and shed light on the broader concept of adaptation in general.

"As long as the studio system was the foundation of the American film industry, . . . experimentation was kept to a minimum" (Jowett 364). This observation by film scholar Garth Jowett provides a partial explanation for the trend toward stylistic conformity in Hollywood films of the studio era, discussed earlier, and for the long-standing Hollywood practice of making movies based on hit novels, stories, or plays. Any edge a studio could gain in terms of public awareness of, and interest in, an upcoming film was an edge to be sought with great dedication. Adapting an already well-known and/or successful work from another medium was one of the most reliable ways of gaining this advantage. In the ten years preceding the release of The Razor's Edge (1935-1945), over 17 percent of the films released by major studios were adapted from novels (qtd. in Bluestone 3). Not all the films were financially successful, of course, but the built-in pre-release publicity proved understandably irresistible. Honors and peer recognition have also been associated with film adaptations since Hollywood's early days. According to a 1979 report by Morris Beja, "Since . . . [the Academy Awards] inception in 1927-8, more than 3/4 of

the awards for 'Best Picture' have gone to adaptations; and of these, about 3/4 were based on either novels or short stories" (78). In fact, eight of the ten Oscar winners for Best Picture of the Year between 1937 and 1946 were adaptations from novels or plays, including the film honored in 1946, the year of The Razor's Edge's release and subsequent Academy Award nominations. The major motion pictures adapted from novels during this ten year span include such well-known films as Gone With the Wind, Rebecca, The Lost Weekend, and The Grapes of Wrath. This Hollywood penchant for adaptations, combined with the potential box-office value of the Somerset Maugham name and reputation for sales success, made the eventual adaptation of The Razor's Edge a near certainty even before the novel was actually published. Guaranteed financial success may not exist in the movie industry, but this adaptation was as comfortably close as a studio could hope to get.

The analysis of the narrative changes that occurred as a result of this transfer from novel to film will be divided into three sections. In the first section, major alterations, deletions, and additions will be reported by group and, in most instances, reasons for these changes will be suggested. Following this discussion, the next section will focus on the impact of these changes on the film's development of the three major plot strands identified in the previous chapter's analysis of the novel. The third division will explore some of the differences in the film's depictions of the major characters found in Maugham's work, as compared to their original characterizations in the novel. This three-tiered approach will allow thorough discussion of the changes themselves while also providing room for an interpretation of the effect of

the changes on the important areas of plot and characterization. Broad similarities do exist, but the differences between the two versions of The Razor's Edge are both interesting and, in many cases, important.

Changes in the Narrative

According to one reviewer, writing soon after the release of the film version of The Razor's Edge, "The fidelity with which Darryl F. Zanuck . . . has transformed Somerset Maugham's The Razor's Edge, or Mysticism Made Easy, into a film is almost absolute" (New Yorker November 30, 1946). While one viewing of the film may lead to such a conclusion, a careful look at the narrative composition of the two versions reveals that the statement is wrong. Significant changes have been made in the story's transfer from novel to film, and these changes can be divided into three categories: alterations, deletions, and additions.

Alterations. For use in this analysis, "alterations" will refer to scenes that are present in both the novel and the film but that have undergone change in some substantial way. The difference may be in the presence or absence of a particular character, in the order of events within the scene, or, on a larger scale, in the placement of entire scenes in a new position in the story's overall narrative structure.

The most common type of alteration, present in almost every adaptation from novel to film, involves a compression of events and streamlining of scenes. At several points in the film version of The Razor's Edge, events occur within one or two scenes that were spread out over several scenes in the novel. For example, the film's opening party scene uses Maugham's curiosity to speak for the audience in eliciting information for plot

exposition that required several sections and an elapsed time of one week in the novel. Maugham, and the viewers, are introduced to all of the film's main characters at the party, and he also learns many of the intricacies of the various love relationships. Additionally, Larry and Isabel have their first important discussion at the party, not at a picnic a few days after the much smaller party in the novel. The effect of this compression into one night is a much more economical exposition of introductory plot information, and the idea is both wise and well-executed. Other, similar, streamlining alterations occur throughout the film. Once Larry has returned from India and resumed his residence in Paris, four important events occur on different days (and in different sections) in the novel. Larry sees Maugham, visits Isabel, cures Gray's headache, and sees Sophie at the Rue de Lappe on four separate occasions. In the film, the four events are presented in substantially the same narrative form, but the time is collapsed and they all take place on one busy day. Many alterations of this type have no special significance, but they are indications of the choices directors of adaptations must constantly make, out of necessity and the demands of clarity and time, in deciding what portions of a novel can be filmed and what portions must be omitted. For this reason, acknowledgement of these alterations is an important part of a thorough account of the adaptation process.

Other alterations in the film version of Maugham's novel have a more wide-reaching impact on the movie as a whole. One of the most interesting of these alterations involves the acquisition of a party invitation, for the dying Elliott, from Princess Novemali's secretary (Chapter Five in the novel; 10,c in the film). The acquisition is handled in substantially

the same way in the two versions, and the film even uses some of the novel's dialogue, but there is one major difference--in the novel, Maugham himself charms an invitation from Miss Keith, while the film allows Larry to perform the kind deed. The impact of this alteration will be discussed in the upcoming section on Larry's characterization in the film, but it may be noted here that the change provides a clear visual reinforcement for Larry's oft-asserted goodness. The scene is one of the few demonstrations of his saintly nature actually provided by the movie, and it is only a minor demonstration at best.

Another scene that features a change in characters involves Isabel's confession of her role in Sophie's demise (Chapter Seven; 10,e). Isabel is driven to make a remorseless confession in both versions of the story, but the recipient of her revelation changes. As with the alteration just discussed, Maugham's presence in the book is replaced by Larry's in the film. Isabel's character is devalued in both instances, but the film's decision to have the information revealed to Larry makes Isabel's confession even more personally damaging. Larry, after all, matters more to her than anyone else she knows.

Shifts in the order of scene presentation are another type of alteration present in The Razor's Edge. Some shifts seem to have been made solely for the purpose of achieving a chronological presentation of the narrative. The novel moves backward and forward in time throughout its plot exposition, as Maugham relays stories told to him by other characters often years after the fact. The film proceeds in strict chronological order, losing the sense that the presentation is being reflected through the memory of one character (even though Maugham does appear in narrative

voice-over, for no apparent reason, twice in the film). Sophie's hospitalization and the death of her husband and child are presented at the time of their occurrence in the film, providing the viewers with their first sight of the character since her brief appearance at Isabel's wedding to Gray. In the novel, however, her tragedy is introduced many years after it has taken place, as a decidedly unsympathetic Isabel attempts to explain to those assembled why Sophie is spending her time in a dive like the Rue de Lappe. Consequently, Sophie is missing from the narrative for a much longer time in the novel than she is in the film. The hospital scene seems odd and out of place in the movie, as Sophie reappears for this traumatic news and then disappears once again. The explanation of her plight occurs at a more relevant time in the novel, but the filmmakers evidently had decided not to use any flashbacks, and they were thus limited in their options if they wanted to use the sad and emotional footage in their finished product.

Another big shift in the order of scenes involves a reversal of entire narrative blocks. In the novel, Elliott's death precedes Sophie's murder in both the order of presentation (Chapter Five for Elliott, Chapter Seven for Sophie) and the date of occurrence (August 1932 and April 1933). In the film, however, the two events happen only a few days apart, and Sophie's murder occurs first. A motive for these changes can only be asserted, not proven, but it would appear that Goulding and his film associates (and, most likely, the studio executives) saw Elliott's death and the gathering of many of the film's principal characters at his villa as a more powerful and appropriate vehicle for crafting the film's ending. Judging from the results, the decision was sound.

The narrative underwent other minor alterations as a result of the transfer from novel to film, but those included here represent the most important and typical changes within this category. Some alterations were made in order to streamline and simplify the story, while others reflect the filmmakers' decision to stress or play down individual characters or events.

Deletions. A deletion is a scene, character, or segment of dialogue or description that is present in the novel but absent in the film adaptation. Obviously, a complete account of every deletion would run for dozens of pages, as a great deal of cutting and trimming is necessary in nearly any story's transfer from a novel to a film of reasonable length. Many of the deletions in The Razor's Edge are quite interesting, however, and they will be discussed along with, when ascertainable, some possible reasons for their exclusion from the film.

As stated above, many deletions can be attributed to the pressures of time. Every event, even every important event, could not be included in a movie that runs for 2½ hours even with deletions. Therefore, some scenes had to be cut, and some ancillary characters trimmed. Among the missing characters who were only marginally important in the novel are: Dr. Nelson, Larry's guardian; Gregory Brabazon, the snobbish but entertaining interior decorator; Adrienne de Troye, described in the novel as "'the smartest kept woman in Paris'" (134); and Paul Barton, described in the previous chapter of this report as a younger and more ruthless version of Elliott. Other missing characters who were not so marginal will be discussed soon. Deletions also included scenes from the novel that functioned like these missing characters--interesting, and of some

value, but not vital to the development of the narrative. Some scenes and bits of information are dropped entirely. For example, the novel reveals (in Chapter Three) that Mrs. Bradley, Isabel's mother, became ill, grew progressively worse, and finally died in Chicago. Elliott returned to America to look after her before her death, and his genuine compassion and love for his family is revealed in letters he wrote to Maugham. In the film, however, Mrs. Bradley simply vanishes after her trip to Paris with Isabel (2,d). She is never seen again, never even mentioned again, and Elliott's compassionate behavior is never shown. This omission is not of great importance to the major plots, but Mrs. Bradley's disappearance without a trace is a disconcerting loose end. Some references to her health, or lack of it, would have been nice. Other omitted scenes are referred to, in passing, in scenes that are included in the film. Maugham's early conversation with Larry at the library of a Chicago club (Chapter One) is one of the novel's first explorations of Larry's desires for his future and the development of his relationship with Maugham. The section also illustrates the depth of his commitment to studying and learning, as Maugham reports that Larry spent the entire day engrossed in his reading. This conversation does not survive in the transfer to film, but Maugham does refer to the library in the opening party scene, telling Larry he had seen him there all day. In this way, a hint of the library meeting's importance can be included without taking the time to establish another scene.

Another deletion involves characters who were important in the novel and sorely missed in the adaptation. The film contains no references to either Suzanne Rouvier or to Larry's travels in Germany and encounter with

the Becker family, two segments that receive more than 25 pages of treatment in the 250 page novel. Though neither Suzanne nor the Becker family has a direct influence on the primary plot, both are important, interesting, and inherently filmable portions of Larry's mostly unfilmable quest.

Suzanne's absence from the movie is understandable, but unfortunate. She is, in the novel, a fun and lively character and a welcome contrast to Isabel, Elliott, and the other assorted examples of high society and self-centered living. In addition, Suzanne's presence adds depth and warmth to the novel's sometimes off-putting description of Larry's aloof behavior. She provides proof that Larry is, for all his saintliness, still human. Through his relationship with Suzanne, Larry demonstrates his humanity in a positive way--his desire to help another person who is struggling--and in the revelation that he does, after all, have the sexual stirrings that are a part of being a person. The wild events at the Becker farmhouse also serve an important purpose in the novel, contrasting effectively with the plot's upper-class focus and aiding in the development of Larry's character. The exclusion of this episode from the film adaptation is also understandable, as a decision not to delete would have necessitated additional sets, actors, and screen time for the presentation of an excursion only tangentially related to the film's narrative core. Still, Frau Becker, Ellie, and the other farmhouse inhabitants are colorful and entertaining characters who add spice and energy to the novel.

Suggesting scenes that should have been put into The Razor's Edge's film adaptation in place of some that were included is ultimately pointless--the movie has been completed and will remain just as it is for the rest of its existence--but an observation of this type is irresistible

when considering the deletion of Suzanne and the Becker family. In light of the total failure of the quest scenes in the film, the Becker story looks especially inviting. Including scenes at the German farmhouse in place of those at the Indian ashram would have picked up the slow tempo that plagues this section of the film, added far more material that could aid in audience understanding of, and identification with, Larry, and provided as much, if not more, valuable and memorable plot exposition. The quest would still not be fully and satisfactorily depicted in the movie if this switch were made, but the boredom that pervades this weak section would, perhaps, be lifted.

Theories concerning the reasons for the deletion of both Suzanne and this farmhouse adventure are speculative, but probable. Both segments, besides lacking a direct tie to the basic plot, contain sexual and immoral overtones. In 1946 Hollywood, with Production Code values and guidelines still very much in evidence, sex was a subject to be handled with care--if at all. The Production Code was established in 1934 and, "from 1934 until the mid-fifties it rigidly dictated the content of American films" (Cook 267). The Code dealt with crime and violence as well as sex, but the sexual restrictions are directly applicable to The Razor's Edge. As film historian David Cook summarizes the Code's provisions in this area:

Adultery, illicit sex, seduction, or rape could never be more than suggested, and then only if they were absolutely essential to the plot and were severely punished at the end (a favorite means was death from accident or disease). (267)

Thus, Sophie's promiscuous behavior could be included in the film, because it is both "absolutely essential to the plot" and "severely punished" (if an ear-to-ear throat slashing is severe enough). But Suzanne, who sleeps

with Larry and several other men in the novel, prospers at the end of the story, acquiring wealth, artistic recognition, and true happiness. Ellie, who also enjoys an amorous encounter with Larry, simply fades out of the novel after Larry leaves the Becker farm. Clearly, these two women, particularly Suzanne, could not be included in the film without radical changes in the presentation of their behavior and/or ultimate fate. Rather than risk encountering Code problems over interesting, but non-essential, characters, Twentieth Century-Fox executives and writers evidently chose to delete the characters and, in their place, play up the sterile and unconvincing Indian extravaganza. Sophie, after all, could inject the commercially beneficial doses of sex, drugs, and alcohol into the narrative--because she is dealt with in accordance with Code specifications as she meets her sad fate.

Other deletions include many of the novel's scenes featuring Maugham, as narrator, in conversation with other characters who have come to him for advice or a sympathetic ear. Most of these scenes are not especially significant, as the information they contain is either unimportant chatter, repetition or corroboration of someone else's version of an event, or material that finds its way into the film adaptation through direct presentation of the events being discussed. One deleted encounter, however, is especially missed in its exclusion from the film. Maugham's meeting with Sophie, in Toulon, provides Sophie with a rare opportunity to color the novel's plot exposition with her own interpretation of events (Chapter Five). The film omits this meeting and conversation entirely, however, and Sophie's personal views on her relationship with Larry and her decision to call off the wedding are never heard. Without this scene,

the film is still able to show what happens to Sophie--she drinks the zubrovka, runs back to the drug den, and is eventually found dead--but insights into why she acted as she did are missing. The movie's exclusion of one of the novel's most interesting scenes, particularly one with the plot importance and new information of this encounter in Toulon, is both inexplicable and unfortunate. The final months of Sophie's life are never explored, and her screaming exit from Larry's fight in the drug den is her last appearance in the film.

A final significant deletion involves the film's exclusion of most of the material contained in Chapter Six, the novel's account of Larry's quest. The actual scene in which Larry's story is presented in the novel--Maugham's accidental encounter with Larry at the theater and their subsequent dinner--is absent from the film, as is most of the theoretical discussion and journey account that constitutes the two men's conversation. The decision to delete the scene, as it is presented in the novel, is probably a wise one. Such a long, involved, and esoteric discussion would not translate well to the screen, or at least to this particular film. On the basis of the quest-related scenes that did make it to the movie, any attempt at verbal or visual explanation of such a complex and uniquely personal experience should have been avoided. Some of the material from Chapter Six is worked into the film in other forms, either through the inclusion of the actual events Larry describes (the Indian exploits), or through the placement of some of his philosophical observations in other filmed conversations. Neither of these methods works particularly well, for reasons to be discussed in the upcoming section on the film's version of the quest.

Thus, while deletions can be seen as necessary elements in the adaptation process, they are elements that need to be carefully planned and thoroughly considered. The film version of The Razor's Edge makes many wise deletions, some questionable ones, and a few that appear to be mistaken exclusions of valuable sections of the novel.

Additions. Defined here as scenes in the movie which do not appear in the novel, additions are the most unusual of the three types of changes. Their rarity can be attributed to the fact that they generally aggravate an already difficult decision-making process. A large number of scenes must be cut from a novel before it can be filmed, in most cases, and the addition of new scenes with no source in the novel makes this cutting an even more exhaustive endeavor. If a completely new scene is created by filmmakers, writers, or studio executives, thereby taking screen time away from sections of the original work being adapted, the new scene must have special importance in the minds of those making the creative decisions. This rarity and perceived significance make additions an especially interesting, and often important, category of narrative change. Three such added scenes can be found in The Razor's Edge.

The first addition occurs after Isabel's attempted seduction of Larry on her last night in Paris (2,d). In the novel, Isabel tells Maugham about the evening, and her ultimately unconsummated plans to trap Larry, one month after the fact. She is ambivalent about her decision to call off the seduction attempt, saying, "'I'm neither pleased nor sorry. I just couldn't help myself'" (78). The film version, however, adds a new ending to the night in Paris. The interrupted kisses are

presented in much the same fashion, following Isabel's account in the novel fairly faithfully. After Larry's hasty departure, however, the film introduces new material that is both entertaining and helpful in the areas of plot and characterization. The added scene features Isabel discussing her scheme with the ever-observant and conveniently eavesdropping Elliott. The meddling Uncle Elliott seems both scandalized and secretly thrilled at the revelation of this underhanded and desperate tactic, and the well-written scene provides him with some clever lines: "Am I right in surmising that you thought if you could get him back here it was almost inevitable that the inevitable would happen?" Isabel explains her decision to send Larry away in the same general terms she uses in the novel's account of her conversation with Maugham, but the film version is both more emotional and more revealing. She has been forced to confess her scheme in the film, and the confession must come only moments after Larry's abrupt exit. Consequently, she is more distraught, and more passionate, in her conversation with Elliott than in the novel's version, where the distancing effect of time and the fact that she is voluntarily revealing the information to the unflappable Maugham give her the appearance of being her usual controlled and remorseless self. The dialogue may be similar, but the circumstances of this added scene shed revealing light on the film's characterizations of both Isabel and Elliott.

Sophie's return to the drug den after her one-woman *zubrovka* party at Isabel's provides the lead-in for the second of The Razor's Edge's new scenes. This addition (8,i) involves Larry's frantic search for his missing fiancée, a trek that is summarized with only one sentence in the

novel: "'Larry spent all night going around her old haunts, but couldn't find her anywhere'" (174). In the film, this single sentence grows into a collection of short scenes. Larry is shown visiting several of Sophie's "old haunts," madly rushing in and out of smoke-filled clubs as torrential rains cascade from the skies. Beyond this expansion from one sentence to several scenes, however, the film version provides an even larger and more significant addition in this segment of the narrative: Larry actually finds Sophie, half-asleep and in the grips of a drunken stupor, at Hakim's, the basement hideaway. This radical change in the storyline permits the creation of a totally new scene, as Larry confronts Sophie and tries to persuade her to leave Hakim's and come with him. Her response to his entreaty is slurred and politely indifferent: "Hello, Larry. Join us. Zubrovka. You must try some." She then passes out, and an ugly fight ensues between Larry and Sophie's drug supplier/boyfriend. The struggle starts slowly, but turns nasty when the boyfriend extinguishes his lighted cigar on the back of Larry's neck. Not to be outdone, Larry retaliates by ripping the pierced earring from his opponent's unsuspecting ear. Sophie stirs, murmurs "I don't need you, I don't need anyone," and then begins to scream wildly as her boyfriend and his companions surround Larry and toss him outside in the rain. This added scene certainly introduces a high level of action and violence into the proceedings, but its value in lieu of some of the excised material from the novel is questionable.

The final addition also revolves around Sophie, although by this time she is dead and the new scene is built around characters' memories of her. The scene (9,b), analyzed earlier from the standpoint of lighting in the discussion of that element of mise-en-scene, involves Maugham and

Larry's visit to the deceased woman's apartment. In the novel, the two men have a brief discussion about Sophie, and their fond memories of her, after they have identified her body at the morgue. The film, however, expands this tribute into a longer, more involved, and more sympathetic scene. Looking around in Sophie's apartment, the men find pictures of her dead husband and child, as well as discovering the Keats ode that inspires Larry's emotional reading. After a few moments of contemplation, they give the photographs and book of poetry to the police officer who accompanied them to the site, requesting that the items be buried with Sophie's body. All of these events are newly created for the film, and portions of the scene as a whole are undeniably moving. The excellent uses of lighting and background music, discussed earlier, are also positive attributes of this oddly pretty scene. Even with these qualities, however, the visit to Sophie's apartment remains a touching but unnecessary replacement for more important sections of the novel that were never filmed.

In summary, scenes were added in the film adaptation for a variety of reasons. Isabel and Elliott's conversation provides a glimpse into a seldom-seen, conscience-stricken side of Isabel; the fight at Hakim's introduces some liveliness and excitement into the narrative, through the use of old-fashioned Hollywood violence; and the scene in Sophie's apartment allows the characters and viewers to reflect on Sophie's life and death. Some deleted sections of the novel would have brought more to the film than these added scenes provide, but each of the three additions does offer something of interest.

With the completion of this analysis of additions, the section on

changes in the narrative concludes. As has been demonstrated, the alterations, deletions, and additions are numerous and, in some cases, quite important. Reasons for these changes range from a need for plot compression and streamlining, to an attempt to avoid conflict with the Production Code, to a desire to spice up the narrative with some physical violence. Possible reasons for other changes, however, remain unclear.

The second section of this analysis of narrative style will focus on the film's three major plot strands. Specifically, the three subplots will be compared to their predecessors in Maugham's novel, with many of the just-discussed changes coming into play as reasons for differences in the two versions.

Plot

The analysis in the previous chapter divided the novel's plot into three primary sections, and these divisions are maintained in the film as well. As a result, this analysis of plot in the film adaptation will be structured along the same lines as the earlier exploration of the novel, using the same divisions: Larry's quest, Larry and the women in his life, and Elliott's life and death.

Larry's quest. While the novel's quest scenes were not sterling examples of clear and intriguing presentation, they begin to assume these positive qualities when they are compared to the film's version of Larry's quest. Unlikely as it may seem, the filmed quest is even less satisfactory than that of the novel. Scenes from the novel that provided at least some meager sense of explanation or motivation are excluded from the film or, if included, they are gutted to the point of ineffectiveness.

The film adaptation includes four scenes that concentrate on the quest (4,a; 5,a; 7,a; 7,b). Without exception, these scenes are poorly written, terminally vague, and unconvincingly acted. Larry's scene with Kosti in the Lens bar (4,a) is amateurish in construction and presentation, with Larry's supposed inspiration to travel to India developed in murky and cliché-ridden fashion. The big scene at the ashram (5,a) is even worse, suffering from the aforementioned fake setting, substandard acting by Tyrone Power and his wise old counterpart, and very weak writing. In addition, the scene is plagued with ridiculous composition--the two men are sitting so close together that their noses almost touch as they gaze meaningfully into each other's eyes. The scene does contain a fair amount of material from the novel's Chapter Six account of the quest, but the details fall totally flat in the transfer to the screen. The farewell scene at the ashram (7,a) is mercifully short, but it still manages to be both predictable and vague:

Old Man: Sometimes strange things happen in the mountains.

Larry: What sort of things?

Old Man: That . . . depends on you.

Finally, the most important quest scene, Larry's explanation of his illumination, is weak and almost unfathomable (7,b). His dialogue wanders in circles without ever hitting any coherent target, and the camera's relentless and tight close-up on his face creates a claustrophobic atmosphere for what should be a spacious and transcendent moment. The film, as a whole, would have profited immensely if these scenes were simply dropped. More than 15 minutes of an overlong running time would be trimmed, and, while the quest would seem mysterious, it would no longer be reduced to this trivial series of hollow and meaningless remarks. The actors in

these scenes try to deliver their lines with an aura of deep profundity and significance, but the result is an almost laughable treatment of a subject that serves as the film's narrative core.

The failure of the quest scenes, while severe, does not destroy the film, and the failure is not totally the fault of The Razor's Edge's production personnel. A convincing film account of Larry's journey--a journey that is so interior and psychological in nature--would be almost impossible to create, partly because of the properties of the film medium itself. As George Bluestone has observed:

Film, having only arrangement of space to work with, cannot render thought, for the moment thought is externalized it is no longer thought. The film . . . by presenting us with dialogue, can lead us to infer thought. But it cannot show us thought directly. A film is not thought; it is perceived. (47-8)

The film version of The Razor's Edge does try to approximate Larry's mental journey, through his dialogue in these scenes, through his conversations about the quest with other characters, and through such visual means as the sunset scene (7,b). Ultimately, however, the film is unable to capture the essence of his transformation, a transformation that is fiercely internal. Many reviewers believed that Maugham's novel was unfilmable because of this inability to reproduce the quest on film, but this opinion seems to overstate the case to a moderate degree. The novel is not unfilmable, but the quest portions may be. A better tactic might have been to mention the quest in passing only, allowing the viewer to imagine the details of the illumination in his or her own mind. In this way, the limitless imagination could soar to the heights required for a genuine comprehension of this supreme experience, instead of being weighted down by attempts to express it in visual (and verbal) terms. Suggestions aside,

the fact remains that the quest is a part of the film adaptation of Maugham's novel--a weak link in an otherwise entertaining movie.

Larry and the women in his life. The three women most involved with Larry in the novel version of The Razor's Edge are reduced to two in the film, as Suzanne Rouvier vanishes somewhere between Paris and Hollywood. Isabel and Sophie remain to tempt and torment Larry, and their relationships with him are important elements in the exposition of the film's narrative.

The biggest change in the relationship between Larry and Isabel comes about through Larry's presence at Elliott's house near the end of the movie. An improvement in the story in terms of narrative tension and audience satisfaction, Larry's presence provides an opportunity for the big confrontation scene that is missing from the novel. Instead of having the more detached Maugham force Isabel's confession, the film allows Larry--the man who has actually been manipulated and wronged by Isabel's trickery--to have the satisfaction of exposing her true complicity in Sophie's degeneration and death.

Reasons for this rather substantial change are most likely grounded in the film's historical context. Larry and Isabel's relationship, bizarre and unromantic as it usually is, is the closest thing to a love story that this film has to offer. As was the case with many Hollywood movies of the era, this love story was the movie's major drawing card. Having signed popular stars Tyrone Power and Gene Tierney to play these romantic leads, the filmmakers and executives planned to use this love relationship as the film's central focus. Thus, while the relationship simply fades away

with no real farewell or resolution in the novel, it is played up and invested with emotional fireworks as it assumes prominence near the end of the film. While Larry and his evolving spiritual philosophy are the center of Maugham's novel, Larry and his relationship with Isabel assume an equal or greater level of importance and emphasis in Goulding's film. The decision to stress this romantic entanglement appears to be a wise one, as the love story is more interesting than the quest adventure both in abstract terms and in actual presentation within the film. The movie's closing confrontation scene between Isabel and Larry helps to tie up some loose ends that are left dangling in the novel, creating a firmer sense of resolution than is present in Maugham's original work. The final scenes also provide a higher level of satisfaction for viewers who may not want to see Isabel's role in Sophie's downfall remain undetected by Larry. All of these considerations reflect a typical Hollywood custom of resolving a film's major conflicts and crafting a tighter, more closed, ending than is often found in novels or plays. Many films, of course, do choose to present open and unresolved endings, but The Razor's Edge makes changes in the treatment of Larry and Isabel's relationship that correspond to a typical pattern of films of the studio era. The romantic attachment does not end happily, but it does seem to end. Taken in the context of the overall narrative of the film, this stronger conclusion provides a solid and dramatic punch that helps to invigorate a lengthy ending to an already overlong film. Genuine tension and emotion are introduced as the film is winding down, and these qualities help to create the desired interest in these final scenes. The film version of this couple's odyssey is generally faithful to the novel's presentation until these concluding scenes, but

the increased emphasis on the end of the relationship is both predictable and, for once, fortunate.

The course of Larry and Sophie's relationship changes very little in the adaptation from novel to film. Added and deleted scenes that affect audience perception of this love story (a term that is even more inappropriate here than in Larry and Isabel's case) have been analyzed in the preceding sections and, while some of these specific changes are important, their impact on the relationship as a whole is minimal. Larry and Sophie's childhood ties are still established (8,e), Maugham still introduces the concept of "self-sacrifice" as the probable motive for Larry's decision to marry Sophie (8,f), and the end of their engagement (another seemingly inappropriate term) comes about through the same series of events (8,h). Larry does see Sophie one final time in the film version as he pleads with her at Hakim's (8,i), but the scene adds very little to the development of their relationship. The film allows Larry to appear slightly more upset and shaken by Sophie's death than the novel does, where his lack of strong reaction is curiously distancing. In both the novel and the film, however, the absence of scenes between the two characters is disappointing. The novel was restricted by its use of a narrator/participant who had to have believable access to all the events he reported, but the film uses voice-over narration without explaining its connection to the scenes included in the narrative presentation. As a result, the film avoided this limitation on what scenes could be presented, but little advantage is gained from this greater freedom. Despite these missed opportunities, Larry and Sophie remain an intriguing couple, important to the development of the plot but sadly underdeveloped as a potentially dynamic pair.

Elliott's life and death. This third and final plot strand is, wisely, the least changed in the adaptation process. Both as a character and in the construction of his scenes, Elliott is one of the novel's finest creations. Fortunately, most of this success is equally evident in the film. His characterization in the film will be discussed in the next section of this narrative analysis, but a look at the number of his important scenes in the novel that were retained in the film indicates the fidelity of his transformation as a major subplot. All of his best scenes--the quarrels with Isabel, the royal-crested underwear, the Ritz luncheon, and, especially, the scenes near his death--are left intact, substantially intact, or, in some cases, even expanded. Elliott remains of only secondary importance to many of the plot's central elements, but his role in the story and his amount of screen time are at least equal to his exposure in the novel. While many adaptations require a drastic reduction in the number of characters and scenes, Elliott survives this adaptation with all of his strong scenes in tow. His death becomes the occasion for a gathering of most of the film's cast, assuming even greater plot importance than it had in the novel. Additionally, his famous death scene is played out in long and perversely entertaining fashion, right down to his dictation of a refusal to Princess Novemali's party invitation and his immortal last words, "The old witch" (with the change of one crucial letter to avoid Production Code troubles).

Characterization

The analysis of the novel in the previous chapter discussed the characterization of nine of Maugham's major creations in The Razor's Edge.

Seven of these nine characters survived to the film version, with Paul Barton and Suzanne Rouvier failing to make the transition. No new characters of great significance are introduced, and these remaining seven are the basis for all of the film's narrative action. In accordance with this chapter's general approach of investigating differences between the novel and its film adaptation, the following character analyses will focus on perceived changes in behavior, personality, or presentation of the seven people under consideration. Similarities will be mentioned when appropriate, but a reiteration of character traits or presentation style already explored in the previous chapter is unnecessary. While the many changes are interesting in themselves, some of them also indicate pressures and influences from outside the closed world of the film. Larry Darrell, the first of the seven to be discussed, is among those characters who have this extra significance.

Larry Darrell. Most of the problems with Larry's film characterization stem from the fact that he appears too good to be true before the quest, and not as good as expected after he returns to Paris. The pre-quest problems are similar to those of the novel and need only be mentioned here. The film offers very little indication that Larry struggles with his decision to leave his girlfriend behind in order to search for elusive inner peace. He seems so serene and detached in the film's earliest scenes that the quest seems pointless, as he appears to be a saint-in-progress who is already on a higher level of humanity than those around him. After the quest, the film's treatment of Larry is even less satisfactory than that provided by the novel, as the movie glosses over the

important task of presenting a convincing portrait of a truly kind and giving man. Larry seems to be essentially the same person that he was before he left on his ten-year trek, yet he is supposed to appear and behave so differently that other characters would repeatedly notice this profound "difference." Perhaps the filmmakers believed that other characters' testimony would be convincing proof of the transformation, but they were wrong. Observable evidence is needed to indicate that Larry has moved to a higher level of awareness and compassion, but the only tangible proof offered by the film is the pseudo-mysticism of the headache cure (8,c), a scene that is faithfully reproduced from its equally unbelievable presentation in the novel. Demonstration of the deep change in Larry was also lacking in the novel, but Maugham's work did include an account of Larry's selfless attention to Suzanne that helped to provide slightly more convincing evidence. Suzanne is absent from the film, leaving only the magic headache-curing coin, the devotion to Sophie that is never explored from Larry's perspective, and a general niceness that seems more bland than awe-inspiring. In addition to this ineffective and unflattering element of his characterization, Larry is also desexualized to an alarming degree. With an actor of Tyrone Power's obvious good looks and sex appeal in the role, this absence of passion and romantic allure is especially disappointing and damaging. The exclusion of the affairs with Suzanne and Ellie has already been discussed, but the film also deletes all of the sexual speculation by Isabel that helps to energize reader perception of Larry in the novel. The film's few romantic scenes between Larry and Isabel lack any spark of believability, and there is no hint of any sort of sexual attraction in Larry's relationship with Sophie--

only a fatherly instinct for protection and rehabilitation. These traits all combine to make Larry seem even duller and more remote in the film than he does in the novel.

Given this shabby treatment by the writers and production staff, it is somewhat odd that Larry's best scenes in the film are those created for him by the filmmakers with no clearly traceable source in the novel. During his stay at Elliott's villa in Nice at the movie's end, a stay that is not found in the novel, Larry shows a slight sense of humor, vague evidence of his kindness, and an actual spark of anger--three human qualities sorely absent from his characterization in most of the film. The humor comes in his visit to Princess Novemali's secretary, where his interplay with Miss Keith seems more flirtatious and genuinely sexy than any of his earlier scenes with Isabel. This visit is also one of the rare demonstrations of Larry's kind nature, as he overlooks Elliott's unfriendliness and seeks to fulfill one of his dying wishes. The movie-ending confrontation with Isabel offers Larry his one chance to show a glimmer of anger and true emotion. The fact that both of these scenes were originally Maugham's in the novel should not be overlooked. The classical Hollywood film notion of placing the protagonist (and, as discussed previously, the love story) at the center of the narrative, especially at the film's end, was the cause of this shift, and the result is advantageous to the film and to Larry's characterization. After an unsatisfactory beginning, including no true explanation of why he felt the need to quest, followed by an unsatisfactory depiction of the quest itself, including no scenes of actual struggle or mental distress, and an unconvincingly shallow and detached characterization upon his return

to Paris, Larry finally comes tentatively alive in these concluding scenes. Consequently, scenes in the novel that did not even include Larry become his best scenes in the film. The unwritten rules of Hollywood romance- and protagonist-oriented filmmaking can be credited for bringing about this saving grace.

Isabel Bradley Maturin. The major change in Isabel's characterization occurs not because of the addition or subtraction of scenes, but because of one key shift in the order of her scenes' presentation. Most of her important scenes are transferred to the screen substantially intact, and the result is that her spoiled, self-centered personality is equally evident in both the novel and film versions. The filmmakers' decision to present all of the scenes in chronological order, however, leads to one difference in her development on the screen.

In Maugham's novel, Isabel's deliberate culpability in Sophie's exposure to the zubrovka is hinted at from the initial revelation of the event. The hints grow stronger as the account of what took place in Isabel's apartment is retold, but the reader cannot be sure the event was not an unfortunate accident until Isabel's confession late in the novel's final section. Suspicions of her conscious involvement color her characterization throughout the novel's slow journey to the truth, but no firm confirmation is provided until Isabel's last-minute admission.

The film version of The Razor's Edge dispenses with multiple points-of-view and retellings of the same event from different perspectives. Instead, the camera becomes an observer with access to any scenes, anywhere. Each event is presented in only one version, seen through the

eyes of the camera instead of through a character's recollections (even though Maugham's voice-overs do indicate that he is supposedly narrating the tale). Additionally, all of the events are presented in strict chronological order, maintaining this straightforward manner of exposition. The result of these changes in narrative method is that viewers see the zubrovka scene at Isabel's apartment (8,h) as it happens, not on a delayed basis or through the accounts of those involved. Isabel's complicity is unquestionable in this film presentation. Director Goulding certainly could have created a more ambiguous version of the events through the omission of some of his more damning shots, but he chooses instead to leave no doubt that Isabel is fully aware of what she is doing, and of the possible consequences. The film version includes such invented details as Isabel's use of her daughter's picture to remind Sophie of her own dead child and Isabel's dramatic pause as she prepares to leave the room--looking at the nervous and newly-distraught Sophie, then looking at the bottle of zubrovka prominently placed at Sophie's side, then leaving this Eve and apple combination alone, her role as the serpent completed.

The effect of this decidedly unambiguous presentation is to push audience perception of Isabel in a strongly negative direction much sooner than that accomplished in the novel. Her behavior is unforgettably cruel and callous, and she never shows remorse for the deed or its ultimate consequences. She remains a fascinating and well-created character, but actually seeing her heartless temptation of Sophie shifts sympathy in her upcoming struggle for Larry completely to his side. The end result, for Sophie, Larry, and Isabel, is the same in the two versions of the story, as Sophie dies, Larry leaves, and Isabel is revealed to be a beautiful

woman with no desire to play the game by any rules but her own, no matter who is hurt in the process. Goulding chooses to show the extremes of this chilling side of Isabel's character much sooner than Maugham did.

Elliott Templeton. One of the best aspects of the film version of The Razor's Edge is that Isabel's snobby Uncle Elliott survives the transition to celluloid in all his humor and glory. There are no significant changes in Elliott's characterization, as the filmmakers apparently recognized the excellence of Maugham's efforts in this creation. Elliott is still infinitely more interesting than Larry, he still steals every scene in which he appears, and his passing still marks the end of one of the most likeable characters in the story.

Many of Elliott's best lines show up in the film exactly as they appeared in the novel, and, as a bonus, he is even supplied with some new lines that are wonderfully consistent with his outspoken and entertaining personality. This exchange between Elliott and Mrs. Bradley, his sister, is one of numerous examples of this effective added dialogue (2,b): Elliott has just explained to Mrs. Bradley that Larry has turned down several social invitations since his arrival in Paris, much to Elliott's annoyance and consternation. Mrs. Bradley tries to console Elliott while excusing Larry, but she finds her reasoning is completely alien to the socially-obsessed mind of her brother:

Mrs. Bradley: Maybe he just didn't want to go.

Elliott: That's the most incredible reason for refusing
an invitation that I've ever heard in my life.

The only change of even minor consequence in Elliott's characterization involves a slight de-emphasis of his more positive qualities.

His generosity, kindness, and family loyalty are apparent in some of his actions, but the film offers little of the direct comment on these traits that is sprinkled through Maugham's novel. Nevertheless, Goulding and his staff deserve commendation for taking one of the novel's assets and bringing it fully alive on the screen. Accomplishing this transformation of character from novel to film is quite difficult, as film scholar Michael Orm  has noted:

You cannot transpose any one character from page to screen and hope to present him entirely as the novelist created him or as the novelist's public knew him. . . . Who can really recall having seen a screen performance which really and truly portrayed his favourite character as he knew it? (qtd. in Bluestone 23)

Happily, the depiction of Elliott Templeton comes close to this rare achievement. The results of this on-screen meeting of character, actor, and dialogue are genuinely enjoyable.

Sophie MacDonald. Sophie's characterization in this film survives an unsteady beginning to become at least partially successful by the time she makes her ghoulish off-camera exit. The major change in her portrayal occurs in the film's early scenes (1,a; 3,a), and the change is definitely for the worse.

The filmmakers' aim was obvious: play up Sophie's sweet nature and strong love for Bob in order to make his death a more credible cause for the chain of events that leads to her tragic fall. The screen version of Sophie in the opening party scene and at Isabel and Gray's wedding, however, is an unreal and overly sweet young woman who displays none of the grit and toughness that come into play after her husband's death. Her initial appearance at the opening party begins with no problems, as she

helps with plot exposition by identifying characters and explaining relationships for the visiting Maugham, and for the audience. After Bob's arrival, however, Sophie's pleasant helpfulness is transformed into an overwrought display of devotion, primarily because of the corny and predictable dialogue she and Bob are required to deliver. A similar case of ineffective and trite dialogue plagues Sophie's characterization in Isabel's wedding scene (3,a), where she and Bob, now happily married, exchange more clichéd vows of devotion. Part of the problem in these early appearances by Sophie lies in the nature of the film medium itself. The depth of Sophie's love for Bob does need to be shown on screen, just as it was an important element in her portrayal in the novel. But while the novel can simply state Sophie's deep feelings in a paragraph of narration, the film must demonstrate her attachment to Bob through dialogue. Conveying the strength and importance of this bond in a fresh and believable manner is, admittedly, a difficult task. However, a problem in presentation inherent in the medium does not excuse poor writing, and a more successful depiction of Sophie's relationship with Bob was certainly possible. The characterization of Sophie in these early scenes is neither credible nor well-developed, and the Sophie who reappears at the Rue de Lappe bears no resemblance to this saccharine version. Her emotional trauma would undoubtedly evoke profound changes in personality, but the link between the two versions of Sophie in the novel is not reproduced in the film.

The hospital scene (6,a) marks the transition point in Sophie's film characterization, and the pathetic creature who stumbles into Larry's life at the Rue de Lappe is more like her counterpart in Maugham's novel. The

film version of Sophie is given some effective new lines in her discussion with Isabel just before the zubrovka incident (8,h), including this poignant observation made as she seeks Isabel's approval of her upcoming marriage to Larry: "I'll be a good wife. . . . I was before." With the exception of these occasional improvements, Sophie's characterization remains faithful to its original presentation in the novel. Important scenes that could establish motivation and attitude are still missing, yet the character is also still affecting and genuinely pathetic throughout the rest of her appearances in the film. These sad segments of her life are presented much more convincingly than the happier times discussed earlier, a contrast that is also present in the novel, though not as noticeably. Anne Baxter's acting skills pull the two screen versions of Sophie into an acceptable whole, but better writing could have heightened the success.

Somerset Maugham. Stripped of most of his duties in the film adaptation, Maugham's development as a character is almost nonexistent. He loses two of his few chances to actually do something important, as Larry assumes his role of prominence at the film's end. Indeed, there seems to be little reason to even have Maugham in the movie. He is featured in one entertaining and funny scene with Isabel that invests him with a little bit of personality (8,f), but he is no longer needed as narrator and his role as confidant is also trimmed noticeably. The film's direct presentation of scenes (with Maugham's two voice-overs gratuitously included) removes the necessity of having every event and conversation either witnessed by or explained to him, and as a result, he seems to wander around and stumble in and out of the film for no apparent reason. Nothing

in the film's characterization of Maugham deserves especially strong praise or criticism, as his presence is generally unobtrusive but uneventful. He does have an important role in the film's opening scene, as he elicits plot information that will aid in audience understanding of subsequent events, and some of his chance meetings with Elliott or Larry do contribute to the unfolding narrative. Beyond these rare examples of usefulness, however, Maugham is characterized most accurately as a bland and superfluous observer.

Gray Maturin. Gray retains many of his identifying qualities from the novel, appearing as the nice but dull best friend. He is too earnest and friendly to dislike, but too boring to attract much audience interest or attention. His thematic importance in the novel is downplayed in the film adaptation, as he no longer seems the embodiment of capitalism and the American drive for success. This loss of thematic significance is due primarily to a sharp reduction in the number of important scenes Gray is involved in, as the novel's early scenes that included the most pointed references to his business drive are omitted from the film. He is still held up to Larry as a peer to be emulated, but his father is nowhere to be seen and the sometimes spirited theoretical conversations that helped define his character are missing as well. The film offers few glimpses into his personality or his reactions to the events that swirl around him, especially the obvious nature of his wife's attraction to another man. Ultimately, the film version of Gray is best remembered as the big, quiet man with the headaches who seems oblivious to the crises his acquaintances are enduring. His momentary flash of anger as he confronts Sophie's boyfriend at the Rue de Lappe is his most exciting moment.

Kosti. Larry's friend from the Lens mine does not prosper in the transfer to film, as most of his adventures in the novel are excluded from the cinema version. His only scene in the movie makes him appear to be a gruff, possibly demented, wandering vagabond with some unclearly explained relationship to God, aspects of the Vedanta, and the intricacies of Indian mysticism. Kosti is not a vital character in the novel, but he does have a few interesting things to say during his extended and often exciting travels with Larry. He provides comic relief, functions as a recipient for explanations of Larry's evolving ideas, and, before he abruptly vanishes from the narrative, he seems to be developing a recognizable and distinct personality. In the film, his brief, one-scene appearance robs him of any dimension as a character. Instead, he functions solely as a mysterious and verbose way to provide Larry with the idea of journeying to India. In the narrative and out again with no development or explanation, his confused presence suggests that a better approach might have been to drop him completely and let Larry head for India through some unexplained inspiration--if the Indian scenes need be shown at all.

This exploration of the stylistic and narrative elements of the film version of The Razor's Edge reveals that the work contains both successful and unsuccessful moments in almost every area under consideration. Stepping away from a view of the film as an outgrowth of the novel, independent stylistic analysis demonstrated that the movie features considerable achievements in the areas of mise-en-scene, cinematography, editing, and sound. Weak points can also be found in all of these areas of cinematic style, often reflecting the film's tendency to echo the rather conservative stylistic approach of many Hollywood films of the studio era. Presenting

the narrative in clear and convincing fashion was the primary goal of this film genre, and cinematic style functioned as a medium for the narrative message, not as a component of equal importance. The significance of this historical perspective should not be underestimated, as the filmmaking customs of the era help to explain many of the stylistic choices made in The Razor's Edge. Similarly, the film's occasional flashes of stylistic innovation are especially noteworthy, as they demonstrate the creativity still at work within these studio films. Fortunately, The Razor's Edge does contain original and entertaining flourishes within these four divisions of cinematic style.

In the analysis of narrative, the film has been seen to be bound to the parameters of Maugham's original story. Significant and specific changes in the narrative have been discussed, as has the impact of these changes on the characterization and plot development in the film. Many of the narrative failures in the film, but not all, have been traced to flaws in the novel that were compounded by the transfer to the screen. The film is less ambitious and expansive in its treatment of the major themes of the novel, playing down the novel's discourses on religion, mysticism, and the desire for material possessions while also de-emphasizing the references to American capitalism and other more cerebral subjects. In place of these themes, the film again reflects the context of its times by pulling the novel's romantic elements to the forefront, particularly in the final third of the story. This shift results in a tighter, stronger, and generally more dramatic final section.

Overlong and occasionally muddled, Goulding's film version of The Razor's Edge does have problems that stand firmly in the way of greatness.

The film's many strong points, however, indicate that no apologies need be made for the filmmakers' work or the final product. Creating a coherent and cohesive movie from Maugham's "unfilmable" novel was a task that many book and film reviewers perceived as impossible, but Goulding and his associates succeeded in capturing much of the story, and many of the characters, in believable and interesting forms. The specific problems discussed in the preceding analyses of cinematic style and narrative do diminish the film's achievements, but viewing The Razor's Edge remains an enjoyable experience. The story is engrossing, well-filmed, and bolstered by several entertaining performances.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

The novel and film versions of The Razor's Edge have been dissected, examined, and interpreted during this analysis of their various parts and interrelationships. As this process concludes, the task becomes that of reassembling the segments into their respective wholes and briefly enlarging the scope of the analysis to encompass the world of novels, films, and adaptations that lies beyond the confines of these specific works. The Razor's Edge, in each of its two forms, is representative of many of the strengths, weaknesses, and general rules of its medium of expression. Beyond the value for detailed content analysis that has formed the core of this exploration, The Razor's Edge also offers significant areas for study in the broader context of the work's relationship to, and use of, the qualities of expression and exposition inherent in its two different forms of presentation.

One natural urge in seeking to reassemble this novel and film, and then examine them from a distance, is to attempt a qualitative comparison of the two--which is better, and why. Such a comparison, however, is both ill-advised and ultimately useless. George Bluestone expresses the pitfalls in such an attempt with clarity and imagination:

It is as fruitless to say that film A is better or worse than novel B as it is to pronounce Wright's Johnson Wax Building better or worse than Tchaikovsky's "Swan Lake." In the last analysis, each is autonomous and each is characterized by unique and specific properties. (5)

These properties--the modes of presentation and perception that help to shape the creation and reception of a novel or film--are fruitful areas

of exploration, however, as they serve both as aids in a final understanding of the two versions of The Razor's Edge and as bridges between the more narrow focus of this analysis and the broader world of the relationship between novel and film.

The Razor's Edge as novel does take advantage of some of the particular strengths of the written word as a mode of aesthetic communication. The material Maugham presents in Chapter Six of the novel is a prime example of a large segment of the work whose success depends on the qualities of its method of expression. In this chapter of the novel, much of Larry's explanation of his inner illumination and conversion is quite dense. The power and importance of this section is due, in large part, to the fact that novels are the most effective way to present such complex and philosophical observations in a fictional setting. Novels provide the space that is lacking in a short story to allow fuller development of what is fundamentally a plot digression. More importantly for the purposes of this analysis, the differences between the written word and a cinematic representation are crucial to Chapter Six's success. Words on a page have two important advantages over the presentation of the same ideas on film, and these advantages help to explain Chapter Six's prominence in the novel and absence from the film adaptation. Specifically, a novel's account of a complex philosophical discussion offers a reader the chance to absorb the material at his or her own pace and the opportunity to re-read important or difficult passages. Filmmakers can slow or emphasize dialogue to aid in audience understanding, but viewers still lack the ability to adjust the flow of events or conversation to suit their own individual needs for repetition or increased emphasis. In a

theater, the entire audience will be exposed to each scene or segment of dialogue for the same amount of time. Levels of attention may vary, but the opportunity to absorb at a slower pace or to repeat a particular scene does not exist. The increased level of at-home movie viewing through the use of videocassette recorders with fast forward and rewind capabilities is beginning to narrow the gap between reader control of exposure and viewer control of exposure, but the dominance of the theater setting and group exposure to movies perpetuates this long-standing difference between the reading and viewing forms. The talky and occasionally obtuse Chapter Six contains material ideally suited for novel, as opposed to film, exposition. Maugham even suggests that readers may want to skip the chapter--an idea that would be difficult to reproduce on film. Long stretches of dense and tangentially important dialogue simply do not transfer well from novel to film, and this fact, more than any other, explains why most of Chapter Six did not survive the adaptation to the screen.

These qualities of greater space, reader ability to control length of exposure, and reader ability to control order of exposure also affect other portions of the novel version of The Razor's Edge. Greater space is the primary reason the novel contains more events and characters than its film adaptation--an observation that holds true for the majority of adaptations in general. Simplicity is important in films because a viewer lacks the ability to refer back to previous events for clarification, an option that is often necessary when a reader tries to absorb all of the events and characters in the written version of an especially lengthy or complex story.

Maugham's novel also draws on the ability of the printed word to

describe abstract thoughts and inner feelings, qualities that are often difficult to transfer to film. Maugham underuses this asset, partially because of his self-imposed limitation in the form of a narrator/participant who cannot report other characters' thoughts unless they are expressed to him. Nevertheless, the novel does include some interesting glimpses into the narrator's mind and occasional speculation concerning possible motives and feelings of those around him. The film is able to capture many of the emotions and subtle shadings of character that are revealed through straightforward narration in the novel, usually through the effective use of close-ups and nuanced acting by many performers. In the depiction of abstract thought, however, this film echoes the weakness of the art form in general in its inability to reproduce the precise description of thought patterns and concepts that can be presented in a novel. Assertions or explanations that can be presented in a novel's narration must be recast in visual terms or in dialogue in most films (those without narration), and The Razor's Edge struggles with this problem of conversion. Visual allusions may be too subtle, while demonstrations through dialogue may place too much emphasis on a point that requires only one short sentence in a novel. The attempts to illustrate the happiness of Sophie's relationship with Bob are obvious examples of this problem in The Razor's Edge.

Film, and this film in particular, also has strengths inherent in its method of presentation. One of the greatest assets is the ability to evoke setting and background detail while simultaneously providing plot exposition. A film can show, in a few seconds, detailed settings that can take a novel paragraphs or pages to develop. While showing these

backgrounds, the film can continue advancing its story--separate tasks in the novel, where action must grind to a halt if any in-depth description of surroundings is to be presented. The Razor's Edge on film makes good use of its ability to show elaborate settings quickly, particularly at the Rue de Lappe and, at the other social extreme, at the opulent parties and clubs visited by Isabel and others. This proficiency in the presentation of The Razor's Edge's external world helps to offset the film's inability to capture the internal world of the characters' thoughts and motivations.

In addition, the film is at its best when it uses film style imaginatively. As has been discussed previously, the film generally reflects the tendency of other Hollywood films of the era in its predominantly conservative and functional treatment of lighting, editing, and other stylistic elements. Some of the movie's best moments occur when Goulding chooses to use the visual capabilities of film in an unusual or especially creative manner. The rare innovation in approach to lighting or camera placement has already been noted, but, taken as a whole, these more imaginative uses of the possibilities of cinema are the too-few reminders of what film can accomplish beyond the mere exposition of narrative. Such devices can be overused and come to overshadow the story they supposedly serve, but a creative use of cinematic style, balanced with a healthy restraint, can extend a film's total artistic accomplishment toward a fuller recognition of the medium's possibilities. The Razor's Edge, a product of the studio system, could have used a few more doses of creativity.

The adaptation process attempts to retain the novel's greatest assets, improve the weaknesses that can be enhanced by the properties of cinema,

and recast the total reading experience into appropriate cinematic terms. Thus, some aspects of the written work arrive on the screen substantially intact, others are changed, and many vanish completely. The challenge and interest inherent in adaptation arises from this attempt to reconstitute, at least in spirit, the fictional world expressed in one medium in a second medium. Fortunately, no foolproof blueprint exists to bridge the distance from the written word to the film adaptation. Individual interpretation of what will and will not work remains, in all its imperfection and variance, the criterion for adaptation decisions, whether it be the interpretation of the director, the studio, or some collaborative effort. This lack of a perfect and inflexible standard may seem disconcerting when an adaptation fails, but the unavailability of one clear method encourages different, and often more imaginative, approaches. No assembly line formula exists for writing a successful novel, creating a successful film, or making all the right decisions in an adaptation. Despite the occasional frustration of failure, the media are better for this uncertainty. Both versions of The Razor's Edge achieve a degree of success, but both successes are tempered with moments of ineffectiveness. The novel falls farther short of more lofty aspirations, while the film comes closer to reaching its more limited goals. Ultimately, each version can stand alone as an example of the creative possibilities within its medium, and the two can combine to offer an interesting and instructive example of the process of adaptation.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

NARRATIVE SUMMARY OF THE RAZOR'S EDGE:

THE NOVEL

CHAPTER ONE: Chicago 1919

- Maugham recounts nature of his friendship with Elliott Templeton.
- Maugham meets Isabel, Larry, Mrs. Bradley (Isabel's mother), Gray, Sophie, and others at a series of luncheons given by Elliott.
- Larry and Maugham meet at library; Larry talks of his desire to "loaf" and his dreams of escaping middle-class life and exploring the mysteries of human existence.
- Larry and Isabel go on picnic; Larry tells Isabel that he plans to go to Paris for two years.

CHAPTER TWO: London, Paris 1920-1

- Elliott tells Maugham about Larry's antisocial behavior in Paris.
- Isabel and her mother arrive for a visit in Paris.
- Isabel, Elliott, Larry, and Mrs. Bradley have lunch; Elliott is still angry at Larry.
- Isabel and Larry argue, officially break engagement.
- Isabel plans to seduce Larry on her last night in Paris, but she finds herself unable to go through with it.

CHAPTER THREE: Lens, Bonn, London, Riviera, Paris 1921-30

- Larry tells of his travels: working in coal mine in Lens, farmhouse in Germany, etc.
- Isabel marries Gray, they have two children.
- Elliott, dissatisfied with the social climate of the "new" Paris, moves to Riviera.
- Stock market crash bankrupts Gray and Isabel; Mrs. Bradley dies; Elliott installs Isabel and family in his Paris apartment.

CHAPTER FOUR: Paris 1930-1

- Maugham, visiting Paris, renews friendship with Isabel.
- Maugham has chance encounter with Larry, invites him to visit Isabel.
- Isabel, Gray, Maugham, and Larry dine together; Larry talks of his "illumination" in India.
- Larry cures Gray of migraine headache.
- Isabel confesses to Maugham that she still loves Larry.
- Maugham visits his friend Suzanne Rouvier, an artists model who was once Larry's lover; Maugham reflects on Suzanne's varied and interesting life.

CHAPTER FIVE: Paris, Antibes, London, Toulon 1931-2

- Isabel, Larry, Gray, and Maugham, out for an evening tour of the seamy side of Paris, run into a drunken Sophie at the Rue de Lappe.
- Isabel reveals details of Sophie's marriage and the subsequent deaths of her husband and daughter.
- Larry talks of his fond memories of a younger Sophie; Isabel is jealous.
- Elliott, in failing health, is still obsessed with party life.
- Isabel is horrified at news that Larry and Sophie plan to marry.
- Isabel begs Maugham to dissuade Larry from marriage; Maugham replies that Larry is acting out of self-sacrificial urge to save Sophie from her drunken life.
- Maugham, Elliott, Isabel, Gray, Larry, and Sophie have lunch at Ritz to "celebrate" upcoming marriage; Isabel, following Elliott's lead, extols virtues of marvelous Polish vodka, called zubrovka.
- Maugham learns that Larry and Sophie's wedding never took place; Isabel tells him that Sophie, left alone at Isabel's apartment, vanished.
- Sophie sees Maugham in Toulon, explains why she couldn't marry Larry, explains how Isabel left zubrovka out for Sophie to drink while alone at apartment.
- Elliott, on deathbed, weeps at realization that he will not be invited to Princess Novemali's party.
- Maugham visits Princess' secretary, manages to get invitation for Elliott.

--Elliott dies, after dictating refusal to party invitation.

--Isabel and Gray arrive after Elliott's death.

CHAPTER SIX: Paris 1932

--Maugham visits Isabel and Gray; the couple, newly wealthy after receiving a bequest in Elliott's will, are contemplating a return to America.

--Maugham dines with Larry; Larry explains details of his stay in India, his illumination, and his new views on life.

CHAPTER SEVEN: St. Jean, Paris 1933-5

--Sophie is found murdered; Larry and Maugham grieve.

--Maugham confronts Isabel with news of Sophie's death, reveals to Isabel that he knows she intentionally left vodka in apartment in order to trap Sophie.

--Isabel refuses to pretend to be sad over Sophie's death.

--Isabel is afraid she has lost Larry forever now that he has sailed back to America; she and Gray prepare to return there as well.

--Two years later, Maugham reflects on how much he misses Isabel and Gray.

--Maugham visits Suzanne, who is now a well-known artist; she reveals that she is about to marry.

--Maugham explains that he never heard from Larry again, but he assumes Larry is in New York City, living a selfless and compassionate life.

APPENDIX B

NARRATIVE SUMMARY OF THE RAZOR'S EDGE:

THE FILM

SEQUENCE 1: Chicago

- a-Maugham, at party given by Elliott, is introduced to Isabel, Larry, Sophie, Bob (her husband-to-be), Gray, and Mrs. Bradley. He learns some details of the romantic entanglements within the group, and he also discovers that Elliott strongly disapproves of Isabel's engagement to Larry.
- b-Isabel and Larry walk away from party to more secluded adjoining area. They discuss (argue about) Larry's decision to turn down job offer, eventually come to understanding that Larry will go to Paris for a few months.
- c-Isabel informs her mother and Elliott that she and Larry have split up. Elliott, inwardly happy, promises to look after Larry in Paris.

SEQUENCE 2: Paris

- a-As Elliott speaks in voice-over about his grandiose plans for Larry's social life, Larry's actual behavior in Paris--much more bohemian and middle-class--is shown.
- b-Larry meets Isabel, her mother, and Elliott, at dock where the women have arrived for a vacation with Elliott in Paris. Elliott expresses his dismay over Larry's continued indifference toward society.
- c-Larry and Isabel go to Larry's apartment. They argue about his desire to continue "questing," and they eventually decide to end their engagement.
- d-Two months later, Isabel prepares for a final night out with Larry before returning to America. She looks exceptionally delicious. She and Larry tour several clubs, then return to Elliott's apartment. Inside, they kiss and seem headed for more until Isabel suddenly asks Larry to leave. Isabel then confesses to Elliott that she had planned to seduce Larry and trap him into marriage, but she couldn't go through with it. She will return to America, and Elliott assures her that she will forget about Larry.

SEQUENCE 3: Chicago

a-Isabel and Gray are married. Sophie and Bob, very happily married, attend the wedding ceremony and reception.

SEQUENCE 4: Lens

a-Larry learns of saintly man in India from Kostî, his coal-mining friend. Kostî says this Indian may help Larry in his quest for life's meaning.

SEQUENCE 5: India

a-Larry talks with Wise Man at ashram. Man agrees to let Larry stay at ashram for intense reading and study.

SEQUENCE 6: Chicago

a-Sophie, hospitalized after car accident, learns that her husband and daughter were killed in the collision. Gray is called on to deliver the unfortunate news.

SEQUENCE 7: India

a-Larry treks to mountain cabin near ashram, begins life in solitude.

b-Later, Wise Man visits cabin and hears of Larry's illumination.

SEQUENCE 8: Paris

a-Maugham sees Elliott in clothing shop, learns that bankrupt Gray and Isabel now live in Paris, at Elliott's apartment.

b-Maugham lunches with Larry, informs him of Isabel's presence in the city.

c-Larry visits Isabel and Gray, cures Gray's headache.

d-Larry, Maugham, Gray, and Isabel have an evening on the town, see Sophie at Rue de Lappe.

e-On way back from club, Larry reminisces about Sophie, finally asks car driver to stop and let him out.

f-A few weeks later, Isabel learns from Larry that he plans to marry Sophie. Frantic, Isabel summons Maugham for advice.

g-Elliott, Maugham, Larry, Sophie, Gray, and Isabel meet for lunch at the Ritz. Isabel gushes about marvelous vodka.

h-Sad and nervous Sophie is left alone in room at Isabel's apartment, with vodka perched conspicuously on a table by her side. She drinks a few glasses, goaded by Isabel's subtle suggestions.

i-Larry visits several clubs on seedy side of Paris, searching for Sophie. He finally finds her, passed out from too much drinking, in an opium den. He is tossed out after a fight, but Sophie does not go with him.

SEQUENCE 9: Toulon, Riviera

a-Several months later, Larry and Maugham are summoned to police station and informed that Sophie has been murdered.

b-Larry and Maugham visit Sophie's apartment, get sentimental.

SEQUENCE 10: Nice

a-Larry and Maugham visit Elliott, who is gravely ill. Elliott is devastated over receiving no invitation to Princess Novemali's party.

b-Isabel and Gray arrive at Elliott's villa as Larry leaves on an errand.

c-Larry charms the Princess' secretary, gets an invitation for Elliott.

d-Elliott, buoyed by socially prestigious visit of bishop, receives the party invitation. He dictates refusal, then dies.

e-Larry prepares to leave. Isabel tries desperately to hold on to him, admits her love has never faded. Larry confronts Isabel about Sophie's death, she admits deliberately setting out the vodka and leaving Sophie alone as a "test." Larry infers to Isabel that she is responsible for Sophie's death. He leaves, she is quite upset.

f-Isabel seeks comfort from Maugham. She wants reassurance that she will see Larry again, in America, but none is forthcoming. She remains distraught, and Maugham praises Larry as a truly good man.

SEQUENCE 11: Adrift on the Atlantic

a-As background music swells, Larry is shown hard at work on a freighter sailing back to America. "The End" appears over this scene.

VITA

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