



THE IDEA OF LIFE IN W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM'S "THE LOTUS EATER"

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Abstract

"He was a lined, long face, deeply sunburned, thin-lipped, with a small grey eyes rather close together and tight, neat features. The grey hair is carefully rushed. It was not a plain face, indeed in his youth Wilson might have been good-looking, but a prim one. He wore a blue shirt, open at the neck, and the grey canvas trousers not as though belonged to him, but as though, shipwrecked in his pyjamas". "He looked like the manager of a branch office in an insurance company," "He was standing up, a pipe in his mouth, and he wore nothing but a pair of trunks. His body was dark brown, thin but not emaciated, and considering his wrinkled face and grey hair, youthful." "He was amiable and polite. He was always pleased to have a talk and I found out that he not only knew every inch of the island but also adjacent mainland. He had read a great deal on all sorts of subjects, but his specialty was the history of Rome and on this he was very well informed. He seemed to have little imagination and to be of no more than average intelligence. He laughed a good deal, but with restraint, and his sense of humor was tickled by simple jokes. A common place man." (*The story teller*)

Key words: Leisure, Thomas Wilson, Capri.

INTRODUCTION:

"The Lotus Eater " is a short story written by William Somerset Maugham in 1945. The beginning of the story is in 1913 and the author tells us about Thomas Wilson, who comes to the island of Capri in Italy for a holiday. He is so enchanted with the place that he gives up his job in London and decides to live the rest of his life without any cares in a small cottage in Capri.

At the beginning of the story the writer gives us three types of people, from these types he divided them as the kind of their living in, so he explained how they are accused or blaming the circumstances without any change in their life style as he submitted in the story "Most people, the vast

majority in fact, lead the lives that circumstances have thrust upon them, and though some repine, looking upon themselves as around pegs in square holes, and think that if things had been different they might have made a much better showing," (8,pp.219-220).

The second part of the classification to the society of our writer is the great part who faced everything in his life as real thing that's mean he shows himself as a realistic accept all life situations, as in "the great part accept their lot, if not with serenity, at all events with resignation." (8,p.220), here the writer similar them as machines, "They are like tram-cars traveling forever on the selfsame rails, they go backwards and forwards, backwards and

forwards, inevitably, till they can go no longer and them are sold as a scrap iron."(8,p.220).

The third part of these kinds of people in the story was apart does not participate in the course of his life, he also as the rest of the people is an ordinary type, but he intendsto change something from the style of his life, and we cannot say he will success or not that's mean it is not only very strange but it is very little at the same time and when you find it you can considered him as a worth, as in the story, "It is not often that you find a man who has boldly taken the course of his life into his own hands, when you do, is worthwhile having a good look at him ".(8,p.220).

Here we can say that the writer agreed with the second part of these parts of people, the ordinary type as we said above, who accept with the fate to the end of his life normally without any changing till they die, but at the same time he shows that most of those peoples did not like to live like these types of people, because they dreamed to choose their life by themselves if they can, by making it more comfortable and acceptable as they wish, but does he agree with Thomas Wilson in the story as a special type inside theEnglish society when he arrange his life style in this way; it's like process of exploring a new kind of life by choosing the strange one.

The person has his right to arrange his life as he want, but he must depend on what he own in order not to fall in mistakes might be served him into a bad situations, so we can imagine ourselves when we insist on matters, we don't have a full idea about all what surrounds, these matters perhaps or certainly it takes some of us to fall in wrong way.

Thomas Wilson was a bank manager,he worked in London. He visited Capri located at the Bay of Naples, he fall in love with Capri Island. He makes a decision to live at Capri. He resigned his job, his house and used his savings to buy the annuity. He lived happily for 25years in a cottage, and then he supposed that he would die before this point of time, but his destiny was another.

He runs out of money. The owner of the cottage asked him to leave the cottage unless he

pays the rent. He tried to kill himself. But his trail was unsuccessful. He was still alive, but felt himself unwell.Assunta and her husband took a pity on him. They left him stayed in a woodshed. To repay that kindness for giving him food and shelter, Thomas Wilson looked after the goat and chickens. He became misfit and antisocial. He died six years later; he died in the moon light.(8,p.240).

Here we have the full story about our hero Thomas Wilson but in the eye of another person who met him, and at the same time he considered to be the teller of the story, and our resource that he will submit the full history of our hero.

This teller has no name, just met our hero after he heard about him more at last after a visit to his friend villa on Capri Island.We see all the situation by his eyes and clearly he has an interest in the story about Wilson. The teller wants to say that from why he heard about Wilson itbecame very necessary to meet him: "That I was curious to meet Thomas Wilson".(8,p.220)

Here he gave us an idea about his decision, and to ask does he take the right decision "It was an interesting and a bold thing he had done". May be the teller likes the idea, when he called it an interesting, but in the end he said "Of course the end was not yet and until the experiment was concluded it was impossible to call it successful ". So the teller insist on the idea of meeting Wilson "I should like to know him ", "I wanted to hear the facts from his own lips ", "...people exaggerate, they love to romanticize".(8,p.220)

The teller has hispoint of view about Wilson, he know everything about our hero his behavior, his appearance, his past life and his life in general on the Island,so he supported us with all this knowledge and from him we know about our hero. The teller tries to give us a short history about our hero when he met him in the first time on Capri island, "It was on the pizza, in Capri, where I spending the month of august at a friend's villa."(8,p.220).

"I didn't mean that. I mean it might be yesterday. Fifteen years it is, and when I look back it seems like a month.I had never been to Italy before. I came for my summer holiday. I went to Naples by

boat from Marseilles and I had a look round, then I came here for a week. I liked the look of the place right away, from the sea, I mean, as I watched it come closer and closer."(8,p.228). And at the same time he wants to show his careless to other people just interesting his time. "Look, there's Wilson," (8,p.221) the tellers friend said that when he saw Wilson suddenly and for the first time with the teller. "The man sitting on the parapet, with his back to us. He's got a blue shirt on. "And the teller described him in order to make us know at least a part of his personality.

"I saw an undistinguished back and a small head of grey hair short and rather thin". (8,p.221).

"He was dressed in a blue cotton shirt and a pair of grey trousers, much creased and none too clean, of thin canvas, and on his feet he wore a pair of very old espadrilles", So the teller continued by giving a description to Thomas Wilson to be clear to the reader. And from these information submitted by the author we can imagine our hero or to understand a part of his behavior.

"He was a lined, long face, deeply sunburned, thin-lipped, with a small grey eyes rather close together and tight, neat features. The grey hair s carefully rushed. It was not a plain face, indeed in his youth Wilson might have been good-looking, but a prim one. he wore a blue shirt,open at the neck, and the grey canvas trousers not as though belonged to him, but as though, shipwrecked in his pyjamas". "He looked like the manager of a branch office in an insurance company,"(8,p.222)."He was standing up, a pipe in his mouth, and he wore nothing but a pair of trunks. His body was dark brown, thin but not emaciated, and considering his wrinkled face and grey hair, youthful."(8,p.224). Through the teller of the story the author tries to tell us the description of our hero, his image by supporting us all his character, at the same time he tries to say that Thomas Wilson was an educational man. But may be in the wrong time not as we think that he chooses on the Capri Island.

"He was amiable and polite. He was always pleased to have a talk and I found out that he not only knew every inch of the island but also adjacent mainland. He had read a great deal on all sorts of

subjects, but his specialty was the history of Rome and on this he was very well informed. He seemed to have little imagination and to be of no more than average intelligence. He laughed a good deal, but with restraint, and his sense of humor was tickled by simple jokes. A common place man."(8,p.226).

Thomas Wilson expresses his love to the island from the first meeting with the teller and showing a part of his personality from his behavior. "When I got out Wilson was lying on his belly, with a towel under him, reading a book". "He puts his pipe inside his book to mark the place and closing it. "Fifteen years." He gave the blue and placid sea a glance, and a strangely tender smile hovered on his thin lips. I fell in love with the place at first sight." Here we see Thomas Wilson stick with the idea of choosing the Island, So he shows us how he fond with the place from the first time that he saw it. But at the same time he explained his difficulties and the type of isolation life that he live on the island.

"Oh, well, when I settled down here I was naturally interested, and I have a plenty of time for reading. When you live in a place like this, with all its associations, it seems to make history so actual."(8,p.225). Most of our hero time not going without any benefit, So he told us that he invest his time by reading because he has a lot of time."Of course I know now that wine I drank was ink, Capri wines my eye, but I thought it all right then. But it wasn't the wine that made me drank; it was the shape of the island and those jabbering people, the moon and the sea and the oleander in the hotel garden. I had never seen an oleander before." (8,pp.228-229).

Thomas Wilson again comes back to us in order to make us sure there is no place in the world like Capri Island in its beauty, he speaks about the wine that doesn't make him drank although it looks like ink, so he likes the nature, the joys of life : silence,warm nights,excellent wine, as we said, and very good cook. So still the Island is the most beautiful place in his eyes.

"So I went alone with Wilson. We climbed the mountain, admired the spacious view, and go back to the inn as night was falling, hot, hungry and thirsty. We had ordered our dinner beforehand. The

food was good, for Antonio was an excellent cook, and the wine came from his own vineyard. It was so light that you felt you could drink it like water." "We sat in a little garden under great vine laden with grapes. The air was exquisitely soft. The night was still and we were a lone. ". "After that I met Wilson several times, either in the piazza or on the beach."

The idea of choosing a comfortable life controlled on Wilson so, he became filled of it, and he tries to prove that he does not only change his old life style but he gets the best one at least from his point of view. "How does anyone know what any one is capable of?" With the help of the teller, the author try to give a meaning to Wilsons choice, to interpret the idea of his life, and the circumstances in which he took his decision.

We know that he suffered too much from losing his wife, and we think it's not easy to lose a closed person to you especially if he considered a member of your family. The pain as we said made him think of individuality and isolation, after the death of his wife, he became free and even we can say that no one ask him more about all what he believe.

"That was my last night that was- Wilson tells the story about his principal decision,- I had got to be back at the bank on Monday morning. When I looked at those two great rocks sticking out of the water, with the moon above them, and all the little lights of the fishermen in their boats catching cattle-fish, all so peaceful and beautiful, I said to myself, well, after all, why should I go back? It wasn't as if I had any one dependent on me. My wife had died of bronchial pneumonia four years before and the kid went to live with her grandmother, my wife's mother. She was an old fool, she didn't look after the kid properly and she got blood-poisoning, they amputated her leg, but they couldn't save her and she died, poor little thing." (8,p.230).

On the other side we are dealing with special conditions of all our human feelings that we bear like Wilson's case or all what we own from our life events cannot be delete, so it's very difficult for us to overcome and release these events from our memory if we don't have strong will. The idea of losing a member consider one of the family with

Wilson's case represent all his feelings and emotions of pain that he suffered from his wife death and we think that he will never prefer to choose a life style like in the past with his family in safe and happiness. Most of these memories drove him the worse condition as we think because he never changes his opinion of living at Capri Island without getting an idea what he will do after 25 years, so all these bases made us concentrate on Wilson's insistence to stay along time far away from cities and systems and rules to live in a calm and simple life.

"Leisure," he said. "If people only knew! It's the most priceless thing a man can have and they are such fools they don't even know it's something aim at. Work? They work for works sake. They haven't got the brains to realize that the only object of work is to obtain leisure." (8,p.227). This is the principal, Wilsons position, his idea of life.

We cannot say that Thomas Wilson didn't take the right decision especially when he deals with the difficult situation he found himself inside; "None. I was an only child. My father had a brother, but he went to Australia before I was born. I don't think anyone could easily be more alone in the world than I am. There wasn't any reason I could see why I shouldn't do exactly what I wanted. I was thirty-four at that time." (8,p.231)

But when the reader looks at him he will take an impression turned that Wilson's behavior depend on the circumstances rounded him, and this circumstances itself drove him to this end, his life in his childhood and with his wife and daughter. "I should have been forty-seven then. I shouldn't have been too old to enjoy my life here, I am older than that now and I enjoy it as much as I ever did, but I should have been too old to experience the particular pleasure of a young man." (8,p.233)

"I had been working since I was seventeen. All I had to look forward to was doing the same old thing day after day till I retired on my pension. I said to myself, is it worth it? What's wrong with chucking it all up and spending the rest of my life down here? It was the most beautiful place I had ever seen." (8,p.231). There is nothing prevent Wilson from supplying his aim according to all what submitted in the story, he choose this new life, and to prove that

money or other qualifications in our life not everything, because it doesn't give us the happiness.

"I wanted to live the perfect life while I still had the energy and the spirit to make the most of it twenty-five years seemed a long time to me, and twenty-five years of happiness seemed worth paying something pretty substantial for. I had made up my mind to wait a year and I waited a year. Then I sent in my resignation and as soon as they paid me my gratuity I bought the annuity and came on here." Wilson wants only modest and simple life. He wanted to have a little place of his own, a servant to look after him, enough to buy tobacco, decent food, books now and then, and something over for emergencies. He knew pretty well how much he needed. He found he had just enough to buy an annuity for twenty-five years.

He has a belief that most of the people will die at fifties, so from this information Thomas Wilson moved quickly when he chose this kind of life and buys the annuity for 25 years, in order to take him more over the age that he expect to die at sixty.

"Yes. It would carry me on till I was sixty. After all no one can be certain of living longer than that, a lot of men die in their fifties, and by the time a man is sixty he's had the best of life."(8,pp.232-233).

The teller explained Wilson's opinion when he speak about all story in details, but still there is anambiguity when he said he doesn't blaming him about what he did. So we don't know if he agree with him or not. "I did not blame him. It was his own life that he had arranged in this strange manner, and I did not see why he should not do what he liked with it. Still, I could not prevent the little shiver that ran down my spine."(8,p.234). The teller describes in details what Wilson loved, what he was waiting from life.

"His only passion was for the beauty of nature, "he was of no use to anybody, but on the other hand he did nobody any harm. His only object was his own happiness; and it looked as though he had attained it very few people know where to look for happiness; fewer still find it. I don't know whether he was a fool or a wise man."(8,pp.235-236)

Another time our teller comes back to us with a new vision, if Thomas Wilson deserve what he had done, or if he doesn't: "He brought it on himself. After all, he's only got what he deserved." I think on the whole we all get what we deserve," "Did he commit suicide as he said he would?" "It is rather a grim story ;"when no effort is needed to achieve ones desires, because ones has placed ones desires only in the things that can be obtained by stretching out ones hand, he will grows impotent."(8,pp.236-237). The teller asks if he commit suicide but, the final events of the story showed what happened to him.

Wilson was estimated by people in the village. They trusted him and they gave him food and shelter without money. He managed to hang on after this fashion for something over a year. Then he could get no more credit from the local tradesman, and there was no one to lend him any more money. "The day before this he went into his tiny bedroom, closed the curtain and lit a brazier of charcoal but he didn't die. "Wilson was taken to the hospital, and though very ill for some time he at last recovered. But as a result either of the charcoal poisoning or of the shock he was no longer in complete possession of his faculties. He was not insane,"(8,p.238). The teller doesn't meet Wilson as it was in the past. Wilson spies on him, hiding the trees.This is the last time, the teller saw Thomas Wilson, on the island then the teller informs us about Wilsons death. "He died last year. He endured that life for six years. He was found one morning on the mountainside lying quite peacefully as though he had died in his sleep. From he lay he had been able to see those two rocks." (8,p.240).

The irony of the story is that Wilson moves to Capri due to the boredom of his "everyday routine "of working,living in London and after relocating to Capri he falls into a new, but equally boring routine. This is the opinion of the teller.Somerset's stories are often rich with ironies, as well as other subtle lessons about human nature. However, I would hesitate to say that the life Wilson led in his adopted home of Capri was a boring routine- not at least, for Wilson. Maugham describes Wilson as enjoying his life on the island for the first fifteen years, anyway that we know of before the 'story teller' leaves him.

He never shows any sign of regret for the fateful decision he has made, and we was given examples of ways in which he enjoys his life as much as any traveler might, though it is a life of low ambition and accomplishment.

"The choice that Wilson makes to leave his London life (and income) behind in exchange for a life of leisure on Capri is at once awesome as well as tragic. It is awesome because it resonates with every young traveler who has gone abroad and has marveled at the comparison between some wonderful new place and the routine dullness of his familiar life at home; who no doubt fantasized over the prospect of exchanging one for the other. But Wilson is tragic because we know he hasn't provided himself enough funds to carry beyond a time that he will still be enthusiastic about living" (8,p.238). The teller gives us his opinion about Wilson.

With Wilson the leitmotiv of the moon is connected during the whole narration and he dies in the moon light, that's mean the moonlight itself bring Wilson to the island and to be his destiny on it at the end. "It was full moon and he must have gone to see them by moonlight.perhaps he died of the beauty of that sight."(8,p.240).

"Moon or no moon," I said briskly, 'of course we have got plenty of time. That's one of the delights of Capri, that there's never any hurry."(8,p.227).

The dreaming idea of most of our authors about the moon and its effect on Wilson in the story, because the moon as we know considered as a symbol of love or the source of all the romantic writers or poets or even the lovers in their inspiration ideas. But with our story may it was the cause that made Wilson take his decision and travel to Capri when he visit the island for the first time, so we can consider the idea of choosing the moon light in most of famous authors works as a sign of their depending on their dreaming idea of ideal life full of leisure far away from cities on isolated lands. It's the moon effect on their inspiration made them shape a very beautiful portrait for a new style of the other side of our life if we think about the other choices.

Everybody knows William Somerset Maugham's mastership as a short-story writer. "The

Lotus Eater" is one of his short stories; Maugham masterly uses all these levels. In first lines Maugham meditates on the problems related to the contents of the story, from his story about the previous life of Wilson, we understand that he had a strong personality and he wasn't excited to "work for work's sake". But after 25 years of felicity living at the island, he lost his strength and became a very week person. It's seen when the author tells us about his miserable existence at the end of his life.Speaking about poetics in the story, we can say that the author's digressions clearly see through the teller's speech and thoughts to express his own feelings, his attitude to the main character, The author implies the resemblance between Thomas Wilson and "lotus eaters" (people who forget about their previous life and remain in the Lotus land forever). The main character is like one of these "lotus eaters" who prefers a relatively peaceful happiness than a long life.

Why did Thomas Wilson choose to live a life of happiness and what were the consequences? Somerset Maugham in his story "the Lotus Eater" has aroused old philosophical question – how to live our lives? Great majority of us, despite being unsatisfied with our lives, think that it could be only one way - as it goes. But only few of us are really trying to change it, to take our fate in our own hands. Is it possible to reach this goal? Author analyzed this not very common situation in example of Mr. Thomas Wilson, an absolutely ordinary person, who seems to be one of us. Mr. Thomas Wilson had tried to solve this problem by cutting off all boring things of his life. He took all advantages of time for preparation his "happy life" – he analyzed the situation from different points of views and made his decision in absolute agreement with his desires. But despite Mr. Wilson's reasons to live a "happy life", his approach could not be regarded as absolutely successful.

Although this question had not been discussed in the story in full details we can suggest that it was only one of many possible ways to build up a "happy life", which in the biggest way was up to Mr. Wilson's personality and suit his mentality. His dull life in grey smoky London, his everyday boring duties went in contradiction with beauty and

splendor of southern Italy – gorgeous nature, lovely weather, friendly people and atmosphere of leisure and joy. According to the story this occurred not long after his wife's death and maybe it was his first visit abroad. He was charmed, fascinated! Another reason which influenced his decision had to do with his character – he was selfish. Even his daughter's death did not disturb him a lot; despite the fact that he spoke about his wife with respect, he did not feel any remorse because of her early death; he hated and despised his mother-in-law. He was an ordinary man, "common place", as S. Maugham characterized him, without any bright abilities and without any tiny will to achieve something which needed a scruple of efforts. He did his work only for living – the only one thing which he mentioned during his long conversations was remark that he needed 37 minutes to reach his work by walking. So this ordinary, unsatisfied, unambitious person without any close relationships in the whole world had chosen his own way of living – he decided not to struggle with obstacles, but to cut them off, to build up "happy life", which totally consists of pleasurable things.

Full consequences of his decision became evident not so fast. At first he was quiet happy with his life – all had moved in accordance with his plan. He enjoyed food, his tiny living place, small measure of pleasures such as books, tobacco and wine. He did not allow anybody even women to disturb his peaceful and quiet existence. I suppose that during this period he was quite happy in his own way. But as time passed his troubles began. And the main problem was the lack of money. Consequences were dreadful – at once respectful man became a "vegetable". He lost all his dignity, self-respect. The finish was expectable – death in the dirt. I even felt a relief that this had occurred at last – it is difficult to see a man without any trace of humanity. We feel that it was reasonable – Thomas Wilson was not able to take into account all consequences of his idea of "happy life". But can we be sure that it was the only one possible way of events, we can imagine that he would be wiser and he would not be in such kinds of troubles. Would he be successful with his idea in this case? Can "happy life" be built by this method, the supposed answer should be "No". When you are

cutting some troubles from your life, other ones became troubles which you had not regarded as troubles before.

There are many articles, public articles and several dissertations about Somerset Maugham in Russia. Russian critics are dealing with different problems. For example, The article of D.P. Chestakov is a very important for it gives a concrete analysis of Maugham in general dealing with subjects. The book of A.A. Bourtsev plays an important role. Bourtsev gives here all analysis about story as a literary genre, at the same time he gives there a general analysis of Maugham's stories, a particular attention was paid to a content of those stories, More detailed approach and a more concrete study of Maugham's tale can be found in the dissertation of N.A. Mesropian. All critics considered him as outstanding master, he was interested in privacy, and he tried to solve moral problems and values of life.

Conclusion

We have chosen the short story "The Lotus Eater" In this story, the same place of action is East, In South Sea Islands, or the South of Europe In these stories we have a problem of civilization between East and West, a problem of nurture and nature, a problem of the idea of life, a problem about the relation between people. Somerset Maugham was very interested in traveling to many parts in the world, he visited Spain, United States, Russia, and Germany for study also he went to South Sea Islands. And from most of his writings we know that he was interested in traveling to these places. In This story "Lotus Eater" we concentrate on the hero Thomas Wilson he left Europe to live on Capri Island. He collects all his money for 25 years, he thinks that it will be enough for him to live all this time in leisure without noise.

Thomas Wilson wanted to have a happy life. He hates the daily routine of work, even of making money he wants to choose his destiny by himself so he loves nature, freedom, free time for reading and meditating. He likes beauty of the nature, of the sea, moon, sunset, flowers, good wine, books, and conversation on philosophical themes. But the ideal of Wilson was only leisure. He denied labor, he denied human contacts, He had the minimum of

human contacts, and he was indifferent to the people. He was an egocentric man as we said before. Wilson who wanted freedom and independence at last became to the state of dependence, dependence on money. So his end was very poor, and miserable. In this story Somerset Maugham was optimistic Wilson chooses his destiny by himself. Wilson couldn't see his future, he just look in front of himself. Maugham believes in good nature of human person. The story is not optimistic to the full because there is a kind of help from the people to the hero but he was against them by leaving them alone. In this story we discuss the attitudes of the author and his way of submitting his Ideas about the hero inside the story itself. Thomas Wilson lives among the people for 25 years as we thought in leisure but he failed and he was unoptimistic. At the end we can say it is a kind of struggle for existence vividly between human beings. Thomas Wilson has an individual choice, He tries to change his life style and his ideal was leisure. Wilson just thrift his money without any care to the future, He neglects his future to fall in catastrophe, may be his fate drove him to this end or his luck from another side we say that Wilson very lazy person useless because he still during the twenty five years without work just like the person who is waiting for his fate.

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