

Somerset Maugham on Epicureanism over one hundred years ago

Post by "Jon M" of May 23, 2020 at 10:14 PM

Philip doesn't get the kind of reply we would like. The novel is really Philip's growing up and learning things for himself, and all the conversations he has with people end in an inconclusive 'figure it out for yourself' kind of way. Maugham (as Philip) had a very conventional Victorian Christian upbringing, and at this point in the novel he is slowly and painfully shedding all this Victorian morality.

I don't know if Morrice (Cronshaw) was really an Epicurean. He led an interesting life in both Paris and Canada, so it is possible.

Or maybe this is just Maugham putting the words into Cronshaw's mouth, what he (Maugham at the time of writing the book in 1915) thought himself, and how the Maugham twenty years earlier in 1895 would have reacted (as Philip).

Anyway, at this point in the novel the conversation is interrupted, and a little while later it resumes like this:

Quote

Cronshaw turned to Philip.

"Have you ever been to the Cluny, the museum? There you will see Persian carpets of the most exquisite hue and of a pattern the beautiful intricacy of which delights and amazes the eye. In them you will see the mystery and the sensual beauty of the East, the roses of Hafiz and the wine-cup of Omar; but presently you will see more. You were asking just now what was the meaning of life. Go and look at those Persian carpets, and one of these days the answer will come to you.

"You are cryptic", said Philip.

"I am drunk", answered Cronshaw.