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## REVIEW ARTICLE

## Plot-Subplot and Characterization in Somerset Maugham's *Mr. Know All*: A New Critical Review

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### Abstract

This paper aims to study Somerset Maugham's *Mr. Know All* from the perspective of New Criticism (Russian Formalism), mainly highlighting the elements of the plot/subplot and the characterization; two of the most important elements of the short story. The study emphasizes the significance of thematic, aesthetic and structural analysis of the text, pinpointing the dominant themes in the story. The paper also analyzes the interconnectedness of such components to serve the thematic essence of the story in the context of the plot that the writer formulates in order to present his characters and themes. The paper pays special attention to the analysis of the major characters and ideas, specifically Mr. Kelada and his struggle with the narrator-character on the basis of prejudice, racism and ethnicity. Moreover, the paper analyzes the narrator-character who transforms from a character of hatred and racism to a balanced character of love towards Mr. Kelada, suggesting the nature of the contemporary human self in its volatility and transformations.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the light of New Criticism, critics explore the various parts of a literary text and the techniques employed to weld such parts together to create an organic and thematic entity. This approach traces the form of the text as a whole; its setting, characters, point of view, plot, and themes. This paper aims at appreciating the major elements of plot/subplot and characters that *Mr. Know All* offers under the umbrella of the new critical approach. Defining the genre of the story, Wilson R. Thornley (1976), states that it is

a series of reported scenes in which a causative situation arises which requires a deciding character with a governing characteristic to try to solve some kind of problem ... and to suffer interruptions and intensifications until he comes to the result of his final decision. (p.4)

Here, Thornley pays highlights two of the major pillars of a story: characterization and plot. In addition, stories are narratives that talk about "people acting in a setting," and whatever happens in this term should be totally "relevant to their intentional states while so engaged; to their beliefs, desires, theories, [and] values" (Bruner, 1991, p. 7). The process of composing stories should first establish the aesthetic form in the author's psyche. Yujun Liu (2009) describes the structure of any story as "a thread, which stitches together the plots, the depiction, the characters," obeying the aesthetic rules of charming story (p.141). In this sense, Maugham's *Mr. Know All* is a narrative that embodies the constituting unified elements of characterization, plot, and themes which artistically prove coherent, influential and entail revisiting. Besides, the narrator has his own vision of prejudice and enmity or antagonism against Mr. Kelada and tries forcefully to convince others to have the same attitude towards Mr. Kelada.

In *Mr. Know All*, both the plot/subplot and the characters are thematically and aesthetically interconnected. Thus, the story has a formalistic balance of its components and content with narrative qualities of tight chronological plot, reliable characterization and realistic themes. Mohammad Matarneh (2014) states that the elements of a story

should be orderly arranged to constitute the organic unity that includes “a unity of effect, conflict and change in character” (p.82). Formalistically, *Mr. Know All* embodies features of “dramatic pattern of the traditional structure of conflict, sequential action and resolution” in a distinctive manner (Liu, 2009, p.142). Meanwhile, Maugham’s narrative reflects his experimental skill to create a distinctive style to offer his readers a sort of “mildly satirical social comedy” (Blackburn, 2014, p. 8). Commenting on the progress of the story narrative, Seymour Chatman (1978) says that “The events in a story are turned into a plot by its discourse, the modus of presentation” and central characters (p.44). Based on such views and the story’s elements, this paper also explores its major characters, plot and subplot.

### Part I: Characterization

Technically, it is through direct dynamic characterization that Maugham makes explicit statements about Mr. Kelada; his popularity with his self-confidence is a source of discomfort and jealousy to the narrator. Chatman (1978) argues that “direct characterization calls attention to a narrator’s voice” (p.226). Likewise, in his view on the creation of a short story, Anthony Burgess (1969) asks the writers to “create characters, give them a time and place to exist in, and leave the plot to them” to avoid imposing actions on them, since actions should arise from the internal mood of the character. In this respect, the narrator physically describes Kelada as “short and of a sturdy build, clean-shaven and dark skinned, with a fleshy, hooked nose and very large lustrous and liquid eyes. His long black hair was sleek and curly” (Maugham, 1998, p.196). This description directly offers a chance to delve into the psyches of both the narrator and Mr. Kelada. For Paul Dawson (2009), the narrator who directly addresses readers suggests an “intrusive commentary” on the actions and characters, enriching the awareness of such characters (p.143). Further, Maugham makes an example for indirect characterization; he reveals the character of Mrs. Ramsay in her words as “Oh, Elmer, you can’t bet on a certainty,” said Mrs. Ramsay” and ““I can’t undo it,” she said. ‘Mr. Kelada will just have to take my word for it’” (Maugham, 1998, p.198). So, the major characters are described physically and intellectually in both indirect and direct ways; everyone has a chance to talk and express his/her own feelings, ideas and attitudes. Mr. Kelada, the narrator-character, and Mr. Ramsay dynamically and thematically contribute to the main plot and subplot.

Ostensibly, the story presents us with characters of various qualities and attitudes. First, the two major dynamic characters are both Mr. Kelada and the narrator; second, the minor static characters include Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, and the doctor. Meanwhile, some characters are viewed prejudiced such as the narrator and Mr. Ramsay, while the non-prejudiced include the oriental Mr. Kelada, the doctor and Mrs. Ramsay. This conflicting negative characterization implies “the merging of two voices” of both the narrator-character and Mr. Kelada that yield to “an intended aesthetic effect” (Chatman, 1978, p.207). In this sense, authors try to portray unique, dynamic and influential characters who appeal to the readers; they aesthetically and cognitively bestow life on their major and round characters and try to get their readers’ identification with such characters.

Meanwhile, this story is also characterized by its “spatial vividness” manifested in the ship, the sea, and the sky under which the passengers converse and experience various feelings and reactions (Kuzmicova, 2012, p.24). Indeed, characterization releases significant relevant facts about the character and aids to uncover the plot. In *Mr. Know All*, the narrator-character offers readers “authorial characterization” through his ideological vision, showing a sort of “superior knowledge to the characters in terms of his or her moral sagacity, intellectual breadth and psychological and social insight” (p.149). Besides, though the characters are away from their own communities, they bring their own cultural preconceptions and stereotypes. For example, Maugham draws a contrastive character sketch between Mr. Ramsay and Mr. Kelada. While the former belongs to a high social status as a member of the American Counselor Service, Mr. Kelada belongs to the most common rank of the ordinary people. Also, Mr. Ramsay is not a wealthy man and has a very simple appearance; he is heavy who dresses unfashionably and poorly.

Characteristically, Mr. Kelada is a tender-hearted and good-natured character; he is viewed as a real gentleman who may sacrifice his reputation to rescue others’ social life and entity. In contrary, both the narrator-character and Mr. Ramsay are detracted to mere petty, egoistic characters, inconsiderate to the feelings of other characters. In addition, Mr. Kelada is characterized as a colonized introduced with negative qualities while the narrator, viewed as a colonizer, is presented with positive superior qualities. Moreover, Mr. Kelada is described as a stereotype with a negative image in relation with a microcosmic society; is a colonized liar, inferior, uncivilized, irrational, and disorganized; he is “a scrub” (Maugham, 1998, p. 195). This characterization of Mr. Kelada implies the writer’s satirical tone against those who show prejudice and superiority against non-white people. In this respect, Balkrishna D. Waghmare (2013) argues that *Mr. Know All* is “packed with such prejudice and stereotyped images” that the narrator attributes to Mr. Kelada (p.110). This narrator also makes it clear in the first few words, “I was prepared to dislike Mr. Kelada even before I knew him” (Maugham, 1998: 195). Here, the narrator has his initial prejudiced strict position towards Mr. Kelada, while coming closer to other characters.

Furthermore, the real feelings and opinions of the characters are expressed frankly as the story develops and intensifies. The narrator acts both as an involved character and an observer in the chain of consequent events and episodes. In this concern, Maugham employs a narrator-character who represents the role of a first-person narrator and who may gain credibility on telling what happens to him, a thing that might happen to any other reader in a similar context. This sort of narrator-character “guarantees the truth of the action, creating an illusion which is particularly

important to establish quickly in the short story form” (Matarneh, 2014, p.81). In a word, Maugham’s choice of the narrator-character as an observer implies that he has his own vision of internal revelation, a vision within. This narrator portrays Mr. Kelada from abroad, based on his interaction with the world around him, his role in that small community, and the opinion of the people towards him. This narrator-character also seems to be the most capable of formulating and transforming feelings of hatred and aversion towards Mr. Kelada into appreciation and acceptance.

Stylistically, *Mr. Know All* fuses subjective and objective narrative flavors along with dramatic tone, embedded in a modern tone of its “traditional elements of structure” that include form, characterization, narrative plot and themes (Liu, 2009, p.142). In this sense, Maugham does not resort to reporting and decision-making in introducing Mr. Kelada; he does not use declarative language to say that Mr. Kelada is an energetic character of travels, who seems smug, initiative, confident, generous, who sometimes tells lies. Rather, Maugham states all these qualities through a plot of immense descriptions and actions. For example, the narrator-character says that Mr. Kelada introduces himself “with a smile that showed a row of flashing teeth, and sat down” (Maugham, 1998, p. 195). This shows that Mr. Kelada introduces himself as a bold, social and confident man; the sign of his confidence is that he sits without permission on the opposite seat at the table with other characters. Accordingly, Maugham draws the character of Mr. Kelada in three dimensions. First, it is the physical dimension manifested in the qualities of his body of length and shortness, obesity and thinness, and personal flaws. Evidently, the narrative’s significance arises from “an actual incident ... dramatized for the sake of a story” in which characters are portrayed in a realistic tempo-spatial way (Blackburn, 2014, p.10). In such a way, the story conveys tempo-spatial characteristics in its narrative structure delivering a realistic vivid narrative mural that arouses readers’ suspense and curiosity.

Second, it is the psychological dimension suggested in characters’ readiness and behavior based on wishes, determination, thought, introversion and/or extroversion. The psychological dimension of Mr. Kelada is evident in being dynamic, bold and social; he is kind, initiative and tolerant. Yet, he has qualities of selfishness, indifference, insistence on excellence, and he imposes himself on others; he never accepts defeat or surrenders. Third, it is the social dimension embodied in the character’s affiliation to specific social class and culture and its elements: religion, nationality, and language. Meanwhile, Mr. Kelada’s social dimension is featured in being a man who speaks English fluently; his Englishness, culture, erudition, and high social stratum allow him frequent travels, knowledge, and reputation. Further, he is an expert in the manufacture of pearls that he is on his way to Japan to discuss the issue of industry of fraud pearls. Also, he is an active leader keen to remain in control of various matters; “He managed the sweeps, conducted the auctions, collected money for prizes at the sports .... He was everywhere and always. He was certainly the best haled man in the ship” (Maugham, 1998, p.197). Here, we note that this description performs an explanatory and suggestive function that unravels the psychological and social aspects of Kelada, a thing that contributes to the interpretation of his behavior and various positions. This social dimension entails living among people in a physical world in which the character attains his belonging to a specific place like a village or a city, or a social class, so that he reflects his class’s mobility, language, behavior, and aspiration. All these features accumulate to draw a difficult, leading, and confrontational character; all of which will, in turn, fuel the conflict and lead to complicate matters.

Therefore, the previous artistic skills and techniques show Maugham’s ingenuity in excluding any marginal and irrelevant elements that disassemble the narrative structure or dilute its pace or affect its unity. In this respect, Bruner (1991) insists that “the act of constructing a narrative ... is considerably more than selecting events either from real life, from memory, or from fantasy and then placing them in an appropriate order” (p.8). Thus, such events are organized to constitute the narrative structure and serve its theme. In this light, the story follows a narrative “object-directed movement of [its] characters,” which summarizes the process of narration of actions (Kuzmicova, 2012, p.26). This style of narration decides on the feelings and impressions of readers since it may intervene with the formulation of their own initial attitudes and opinions. Meanwhile, the story depends mainly on condensation to achieve its meaning. It is also characterized by unity of character, that here is the character of Mr. Kelada who is the center of the plot and whom the writer employs to serve his ultimate themes and ideas. On the other hand, we learn that Mr. Ramsay is naive who does not understand the significance of his wife and other characters around him and ignores their feelings and dignities. All of which deviate his attempt to discover the truth about Mr. Kelada.

Stylistically, characterization makes us closer to the characters, in particular the main character, as if we sit down with them, listen to them and share with them their moments of sailing on the deck. In this light, Kuzmicova (2012) argues that “the reader is following the narrated events from within” (p.15). Moreover, there are two basic methods of portraying the major characters in any narrative plot. First, it is the declarative method in which the narrator presents his characters by describing their conditions, emotions, and ideas. So, the narrator can identify the characters’ public features from the beginning and flash back their actions in the form of summarizing, commenting on the actions and analyzing them in a direct way. Liu (2009) states that the narrative process starts with collecting “source material, portraying the characters and arranging the scenes of the characters’ activities exquisitely” (p.141). Thematically, such characters may be rigid, fixed, and flat that they are not affected by the movement of events and do not affect them. Also, on portraying a character in such a way, the narrator flattens and freezes it. Second, it is the

descriptive method in which the narrator portrays a character through its movement and actions while having either an internal conflict or an external one. In this concern, Maugham masters “the narrative mode of thought from the forms of narrative discourse” (Bruner, 1991, p. 5). To this extent, Liu (2009) argues that “modern narrative structure is still visible in the form,” which governs the whole parts of the story (p.142). Here, the correlation between the character and the events is inextricable, since every evolution in any event includes a change in the character itself, and every growth in the character follows a certain change in the event and an escalation in the conflict.

Noticeably, Maugham creates characters who fuel the plot and emphasize the major themes; he brings them vividly to a realistic life. In this respect, Liu (2009) clarifies that the successful short story should be realistic and its informative plot should be “based on probability or causality, illustrating a sequence of casually related incidents” as we have seen in tracing the main elements of its plot and structure (p.142). Realistic texts, such as *Mr. Know All*, are aesthetically characterized by daily actions and episodes and real protagonist/antagonist communications. Thus, Maugham presents an integrated a narrative web of serious plot and character evolution. In this light, Ann Charter (2003) says that character is “any person who plays a part in a narrative,” adding that round characters are “complex, full, described in detail, often contradictory, and usually dynamic” (p.1045). Thus, the realistic characterization in *Mr. Know All* enables us to know the actual dominant characters that play most of the major decisive roles. The plot eventually allows both the narrator and Mr. Ramsay to change and accept Mr. Kelada as he is.

### **Part II: Plot-Subplot**

“A narrative without a plot is a logical impossibility.” (Chatman, 1978, p. 48)

Technically, *Mr. Know All* has two plots: the main plot and the sub-plot. The former suggests the problematic relationship between the nameless narrator and Mr. Kelada. Clearly, narrative structure of actions and episodes arises from a realistic conflict that shapes the momentum of the major plot which starts and develops on a ship. On which the narrator is on a mission from San Francisco to Yokohama. He accepts to have Mr. Kelada as a cabin-mate, who seems to him a non-white character. Initially, the narrator shows his hatred to Mr. Kelada believing that he is ostentatious, chatty, and polemic, “Mr Kelada was chatty. He talked of New York and of San Francisco. He discussed plays, pictures, and politics” (Maugham, 1998. P. 196). So, the narrator’s prejudice against Kelada is expressed in “Mr. Kelada’s brushes, ebony with his monogram in gold, would have been all the better for a scrub. I did not at all like Mr. Kelada” (Maugham, 1998, p. 195). Here, Maugham pushes the plot towards the climax through the creation of a conflict fueled by tense events between Mr. Kelada and the narrator. In this regard, Dawson (2009) argues that such plots “transpire on what’s often called a broad social canvas” (p.156). So, *Mr. Know All* offers an eventful plot that suggests the writer’s experimental technique in both overt structure and tone.

On his part, Mr. Kelada believes that he knows and understands everything around him; he is communicative with a lot of topics, a thing that makes other passengers call him Mr. know all. In this respect, Matarneh (2014) advises that readers should not “identify the narrator with the author, for the narrator is a character like any other and he may also be the hero” (p.82). Here, the narrator-character, who narrates in the first-person, is just a witness who conveys the events and tells about the characters. This technique allows us to see events from the narrator’s corner and to identify with him, based on what he sees and knows. So, the narrator is a limited questionable narrator, unfamiliar with the mysteries of the characters or other related details. He has his own inner vision and makes us feel keen to discover what solely happens around him. In this concern, Maugham is masterful in portraying the details of his fiction and in “filling in the colors” in a creative way (Liu, 2009, p.141). This imagist technique instigates our sense of surprise and suspense and creates an intimate relationship with the story.

In its major plot, *Mr. Know All* is presented in a dramatic way in terms of its content and tone to “exhibit themes and methods that he was to draw upon” (Blackburn, 2014, p. 9). Further, Maugham creates a descriptive plot and devotes a full page to the setting of description; the physical and the psychological, offering the readers a clear image of the major characters and the reasons behind their internal, external and interpersonal conflicts. Again, the exposition presents Mr. Kelada with both good and bad qualities, all of which anticipate the episodes that come diachronically in the major plot. Certainly, strong plots make the story powerful and effective, and good characterization creates a significant mechanism to unearth these plots. So, effective plots should have distinguishable characters and convincing themes. *Mr. Know All* shows Maugham’s skill to convey facts and descriptions, enabling the reader to interpret the plot and get its main ideas. Also, the story embodies significant narrative form and meaning that bestow on it a capacity to transport readers into virtual environments of thematic dimension and “literary aesthetics” (Kuzmicova, 2012, p.23).

Structurally, the story’s well-structured plot begins with excitement and suspense as the narrator subjectively reveals his abhorrence for Mr. Kelada. This attitude initially arouses our curiosity to find out the reason of this detestation and its consequences. *Mr. Know All* has two definite significant aspects of the plot structure: the outward structure and the inward structure. The former aspect comprises “the external relations of the linguistic signs,” while the latter reflects “the network of internal relations underlying the surface structure” (Liu, 2009, p.142). In this respect, the narrative tells us that the narrator-character is British and shows signs of prejudice against those who are not pure British. Based on this prejudice, Mr. Kelada expresses his annoyance from the narrator’s point of view by a



mechanism of being too talky. Also, this is ironically significant because others on the ship believe that Mr. Kelada isn't so annoying. Thus, events and actions exponentially succeed to reveal Mr. Kelada as an enigmatic major character. *Mr. Know All* is a well-plotted story that touches readers' psyche by its "profound significance, choice of phrases, skilled techniques, and exquisite structure" (Liu, 2009, p.141). For example, the narrator sets up a dialogue with Mr. Kelada tactlessly and explicitly expresses his own thoughts, "Are you English?" and Kelada politely replies, "Rather. You don't think I look like an American, do you? British to the backbone, that's what I am" (Maugham, 1998, p.195). In this dialogic example, we can see two different tones; the narrator's prejudiced and arrogant tone and Mr. Kelada's moderate and well-mannered one.

Noteworthy, the story takes place in "international waters." This is a significant spatial symbol for two reasons. First, considering the plot in international waters of a non-specific country, the author implies that the theme of prejudice is an international dilemma. Second, the author suggests that both prejudice and racism are human features and are not bound to any specific culture. Likewise, the ship is a spatial-object symbol of the whole world with different people of different cultures, languages, and qualities. Thus, the story is more than words; it has serious plot, theme, and characters. Generally, in structuring its plot, the story mainly resides on the technique of characterization in introducing the characters. In this light, characterization has a vital function manifested in the writer's ability to present his characters to readers with their individual lively specificities. In this sense, Bruner (1991) argues that readers "organize their experience and memory of human happenings mainly in the form of narrative—stories, excuses, myths, reasons for doing and not doing" (p. 4).

In *Mr. Know All*, the subplot starts when Mr. Ramsay is accompanied by his wife who comes with him to Kobe after spending a year visiting her family in New York. Mrs. Ramsay is a beautiful lady with small body; she is a character of humor and fun,

she was dressed always very simply; but she knew how to wear her clothes. She achieved an effect of quiet distinction. I should not have paid any particular attention to her but that she possessed a quality that may be common enough in women, but nowadays is not obvious in their demeanor. You could not look at her without being struck by her modesty. It shone in her like a flower on a coat. (Maugham, 1998, p.197)

These descriptions are not arbitrary, but they explain many things and contribute to the construction of the subplot and theme. Having such a humorous character with attractiveness makes Mrs. Ramsay contrary to her arrogant and stubborn husband. As a result, this discrepancy also makes her infidelity possible, and describing her simple clothes with attributing this to her husband's limited income is an anticipation of the impossibility of her possession of the expensive diamond necklace, and thus feeds the idea of treason. Based on such a subplot, Bruner (1991) points out that "narrative constructions can only achieve verisimilitude" through its descriptive plot and subplots (p.4).

The subplot conflict escalates when both Mr. Kelada and Ramsay start a vehement debate about the real and false pearls. Putting in mind that Mr. Kelada is a businessman who travels to Japan to examine the cultured pearl industry, he looks at Mrs. Ramsay's beautiful necklace of pearls and tells her that her necklace has its value despite being made of cultured pearls. Accordingly, the conflict stems from a collision between the two opposing characters: Mr. Kelada and Mr. Ramsay whom the narrator describes as "a great heavy fellow" on the ship (Maugham, 1998, p.197). Mr. Ramsay is an American consular working at the American consulate in Kobe; a character of huge body and controversies. These descriptions reveal Mr. Ramsay's sense of excellence and high rank, making him dominator at the table; he gets the strength and solemnity that fit the military service at which he serves. Also, this character's immense arguments refer to the propensity to confrontation and opposition, anticipating a sharp clash in the successive events. Thus, events and tension get more serious and furious when Mr. Kelada asks Ramsay to examine the latter's wife's necklace, stressing that its price is not less than fifteen thousand dollars. In his turn, Mr. Ramsay accepts the bet, while his wife's face gets paler showing signs of horror and sends beseeching looks to Mr. Kelada, who reasonably understands what happen to the wife and changes his mind.

Obviously, the intensity of this conflict gets relieved when Mr. Kelada draws back his opinion and accepts to lose the bet despite the validity of his conviction on the pearls. Eventually, the moment of enlightenment reveals the truth and complements the thematic meaning of the story. In the morning, the lady sends Mr. Kelada an envelope with one hundred dollars, he gets rid of the envelope and restores the securities in his portfolio and says to his friend, the narrator, "If I had a pretty little wife I shouldn't let her spend a year in New York while I stayed at Kobe" (Maugham, 1998, p. 199). Clearly, Mrs. Ramsay was exposed to temptations because of her young age, beauty and husband's abandonment; she was responsive to these temptations, and this diamond necklace is the price of this responsiveness. Mr. Kelada realizes all these things and prefers to retreat before he exposes her behaviors, feeling pity towards her after seeing panic on her face. This position results in a shift in the narrator's feelings; he feels that hatred has left his heart, recognizing that Mr. Kelada's behavior involves chivalry and humanity never felt before. This end signifies an important fact in human life, namely, that those things we see bad might be good if we look at them from another angle; the narrator-character says, "I did not entirely dislike Mr Kelada" (Maugham, 1998, p. 199). Accordingly, this

plot reaches the peak as Mr. Kelada is a “sympathetic protagonist whose goals are mistakenly conceived” (Chatman, 1978, p.89).

In its purgatory sense, this end is characterized by its sharp reversal, in which there is a shift that helps to foster the characters’ positive feelings and reactions; the narrative acquires an amazing humorous catharsis. In this concern, the story represents a unique narrative event; its end is manifested in its downfall action that implies both strangeness and excitement which make a new creative text unheard before. To this end, Matarneh (2014) asserts that these sequent events suggest that “the presentation of plot is dominant over characters” (p.88). Thus, Maugham paves the way for a moment of enlightenment in an intelligent and aesthetic way and in a tight plot. The end is not haphazardly constructed; rather it is a necessity required by and compatible with thematic context. Meanwhile, this moment manifests the narrator’s “hollowness of his prejudice against a colored person” and that human pureness is not correlated with color, race and gender (Waghmare, 2013, p.112). This is true since Mrs. Ramsay, a white woman, is insincere to her husband, whereas Mr. Kelada, a non-white character, cares a lot to protect her marriage. In this sense, “Revelatory plots tend to be strongly character-oriented, concerned with the infinite detailing of existents, as events are reduced to a relatively minor, illustrative role” (Chatman, 1978, p.49).

Technically, these two plots are linked, where the sub-plot brings the complications of the main plot to climax and then catharsis. Therefore, it is significant to analyze the climax of the narrative as another element, embedded in the sub-plot that characterizes the formalist review. In this sense, Maugham develops his narrative using “the story-within-a-story narrative technique” (Blackburn, 2014, p.10). Again, the moment of suspense arises when the narrator realizes that Mr. Kelada is indeed a gentleman and positively transforms in his attitude about him. In this light, the subplot of a story is “the sequence of events in a story and their relation to one another develop and usually resolve a conflict” (Charters, 2003, p. 1003). Moreover, the characters’ growth is another aesthetic tool that enables Maugham to express his thoughts in a provocative plot. Maugham employs his characters’ transformation to promote the plot to gain the identification of his readers. Besides, the subplot in *Mr. Know All* takes place mainly in the psyche of Mr. Ramsay prior to that of Mr. Kelada, a thing that enables us to understand their characters and thoughts. In this view, Liu (2009) reminds us that the “plot is the carrier of the structure” and that the plot is the series of actions and episodes arranged in “order, and proportion” with a symmetrical balance (p.143). Stressing this point, Bruner (1991) adds that any “narrative comprises an ensemble of ways of constructing and representing the sequential, diachronic order of human events” (p. 6). So, *Mr. Know All* fuses both the setting in the plot and characters to get the utmost effect on the readers who might experience similar situations in human modern life.

## Conclusion

The thematic meaning of *Mr. Know All* is apprehended through the presentation of the major characters and plot. So, Maugham creates characters who emphasize the setting and brings them vividly to a realistic life. Charters (2003) states that modern characters are ordinary people who act and interact in an effect and that round characters look “complex, full, described in detail, often contradictory, and usually dynamic” (p.1045). Thus, it is interesting to notice that Maugham’s story is nearly without serious flat characters. *Mr. Know All* has a short magnitude with simple realistic characterization and plot which consists of “repeated elements and recurrent details of action and gesture, of description, and of shifts in direction and changes of focus” (Liu, 2009, p.142). This repetition is important as it thematically connects central characters and dominant ideas. Thus, the realistic characterization in *Mr. Know All* qualifies us to know the actual dominant characters that play most of the major decisive roles. The plot and subplot eventually allow both the narrator and Mr. Ramsay to change and accept Mr. Kelada as he is. This end implies a surprise and an irony, in which both characters transform drastically in favor of their antagonists. In this case, Mr. Kelada is the center of an admirable plot whose action contains a “change for the better . . . caused by a sympathetic protagonist’s nobility of character” (Chatman, 1978, p.88).

On the whole, Maugham masters the craft of aesthetic and thematic plotting/sub-plotting and characterization; he fuses them to enable his readers enjoy the story and relate it to themselves. In general, *Mr. Know All* is narratively constructed on one basic principle: groundless hatred, which is a basic for the story’s events and actions, but without serious and convincing justification. Like modern man, the characters are viewed according to their ordinary appearances and qualities; the narrator is an exception. Mr. Kelada is a unique character for he maintains his spirits high and contained before and after the disputing with the provocative narrator. Besides, he actually has high sense of solidarity and altruism to help others around him.

Definitely, characterization is one of the main elements of any narrative. In Maugham’s story, there are two types of characters: major characters and minor peripheral characters. Most of the characters in this story are involved in the plot/subplot and intimately connected to the themes; they structurally move in the plotted directions and according to their roles. The first-person narrator is the sole presenter of central characters from his subjective point of view. Consequently, readers fall victims of his points of view and get influenced by these perspectives he expresses. In this sense, this type of narrators cannot be reasonably reliable or neutral. It is until the ending paragraph that readers

get the chance to realize the real characterization of Mr. Kelada among others. It is also through the character of Mr. Kelada that we realize the human nature and its aspects, mainly in our modern life and its ups and downs. Aesthetically, this impressive fusion of plot and characterization is viewed as a distinction of Maugham's narrative techniques.

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