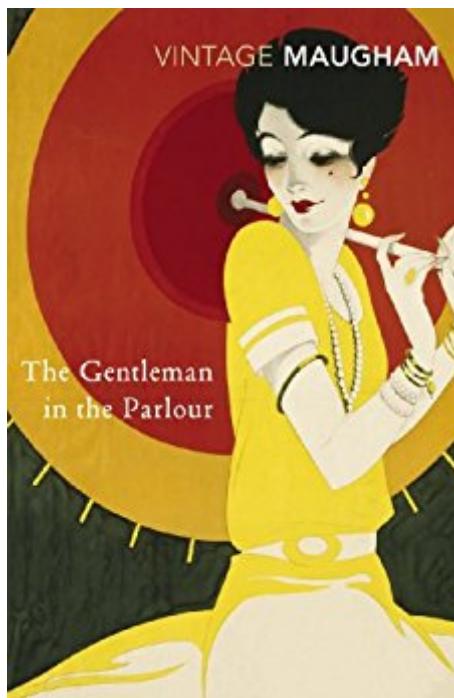


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The Gentleman In The Parlour (Vintage Classics)



Synopsis

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY PAUL THEROUX Somerset Maugham's success as a writer enabled him to indulge his adventurous love of travel, and he recorded the sights and sounds of his wide-ranging journeys with an urbane, wry style all his own. *The Gentleman in the Parlour* is an account of the author's trip through what was then Burma and Siam, ending in Haiphong, Vietnam. Whether by river to Mandalay, on horse through the mountains and forests of the Shan States to Bangkok, or onwards by sea, Maugham's vivid descriptions bring a lost world to life.

Book Information

File Size: 892 KB

Print Length: 240 pages

Publisher: Vintage Digital; New Ed edition (March 20, 2010)

Publication Date: April 1, 2010

Language: English

ASIN: B003D87Q2G

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #873,853 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #67 in Books > Travel > Asia > Myanmar #138 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Nonfiction > Travel > Asia > Thailand #604 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Nonfiction > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Modern

Customer Reviews

You step into colonial Burma and Thailand during the early 1920s, and you will travel by mule train, rail cars, and motor cars all described as only Willy Maugham can !! I love the way he describes the people he meets, the quint South East Asian villages, and the lush jungles that took over Angkor Wat like magical pythons out of an opium dream. I can here the song, "Hungry like the wolf" (1983 by Duran Duran) on this South East Asian voyage complete with Buddhist monks in saffron colored robes and expat colonials living strange lives far away from the stately homes back in Mayfair and Knightsbridge in London. Yes, as a fan of Somerset Maugham, this is a great book from a bygone

era that will never return again.

Reading Maugham's colorful descriptions of his travels in a small volume with yellowed pages easily lulled me back eighty years into the time he wrote which is so different from how one would go to SE Asia nowadays. Taking a break from writing fiction, he filled his journal with interesting stories of people he met along the way. I especially marveled at the former monk's recollection of collecting food in his begging bowl and the man who had to marry in a hurry in order to get a job. The beauty of his writing shown through each page; for example: "The coconut trees with their disheveled heads were like old men suddenly risen from sleep." Written from his heart, the journal felt like a way of getting a look inside Maugham's soul.

If you like Southeast Asia, this is a wonderful book to read. Although old fashioned, it will make you laugh and reminiscent. It describes Asia that we imagined, but which no longer exists. Take it with you on a trip to Myanmar or Vietnam.

Outstanding

I've read this book a number of times, and I think that as with THE BRIDE OF SAN LUIS REY and a couple of other books, it is likely to be one of those books I read yearly, perhaps, or at least regularly, from here on in. THE GENTLEMAN is good company, and every page has something of interest on it. Yes, the Introduction is flashy, and a Master's Class in and of itself, for aspiring writers, but the entirety of the book, chapter by chapter, incident by incident, is a demonstration of what English prose can do well: it entertains as it informs. If one's taste has been corrupted by the Gee Whiz, Buzz-Word and media-clever sound bite slangadellic scribbling that passes for, well, writing nowadays, this simple book may come as a surprise and a healthy cure for bad reading habits (or addictions to trashy faddistic stuff) and may prepare the reader for a new direction in book-buying. And, rarest of all, and quite unexpected, this oyster bears within its unassuming flesh, a pearl of superlative price.

The Gentleman in the Parlour by W. Somerset Maugham
A single man? In 1922 William Somerset Maugham by then already a very successful playwright, short story teller and novelist. Makes a journey from London to Ceylon and onwards to Rangoon and Mandalay, by mule to Keng Tung in the Shan state of north east Burma, from where he continues to Bangkok, Angkor Wat in Cambodia

and onwards to Saigon, Hue and Hanoi in Vietnam and finally to Hong Kong across the United States and finally back to London. He only got around to writing his account of this trip seven years later in the travel story "The Gentleman in the Parlour". In the years in between he was very productive and wrote some of his most famous books as "The Painted Veil" (1925) "The Casuarina Tree" (1926) two full length plays and the novel "Cakes and Ale" (1930). High points in this travel story are his (mule) trip to upper Burma, his period in Bangkok and his description of Angkor Wat in Cambodia. Also he tells us he has left himself at home he gives us a very interesting and personal account of his observations. But more than a traveller Maugham remains a story teller and writer, some of the stories he tells us from this trip he published elsewhere to, sometimes even before this journey. So more than a travelogue this is a very carefully composed novel in the form of a traveler's story. And also his observations tend to be very personal he is very careful about his private life. For instance there is no word about his companion. His eighteen year younger lover Gerald Haxton, how also was a great help on all his journeys. He always pretends to travel alone (with local guides and helpers) he actually never does. Like many famous travelers, such as Bruce Chatwin, V.S. Naipaul, Graham Greene and Wilfred Thesiger, all pretending to travel alone, but all in the good company of lovers, wives and mistresses. Nothing wrong with that but it sheds a little different light on their journeys, and makes the travels of the few actual solitary wanderers all the more heroic. All do complaining sometimes the periods of his travels though south east Asia must have been among the happiest of Maugham's life. He is happy, healthy, in the company of his lover, enjoying country as well as city, confident, hopeful and full of energy. This novel tells us that too, the long line of works he wrote after this trip even so.

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