**Mayhew**

By W.S. Maugham

The lives of most men are determined by their environment. They accept the circumstances amid which fate has thrown them not only with resignation but even with good will[[1]](#footnote-1). They are like streetcars running contentedly on their rails and they despise the sprightly flivver[[2]](#footnote-2) that dashes in and out of the traffic and speeds so jauntily[[3]](#footnote-3) across the open country. I respect them; they are good citizens, good husbands, and good fathers, and of course somebody has to pay the taxes; but I do not find them exciting. I am fascinated by the men, few enough in all conscience[[4]](#footnote-4), who take life in their own hands and seem to mould it to their own liking. It may be that we have no such thing as free will, but at all events[[5]](#footnote-5) we have the illusion of it. At a cross-road it does seem to us that we might go either to the right or the left and, the choice once made, it is difficult to see that the whole course of the world's history obliged us to take the turning we did.

I never met a more interesting man than Mayhew. He was a lawyer in Detroit. He was an able and a successful one. By the time he was thirty-five he had a large and a lucrative practice[[6]](#footnote-6), he had amassed a competence, and he stood on the threshold of a distinguished career. He had an acute brain, an attractive personality, and uprightness. There was no reason why he should not become, financially or politically, a power in the land[[7]](#footnote-7). One evening he was sitting in his club with a group of friends and they were perhaps a little worse (or the better) for liquor[[8]](#footnote-8). One of them had recently come from Italy and he told them of a house he had seen at Capri[[9]](#footnote-9), a house on the hill, overlooking the Bay of Naples[[10]](#footnote-10), with a large and shady garden. He described to them the beauty of the most beautiful island in the Mediterranean.

"It sounds fine," said Mayhew. "Is that house for sale?"

"Everything is for sale in Italy."

"Let's send'em a cable[[11]](#footnote-11) and make an offer for it."

"What in heaven's name would you do with a house in Capri?"

"Live in it," said Mayhew.

He sent for a cable form, wrote it out, and dispatched it. In a few hours the reply came back. The offer was accepted. Mayhew was no hypocrite and he made no secret of the fact that he would never have done so wild a thing if he had been sober, but when he was he did not regret it. He was neither an impulsive nor an emotional man, but a very honest and sincere one.

He would never have continued from bravado in a course that he had come to the conclusion was unwise[[12]](#footnote-12). He made up his mind to do exactly as he had said. He did not care for wealth and he had enough money on which to live in Italy. He thought he could do more with life than spend it on composing the trivial quarrels of unimportant people[[13]](#footnote-13). He had no definite plan. He merely wanted to get away from a life that had given him all it had to offer[[14]](#footnote-14). I suppose his friends thought him crazy; some must have done all they could to dissuade him. He arranged his affairs, packed up his furniture, and started.

Capri is a gaunt rock of austere outline, bathed in a deep blue sea; but its vineyards, green and smiling, give it a soft and easy grace. It is friendly, remote, and debonair[[15]](#footnote-15). I find it strange that Mayhew should have settled on this lovely island, for I never knew a man more insensible to beauty. I do not know what he sought there: happiness, freedom, or merely leisure; I know what he found. In this place which appeals so extravagantly to the senses[[16]](#footnote-16) he lived a life entirely of the spirit. For the island is rich with historic associations and over it broods always the enigmatic memory of Tiberius the Emperor[[17]](#footnote-17). From his windows which overlooked the Bay of Naples, with the noble shape of Vesuvius[[18]](#footnote-18) changing colour with the changing light, Mayhew saw a hundred places that recalled the Romans and the Greeks. The past began to haunt him. All that he saw for the first time, for he had never been abroad before, excited his fancy; and in his soul stirred the creative imagination. He was a man of energy. Presently he made up his mind to write a history. For some time he looked about for a subject, and at last decided on the second century of the Roman Empire. It was little known and it seemed to him to offer problems analogous with those of our own day.

He began to collect books and soon he had an immense library. His legal training had taught him to read quickly. He settled down to work. At first he had been accustomed to foregather in the evening with the painters, writers, and such like who mot in the little tavern near the Piazza[[19]](#footnote-19), but presently he withdrew himself, for his absorption in his studies became more pressing. He had been accustomed to bathe in that bland sea and to take long walks among the pleasant vineyards, but little by little, grudging the time[[20]](#footnote-20), he ceased to do so. He worked harder than he had ever worked in Detroit. He would start at noon and work all through the night till the whistle of the steamer that goes every morning from Capri to Naples told him that it was five o'clock and time to go to bed. His subject opened out before him, vaster and more significant, and he imagined a work that would put him forever beside the great historians of the past. As the years went by he was to be found seldom in the ways of men[[21]](#footnote-21). He could be tempted to come out of his house only by a game of chess or the chance of an argument. He loved to set his brain against another's[[22]](#footnote-22). He was widely read[[23]](#footnote-23) now, not only in history, but in philosophy and science; and he was a skilful controversialist, quick, logical, and incisive. But he had good-humour and kindliness; though he took a very human pleasure in victory, he did not exult in it to your mortification[[24]](#footnote-24).

When first he came to the island he was a big, brawny fellow, with thick black hair and a black beard, of a powerful physique; but gradually his skin became pale and waxy; he grew thin and frail. It was an odd contradiction in the most logical of men that, though a convinced and impetuous materialist, he despised the body[[25]](#footnote-25); he looked upon it as a vile[[26]](#footnote-26) instrument which he could force to do the spirit's bidding. Neither illness nor lassitude[[27]](#footnote-27) prevented him from going on with his work. For fourteen years he toiled unremittingly. He made thousands and thousands of notes. He sorted and classified them. He had his subject at his finger ends, and at last was ready to begin. He sat down to write. He died.

The body that he, the materialist, had treated so contumeliously[[28]](#footnote-28) took its revenge on him. That vast accumulation of knowledge is lost for ever. Vain was that ambition, surely not an ignoble one, to set his name beside those of Gibbon and Mommsen[[29]](#footnote-29). His memory is treasured in the hearts of a few friends, fewer, alas! As the years pass on and to the world he is unknown in death as he was in life.

And yet to me his life was a success. The pattern is good and complete. He did what he wanted, and he died when his goal was in sight and never knew the bitterness of an end achieved.

**赏析：**

**叙事技巧：**

文章采用了毛姆独特的叙事特点，即第一人称叙述者——“我”——作为小说中的一个次要角色，站在故事的边缘，不参与故事的进程，而是扮演叙事者、观察者和评判者的角色。这样就给人以真实感，起到了与读者拉近感情距离，让其自然而然带入的引人入胜的效果。

作者用平和客观、朴实清晰地语言塑造出立体多面的人性，通过主人公身份的设置和行为语言的描写——既是理智的律师，坦承的唯物主义者，对大自然的美无动于衷，又隐隐不甘于生活的平庸和世俗的成功，不顾一切地追求精神的满足，甚至到了无视自己肉体需要的地步——使读者可以自行勾勒出主人公饱满的形象。

小说的情节设置也很巧妙，将寓意暗含其中。梅休因酒醉的决定抛弃一切奔赴世外桃源追求精神生活的充实，又在着手写书之际英年早逝，使故事戛然而止。回顾整个故事，情节的转折似乎都体现着命运的无常和难以把握，与小说的开头相呼应。

**中心思想：**

这篇作品主要探讨的是人生观，这也是毛姆一生都在思索的问题。早在22岁那年，他就在卡布里岛写下的读书笔记中表现出了这样的疑惑：“生活的意义是什么？……一个人在生活中应该如何立身？……有没有一条道路比另一条更好？”他试图从自己的生活中找寻答案，但没有找到。他一方面在作品中用冷静犀利地笔调嘲讽当时西方资本主义社会的势力虚伪、追名逐利、精神空虚，一方面却认为人生虚妄，而对名利有着狂热的欲望，并常常以此自嘲。

本文同样带有虚无主义的色彩，认为人无法将生活的自主权掌握在自己手中，而只能忍受命运的随意拨弄，屈服于外部环境，如同轨迹已经被定好的有轨电车，所谓的自由意志也许仅仅是一种错觉罢了。追求精神自由的梅休是极少数选择不一样道路的人，但这是建立在他优越的经济条件之上，并且最后他也不得不受制于肉体的局限性，无法完成向往已久的著作，废寝忘食的工作成果都随着死亡化为泡影，令人不禁为人生的虚妄而感到悲伤。

然而，作者又肯定了以精神追求为人生目标的行为，认为主人公的人生是圆满的。也许正是由于他没能完成写作而跻身著名历史学家的行列才更是如此，因为他过着精神得到极大满足的生活，拥有崇高的目标与信念，在为之奋斗的过程中收获了快乐，同时又不为世俗的名利所累，他的满足感是纯粹的，不掺杂任何社会的功利因素。

这是每个人，包括作者自己，生活的两难境地的写照。一方面受制于尘世的名利和成见，追求心灵的自由似乎只是奢望，终究是无益的，另一方面又极度渴望摆脱这所有的一切，通过精神追求将人生的选择权握在自己手里。

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陈天怡

1. They accept the circumstances amid which fate has thrown them not only with resignation but even with good will:他们在命运的拨弄面前，不仅逆来顺受，甚至还能随遇而安。 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Flivver:廉价小汽车。 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Jauntily: 得意洋洋地，神气活现地。 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. In all conscience:公正地说，凭良心说。 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. At all events:在任何情况下，不论怎样。 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Lucrative practice:利润大的、赚钱多的生意。 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Become, financially or politically, a power in the land:在这个国家里变得有钱或者有势。 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. They were perhaps a little worse (or the better) for liquor:有的人有些醉意，其他人则清醒一些。 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Capri:卡布里岛，位于那不勒斯湾以南30公里的海面。 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The Bay of Naples:那不勒斯湾，意大利南部海湾，以风景优美著名。 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Send’em a cable:即send them a cable, 给他们发一封电报。 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. He would never have continued from bravado in a course that he had come to the conclusion was unwise: 他无论做什么，只要意识到所做并不明智，就会马上停下来，从不因一时逞能而一味蛮干下去。 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Composing the trivial quarrels of unimportant people:调停平庸之辈的小打小闹，这里指他当律师所做之事。 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. A life that had given him all it had to offer:指现有的生活已经不能再满足他，他没法从现有的生活中获得新的东西了。 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Debonair:原指人温文尔雅，这里形容岛上景色宜人、生机盎然。 [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Appeal extravagantly to the senses:带给人诸多感官上的享受。 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Tiberius the Emperor:古罗马帝国的提比略大帝，性格孤僻，公元14年即位，37年去世，生前最后十年隐居于卡普里岛，留下了许多无从考据的传闻和建筑遗迹。 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Vesuvius:维苏威火山，位于那不勒斯湾东南岸，海拔1,281米，是一座活火山，于公元79年的一次猛烈喷发中摧毁了庞贝古城。 [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Foregather in the evening with the painters, writers, and such like who mot in the little tavern near the Piazza每晚和画家、作家之流在集市旁的小酒馆聚会。 [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Grudging the time:舍不得时间，即他觉得在海中洗澡和在海边散步太浪费时间了。 [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. In the ways of man:和他人来往。 [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Set his brain against another's:与人斗智。 [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Widely read:博览群书。 [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Though he took a very human pleasure in victory, he did not exult in it to your mortification:虽然他像常人一样面对胜利难免欢欣鼓舞，但他不会沾沾自喜而让别人下不了台。 [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. It was an odd contradiction in the most logical of men that, though a convinced and impetuous materialist, he despised the body:作为一个最讲逻辑的人，他却自相矛盾，尽管他是个坚定不移而且偏激的唯物主义者，却不把自己的肉体放在眼里。 [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Vile:卑微的。 [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Lassitude:倦怠，疲惫。 [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Contumeliously:无礼地，侮辱性地。 [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Gibbon and Mommsen: 爱德华·吉本（Edward Gibbon, 1737-1794）, 近代英国杰出历史学家，十八世纪欧洲启蒙时代史学的卓越代表，著有影响深远的史学名著《罗马帝国衰亡史》,以及特奥多尔·蒙森（1817-1903, Theodor Mommsen）, 德国古典学者、法学家、历史学家、考古学家，1902年诺贝尔文学奖获得者。他关于罗马历史的作品对当代的研究十分重要。 [↑](#footnote-ref-29)