



# Of Human Bondage

*W. Somerset Maugham*

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## **Of Human Bondage** W. Somerset Maugham

Of Human Bondage is a 1915 novel by W. Somerset Maugham. It is generally agreed to be his masterpiece and to be strongly autobiographical in nature, although Maugham stated, "This is a novel, not an autobiography, though much in it is autobiographical, more is pure invention."

The book begins with the death of the mother of the nine-year-old protagonist, Philip Carey. Philip's father had already died a few months before, and the orphan Philip is sent to live with his aunt and uncle. His uncle is a vicar of Blackstable, a small village in Kent. Philip inherits a small fortune but the money is held in custody by his uncle until he is 21, giving his uncle a great deal of power over him until he reaches his maturity.

Early chapters relate Philip's experience at the vicarage. His aunt tries to be a mother to Philip, but she is herself childish and unsure of how to behave, whereas his uncle takes a cold disposition towards him. Philip's uncle has an eclectic collection of books, and in reading Philip finds a way to escape his mundane existence and experience fascinating worlds of fiction.

Less than a year later, Philip is sent to a boarding school. Philip shows considerable academic talent and is informed by the school's headmaster that he could have earned a scholarship for Oxford, but instead he becomes determined to leave the school and go to Germany. Philip's uncle and the headmaster oppose Philip's desire to go to Germany, but eventually they give in and allow him to go to Heidelberg for a year.

In Heidelberg, Philip lives at a boarding house with other foreigners and studies German, among other subjects. Philip is intrigued by his long discourses with Hayward and Weeks and eventually becomes convinced that he need not believe in the Church of England; a radical idea for him as he had been brought up with staunch Christian value.

The rest of the book tells the romantic history of Philip. Eventually Philip gets married and puts aside his lofty, complex artistic and philosophical ideals, coming to the conclusion that "the simplest pattern, that in which a man is born, worked, married, had children, and died, was likewise the most perfect."

The Modern Library ranked *Of Human Bondage* No. 66 on its list of the 100 best English-language novels of the 20th century.

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