



## Of Human Bondage

W. Somerset Maugham (1874 -1965)

Read by:	Tom Weiss	Catalog:	DB-2009
Length:	25 hours and 38 minutes	UPC:	0701236969849
Language:	English	MSLP:	\$14.99
Style:	Solo	Formats:	2 MP3 CDs in DVD case
Genre:	General Fiction, Bildungsroman		

The phrase W. Somerset Maugham used as the title for *Of Human Bondage* comes from Part IV of Spinoza's Ethics, "Of Human Bondage, or the Strength of the Emotions", which treats the general inability of people to control their emotions, and thus constitutes a type of bondage. He goes on to connect beliefs to emotions of pleasure and pain and how desires evolve into plans and outcomes. That central theme runs through the life arc of Philip Carey, a character based in part on Maugham. Orphaned at age nine and afflicted with a club foot, he is taken in by an aunt and emotionally remote uncle and soon shunted off to a boarding school. We follow his evolution through his youth, education, his awkward first loves, his difficulties in finding a

vocational fit, and the heartbreaks and disappointments he encounters in his quest for meaning. Maugham dissects the confusion and dissonance of being simultaneously attracted to and repulsed by people, objects, thoughts and events with surgical precision and cool detachment. His descriptions reveal an artist's eye and his conversations have a musician's ear for pitch, tone and timbre. The result is a depiction of the complexity and ambivalence of living in the changing environment of the modern world that Theodore Dreiser called a work of genius and compared to a Beethoven symphony. It is no surprise that the Modern Library included *Of Human Bondage* at number 66 on its list of the 100 best English-language novels of the 20th Century.

**William Somerset Maugham** (January 25, 1874 – December 16, 1965), known as W. Somerset Maugham, was a popular British writer of novels, plays and short stories. He was born in the British Embassy in Paris, where his father was a lawyer. He was left an orphan at age 10 and sent back to England to live with an uncle and attend King's School in Canterbury, where he was an outsider and developed a stammer. At age 16 he left school and studied in Heidelberg for a year. He struggled to find a profession, eventually studying medicine in London, where he witnessed death, pain, hope, fear, and relief first hand. He had been writing since age 15 and in 1897 published his first novel, *Liza of Lambeth*, a story of working-class adultery. It quickly sold out its first print run, prompting him to become a full-time writer. He had a hit play in 1907 with *Lady Frederick*, and at one time had four plays running concurrently in London. When the war broke out, he served in France with the British Red Cross as a member of the "Literary Ambulance Drivers" group that included Ernest Hemingway, John Dos Passos, and E.E. Cummings, and later served in British Intelligence. Initial response to *Of Human Bondage* in 1915 was mixed until high praise from influential critic and writer Theodore Dreiser lifted it to success. Other major works include *The Moon and Sixpence*, a novel based on the life of Paul Gauguin, and *The Razor's Edge*. Writers as diverse as Anthony Burgess, Ian Fleming, George Orwell, and Stephen King cite Maugham as an important influence.