

Memorial.

I saw your face as we walked past yesterday  
At the end of a race. You were leaning against  
The back of a car that was open like an army truck.  
And you were smiling at something just said to you.  
The day was cloudy with bursts of yellow sunlight  
Drenching the hills and making the jockeys' colours  
Shine and the tops of the cars like a metallic sea  
Of russet and blue stretched across the course  
With ropes and marquees and bookies' stands  
And blanketed horses at the end of ropes being walked  
And trotted. You had a black moustache, I remember.  
And soft, flushed cheeks like a girl. And a smile  
That was curious and abashed as if expecting  
All sorts of wonders of which you were innocent.  
But then I remembered you were dead. No longer  
Among the moving men and women of this field.  
But in silence. Like the breeze that came past our ears  
And went in a dainty whispering towards the paddock.  
I remembered you were killed, complaining of a pain  
In your arm where you weren't hit. I almost stopped.  
You wore my hat when you died. I can remember  
Your name: Captain Maugham. Even now a sweetness  
Surrounds it for me. You were gentle, I remember.  
You never used harsh words. One afternoon near Cassino  
You asked to borrow my cap before you went up,  
And I turned as you were leaving and said, 'Don't forget  
To come back!' And with the same abashed smile  
You opened your mouth as if I'd shown you the future  
And said, 'I hope so!' I wish it had been you  
By the car, leaning there talking, mildly amused,

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With the same smile, at something beyond you;  
Your grace wouldn't have changed. There was something  
Of grace beyond men in your eyes. You were hardly  
More than a boy. It has only just occurred to me,  
That your's was the smile of a boy. We were boys then.