

The actor's calling is a hard one. I am not speaking now of the young women who go on the stage because they have a pretty face and, if good looks were a qualification for typists, might just as well have gone into an office, or of the young men who do so because they have a good figure and no particular aptitude for anything else. They drift in and out of the profession; the women marry and the men get into a wine merchant's office or take up interior decoration. I am speaking of the actors by vocation. They have a natural gift and the desire to use it. It is a profession that requires assiduous labour to achieve proficiency, so that by the time an actor knows how to act any sort of part he is often too old to act any but a few; it requires boundless patience; it is fraught with disappointments. Long stretches of enforced idleness must be endured. The prizes are few and can be held but for a brief period. The rewards are inadequate. The actor is at the mercy of fortune and the inconstant favour of the public. He is forgotten as soon as he ceases to please. Then it will avail him nothing to have been the idol of the crowd. He can starve for all they care. It is when I think of this that I find it easy to be indulgent to the actor's airs and graces, his exigencies and vanity, when he is on the crest of the wave. Let him be flamboyant and absurd if he likes. It all lasts such a little while. And after all his egotism is part of his talent.

W. Somerset Maugham