COLONIZING MASCULINITY: 
THE CREATION OF A MALE BRITISH SUBJECTIVITY 
IN THE ORIENTAL FICTION OF W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM 

by 

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B.A., University College London, 1983 
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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF 
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF 
DOCTOR IN PHILOSOPHY 
in 
THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES 
(Department of English) 

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THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA 
May 1994 
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Date 22/4/94

DE-6 (2/88)
This thesis discusses the oriental fiction of W. Somerset Maugham in the light of current theoretical models introduced by postcolonial and gender studies. Immensely popular from their time of publication to the present, Maugham's novels and short stories set in Asia and the South Pacific exhibit a consummate recycling of colonialist tropes. Through their manipulation of racial, gender, and geographical binarisms, Maugham's texts produce a fantasy of a seemingly stable British male subjectivity based upon emotional and somatic continence, rationality, and specularity. The status of the British male subject is tested and confirmed by his activity in the colonies. Maugham's situation of writing as a homosexual man, however, results in affiliations which cut across the binary oppositions which structure Maugham's texts, destabilising the integrity of the subject they strive so assiduously to create.

Commencing with Maugham's novel The Moon and Sixpence, and his short story collection The Trembling of a Leaf, both of which are set in the South Pacific, the thesis moves to a discussion of Maugham's Chinese travelogue, On a Chinese Screen, and his Hong Kong novel, The Painted Veil. Further chapters explore the Malayan short stories, and Maugham's novel set in the then Dutch East Indies, The Narrow Corner. A final chapter discusses Maugham's novel of India, The
Razor's Edge. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Maugham does not even attempt a liberal critique of British Imperialism. Writing and narration are, for him, processes closely identified with codes of imperial manliness. Maugham's putatively objective narrators, and the public "Maugham persona" which the writer carefully cultivated, display a strong investment in the British male subjectivity outlined above. Yet Maugham's texts also endlessly discover writing as a play of signification, of decoration, of qualities that he explicitly associates in other texts with homosexuality. If Maugham's texts do not critique the formation of colonial subjects they do, to a critical reader, make the rhetoric necessary to create such subjects peculiarly visible.
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I would like to thank my Research Supervisor, Dr. Patricia Merivale, for her sensitive criticism and intellectual support, and also to acknowledge the help I received from the two other members of my Supervisory Committee, Dr. John Cooper, and Dr. Eva-Marie Kröller. I would also like to thank Ms. Rosemary Leach, Graduate Secretary in the English Department, for her assistance to me during my five years in the Ph.D. programme.
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INTRODUCTION

1. Re-reading Maugham

"Is it all right," American critic Joseph Epstein wonders in an essay written in the mid 'eighties, "to read Somerset Maugham?" (1) The feeling persists that it somehow is not quite au fait. Maugham's works are not part of the English Literature canon in British or North American universities, nor have they been subject to focused critical attention. A detailed critical reading of a defined body of Maugham's fiction, which this thesis attempts, faces difficulties no matter what critical stance is chosen. For the New Critic, Maugham's novels and short stories are lacking in depth and density. Their symbolism is clumsily obvious, plots contrived, language polished and euphonious but tending towards the cliché. In Maugham's fiction, meaning is often on the surface, and the text itself needs little explication or annotation, in contrast to the modernist fiction and metaphysical poetry upon which British New Criticism cut its analytic teeth.

More contemporary critical approaches to Maugham's texts, however, face other obstacles. Poststructuralist analysis, in the age of the death of the author, finds Maugham's confidence in intentionality and writerly craftsmanship misplaced, if not naive. Feminist critiques face the arduous task of finding purchase on the smooth
surface of Maugham's masculine self-fashioning. The author's early novels, such as *Mrs. Craddock* (1902), and many of his plays, are sympathetic interventions in debates on "the woman question" of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century similar thematically to the plays of Henrik Ibsen or the later novels of Thomas Hardy. His later, and more popular fiction, however, is increasingly sex-stereotyped, displaying a misogyny that is impervious to critical intervention. James Joyce's and D.H. Lawrence's female characters are frequently troubling presences, cracking open the surfaces of gender roles so that the reader may peer, albeit briefly, beneath. Maugham's memsahibs, in contrast, seem so self-evidently stereotypical, such clearly-defined products of a rigid, internally consistent sex/gender system,\(^1\) that they resist the leverage of deconstructive analysis.

Postcolonial critiques of Maugham's writings also arrive at an impasse. Maugham wrote a substantial body of texts about Asia, and is often thought of, erroneously, as a writer whose subject matter is predominantly colonial. His novels and short stories set in Asia, however, suffer in comparison with those of two canonized predecessors, Kipling and Conrad. Maugham's work does not foreground the fantasy of a life on the border zone between two cultures, of a merging into the exotic culture while still maintaining one's English subjectivity intact, as Kipling's best work, such as *Kim*, does. Nor do Maugham's texts exhibit the
fractured structure of Conrad's novels and short stories, 
the overlapping of narrational voices and their ultimate 
dermination of the status of truth. Maugham's narrators sit 
in the clean, well-lighted place of reason; they observe 
with irony, but they rarely doubt. Maugham's stories thus 
read like Conrad's purple patches: it is as if Jim were 
permanently marooned at Patusan, and had the luxury of 
writing his own story, without Marlowe's, Stein's, or 
Brown's mediation. Such narrational surety does not readily 
provide the textual discontinuities and fissures beloved of 
postcolonial critics; the stories' seamlessness makes it 
difficult to locate "the indeterminate moment when 
specificity is dissolved" (Spivak, "Imperialism and Sexual 
Difference" 229).

The variety of critical approaches grouped as Gay and 
Lesbian Studies, Gender Studies, or most recently as Queer 
Theory, would initially appear to offer a ready means of 
engaging Maugham's work critically. Here too, however, there 
are obstacles. Maugham did not intervene publicly in debates 
upon homosexuality, as Gide did with Corydon, nor did he 
leave a number of texts with homosexual themes for 
posthumous publication, as Forster did with Maurice and a 
number of short stories. The creation of the Maugham 
narrator seems very much to be a device to keep Maugham 
himself securely closeted, and indeed the author's few 
published remarks on homosexuality seem conventionally 
homophobic. His novels themselves do not actively thematize
homosexuality, and whereas it is possible to read homoeroticism into them, much the same might be said of the works of most nominally or indeed certifiably heterosexual twentieth-century British male writers.

The resistance of Maugham's texts to analysis is, perhaps, responsible for the paucity of critical readings of his works. And yet, in a sense, it is their very slickness that makes them interesting. Attempting to investigate how such slickness is produced, this thesis concentrates upon Maugham's oriental fiction, his short stories and novels set in Asia and Australasia, commencing with the novel *The Moon and Sixpence* (1919) and ending with *The Razor's Edge* (1944). Widely acknowledged to be finely crafted, more popular in terms of sales than the writings of supposedly more literary chroniclers of Empire such as Conrad or Kipling, Maugham's oriental fictions are successful participants in the reproduction of imperial ideology. Like a series of trompe l'oeil murals, they depend for their harmonious effect upon a certain way of seeing, upon an alignment of reader, narrator, and object which is so assiduously created that it becomes difficult to find another angle of vision. In his most recent work, Edward Said compares "imperialism's consolidating vision" to Maupassant's "enjoying a daily lunch at the Eiffel Tower because it was the only place in Paris where he did not have to look at the imposing structure" (*Culture and Imperialism* 239). It is only the gazing subject who is himself immune to
the survey of the gaze; he himself is already invisibly natural, always already there. Maugham's oriental fiction, then, works to naturalise such concepts as "Britishness" and "masculinity" by, in a sense, eliding their presence.

An extension of Said's metaphor may provide a hint of a methodology for a re-viewing of Maugham's works. On June 10, 1884, Sir Frederick Weld gave a talk on the Straits Settlements and British Malaya to an audience at the Royal Colonial Institute, London, which omitted reference to Singapore, the area's centre, second London of the Empire. The omission, the chairman of the session remarked after the presentation, was quite in order, and did not proceed from any disregard of Singapore's importance. Rather, Weld's silence was "the greatest possible compliment ... to Singapore. This Colony is getting on so well that there is no occasion even for a Parliamentary question about it" (Weld 85). Like Maupassant's Eiffel Tower, then, Singapore is a centre that, by its privileged position, escapes observation. Yet a late twentieth-century reader may well see colonial Singapore differently--an imperial fortress with all guns facing seaward, subject to investiture from the rear--or even view Singapore as primarily a postcolonial space, Lee Kuan Yew's "poisonous shrimp," which would give an invader indigestion, or one of Asia's little dragons.

The point I wish to make through the extension of Said's metaphor is perhaps an elementary one: ideologies and discourses are not monolithic, and they are subject to
processes of change. For all the continuing power of imperial nostalgia in Britain, there are now angles from which one can look which show the constructed nature of colonial discourse, its continual making and remaking of the boundaries of imagined communities, angles from which Maugham's works are denaturalised, their rhetorical sleights of hand made visible. The angle I will use in this thesis will be to read Maugham as a homosexual writer in an effort to open up the enforced symmetries of his oriental writings, to view homosexuality as the unmentionable invisible presence that centres the urbane circumference of his works.

My hope in this thesis is thus to use homosexuality as a lever to explore the connection between British constructions of masculinity and imaginative geography in the early twentieth century. European colonial communities were historically not merely wardrobes for the trying on of different constructions of masculinity, but factories for "the cultivation of all that is masculine and the expulsion of all that is effeminate" (Newsome, qtd. in Hyam 72).

My conviction is that colonial texts such as Maugham's not only write British masculinity large but are themselves subject to continuous interlocution by the material they seek to process. Even as Maugham's narration cuts up, stretches, and frames its material in order to process it, so the material itself talks back, suggesting the tenuousness of the narrator's position.

2. Maugham's Critical Heritage
The amount of academic writing upon Maugham is surprisingly small. Two substantial scholarly biographies exist,\(^3\) supplemented by a number of general studies which, while providing ample plot summary and contextualization, are largely content to remain on the fringes of textual analysis, making only occasional forays into a broad discussion of theme and imagery. A further series of reviews and essays attempts to establish Maugham's status within the canon of English or World Literature in a debate which commences with Dreiser's 1915 review of *Of Human Bondage* and is still pursued, perhaps with rather flagging vigour, today. Critical monographs concerning the modern short story, writing and imperialism, and writing and gender often make brief reference to Maugham. In most of these studies, however, Maugham plays the role of torch-bearer to Kipling, Conrad, and Forster, each of whom is an accomplished short story writer in his own right. Ironically for a writer so concerned with Others of race, class and sexuality, Maugham himself is made Other in these academic texts, presented as the competent but uninspired professional writer against whose works true literary genius may be measured. Finally, there is a small number of works that use a clearly defined critical approach to analyse one or more of Maugham's texts.

I do not propose to give an extended summary of Maugham's critical reception here.\(^4\) Rather, I wish to focus upon critical treatment of aspects of Maugham's
novels, travel writings and short fiction that are relevant to this thesis: imaginative geography, gender, sexuality, and lastly Maugham's "one triumphant creation, W. Somerset Maugham, world-weary world-traveler, whose narrative first person became the best-known and least wearisome in the world" (Vidal 40).

Most criticism of Maugham stresses the importance of Asia as a setting for his fiction. On the most superficial critical level, Asia is seen as providing background material and little more. John Whitehead, for example, feels that Maugham's journeys to "the Far East" provided inspiration for "his best work" (Maugham: A Reappraisal 17). Raymond Mortimer, in contrast, confesses to being "bored with the sarongs and padangs and kampongs which serve for local colour" (244), and locates the interest Maugham's Malayan stories hold in their characterization. Even an extended essay such as Klaus Jonas' "Maugham and the East" does not move beyond plot summary and character description. Leslie Marchand's conclusion follows similar lines:

Exoticism did not perceptibly colour Maugham's thinking or modify his method. It was rather a useful medium, but it never subdued or chastened him. The tone of his work remains constant. (71)

Archie Loss moves a little further in recognising exile as a theme in the Malayan fiction (72-3), a concept which is amplified by Robert Gish. Gish sees Maugham's texts as part of a coherent tradition of the exotic short story in English
Literature which stretches from Kipling to Greene, a tradition which reflects a "major literary mode of modernism" (2):

Not only did Kipling and his heirs—each in his own way—extend the subject and theme of exoticism and thus the scope of the modern short story; they also enhanced our understanding of the alienation common to those who live in the twentieth century, early and late . . . The modern British short story is often the product of "refugees" in exotic places and situations, exiles of culture, of class, of sexuality or—the ultimate exoticism—of death. (37)

Curtis briefly explores exile's other face, moving away from a treatment of effects the exotic upon the British psyche to a consideration of Maugham's depiction of the colonial situation. The racism of the Malayan stories is, he comments, "not likely to endear Maugham to the modern liberal-minded reader" (The Pattern Of Maugham 158). Both Curtis and Antony Burgess remark on the paucity of Asian characters in Maugham's oriental fiction, Burgess commenting that "Maugham cannot be blamed for making his stories centre on . . . Europeans, since they were the only people he could really get to know" (xvi). Curtis further raises in passing Maugham's "fixation with inter-racial sex" (158), and unintentionally foregrounds a dichotomy that underpins the Malayan fiction, that between "the isolated Outstation . . .
[as] a Great Good Place where the real man emerged" (155), and the lives of Europeans in Asia as "a process of degeneration, or of eroded integrity"(175). All these comments, however, are very much in passing, packaging material surrounding solid nuggets of plot summary and contextualization: there is little extended analysis of either race or imaginative geography in general studies of Maugham.

Maugham's works still await extended readings by established critics in the manner of Frederic Jameson's of Lord Jim (1900) in The Political Unconscious (1981), or even critical prefaces after the example of David Trotter's 1987 introduction to Kipling's Plain Tales From the Hills (1890). The novels and short stories are excluded both from pioneering studies of English literature and colonialism, such as M.M. Mahood's The Colonial Encounter (1977) and Jeffrey Meyer's Fiction and the Colonial Experience (1973), and also from critically more sophisticated studies, including Patrick Brantlinger's Rule of Darkness (1988). Nor have the texts attracted attention from postcolonial critics, in marked contrast to the explosion of re-readings of Forster and Conrad in the late 1980s. The reason may well be that Maugham's writings are not, and have never been, part of the English Literature canon at British and North American universities. Exposing imperialist rhetoric and divisions of Self and Other in Forster or Conrad leads directly to questions of literary value and canon formation.
A similar exercise performed upon Maugham's texts leads nowhere, since he has already been judged by literary scholars and found to be non-canonical.

There is, however, a small body of studies of Maugham's imaginative geography in detail and from a defined critical perspective. Subramani's "The Mythical Quest: Literary Response to the South Seas" provides, as its title suggests, a reading of *The Moon and Sixpence* (1919) inspired by Joseph Campbell. Jane O'Halloran's "At the Far Edge of their Firelight" (1988), to which we might apply a cumbersome but necessary neologism such as proto-postcolonial/feminist analysis, is appealing in its linking Maugham's constructions of feminity and racial alterity, but disappointing in its homophobia. Finally, Debra Stoner's "Ironic Designs in the Exotic Fiction of W. Somerset Maugham" (1989) explores the place of irony within Maugham's exotic short fiction. These readings will be discussed in Chapters One and Two, which provide analyses of Maugham's fiction set in the South Pacific.

If criticism exploring Maugham's imaginative geography and constructions of racial Others is sparse, it is nonetheless plentiful in comparison with accounts of his fictional constructions of gender. Most works of criticism acknowledge Maugham's misogyny. Loss, for example, critiques the characterization of women as obstacles to the expression of male genius in *The Moon and Sixpence* (43-47), and remarks that most of Maugham's female characters "fall into the
categories of love goddess or bitch" (112). Wilmon Menard's account of the genesis of Maugham's South Pacific tales, which I take to be largely fabricated, endorses this view, representing Maugham as glossing his mems as "'boresome psychopath[s], . . . female[s] plagued by Freudian neuroses'" (9-10). As a counterbalance, Curtis argues that Maugham's dramatic heroines are positively presented, and Calder uses biographical evidence to read misogyny out of the short stories and novels (Willie 74-5). The two critics are, however, in the minority; the most common approach is to examine Maugham's "images of women" in passing, to find them wanting, and to ascribe their deficiencies to the writer's homosexuality. The first volume of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's No Man's Land (1988) raises the important question of narrational authority in a discussion of the manner in which Maugham's short story "The Colonel's Lady" illustrates the fear among male writers "of a female literary tradition whose existence might debilitate not only men of letters but all men" (141); this is, however, the only extended discussion of Maugham by feminist critics.

Maugham's homosexuality, which is central to the analysis this thesis performs, has, like the question of gender, been approached only tangentially by critics. Much early analysis does not raise the issue at all: Richard Cordell, Maugham's first biographer, was misled into believing Maugham to be heterosexual. "I was just a country
boy," he later explained in mitigation (Morgan xv). Anthony Curtis' study *The Pattern of Maugham* (1974) engages in a curious form of critical sidestepping. If one knows, chapters with such titles as "A Double Life" have a certain resonance; if one doesn't, Curtis is not prepared to enlighten one. Calder's *W. Somerset Maugham and the Quest for Freedom* (1972) discusses Maugham's relationship with Gerald Haxton as part of a "Biographical Introduction." The critic does not, however, integrate a discussion of Maugham's sexuality into his critical introduction to the novels and short stories. This is surprising, since Calder identifies images of imprisonment and confinement as central to Maugham's fiction, images that might plausibly be connected to Maugham's situation of writing as a closeted homosexual.

Criticism in the last fifteen years has acknowledged Maugham's homosexuality but has, following the example of *W. Somerset Maugham and the Quest for Freedom*, largely been unable to integrate it into a discussion of his works. Joseph Epstein's view, if stripped of its political agenda, is perhaps more representative than it might at first seem:

Does it make any sense to consider Maugham essentially a homosexual writer--a figure, if you will pardon the expression, in Gay Lit? I, for one, do not think it does. True, in his fiction he tended to be hard on women, but certainly no harder than that figure from Hetero. Lit, Norman Mailer. . . . More important, unlike
so many other modern homosexual writers, from E.M. Forster to Genet to Gore Vidal, Maugham was an apolitical writer; he never sold his artistic birthright. . . . No, Somerset Maugham was not a homosexual writer but instead that quite different thing, a writer who happened to be a homosexual.

Epstein's assumptions need little comment: the reader is assumed to be heterosexual ("if you will pardon the expression"), homosexuality to lead automatically to misogyny, political writing to an abandonment of literary values. If one is to talk of a concept such as artistic birthright, Maugham seems to have obtained a much better price directly from Hollywood than did the Forster estate from Merchant Ivory Productions. Yet it is impossible to retrospectively see an active expression of a gay consciousness in Maugham's texts, and indeed problematic, in a certain respect, to view Maugham as a homosexual writer at all. Homosexuality does not provide overt thematic content for any of Maugham's fiction. Many of the author's short stories and novels do display homoeroticism, but to no greater extent than most colonial or metropolitan fiction written by nominally heterosexual British men. Critical efforts to uncover the importance of Maugham's sexuality in his works have largely proved unable to proceed beyond this impasse.

Recent critical attention to homosexuality in Maugham's
works is thus similar to analysis of gender, imaginative geography, or race. The critic identifies homoeroticism, or detects the substitution or displacement of homosexuality within an individual work, but then moves on. Various critics have commented upon the homoerotic gaze of the narrator in "Salvatore," the fact that Mildred in Of Human Bondage may be an example of textual cross-dressing parallel to Proust's Albertine, or the use of incest as a stand-in for homosexuality in "The Book Bag," but few have attempted extended analysis. Calder's discussion in Willie is perhaps the most detailed (237-242), yet it begins with the premise that Maugham's "main purpose was never the exploration of the homosexual consciousness" (237), and concludes with the uncritical use of 1960s behavioural psychoanalysis:

[T]he teller of Maugham's tales . . . has unresolved conflicts between activity and passivity, conformity and non-conformity, and identification as a man and as a woman. His main defences are reaction formation . . . , emotion isolation, repression, and withdrawal to superficial relationships. . . . In other words, a close psychoanalytic reading of Maugham's work reveals the attitudes, responses, and language which are characteristic of homosexuals. (240-1)

Forrest D. Burt reaches a similar conclusion from an Adlerian perspective, identifying Maugham as a psychologically "unhealthy individual" who lived "a kind of
'double life,' partaking of both masculine and feminine aspects of his . . . being" (12). The fact that critics still use such approaches in the 1980s, long after psychoanalysis itself has discredited them,^ indicates the currently unsophisticated level of theoretical debate on sexuality in Maugham's writings.

The fourth aspect of Maugham criticism that is relevant to this thesis consists of various comments upon what Michel Foucault has called "'the author-function'" ("What is an author?" 202), that cluster of narrational positions that include Maugham's nameless narrators, "Ashenden," the narrator called Somerset Maugham, and Vidal's "triumphant creation" (40), the writer Somerset Maugham himself. Since the advent of New Criticism, literary analysis has habitually made a clear division between narrator and writer. Maugham's works make such a division less evident than one might at first suppose. What, for instance, should a reader make of The Razor's Edge (1944), a self-acknowledged "novel" (1), narrated by a character called Somerset Maugham, who has already written a novel called The Moon and Sixpence and claims to have "invented nothing" apart from some imagined dialogue in the story of Larry Darrell? Or the re-presentation of the vignette "The Taipan" from the avowedly non-fictional On a Chinese Screen (1922) as fiction in The Complete Short Stories (1951)? "Fact and fiction," Maugham wrote, "are so intermingled in my work that now, looking back on it, I can hardly
distinguish one from the other" (The Summing Up 5), a comment that gains resonance if one includes the creation of the persona of Somerset Maugham, author, among Maugham's best work. As I have indicated earlier, I believe there is a clear connection in Maugham's works between manner of narration and masculine self-fashioning, a connection that will become central to this thesis.

Given the difficulty outlined above concerning the identity of the narrational voice in Maugham's fiction, much criticism focusing upon the writer's works has tended to merge unproductively with biography. Any reader of "The Book Bag," Anthony Curtis comments, "will recall that Maugham used to travel across Malaya with a portable mini-library" (The Pattern of Maugham 14). Such conflation of fictional persona with historical personage also marks the biographies of Calder and Morgan. In the absence of the majority of Maugham's personal documents, which the author and his secretary Alan Searle burned in the early 1960s, the temptation to make use of novels that contain clear biographical elements, such as Cakes and Ale (1930) and Of Human Bondage (1945) is strong. The result of such usage, however, is to take the Maugham "author-function" at face value, and thus evaluate the fiction in terms of its mimetic representation of Maugham's life. "Never able to reconcile his emotional needs with what he felt was socially acceptable," writes Archie Loss, "[Maugham] lived a lie that affected his work" (13). Such a lie is, perhaps, central to
Maugham's work: it not so much affects his texts as makes their creation possible. I do not wish to be so narrowly post-structuralist in this thesis as to judge efforts to find the "real Mildred" or the "real Rosie" (for example, Calder's first appendix in W. Somerset Maugham and the Quest for Freedom) completely futile. Clearly, as I will argue, Maugham's situation of writing is important, as is any information illuminating that situation. It is equally important, however, to recognize that the "real Mildred," and, for the purposes of this thesis, the "real Maugham" exist for us only textually.

A number of critical observations regarding Maugham's narration manage to move beyond, or at least sidestep, the question of autobiography. Anthony Curtis notes that the Maugham persona becomes more visible and its usage more sophisticated as the author's literary career develops. Early in his career as a novelist, Curtis writes, "Maugham did not have the self-confidence to appear in his own books in person" (The Pattern of Maugham 42); later, he did. Critics are almost unanimous in praising Maugham's objective narrative style, although again often conflating author and persona. Maugham as glimpsed in the short stories, Joseph Epstein comments, is "a man of few illusions" (1), whereas John Pollock credits him with a "photographic power of observation" (371). In the most detailed discussion of "the Maugham persona" to date, Calder explores the skill with which "[t]he point of view of the sensible, balanced,
skeptical man" (W. Somerset Maugham and the Quest for Freedom 222) is presented, and remarks that the pleasure of reading Maugham's texts proceeds from "observation and contemplation" rather than "involvement and participation" (221). Debra Stoner's study examines irony in Maugham's fiction as a means of introducing distance between narrator and reader. Interestingly, unfavourable assessments of the author's works also stress the objective nature of his narrative strategies: Brigid Brophy feels Maugham is "a good reporter," but that he "lacks intellectual imagination," while John Lehmann criticizes the "remorseless cold irony of the story-teller's eye" (232).

Claire Hanson's analysis of narration in Maugham's short fiction places such objectivity in an ideological context. Maugham's self-conception as "a pathologist of human feeling" (51), Hanson suggests, is deployed to produce a narrative which, while loudly proclaiming its objectivity, in fact reinforces a communal value system:

It is not surprising to . . . find that the basis of a short story for Saki and Maugham was the anecdote. The anecdote relies for its effect on convention. It both appeals to and endorses a shared system of values: at its simplest level it appears as the "in joke" and it may have a certain bravura quality, affirming group values a shade too emphatically. It will normally be told by a first-person narrator who guarantees both the tale and certain values associated with
Hanson's recognition that Maugham's adoption of the mantle of objectivity in narration has an ideological function is an important starting point for this thesis. Her analysis, however, is the only critical attempt to date to attempt to apply pressure to the notion of the objective narrator in Maugham's fiction.

3. Theoretical Foundations

In an attempt to realise the goals outlined in the first section of this chapter, I wish to make use of a number of critical approaches sharply different from those described above. My first debt is to the writings of Michel Foucault. Foucault's work is complex, frequently contradictory, and resists easy summary and definition; it does not so much constitute a method of analysis or an overarching theoretical framework as a series of interventions which have profoundly unsettling implications for received theories of knowledge. The Foucaultian canon (a term that the philosopher would himself reject) is largely concerned with the shift from the classical to the modern period in Western Europe.¹⁰ Such a shift, Foucault argues, was marked by a change in the episteme, the space of knowledge or the system of production of knowledge. This epistemic transformation was marked by the rise of the subject, by the placing of "Man" as subject and object at
the centre of all systems of knowledge. The transformation of the episteme, Foucault argues, can be traced through the examination of a series of discursive formations such as medicine and the penal and legal systems. The author devotes three of his most accessible works, *Madness and Civilization* (1961), *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963), and *Discipline and Punish* (1975), to a discussion of how the asylum, clinic and prison exemplify the entrance of Western society into modernity.

Foucault's approach is perhaps best exemplified by a summary of the argument of the most relevant of his works to this dissertation, the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* (1976). The study commences with a typically Foucaultian rebuttal of received views of sexuality, particularly the historicisation of sexuality common in Western Europe which Foucault terms the "'repressive hypothesis'" (10). According to this hypothesis, sexuality in seventeenth-century Europe was relatively liberated, "[b]ut twilight soon fell upon this bright day, followed by the monotonous nights of the Victorian bourgeoisie" (3). Sexuality became increasingly repressed over "two long centuries" (5):

A single locus of sexuality was acknowledged in social space as well as at the heart of every household, but it was a utilitarian and fertile one: the parents' bedroom. The rest had only to remain vague; proper demeanor avoided contact with other bodies, and verbal decency sanitized
one's speech. And sterile behavior carried the taint of abnormality; if it insisted on making itself too visible, it would be designated accordingly and would have to pay the penalty.

(3-4)

Under the repressive hypothesis, Foucault indicates, it is only in the twentieth century that we believe we have begun to emerge from two centuries of sexual repression and to achieve sexual liberation, even if "[o]nly to a slight extent" (5).

While not denying that a restrictive "economy" (5) of sexuality existed in the nineteenth century, Foucault urges that we "abandon the hypothesis that modern industrial societies ushered in an age of increased sexual repression" (49). What happened, on the contrary, was a "discursive explosion" "around and apropos of sex" (17). Scientific treatises on sexual deviance proliferated; medicine, psychiatry and the criminal justice system all codified sexuality and brought it within their purview. Sex came to be seen as expressing "the secret" (35) of human nature; it was a domain of truth, hidden within human subjects who were also objects of inquiry, a domain that had to be made to speak. Western European society developed a scientia sexualis, a procedure "for telling the truth of sex" (58) through confession. Methods of investigation and interrogation were devised, supplemented by case histories and lists of symptoms:

From the bad habits of children to the phthises of
adults, the apoplexies of old people, nervous maladies, and the degenerations of the race, the medicine of that era wove an entire network of sexual causality to explain them. This may well appear fantastic to us, but the principle of sex as a "cause of any and everything" was the theoretical underside of a confession that had to be thorough, meticulous, and constant, and at the same time operate within a scientific type of practice. (65-66)

Sex was latent and immanent, and its secrets could only be revealed through the interpretation of professionals such as analysts or medical doctors. Sexuality was thus increasingly tied to the operations of power within Western European society, and hence, for Foucault, there can be no "liberated" or "true" sexuality: "[w]e must not think that by saying yes to sex, one says no to power" (157). Through the process outlined above, sexuality has become central to Western European concepts of subjectivity and self, and we have become "dedicated to the endless task of forcing its secret, of exacting the truest of confessions from a shadow" (159).

If Foucault is to be used in the study of Maugham's works, the position of homosexuality within the discourse of sexuality is clearly important. Foucault himself does not discuss homosexuality at length in The History of Sexuality, although the brief historiography of homosexuality in the
study has become foundational to contemporary gay and lesbian studies. According to Foucault's schema, homosexuality did not exist before the nineteenth century, and acts that would now be labelled homosexual were placed under the more inclusive category of sodomy. If one engaged in sodomy, it revealed nothing of one's true essence or nature. With the rise in *scientia sexualis* in the nineteenth century, this construction changed:

As defined by the ancient civil or canonical codes, sodomy was a category of forbidden acts; their perpetrator was nothing more than the juridical subject of them. The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality. . . . The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species. (43)

Having been so defined, homosexuality emerged in the twentieth century and "began to speak on its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or 'naturality' be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified" (101). Thus Stonewall and movements for gay rights.

Foucault's argument does not invalidate concepts such
as a gay identity; on the contrary, it emphasizes that homosexuality is not merely a minority issue but rather central to Western European concepts of self. In the study which follows, I wish to make use not only of Foucault's work, but of a body of criticism, history and literary theory inspired by his writings, contemporary gay and lesbian studies. Particularly relevant to my dissertation is the work of Jeffrey Weeks, who provides a detailed account of the operation of Foucault's discursive formation in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Britain, and of Lee Edelman. For brevity here, however, I wish only to introduce the criticism of Eve Sedgwick.

For all their influence upon literary studies, Foucault's works contain little extended close textual analysis. To assert that a paradigm shift occurred between 1750 and 1950 is easier than to demonstrate the workings of that shift within an individual text. By their very definition, Foucault's "great procedures for producing the truth" (History 57) are invisibly natural, and are hardly easily identifiable within an individual novel, play, short story or other literary production. Added to this difficulty is the heterogeneity of discourses: constructions of self, race, gender and sexuality are written over each other in a mutually contradictory fashion. The modern may be uneasily mingled with the pre-modern, and an emergent paradigm may draw its strength from comparison with one about to be superseded. Maugham's texts, poised awkwardly between
different discourses, exhibit a confusion in paradigms. The early Malayan short stories are reminiscent of Kipling and Conrad in their construction of the Orient, while the India of The Razor's Edge seems thematically closer to the Asia of the Beats and 1960s rereadings of Hermann Hesse. High Victorian examples of what Joseph Allen Boone has called "the seduction tale" (Tradition Counter Tradition 10) cohabit with modern constructions of the primitive.

Stylistically, Maugham is pre-modernist, although he was a contemporary of the first generation of modernist writers, and yet the production of sexuality in his novels is, I wish to suggest in this thesis, predominantly twentieth-century.

In the area of sexuality, the dilemma outlined above leads us directly to the work of Eve Sedgwick. Sedgwick's criticism is a deft, although at times almost too manipulative, combination of Foucault, Marx, Lacan's Freud and structuralist poetics. In Between Men (1986), Sedgwick provides a series of readings of texts largely from "a relatively short, recent, and accessible passage of English culture" (1), which are expressive of "male homosocial desire" (1). "In our society," Sedgwick writes (although her literary analysis is largely of eighteenth and nineteenth century novels), the social coding of male/male relationships is markedly different from that of female/female relationships:

It is clear, then, that there is an asymmetry . . . between, on the one hand, the relatively continuous relation of female
homosocial and homosexual bonds, and, on the other hand, the radically discontinuous relation of male homosocial and homosexual bonds.

(Between Men 5-6)

Constructions of masculinity in Western (a word that Sedgwick never explicitly defines) society permit little intimacy between men that is not defined as homosexual. As a result of this disruption of the "continuum between homosocial and homosexual" (1), Sedgwick argues, homosocial relations between men, with attendant desire and homophobia, are often enacted through the medium of women. Women in "our society," then, become for Sedgwick, following Gayle Rubin's reworking of Lévi-Strauss' concept of the traffic in women, "exchangable, perhaps symbolic, property for the primary purpose of cementing the bonds of men with men" (25-26).

While she wishes to retain elements of a diachronic analysis through her debt to Marx and Foucault (Between Men 14), Sedgwick's analytical tools are largely structuralist and synchronic. In an analysis which hovers between a strategic redeployment and a productive misreading of René Girard's Deceit, Desire, and the Novel (1972), Sedgwick traces in the texts she analyses "a calculus of power . . . structured by the relation of rivalry between the two active members of an erotic triangle" (21). In Girard's schema, the desire of the protagonist (or vaniteux) for either a second party or an object is mediated by the presence of a rival:

A vaniteux will desire any object so long as he is convinced that it is already desired
by another person whom he admires. The mediator here is a rival, brought into existence as a rival by vanity, and that same vanity demands his defeat. (Girard 7)

Sedgwick focuses upon erotic rivalry, which is only part of Girard's original study, and adds gender to the trigonometric equation:

What is most interesting for our purposes in his [Girard's] study is its insistence that, in any erotic rivalry, the bond that links the two rivals is as intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved; that the bonds of "rivalry" and "love," differently as they are experienced, are equally powerful and in many senses equivalent . . . .

And within the male-centered novelistic tradition of European high culture, the triangles Girard traces are most often those in which two males are rivals for a female; it is the bond between males that he most assiduously uncovers. (21)

Sedgwick's analyses in Between Men make visible the workings of "'triangular' desire" (Girard 1) and thus, if adequately historicised, provide a means of discussing the emergence of the homosexual as "a species" (Foucault, History 43) in texts that do not actively thematise homosexuality itself.

In her next work, Epistemology of the Closet (1991), Sedgwick concentrates more precisely upon the period of the
construction of the "singular nature" (Foucault, History 43) of the homosexual, from medical discourse of the nineteenth century to the emergence of a visible gay culture in the twentieth. Following Foucault, she asserts that sexuality is central to the constitution of the modern subject:

[Modern Western culture has placed what it calls sexuality in a more and more distinctively privileged relation to our most prized constructs of individual identity, truth, and knowledge, [and thus] it becomes truer and truer that the language of sexuality not only intersects with but transforms the other languages and relations by which we know.]

(Epistemology of the Closet 3)

For Sedgwick, the Girardian triangles of late nineteenth and early twentieth century literary discourse are marked not only by rivalry in desire, but also by a fear, the fear of the closet. Given the centrality of sexuality to Western notions of the subject, Sedgwick posits that twentieth-century Western culture is "structured--indeed fractured--by a chronic, now endemic crisis of homo/heterosexual definition, indicatively male, dating from the end of the nineteenth century" (1). Heterosexuality itself is founded upon homosexuality; the word "heterosexual" only came into existence as a response to "homosexual" (Halperin 16). Thus homosexuality becomes an "indispensable interior exclusion" (Fuss, Inside/Out 3) to heterosexuality; it is unspoken, but omnipresent:
I think that a whole cluster of the most crucial sites for the contestation of meaning in twentieth-century culture are . . . indelibly marked with the historical specificity of homosocial/homosexual definition . . . . Among those sites are . . . the pairings secrecy/disclosure . . . [,] private/public . . . , masculine/feminine, majority/minority, innocence/initiation, natural/artificial, new/old, growth/decadence, urbane/provincial, health/illness same/different, cognition/paranoia, art/kitsch sincerity/sentimentality, and voluntarity/addiction. (72)

If the triangles of *Between Men* provide a ready analytical tool for the unpacking of Maugham's fiction, Sedgwick's philosophical extension of Foucault in *Epistemology of the Closet* offers a means of connecting the triangles with other figures founded upon another prominent feature of Maugham's oriental fiction: the discourse of race.

Before turning to a discussion of the theoretical models for analysis of race and imaginative geography in Maugham's work, it is perhaps best to pause a little for reflection. What would a Sedgwickian analysis of a Maugham novel look like, and how precisely would it differ from previous criticism? Taking Maugham's *The Razor's Edge* as an example, we may note that a number of critics have remarked upon examples of homoeroticism in the novel, such as the
scene in which the narrator feels the biceps of Sophie's sailor boyfriend (241). Eliott Templeton is clearly a "camp" figure, and Larry Darrell has been identified by Anthony Curtis as "a compassionate homosexual . . . . [whose] occasional beddings with women . . . must be taken with a pinch of salt" (The Pattern of Maugham 226). The content of Maugham's fiction, we might theorise, surreptitiously mimes what is occurring in the author's real, private life. Yet, given the relative paucity of obvious homoerotic moments in Maugham's fiction, such an analysis would stop at this point; homosexuality might be worthy of an aside, or a paragraph, but it would hardly be central in an extended discussion of the text of The Razor's Edge.

An analysis informed by Sedgwick and Foucault would start with very different assumptions. Rejecting the repressive hypothesis, which suggests that there is already a latent, fully-formed sexuality "hidden" within the texts of Maugham's works, we rather would note that the text of The Razor's Edge is part of a process of the construction of sexuality through discourse. No hidden truth waits to be exposed; rather, references to homosexuality may help us to explore the fissures in the constructions of race, gender and sexuality in the novel. Maugham's situation of writing as a man with homosexual experience is clearly important to such an analysis, yet analysis begins not with the author Somerset Maugham but with the text itself. We would notice, for example, the two triangles involving Gray, Isabel, and
Larry, and Larry, Sophie and the narrator. Our discussion might emphasize the fact that within these triangles sexuality is often displaced onto women: women desire, whereas men do not. And we would note that Larry achieves transcendence through his visit to India, to a geographical exteriority which is also a closeted, internal "'truth and freedom'" (The Razor's Edge 291). Chapter 8 constitutes a full discussion of The Razor's Edge; for the present it is sufficient to note that a reading informed by Foucault and Sedgwick enables sexuality to be foregrounded in a discussion of the novel, and facilitates connections to representations of geography and race.

This thesis is not only, however, a reading of a selection of Maugham's novels and short stories through Sedgwick and Foucault. Rather, in discussing Maugham's oriental fiction, I wish to discover filiations, parallels, superimpositions and contradictions between constructions of sexuality and those of race and geography. In the latter two areas, I wish to use some of the analytical tools developed by contemporary postcolonial criticism.

Any theoretical discussion of a European novelist writing in the colonial arena must begin with Edward Said's Orientalism. "[T]he French and the British," Said states at the beginning of his 1978 monograph, have over the past three hundred years developed a discursive formation which he names "Orientalism":

Orientalism is] a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special
place in European Western experience. The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. In addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience. (1-2)

The Orient is produced as Other to Europe, European culture gaining "strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self" (3). Said takes the terminology for his study from Foucault and thus posits that the discourse of Orientalism, like the discourse of sexuality, is inescapable, delimiting the terms of all knowledge concerning "the East":

In a sense Orientalism was a library or archive of information commonly and, in some of its aspects, unanimously held. What bound the archive together was a family of ideas and a unifying set of values proven in various ways to be effective. These ideas explained the behaviour of Orientals; they supplied Orientals with a mentality, a genealogy, an atmosphere; most important, they allowed Europeans to deal with and even to see Orientals as a phenomenon possessing regular characteristics. (41-42)
The characteristics which Said illustrates are based upon a binary opposition between East and West: the East is chaotic, black, changeable, irrational, despotic, pre-modern and passive, while the West is represented as ordered, white, constant, rational, democratic and modern. The East is even given a gender, and contrasted with the masculine West:

[T]he Orient was routinely described as feminine, its riches as fertile, its main symbols the sensual woman, the harem, and the despotic--but curiously attractive--ruler. Moreover Orientals, like Victorian housewives, were confined to silence and to unlimited enriching production.

("Orientalism Reconsidered" 225)

Texts written about the Orient by Europeans will thus be concerned with policing a border between East and West, between Self and Other.

Inevitably Orientalism, as a pioneering work, has flaws. The study expresses a nostalgic hankering for humanism which contradicts the Foucaultian terminology its author employs. Said's Orient also seems somewhat plastic. Whereas Orientalism focuses upon eighteenth- and nineteenth-century French and British discourse regarding what we now call the Middle East, Said also makes temporal and geographical leaps which seem to require more contextualization. Examples of this are a discussion of Orientalism in Aeschylus' The Persians, and Said's prefacing
a quotation from I.A. Richard's *Mencius and the Mind* with the comment that "we can quite easily substitute 'Oriental' for 'Chinese' in what follows" (254). In applying Said to Maugham's writings, it is important to recognise that the novels and short stories contain not one undifferentiated but four distinctly separate Orients—the South Pacific, Malaya (including much of the then Dutch East Indies), China and India—each of which possesses a different, though not unrelated, symbolic repertoire.

Two tropings of the East identified by Said are, I think, found across the full range of Maugham's imaginative geography. The first is the feminization of the Orient discussed above: the East is gendered female, the West male. For Maugham's male protagonists, then, the East becomes a masculinising space, an area in which a male subjectivity is defined: Charles Strickland and Red acquire masculinity by contrast with an East personified as female. The second is a troping upon which Said touches only briefly:

[T]he Orient was a place where one could look for sexual experience unobtainable in Europe. Virtually no European writer who wrote on or travelled to the Orient in the period after 1800 exempted himself or herself from this quest . . . . In the twentieth century one thinks of Gide, Conrad, Maugham and dozens of others.

*(Orientalism* 190)

One might wonder what forms of sexual experience were
unobtainable in Europe, but Said's overall formulation is sound. In a further binarism, then, the Orient became associated with deviance and sexual licentiousness, the Occident with nominally normative and procreative sexuality. This binarism has perhaps its clearest exposition in Sir Richard Burton's positing of a "Sotadic Zone" (Burton 3749), encompassing the Mediterranean, most of Asia and the Americas, inside of which "the vice is popular and endemic," and outside of which "races . . . practise it only sporadically amid the opprobrium of their fellows" (3749). Burton's "Terminal Essay" to The Book of The Thousand Nights and a Night provides a guided tour of all parts of the zone:

The Chinese, as far as we know them in the great cities, are omnivorous and omnifutucentes: they are the chosen people of debauchery, and their systematic bestiality with ducks, goats and other animals is equalled only by their pederasty.

(3770)

In Said's analysis, this is a further trope producing a rigid division between Occident and Orient, setting up the East as dark Other to an enlightened West.

The bizarre nature of the section on "Pederasty" in Burton's "Terminal Essay," however, should alert the reader to possibilities for analysis that are also relevant to Maugham's works. The section grows, seemingly out of all sense of proportion, to engulf the essay. It provides an exhaustive catalogue of sexual acts, described with a
curious mixture of relish and condemnation, yet it is banished to the back of the book and erased from the contents page. What we see here is an overlapping of discourses, discourses that do not line up in harmony but are sharply contradictory. As an orientalist, Burton writes of the East as the West's Other. As a subject in the discourse of sexuality, he feels the desire to confess, to write the truth of himself as a homosexual or pederast. Such a confession, however, would "orientalize" him, placing him on the Eastern side of an East/West binary opposition. The text of the essay thus becomes a border zone between Self and Other, the site of a series of skirmishes that cannot be resolved. Homosexuality always carries with it the burden of race, since it is the defining characteristic of those other races which inhabit the Sotadic Zone; race, in turn, cannot be raised without also raising questions of sexuality.

A similar contradiction of symbolic systems is present in Maugham's work. Homosexuality in Maugham's texts is also subject to erasure (the omission, for instance, of Gerald Haxton, who was Maugham's travel companion for the whole of the journey described, from the travelogue The Gentleman in the Parlour) or displacement (onto the body of the pengamok in "The Outstation"). The symmetry of a masculine Occident facing off against a feminine Orient is increasingly disturbed in Maugham's later writings by the presence of European women. Maugham's mems are almost uniformly passionately sensual, expressing an unbridled sexuality that
reinforces, through contrast, the coolly rational masculinity of his narrators. Yet this very sensuality transforms the mem herself into a liminal zone, Occidental yet susceptible to orientalization. And if we add the construction of homosexuality by Maugham's society as "a certain way of inverting the masculine and feminine in oneself" (Foucault, History 43), it becomes apparent that femininity is imbricated into the Occidental masculinity that Maugham's texts try so assiduously to mark off, to differentiate. No sooner is an opposition established, a police action completed, than the excluded Other is discovered still working away as a fifth columnist within the citadel of the Self.

Using Said (and, in the course of this thesis, more recent postcolonial theory), in conjunction with Sedgwick, we might first observe that Maugham's Girardian triangles may feature a geographical space, not a woman, at their apex. Triangles that appear equilateral may, in fact, be isosceles, pulled out of shape by subtle affiliations that disrupt the oppositions upon which they are founded. It is through these distorted shapes, I believe, that we may see the "sutures of contradiction" (Between Men 15) which knit together the rhetoric of Maugham's oriental fiction.

4. Theoretical Modifications

One important contribution of poststructuralist
criticism has been its suspicion of grand, overarching
theories of literature, of great codes or schemas that
apportion meaning in each and every text subject to their
purview. Postcolonial theory, in particular, has stressed
the importance of the local, of microanalysis of the
politics of a given situation of reading and writing. "It's
no longer any scandal," Henry Louis Gates has written, "that
our own theoretical reflections must be as provisional,
reactive, and local as the texts we reflect on" ("Critical
Fanonism" 470). The theoretical models of Sedgwick, Said,
and Foucault, and later critical developments inspired by
them, form the toolbox, or perhaps, after Maugham, the
book-bag, for a first approach to Maugham's works. In
reading Maugham, however, I have found it necessary to
supplement, and indeed to modify, the theoretical apparatus
in three areas.

First, the question of narration. Sedgwick does not
place the narrator or reader within her triangles; in this
sense her readings of texts are purely structuralist, and
thus limited. In Maugham's writings, the position of the
narrator is clearly of great importance, as is his (or,
infrequently, her) relation to the implied reader. I have
thus modified Sedgwick's reading strategy in placing
Maugham's narrators at one apex of her Girardian triangles.
Furthermore, in order to better discuss the narrator's
position within the text, and the diegetic levels of such
"framed" stories as "Red," I have made use of narratological
terminology, largely those terms introduced or precisely defined by Gérard Genette and Gerald Prince. My use of such terms does not imply my endorsement of narratology as a science of reading; rather, following Genette, I wish to "go not from the general to the particular, but . . . from the particular to the general" (23), utilizing narratological terminology in order to better detect the textual fissures of Maugham's oriental fiction.

Second, the question of the importance of the author, and of biographical evidence and personal experience. The problem of the relation between Maugham the narrator and Maugham the author has, we have seen, proved a stumbling block for critics. The status of the individual author is also a point of disagreement between Said and Foucault, and one that cannot be ignored in a thesis that utilizes the theoretical models of both writers. Early in Orientalism, Said distances himself from the Foucaultian methodology upon which his study is based in an apparently trivial, yet analytically fundamental way:

[U]nlike Michel Foucault, to whose work I am greatly indebted, I do believe in the determining imprint of individual writers upon the otherwise anonymous collective body of texts constituting a discursive formation like Orientalism. . . . Foucault believes that in general the individual text or author counts for very little; empirically . . . I find this not to be so. Accordingly my analyses employ close textual readings whose goal
is to reveal the dialectic between individual text or writer and the complex collective formation to which his work is a contribution.

(Orientalism 23-24)

There is a slippage here in Said's view of subjectivity. The passage begins with the notion of an autonomous, fully-formed writing subject producing an imprint upon the discourse, yet it ends with a vision of writer and text as equivalences, neither having sovereignty, and stresses that the relationship between writer/text and discourse is dialectical, not merely a question of stamping or imprinting. Such slippage is, in fact, present throughout Orientalism as Said tries to both have his theoretical cake and eat it, to make use of Foucault while preserving a very non-Foucaultian concept of the subject.

Such theoretical confusion, I feel, loosens the critical purchase of Orientalism. Said accepts Orientalism as a discourse which shapes Western perceptions of the Orient, and which is ultimately bound up with questions of Western identity and selfhood. His analysis of sexuality as a discourse, however, is far less sophisticated; indeed, Said critiques Foucault in Culture and Imperialism for moving "further and further away from serious consideration of social wholes" (278) in, presumably, his final writings upon sexuality. Thus Said's analysis of the feminization of the Orient, for example, depicts a coherent, fully formed Western sex/gender system which is then held, like a
template, over the blank surface of the Orient. This
analysis elides the role imperialism played in the formation
of Western models of gender and sexuality; it presupposes a
gendered subjectivity in the creation of an Orientalist one,
rather than demonstrating that each is involved in the
creation of the other. In Maugham's case, I wish to see the
process of writing about the Orient and of being read in the
Occident as part of the construction of a closeted
subjectivity, the public man of letters and the private
homosexual. Clearly, Said's analysis is of limited use, yet
Foucault's notion of the "author-function," taken in
isolation, seems also too mechanistic. An extreme
application of Foucault here would result in the excision of
all biographical data from the study. It is here that we may
return to a concept that Said introduces at the end of
Orientalism, one that initially seems to be another ruse to
let humanism in by the back door: "experience."

In his epiphanic endorsement of cross-disciplinary
studies in the final paragraphs of Orientalism, Said makes
an appeal to an ethics of reading:

Perhaps too we should remember that the study of
man in society is based on concrete human history
and experience, not on donnish abstractions, or on
obscure laws or arbitrary systems. The problem
then is to make the study fit and in some way be
shaped by the experience, which would be
illuminated and perhaps changed by the study.

(327-8).
The notion of experience here, although concrete, is also mutable, it is not "the mere registering of sensory data" but, as Teresa De Lauretis has argued, "the general sense of a process by which subjectivity is constructed," which is "continuous, its achievement unending or daily renewed" (159). It is this process that Maugham's oriental writings disclose.

In accordance with De Lauretis' argument, I wish to avoid biographical speculation about Maugham, and to concentrate upon the texts, while at the same time placing the novels and short stories within their cultural and political situations of production and reception. This thesis thus will concentrate upon micropractices, upon localized economies of significance that, when assembled, make up the larger discourse of Orientalism. In Maugham's case, I would identify four different constructions of the East: the South Pacific, Malaya (including parts of the then Dutch East Indies), China, and India. Maugham's oriental fiction represents a movement from one construction to another, a movement that I shall argue parallels efforts to constitute himself as homosexual and writer. Each area of the East will, therefore, be firmly contextualised; I will explore the intertextuality between Maugham's work and that of other colonial writers, and its place within a larger historical framework of imperial practice. At the same time, I will attend to the specifics of Maugham's own position: class, Englishness, an established writer travelling to find
material for fiction. Kipling was born in the East, Conrad worked there, Stevenson retired there: these experiences inspired their writing. Maugham, almost like an anthropologist, visited the East with the expressed intention of gathering material for writing. In my study, every piece of Maugham's writing will thus be treated as a fictional text: *A Writer's Notebook* and Maugham's many essays upon the art of writing do not so much present us with a critical key to unlock the "real" meaning of the novels and short stories as provide a repertoire of postures of subjectivity with which the fiction may be compared.

Finally, I wish to make a commitment to theoretical eclecticism, even at the risk of inconsistency of method. My justification is twofold. First, following the Gates quotation earlier in this section, I feel that textual analysis in a thesis which spans many disparate geographical areas must be flexible, even protean, able to meet varying situations with varying strategies. Second, Maugham's texts have attracted so little sustained critical attention that a series of analyses which make interventions in a variety of areas, opening routes for future critical exploration, may prove more timely than a more critically consistent yet less widely ranging study.

5. Thesis Outline

The chapters constitute a series of readings of the
majority of Maugham's oriental fiction using the theoretical apparatus outlined above. In order to move away from the survey approach of previous criticism, I have not attempted to provide close readings of all the short stories, but rather have chosen representative examples for close analysis. I have furthermore excluded two prose works with oriental elements, *A Writer's Notebook* (1949) and *The Gentleman in the Parlour* (1930). The former incorporates much material later used in the short stories but is not predominantly "oriental" in content. The latter is by far the less interesting of Maugham's two Asian travelogues, and also contains much recycled material.

My first chapter explores Maugham's first oriental novel, his fictionalization of the life of Paul Gauguin as *The Moon and Sixpence*. In writing of Tahiti and the Polynesian South Pacific Maugham entered an already preinscribed fictional space: the world of Jack London, Pierre Loti, Herman Melville, Charles Stoddard, Robert Louis Stevenson and Rupert Brooke. After sketching the contradictory literary discourse in which *The Moon and Sixpence* intervenes, I wish to concentrate upon, and bring together, two aspects of the novel. The first is Maugham's use of primitivism as a method of reinforcing modern British conceptions of self, while the second is the Girardian triangle that Maugham establishes between narrator, protagonist, and a feminized colonial landscape.

The second chapter explores, through selective close
reading, Maugham's South Pacific short fiction, the bulk of which was collected in the volume \textit{The Trembling of A Leaf} (1921). Remaining conscious of the literary discourse outlined in Chapter One, I wish to examine the role of irony in privileging the narrator's authority within the short stories. The chapter focuses upon the Girardian triangle and different levels of narration in one of Maugham's most homoerotic short stories, "Red," and upon the differing constructions of masculinity represented by the two male characters.

In the third chapter, I move to a reading of Maugham's China travelogue, \textit{On a Chinese Screen} (1922). A series of sketches without a linear narrative, this text is less amenable to a Sedgwickian reading. After contextualisation, I therefore move to a closer analysis of Maugham's narrating persona, and a comparison of this persona with that creature of nineteenth century urban tourism, the \textit{flâneur}.

Chapter Four again features a text which resists a straightforward application of Sedgwick, in this case Maugham's Hong Kong novel \textit{The Painted Veil} (1925), which has a female character, Kitty Fane, as its central consciousness. I read \textit{The Painted Veil} through Roland Barthes' \textit{Empire of Signs} as an evacuated text which co-opts the image of a blank, nonsensical East in order to problematize "Western" sexual signification. For all its inventiveness, however, the text finally reinscribes the very divisions it partially critiques.
The fifth chapter analyses a representative sample of Maugham's Malayan short stories, which have been considered the heart of his oriental fiction. Again, I wish to contextualise Maugham's writings by an account of the series of tropes that makes up the signifying system of British Malaya, and the importance of the figure of the memsahib as a site of displaced sexuality. Reading two of Maugham's most famous short stories, "The Yellow Streak," and "The Letter" I wish to show how Maugham's rhetoric of bifurcation is frequently broken by the presence of an irreducible supplement: the Eurasian or the Chinese.

In the penultimate chapter of the body of the thesis we return, through an examination of Maugham's 1932 novel The Narrow Corner, to a homosocial triangle mediated by a woman. If this novel is Maugham's most openly homoerotic, it is also, finally, the most harshly normative, since it ends in the death of the two erotically significant characters. In exploring the series of Girardian triangles which structure the novel, I also wish to attend to Maugham's construction of Saunders' opium addiction, and its connection to sexual continence and the ability to narrate.

Chapter Seven commences with a discussion of Maugham's move to a disembodied East, as exemplified by his presentation of India in The Razor's Edge. After again analysing the erotic trigonometry of the novel, I move to a consideration of the role of the narrator of the text, who is named Somerset Maugham. The final chapter will be
supplemented by a Conclusion in which I suggest possible extensions of the readings performed in the body of the thesis, and the place of a study of Maugham's writing within the context of other contemporary critical investigations of colonial discourse and sexuality.

6. Envoi

Finally, a note of caution. This thesis is the study of a writer producing texts within an ideological context for a reading community. Yet reading communities are not homogenous nor, in an increasingly multicultural Britain, are they necessarily distinct. Maugham is now largely read by audiences very different from that for which he wrote. If he is still read by Britons in moods of colonial nostalgia, in parallel with compulsive viewing of repeats of The Jewel in the Crown, he is also read, and indeed has always been read, in other, very different contexts.

In the academic year 1992-3, I studied Chinese in South Taiwan, and supplemented my stay with a visit to Hong Kong at Chinese New Year. During this time, I encountered Maugham in many situations of reading very different from those outlined in this study. Three examples stand out. The first was suggested by my discovery in the University library of a series of Maugham short stories published in Tokyo in 1938 and 1939, specifically annotated for the study of English as a second language. The ideological framework in which
student would have read these texts is, to say the least, complex. A deracinated colonial subject of another Empire, in the process of being inducted into a Japanese colonial educational system, would a Taiwanese student have read these texts straight, or subversively? As a positive reflection of imperial values or as an example of Western meddling in a Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere?

My second situation of reading was equally problematic. Visiting a former fellow student in Hong Kong and discussing my thesis topic with her, I was surprised to hear her say that she enjoyed Maugham's Asian fiction. When I asked why a Hong Kong Chinese would enjoy Maugham, my friend then gave a standard Marxist analysis: her pleasure was obviously false consciousness engendered by a colonial education system. Yet the pleasure of reading, troublingly, still remained. My third discovery was perhaps the most surprising: my Taiwanese teacher's avidly reading a new translation of Of Human Bondage. Again, this could be theorized: Maugham's bildungsroman, like the lectures of Dale Carnegie and the autobiography of Lee Iaccocca, has considerable sales potential in a developing society where questions of modern subjectivity and "self-improvement" begin to be articulated. Yet reading practices, in their variety, always exceed the limits of theory. Even with narrators as insistent as Maugham's, with the channelling of vision in Foucault's epistemes and discursive formations, even within an ideological framework, it is never impossible to look, if not away, at least at a different part of the picture.
1. Envisioning the Primitive:
The Moon and Sixpence

On November 14, 1916, Maugham and Gerald Haxton arrived in Honolulu on the steamer S.S. Great Northern. They spent the next five months touring the South Pacific, returning to San Francisco in April of the following year. The trip was planned specifically to provide material for Maugham's writing, and successfully achieved its goal: the writer reused elements of his Pacific diaries not only in his reworking of the life of Paul Gauguin in The Moon and Sixpence, but also in the short story collection The Trembling of A Leaf and in later fiction.

Despite Maugham's protestations that many aspects of "the South Seas . . . were entirely new to me," and that in writing of the area he "seemed to be entering upon an entirely new literary life" (qtd. in Marchand 59), the South Pacific landscape that he observed and then reinscribed was already a highly textualized one. In two of Maugham's earlier works, the area already represents a space that both allows the expression of a nominally masculine selfhood and yet is simultaneously closeted, existing only in the unarticulated thoughts of male protagonists. Frank Hurrell in The Merry-Go-Round (1904), trapped by the social conventions of London, longs to "fight hand to hand with primitive nature," to "know . . . the violent adventures of the South Seas Islands," and there "to see life and death,
and the passions, the virtues and vices, of men face to face, uncovered" (249). In Of Human Bondage, Philip Carey dreams of the "lagoons of the South Sea Islands" (683), and of "tropical sunshine, and magic colour, and of a teeming, mysterious, intense life" (678), but settles instead for marriage to Sally Altheny. Maugham's A Writer's Notebook specifically mentions the work of Jack London, and of course that of Paul Gauguin, as creative antecedents; his visit to Apia was punctuated by a pilgrimage to the grave of Robert Louis Stevenson.

Discussion of Maugham's first oriental novel, The Moon and Sixpence, then, should be prefaced with an exploration of European and North American troping of the South Pacific, a process which begins with eighteenth-century accounts of Cook's voyages and continues in twentieth-century fiction and anthropology. Such troping, I believe, cannot be seen as merely a series of rigid and already-formed stereotypes imposed by one culture upon another. Rather, it may be seen as forming a Foucaultian archive, or discourse, in which many constructions, frequently contradictory, are put into play, taken up as writing tools in a ceaseless reinscription of the line between Self and Other.

1. Imagining the South Pacific

Bernard Smith's study European Vision and the South Pacific provides a useful foundation for a consideration of
European representation of the South Seas. Early European observers, Smith contends, distinguished the "soft" primitives of the Society islands and Hawaii from the "hard" primitives of Australia, Melanesia and Patagonia. In the years after Cook's first voyage (1768), the native peoples of Tahiti and Hawaii were presented in travel narratives as noble savages, their societies compared to those of Ancient Greece or of Eden (43); in Enlightenment Europe, Cook's discoveries provided evidence for "a deist's argument against the necessity of Revelation" (44). However, Europeans also posited a darker side to South Pacific societies, exemplified by ritual murder and cannibalism. With the growing influence of Calvinism and the spread of missionary activity, this aspect came to be increasingly stressed, the inhabitants of the area being seen as depraved children, subject to violent and ungovernable emotion, and in want of tutelage. Such a construction dovetailed neatly with the rise of nineteenth-century evolutionary theory, which represented native peoples not as noble savages, but as occupying a lower rung than Europeans upon the evolutionary ladder.

With the dawning of Romanticism, Smith again posits, the noble savage was resurrected, though in a slightly different form:

[T]he romantic savage was, in a sense, child both of noble and of ignoble savage. And as the noble savage had been an epitome of the virtues of the natural man of the Enlightenment so the romantic
savage became an epitome of the virtues treasured by the romantics. A great love of personal freedom, a devotion to race and "nation", a temperament which reacted violently and immediately to experience, courage, great emotional depth, and a childlike warmth and generosity of feeling characterized his personality. He was, of course, like the noble savage, essentially a European fiction. (326)

Smith's analysis ends with the period 1820-1850, but could plausibly be extended into the twentieth century. In a recent study of the relationship between Western views of the primitive and modernism, Marianna Torgovnick remarks on the use of the South Pacific by Malinowski as "the testing ground, the laboratory, the key" to "the universal truth about human nature" (7), D.H. Lawrence's use of "Oceanic statues and modern art works based upon them to discuss, by indirection, 'taboo' sexual subjects" (12), and Margaret Mead's proto-feminist appropriation of South Pacific social structures:

Mead pinpoints, rather precisely, what the postmodern West seems to want most from the primitive: a model of alternative social organization in which psychological integrity is a birthright, rooted in one's body and sexuality, and in which a full range of ambivalences and doubts can be confronted and diffused through the culture's rituals, customs,
If Torgovnick represents it accurately, Mead's thesis, although articulated in a very different social context, bears marked similarities to Cook's and Banks' eighteenth-century observations concerning the natural morality of the Tahitians.

Smith's genealogy, then, provides an archive of European responses to the Pacific which are variously employed by European writers to talk about the nature of European selfhood. Questions of alterity, Rob Shields argues, are fundamentally questions regarding Self:

The social "Other" of the marginal and of low cultures is despised and reviled in the official discourse of the dominant culture while at the same time being constitutive of the imaginary and emotional repertoires of that dominant culture. (5)

Smith even goes so far as to identify four core, mutually contradictory European constructions of the South Pacific: first, a model of the ideal Southern Kingdom; second, an illustration of the transience of earthly happiness; third, an exemplification of the universal chain of being; fourth, an "inversion" of the Northern Hemisphere. All these constructions take Europe as their first reference point; they are redeployed in European writing of the Pacific, recycled for many different purposes, but seldom completely circumvented or challenged.
Maugham’s precursors as writers of South Seas fiction, then, work very much within the discourse outlined above. For Herman Melville’s narrator Tommo, describing the Marquesas, the valley of Typee is, if not quite pre-lapsarian, at least the nearest approximation to Eden now to be found. Melville consciously understates the role of agriculture in Typee society, and denies the tribe’s agency in the construction of the stone ruins that litter the landscape:

The penalty of the Fall presses very lightly upon the valley of Typee; for, with the one solitary exception of striking a light, I scarcely saw any piece of work performed there which caused the sweat to stand upon a single brow. As for digging and delving for a livelihood, the thing is altogether unknown. (195)

Jack London’s South Pacific stories idealise a number of native characters, such as the protagonist of "Koolau the Leper," who fight to maintain a pre-lapsarian integrity in a world made fallen by the presence of Europeans. Pierre Loti uses a similar construction of the South Pacific for very different ideological purposes in The Marriage of Loti. The Tahitians are here described as Etruscan, their bodies "the dusky brick-red hue of the light earthenware of ancient Etruria" (12). Just as Etruscan society was overcome by that of Rome so, for Loti, is the Polynesian race "dying out in
contact with our civilization and our vices" (117). Yet even Rupert Brooke, coming later to Samoa and Tahiti, still felt himself within touching distance of Eden. "It's getting back to one's childhood somehow," he wrote to Edmund Gosse:

\[B]\)ut not to the real childhood, rather to the childhood that never was, but is portrayed by a kindly sentimental memory; a time of infinite freedom, no responsibility, perpetual play in the open air. (Letters 530)

The South Pacific was, for Brooke, a retreat to the infancy of humankind and the poet, entranced by the "thrilling and tropical and savage," soon "felt strange ancient raucous jungle cries awaking within me" (522).

European literature written by male travellers to the South Pacific clearly feminizes the landscape. Rarahu epitomizes Tahiti for Loti; the young woman is "a perfect specimen of the Maori race that inhabits the archipelago" (12), and her descent into "a life utterly abandoned and foolish" (184) after the narrator leaves her seems a crude reflection of the writer's Social Darwinist beliefs. Stevenson's "The Beach at Falesa" likewise casts the relationship between Europe and the South Pacific as a marriage between native child-woman and mature Western man, expressed in Wiltshire's precipitate nuptials with Uma, "all dressed out for the sake of the ship being in" (119).

Reflecting the construction of the South Pacific as part of a universal chain of being, such sexuality is figured as
natural, unadulterated by the influence of civilization. Women in Samoa and Tahiti, wrote Brooke, were "like no one you've ever seen in your misty tight-lipped feminist lands" (Letters 540).

Feminization of the South Pacific as an area for the expression of a naturalised heterosexuality is, however, contradicted by the construction of the Southern hemisphere as an inversion of the Northern. For all Tommo's adoration of Fayaway's natural feminine virtues in Typee, he is more entranced by Kory-Kory. Indeed, it is an ellipsis in the Melville passage quoted above that opens up the possibility of inversion of the established heterosexual signifying system. The Typee, we recall Melville's narrator stressing, live in a pre-lapsarian state, expending no labour "with the one solitary exception of striking a light" (195), a process which Tommo has described in detail earlier in the text:

At first Kory-Kory goes to work quite leisurely, but gradually quickens his pace, and, waxing warm in the employment, drives the stick furiously along the smoking channel, plying his hands to and fro with amazing rapidity, the perspiration starting from every pore. As he approaches the climax of his effort, he pants and gasps for breath, and his eyes almost start from their sockets with the violence of his exertions. . . . Suddenly he stops, becomes perfectly motionless . . . . The next moment a delicate
wreath of smoke curls spirally into the air, the heap of dusty particles glows with fire and Kory-Kory almost breathless, dismounts from his steed. (111)

Melville's encrypted description of masturbation is, given Tommo's gaze, explicitly homoerotic; that later writers within the South Seas tradition, such as Maugham, were quite aware of such eroticism is shown by Maugham's identification of Melville as "a repressed homosexual" (The Art of Fiction 203).

Charles Stoddard's South Pacific travelogue South Sea Idyls [sic] is, as Roger Austen illustrates, openly homoerotic in content (Austen 73-77), while Brooke's letters from the South Pacific are punctuated by references such as the following among obligatory homages to dusky maidens:

One of them is the finest made man I've ever seen: like a Greek statue come to life: strong as ten horses. To see him strip and swim a half-flooded river is an immortal sight. (543)

Such homoeroticism slips over into Brooke's South Pacific poems, in which he enumerates "the rough male kiss/ Of blankets" (Collected Poems 301) among the pleasures of love. Gauguin, Maugham's model for the protagonist of The Moon and Sixpence, was similarly celebratory during a walk in the forest with his "ami naturel" (Noa Noa 27):

Et nous étions seulement tous deux.

J'eus comme un pressentiment de crime, le désir d'inconnu, le réveil du mal. Puis la lassitude du
rôle de mâle qui doit toujours être fort, protecteur; de lourdes épaules à supporter. Être une minute l'être faible qui aime et obéit. (28)

In Tahiti, there was the unavoidable figure of the mahu, the transvestite "village homosexual . . . often highly respected" (Gilmore 207) by his fellows to problematize European constructions of heterosexuality as natural. There is, indeed, considerable evidence that the "androgynous, long-haired figures, who have often been mistaken for women" (Collins 61) in Gauguin's paintings are, in fact, mahu.

Clearly, then, the South Pacific provided scope not only for the expression of normative European sexuality, but also for the playing out of those elements considered inverted or perverse; the "unnatural," closeted within the covers of a text, becomes naturalized.

Given the centrality of sexuality to European constructions of self it would be surprising if the texts mentioned above did no more than offer a smorgasbord of sexual possibilities. One key element of most of the works, and one that becomes more prominent as the Pacific becomes more textualized, is the relationship between narrator and a manly precursor, who is either an explorer, a writer, or an artist. Melville's protagonist adopts the first name of the author's cousin and precursor in the Marquesas; Loti's The Marriage of Loti is a prolonged ave frater atque vale addressed to an older brother. Loti's relationship with Rarahu is a reprise of his brother's with Taimaha;
implicitly, the most important relationship in the novel is that between the brothers. Stevenson's "The Beach of Falesa" is predicated upon a violently homosocial relationship, whereas Brooke's letters recount a pilgrimage from monument to monument of masculine European artistic endeavour, a visit to Stevenson's grave followed by a hunt for a surviving Gauguin canvas. Maugham pursues Gauguin in *A Writer's Notebook*; in *The Two Worlds of Somerset Maugham* Wilmon Menard combs the South Pacific for traces of Maugham.

Perhaps the clearest illustration of the relationship between narrator, male precursor and feminized landscape in these texts is given in a sentence from Brooke's letters. "Three passionate Pacific women cast their lustrous eyes towards me," he wrote to Cathleen Nesbitt, "but, with a dim remembrance of the fates of Conrad characters who succumbed to such advances, I evade them" (515). Brooke here disavows his own activity in exploring Samoa and Tahiti; rather, a "passionate," feminine and generic Pacific thrusts itself upon him. The poet's discipleship to Conrad, and his resultant ability to read what he sees through the mediation of a precursor's texts, finally enables him to gain control over his environment, and to take avoiding action.

Evidently, then, many European texts about the South Pacific are centred upon a Girardian triangle of the type illustrated above. Indeed, they exemplify a particular form of triangular narrative, one that Michael Cooper, extending Sedgwick's analytic concepts discussed in the introduction,
has termed the "'apostolary' narrative," in which narrators gain authority by telling "the story of the person who obsesses them, together with their own part, however minor, in the plot" (66). The most common relationship "around which canonical apostolary narratives coalesce," Cooper writes, is "a homosocial relation between men" (66):

While the bald fact that the narrator tells a story not his own does not hamper him from asserting a subaltern authority to narrate, it does constrain much of his narration to the business of justifying this authority, explaining how he knows what he does about the protagonist, and speculating for the reader on the protagonist's subject position. In Lord Jim, for instance, Marlow, the narrator, offers up the evidence of a whole series of interviews with other characters to justify both the narratability of his story and his views on Jim, the protagonist. Like a critic, Marlow essentially reads Jim and interprets him. (66-7)

Cooper's subsequent argument loses some strength, I feel, through his willingness to invert, or even distort the Girardian triangle as an analytical tool. James, he argues, "turns Sedgwick's homosocial triangle on its side," and "frankly feminizes the author position" (70). Such analysis, I think, forgets the basis of Sedgwick's argument: that such triangles are based upon fundamental non-equivalences of
gender roles in Western society, non-equivalences that may either be analyzed in structuralist (Rubin after Levi-Strauss) or psychoanalytic terms (Lacan).

At the end of Cooper's essay, he returns to a Giradian triangle that looks more like Sedgwick's, pointing out that "ultimately what the disciple dreams of . . . is to adopt the subject position of the mediator in order to stand in direct relation to the object" (80). There seems here to be an unanalyzed tension between gaining authority to narrate through intimacy, so that the disciples imaginatively becomes his mentor, and the demands of realist narration, which stress the specularity and distance of the narrator—Cooper's activity of reading. Such tension, we shall see, puts disciple and precursor in a contradictory position in Maugham's novel, requiring distance between the the narrator and protagonist while at the same time insisting upon their shared masculinity. Placed within the masculinizing imaginary geography of the Pacific, and sharing in the tropes outlined above, Maugham's The Moon and Sixpence is, with the modification introduced above, an apostolary narrative par excellence.

2. Desire, Deceit and Narration: The Moon and Sixpence

The Moon and Sixpence is very much a text within the European South Seas literary tradition outlined above. As in Mead and Melville's texts, Tahiti in Maugham's novel is
figured as primitive, an Edenic kingdom spatially and temporally removed from the civilized West, reached only by a long, arduous journey of descent into primitivity from London, to Paris, then to Marseilles and finally to the South Pacific. Yet the island also has a dark side. Charles Strickland, the novel's protagonist, reaches an artistic apotheosis there, yet he also dies of leprosy, infected by the tropical surroundings. Tahiti, for both Strickland and the narrator of the novel, represents artistic freedom of expression, yet it also contains the threat of dissolution and death.

*The Moon and Sixpence* maps an English man's descent (or return?) to primitivity, a reacquisition of the putatively natural. This process of masculine cartography is carried out by the narrator who, in classically apostolary fashion, pursues the protagonist and seeks out every trace of his passage. The narrator of Maugham's novel resembles two of Cooper's prime examples of apostolary narrators: Dr. Watson, and the narrator of many of Henry James' short stories. Watson's recounting of Holmes' adventures shows, in Cooper's analysis, not only his devotion to his mentor but also his importance as a conduit, disseminating the fruits of Holmes' genius to a wider public. Many of James' stories, Cooper remarks, follow a similar pattern, in which a sympathetic male reader claims a unique knowledge of an author. *The Moon and Sixpence* precisely fits this pattern. The novel features an apparently simple Girardian triangle:
the narrator, or *vaniteux*, is united with the protagonist in their mutual admiration of and desire to possess a feminized landscape. Through Strickland's tutelage, the narrator gains possession of the landscape through writing, just as Strickland has through painting. The obvious eroticism in the relation of the two men is thus elided; instead, Strickland induces the narrator into his own vision of a masculinity based upon opposition to, and escape from, femininity.

The symmetry of Maugham's text, however, is subject to topological distortions in two areas. First, the narrator's attitude to Strickland is fundamentally ambiguous. To gain narrational authority he frequently attempts to identify himself with Foucauldian apparatuses of surveillance such as the police, the medical profession, or scientists. He places Strickland in the position of the object of inquiry whose true essence may be read through a *scientia sexualis*. Yet his narrational authority is also predicated upon having been "intimately acquainted" (11) with Strickland, upon being a jejeune member of the same artistic coterie. The contradiction between these two narrational poses results in an uncomfortable series of disavowals and elisions, a series of fissures in the text. The second distortion is in the text's representation of femininity. For the narrator, femininity is associated not only with primitivity but also with the modern. Paralleling the cosy triangle of Tahiti, Strickland, and narrator is another triangle, one in which
Mrs. Strickland seeks her husband through the mediation of the narrator. The text of The Moon and Sixpence is framed by the feminine space of Mrs. Strickland's drawing room, and by reference to the First World War, perhaps the Little Bighorn of many Victorian constructions of masculinity. In a feminised universe, the narrator can only figure masculine spaces by framing them off diegetically from the main text. For all the narrator's efforts otherwise, masculinity becomes coded not as "an island lost in a boundless sea" (79) but rather as the closet.

The Moon and Sixpence is clearly dependent upon a discursive binary opposition between civilized and primitive, North and South. London is "chaste, artistic, and dull" (18), and the London society in which the narrator moves has "an air of well-satisfied prosperity" (22). In London, everyday existence is often metaphorically associated with drama; Mrs. Strickland is well "able to dress the part she had to play according to her notions of seemliness" (34), and the narrator feels that much of her behaviour is a "pose" (39). Social roles are subject to a repeated and meaningless performance, and London's inhabitants live in a world of manifest social engagement that has no latent content. One of Mrs. Strickland's guests at the end of the novel is described as possessing "a bloodless frigidity" (214), an appellation which might also be applied to the narrator's description of her brother-in-law, Colonel MacAndrew:

He was a tall, lean man of fifty, with a
drooping moustache and grey hair. He had pale blue eyes and a weak mouth. I remembered from my previous meeting with him that he had a foolish face, and was proud of the fact that for the ten years before he had left the army he had played polo three days a week. (30)

The Colonel dreams of polo, Mrs. Strickland hosts her dinner parties, while her husband plays golf. All participate harmoniously in an empty society, one, the narrator remarks, which "reminds you of a placid rivulet, meandering smoothly through green pastures and shaded by pleasant trees, till at last it falls into the vasty sea" (25). Yet the sea into which it pours is "so calm, so silent, so indifferent, that you are troubled suddenly by a vague uneasiness" (25).

For both the narrator and Strickland, like Philip Carey and Frank Hurrell in Maugham's earlier novels, the South Pacific is already part of an imaginary topography before it is physically traversed. In Paris, Strickland articulates a wish to journey to "'an island lost in a boundless sea, where I could live in some hidden valley, among strange trees, in silence'" (79). Later, the narrator remarks that Strickland's "imagination had long been haunted by an island, all green and sunny, encircled by a sea more blue than is found in Northern latitudes" (167). The narrator, indeed, confesses earlier in the novel to harboring similar designs, "a desire to live more dangerously . . . for jagged rocks and treacherous shoals if only I could have
change--change and the excitement of the unforeseen" (25). Tahiti thus is important not only as an antipodean opposite of England where nature is unrepressed by culture, but also as the end point of a quest, a voyage of geographical discovery that is also a discovery of, or more properly a construction of, self.

Strickland's first move, from London to Paris, is represented as the beginnings of a journey to a more natural sense of self. "'I couldn't get what I wanted in London,'" Strickland tells the narrator, "some vehement power . . . struggling within him" (48-49). The narrator describes his own decision to go to Paris with a gloss of urbanity, but the motive is the same, a wish to escape the "tedious banality" (63) of the English metropolis.

In Paris, the narrator emphasizes Strickland's pursuit of a putatively natural masculinity by placing him in the first of the text's Girardian triangles, that between Dirk Stroeve, his wife Blanche, and the artist. Strickland wins Blanche's affections, in the narrator's construction, because of his naturally assertive masculinity: he is "big and strong" (110), giving the "impression of untamed passion" (110). Stroeve, in contrast, has become feminized by civilization to such an extent that he continually humiliates himself in attempting a reconciliation with his wife. "I could not stomach his weakness," the narrator remarks (106), and later confesses that "Dirk, with his vain lamentations, had begun to bore me" (120). His masculinity
confirmed through contrast with Stroeve, Strickland leaves the spoils behind in his pursuit of natural selfhood.

From Paris, Strickland moves to Marseilles, which figures prominently in Maugham's works as a liminal zone between East and West. Marseilles is a key hub in French imperial commerce, importing raw materials and exporting finished goods. The city is subject to a process of orientalisation. Life in Marseilles, the narrator recounts, is "brutal, savage, multi-coloured and vivacious" (166), just as it is in Tahiti. The description of the red light district in Marseilles (171) bears a close resemblance to Maugham's description of the red light district of Honolulu in his notebook (A Writer's Notebook 96-98). In this liminal space, Strickland is inducted into codes of colonial masculinity, defeating Tough Bill, "a huge mulatto with a heavy fist" (166), in a fistfight, then leaving on the next boat in order to escape "a knife-thrust in his back" (172).

Tahiti, like Marseilles, is figured as "sensual with an unashamed violence that leaves you breathless" (160). Yet Strickland finds even Papeete too urban, and moves out into the countryside to a modern Eden:

"[T]he place where Strickland lived had the beauty of the Garden of Eden. Ah, I wish I could make you see the enchantment of that spot, a corner hidden away from all the world, with the blue sky overhead and the rich, luxuriant trees. It was a feast of colour. And it was fragrant and cool."
Words cannot describe that paradise. And here he lived, unmindful of the world and by the world forgotten." (191)

Tahiti operates according to a natural law which, for all its prelapsarian text, seems to have suffered a number of Social Darwinist amendments: the "'natives ... herd together,'" "'lying on the veranda'" (191) while Strickland carries on with unstinting artistic production.

Two features of Tahiti stressed in The Moon and Sixpence—first, the island's allochrony, its being outside of the linear, historical time of the West, and second, its femininity—are clearly shown in the narrator's description of his arrival in Papeete:

Tahiti is a lofty green island, with deep folds of a darker green, in which you divine silent valleys; there is a mystery in their sombre depths, down which murmur and plash cool streams, and you feel that in those umbrageous places life from immemorial times has been led according to immemorial ways. . . . For Tahiti is smiling and friendly; it is like a woman graciously prodigal of her charms and beauty; and nothing can be more conciliatory than the entrance into the harbour at Papeete. (160)

The passage clearly exhibits a "denial of coevalness, or allochronism" (Fabian 33), a mechanism by which Western anthropological and literary texts mark off non-Western
spaces and so produce them as objects for study. In *Time and the Other*, Johannes Fabian maps the rise of anthropology as a discipline, and its "use of Time . . . for the purpose of distancing those who are observed from the Time of the observer" (25). In order to preserve the putative objectivity of the anthropologist, Fabian argues, anthropology shows "a persistent and systematic tendency to place the referent(s) of anthropology in a Time other than the present of the producer of anthropological discourse" (31). Primitive societies in Western anthropological texts are thus structured as temporally cyclical and repetitive, in contrast to the linear, progressive time occupied by the Western observer.

Applying Fabian's analysis to a literary text also authorized by a putatively objective narrator, we note Tahiti's metaphorical attachment to both Biblical time (the Garden of Eden) and Greek mythology ("a Polynesian garden of the Hesperides" [212]). In the passage in the previous paragraph the island is also placed in mythological or prehistorical time through the use of the adjective "immemorial." The narrator and Strickland's lives in London are marked out by a series of appointments; life in Tahiti, in contrast, exists in an eternal present:

Then the natives would assemble with spears, and with much shouting would transfix the great startled things as they hurried down to the sea. Sometimes Strickland would go down to the reef, and come back with a basket of small, coloured
fish that Ata would fry in coconut oil, or with a lobster; and sometimes she would make a savoury dish of the great land-crabs that scuttled away under your feet. (189)

The iterative "would" here removes any sense of the passing of time: life in Tahiti is outside history, and subject to a series of circular repetitions without any linear progress. Maugham's representation of conversations in the vernacular, through the use of Biblical archaisms, achieve a similar effect:

"Be quiet, woman. Dry thy tears, " said Strickland, addressing Ata. "There is no great harm. I shall leave thee very soon."

"They are not going to take thee away?" she cried. . . .

"I shall go up into the mountain," said Strickland.

Then Ata stood up and faced him.

"Let the others go if they choose, but I will not leave thee. Thou art my man and I am thy woman. If thou leavest me I shall hang myself on the tree that is behind the house. I swear it by God." (202)

Tahiti is thus made a series of Biblical or Greek tableaux, a process replicated in Strickland's pictures, which represent "the fruit on the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil" (212) or a "version of the Holy Family" (215). To
maintain a continuous awareness of allochrony, The Moon and Sixpence's leading characters do not wholly merge with their background. Strickland, we have seen, maintains his difference from the "natives" through his production of art, packets of allochrony which will be consumed in the linear time of Europe. The narrator, similarly, denies Tahiti's coevalness while at the same time inscribing it as a moment of allochrony within the linear temporal progression of the novel.

More apparent than the text's erasure of coevalness, and related to it, is its feminization of Tahiti. The Moon and Sixpence is probably Maugham's most misogynist novel, and is founded upon a binary opposition between the artificial femininity of London, in which the narrator is surrounded by active, "large, unbending women with great noses and rapacious eyes" (14), and the putatively natural femininity of Tahitian women, who prove substantially more flexible. Tahiti, we recall from the narrator's first description of the island, is mysterious, its landscape folded, and veiled in cloud. It is also, however, conciliatory, graciously opening itself up to a penetrating Western gaze. In an unpacking of the not so latent content of the passage, Jane O'Halloran comments that "Tahiti is waiting, legs spread, for the (Western) male" (95). Ata, Strickland's wife, O'Halloran writes, is "compliant and submissive":

She is the ultimate, acquiescent, Oriental woman; the antithesis of the parasitic, sexually
assertive, Western woman, sapping the strength (and artistic creativity) of the Western man. It is Ata, as the embodiment of the ever supine East, who facilitates the retention of Strickland's "masculine" individuality, and, hence, his creativity. If we take Ata to signify the East, then the Orient is the answer to the threat to Western patriarchal society posed by its emancipated women. (97)

To emphasize the dichotomy, Maugham has Tiaré comment that Ata hasn't "a drop of white blood in her" (185). The presence of Tiaré herself as a very different feminine embodiment of Tahiti, "arms . . . like legs of mutton, . . . breasts like giant cabbages" (177), however, suggests another, slightly more culinary, construction of Tahiti. It is Maugham's construction of femininity which opens up his text to deconstructive analysis.

"The devil," writes Subramani, "is an indispensable principle in the paradise myth" (177). The Moon and Sixpence again follows very much in the European South Sea tradition: the very perfection of paradise also hints at the transience of earthly pleasures. My ellipsis in quoting the narrator's arrival in Tahiti conceals a passage that undermines the effect of its surrounding text:

[L]ife from immemorial times has been led according to immemorial ways. Even here is something sad and terrible. But the impression is fleeting, and serves only to give a greater
acuteness to the enjoyment of the moment. It is like the sadness which you may see in the jester's eyes when a merry company is laughing at his sallies; his lips smile and his jokes are gayer because in the communion of laughter he finds himself more intolerably alone. For Tahiti is smiling and friendly; it is like a lovely woman graciously prodigal of her charm and beauty.

(160)

Paradise is circumscribed with danger, as Strickland's hut is surrounded by the "primeval forest" (204). Looking at Strickland's paintings, Coutras feels "'helpless in the clutch of an unseen horror'" (210). Like Tommo's discovery of the remains of ritual murder and human sacrifice in the houses of the Typee, the thematic function of Maugham's narrator's continual lack of ease in Tahiti is to rein in the primitive, to emphasize the necessity of a return to the civilised. The allochrony and feminized nature of Tahiti only gain significance when placed in comparison with their English counterparts. For all Strickland's wild artistic apotheosis, his paintings, and indeed his life story, only become significant in their reception in London.

The Moon and Sixpence, then, initially seems to read as a successful inscription of a Girardian triangle. In the beginning of the novel, the relationship between Strickland and the narrator is figured with a coded eroticism. "What would we not give," the narrator asks his imagined readers,
"for the reminiscences of someone who had been as intimately acquainted with El Greco as I was with Strickland?" (11) The association of Strickland with the only painter Maugham himself identified as a homosexual seems more than coincidental, given that the narrator's quest to find the truth about Strickland is also figured erotically. "[H]e was like a wrestler whose body is oiled;" the narrator comments, "you could not get a grip on him" (54). Later he confesses to wishing "to pierce his [Strickland's] armour of complete indifference" (145). The artist is frequently described as "sensual" (77) by the narrator earlier in the novel, and as "queer," the narrator attributing his own desire to escape from London and join Strickland in Paris as resulting in "a kink in my nature" (25). Even the narrator's confessed "horror" (140) at Strickland's "'inhuman'" (97) or "'abominable'" (97) nature leads to a joining of narrator and protagonist in a shared sense of transgression. In Paris, during one of their interviews, Strickland asks the narrator why he is so interested in the artist's life:

"It's a purely professional interest you take in me?"

"Purely."

"It's only right that you shouldn't disapprove of me. You have a despicable character."

"Perhaps that's why you feel at home with me." (80)
In good Sedgwickian fashion, however, such intimacy and identification is displaced onto a third party, the feminized landscape of Tahiti. The narrator, as vaniteux, approaches Tahiti through the mediation of Strickland; both men are united in their desire to achieve self-expression through demonstrated mastery of topography coded female, to imprint it with meaning. Following the schema of the apostolary narrative as outlined by Cooper, the narrator is prepared to defer to Strickland and to assert a subaltern authority to narrate. At the beginning of the novel, the narrator meets Strickland face to face in Paris many times; by the end he is diegetically removed from his object of pursuit, forced to rely upon a series of supplementary narrators--Tiaré Johnson, Captain Nichols, Dr. Coutras and Capitaine Brunot--each of whom, he confesses, might be "an outrageous liar" (173). Through Sedgwick's "homosexual panic" the relation between the two men is transformed into a disembodied one, into a joint membership of the "mystic brotherhood" (15) of male writers and artists.

The neat trigonometry of The Moon and Sixpence is, however, disrupted by two factors, the first concerned with the status of the narrator, the second with the depiction of femininity in the novel. These factors, in their distortion of the patiently built symmetries of the text, open up channels for an examination of how masculinity and sexuality are constituted in Maugham's text.
The narrator's authority to narrate is, as I have indicated earlier, built upon two mutually contradictory constructions of his relationship with Strickland. In the first construction, the narrator adopts a posture of specularity, allying himself with medicine and science, and attempting to read Strickland from without, thus becoming a part of the apparatus of Foucault's *scientia sexualis*, of a "hierarchy of personnel who kept watch, organized, provoked, monitored, and reported, and who accumulated an immense pyramid of observations and dossiers" (56). In the second, contradictory construction, he gains authority through his intimacy with Strickland, not through distance from the artist. *The Moon and Sixpence*, in this construction, becomes not an observation but a confession, and it is perhaps fitting that the novel opens with the words "I confess" (5). Unable to reconcile these two modes of authorization, the narrator is caught in perpetual oscillation between desire for and identification with his protagonist.

The process of coming to know Strickland, and thus explicating him to an audience through narration, is most overtly figured by the narrator as a science. "I applied the scalpel boldly," remarks the narrator of a particularly ambitious interview with Strickland (140). "I am in the position of a biologist," he comments later, using a slightly different metaphorical tack, "who from a single bone must reconstruct not only the appearance of an extinct animal, but its habits" (174). The process of narration is
also compared to textual restoration (76), and is predicated upon the objectivity of the narrating voice. Expressed as it is in medical and scientific metaphor, the narrator's specular quest for knowledge of his specular object is part of a general nineteenth and early twentieth-century quest for universal truth, a trope that Ludmilla Jordonova has described as "Nature unveiling before Science" (87):

[It indicates] a general mentality, that I would call physiognomic, which encouraged people to think in terms of getting behind appearances, to some deeper level—by means of a process of unveiling. In physiognomic traditions, moving inferentially from visual signifiers to other, invisible, inner signifieds was the central operation. (92)

Following the quest which Jordonova identifies, the narrator of The Moon and Sixpence looks for clues from Strickland's appearance, from the furniture of his apartment, from his habits, from his paintings in order to excavate the hidden truth about the artist's nature. The narrator departs on his first Paris expedition to gain "proofs" (33); in his following meetings with Strickland he assiduously searches for moments not so much of conversation and interchange as of observation:

I welcomed the opportunity to examine him at my ease. I certainly should never have known him. In the first place his red beard, ragged and untrimmed, hid much of his face, and his hair
was long; but the most surprising change in him was his extreme thinness. It made his great nose protrude more arrogantly; it emphasised his cheek-bones; it made his eyes seem larger. There were deep hollows at his temples. (73)

Through such specular description, the narrator looks for some "deep-rooted instinct" in his [Strickland's] soul (53), to see through the "almost transparent" "screen of the flesh" (98), and thus examine "the innermost secrets of his soul" (147).

We may note here that the specular discourse employed by the narrator was employed in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in discovering signs of difference upon homosexual bodies. The "physiological profiles" of Lombroso and Tardieu (Edelman, "Homographesis" 190) gave way, with changing intellectual theories, to the section of Havelock Ellis' Sexual Inversion regarding the "physical abnormalities" of "inverts," which commences with a description of physical deformities and ends, in a final reductio ad absurdum, with comments upon "[t]he frequent inability of male inverts to whistle" (291) and their "decided preference for [the colour] green" (299). Given this application of scientific specularity to the unmentionable, to the love that dare not speak its name, the narrator's final inability to excavate Strickland's "inner signified" gains significance. The truth about Strickland is "not human," "unholy for men to know" (207); he is "part
human and part beast" (98), Maugham here drawing upon the
gothic tropes of his earlier novel, The Magician (1908). And
for all his objective narration, the narrator is concerned
that such a secret may also lurk inside himself. "[M]y own
practice, " he remarks when discussing confession of sins,
"has always been to deny everything" (44), and later talks
of the "bravado" of those persons who "do not fear
reproaches for peccadilloes which they are convinced none
will discover" (54). I do not mean to suggest here that in
some absolute sense the character Strickland and the
narrator of The Moon and Sixpence are "really" homosexual;
rather, I wish to suggest that, given Maugham's situation of
writing, the question of personal identity or essence is
always infused with male homosexual panic, and boxed into
the trope of the closet. To gain authority to narrate, the
narrator must promise to read Strickland's "soul" (54) for
the benefit of his readers. Sexuality being the truth of
self, he cannot deliver on this promise. After his last
interview with a potential informant, he sadly remarks that
"I felt that Strickland had kept his secret to the grave"
(212).

Failing to authorise his narration through distance,
the narrator attempts to bolster his authority by using a
sharply contradictory strategy: by his claims of closeness
to Strickland. In contrast to the scientific metaphors
explicated above, the narrator in this mode represents
himself as a jejeune disciple of the master painter. On his
first meeting with Strickland in Paris the narrator
describes himself as "ingenuous" (47), and later confesses
to being "put out" (146) when the painter tells him that his
opinions are unimportant. Both Strickland and the narrator
are members of a "mystic brotherhood" of creative artists,
and the narrator predicates his authority for writing his
account upon the fact that "I knew him more intimately than
most" (10). Both narrator and protagonist share "a desire to
live more dangerously" (25), and both feel themselves to be
outcasts, the narrator having "a kink in my nature" (25),
while Strickland is described as "a queer fish" (194) or
"the square peg in the round hole" (194).

The fault-lines at which the two constructions of
narrational authority in The Moon and Sixpence collide are
the narrator's series of "reconstructions" of Strickland's
inner life. In each of these reconstructions the narrator,
through deductions drawn from careful observation of
Strickland, moves beyond the exterior to the artist's
interior thoughts and emotions. Each of these passages
presents Strickland as in the grip of uncontrollable sexual
passions: like the perverts of nineteenth-century
constructions of sexuality, he is unable to govern his
sexual urges. Early in the novel, during a conversation
between Strickland and narrator at a restaurant in Paris,
the narrator sharply rebuts his protagonist's claimed
"disgust" for sexual acts:

"Let me tell you. I imagine that for months
the matter never comes into your head, and you're
able to persuade yourself that you've finished with it for good and all. You rejoice in your freedom, and you feel that at last you can call your soul your own. You seem to walk with your head among the stars. And then, all of a sudden you can't stand it any more, and you notice that all the time your feet have been walking in the mud. And you want to roll yourself in it. And you find some woman, coarse and low and vulgar, some beastly creature in whom all the horror of sex is blatant, and you fall upon her like a wild animal. You drink till you're blind with rage."

(80-81)

In reconstructing Strickland's inner life, the narrator must perforce identify with him. At these moments homosexual panic becomes most evident. During the passage above, the narrator is stared at by Strickland, and remarks that "I held his eyes with mine" (81). He continues his reconstruction by telling Strickland that "when it's over you feel so extraordinarily pure. You feel like a disembodied spirit, immaterial" (81):

He kept his eyes fixed upon mine till I had finished, and then he turned away. There was on his face a strange look, and I thought that so might a man look when he had died under the torture. He was silent. I knew that our conversation had ended. (81)
Through recounting Strickland's heterosexual adventures, the narrator thus produces a passage which, like Melville's description of Kory-Kory's firemaking, mimes a sexual act, the narrator in effect bringing Strickland to orgasm, while at the same time circumscribing his narration with adjectives showing disgust.

A similar process of complex displacement operates in other imaginative reconstructions by the narrator. In a later episode, imagining how Blanche Stroeve, a fellow painter's wife, came to fall in love with Strickland, the narrator spends a "restless night" in speculation:

[S]he wondered what fancies passed through his dreams. Did he dream of the nymph flying through the woods of Greece with the satyr in hot pursuit? She fled, swift of foot and desperate, but he gained on her step by step, till she felt his hot breath on her cheek; and still she fled silently, and silently he pursued, and when at last he seized her was it terror that thrilled her heart or was it ecstasy? (111)

Reconstruction again enables the narrator to be chased vicariously by Strickland, and to express a physical passion defined by panic, by both "terror" and "ecstasy." Even in these moments of identification, however, the voice of the objective narrator is never very far away, sealing up potential fissures in the text. "But perhaps this is very fanciful," the narrator remarks after a further paragraph.
The narrator's reconstructions add a certain frisson to the relationship between mediator and vaniteux, distorting the symmetry of the novel's erotic trigonometry. A similar distortion also exists in regard to the text's representation of femininity. Maugham, we have seen, very much follows tradition in feminizing the colonized landscape of Tahiti; in *The Moon and Sixpence* the primitive femininity of the South Pacific is contrasted with the Occidental, gone-to-seed variety exemplified by Blanche Stroeve and Mrs. Strickland. In possibly the most misogynist of Maugham's novels, the narrator hankers nostalgically for a time when "Woman had not yet altogether come into her own" (14). "'The soul of man wanders through the uttermost regions of the universe,'" remarks Strickland to the narrator, "'and she [Woman] seeks to imprison it in the circle of her account-book'" (144). If this statement is not endorsed by, neither is it refuted by the narrator.

Women in *The Moon and Sixpence* thus appear to occupy the position of both nature and culture, a situation similar to representations of women in late nineteenth-century avant garde writing:

> [W]omen stand for the most despised aspects of both culture and nature, exemplifying the crass vulgarity and emptiness of modern bourgeois society (woman as archetypal consumer) as well as natural sentimentality coded as specific to women, an inclination to outpourings of uncontrolled feelings that threaten the
disengaged stance of the male aesthete.

(Felski 1100)

Mrs. Strickland's parlour encloses the novel, providing the setting for both its opening and closing scenes. In it, Mrs. Strickland operates as Felski's archetypal consumer, emphasizing the "'essentially decorative'" nature of Strickland's art, her clothes "modish" (213) and her sense of interior decoration also having "moved with the times" (214). The whole topography of Maugham's novel, indeed, is invaded by female consumption: Paris by Blanche Stroeve, Tahiti by Mrs. Nichols, "inexorable as fate and remorseless as conscience" (163) in her efforts to track down her vagrant husband. Tahiti also confronts the narrator with the "enormous proportions" (177) of Tiaré, and Madame Coutras, "an imposing creature" who pours "forth a breathless stream of anecdote and comment" (208), drowning out his own narrational voice. Beneath the misogynist bluster, an anxiety makes itself present: women may, in fact, be better at colonizing practice than men. Madame Coutras is metaphorically described as "a ship in full sail," and she has "not yielded to . . . the tropics," remaining "more active, more worldly, more decided than anyone in a temperate clime would have thought it possible to be" (208). Mrs. Strickland is ironically described by the narrator as a "lion-hunter" (18) but she displays, at the end of the novel, a remarkable control over her captured quarry.
By the end of The Moon and Sixpence, a female topography has swallowed up both the narrator and Strickland: the narrator escapes from Tiaré's "vast bosom," like "a billowy sea" (213) into Mrs. Strickland's drawing room. Masculinity has shrunk from Melville or Stoddard's ocean of homosociality to the confined space of the closet. Strickland's final masterpiece is his mural on the walls of the hut in which he dies, the "indescribably wonderful and mysterious" artwork sharing the room with painter's own body, "the dreadful, mutilated, ghastly object which had been Strickland" (207). The secret of Strickland is the secret of the closet: "'you were afraid,'" remarks Coutras, "'for you saw yourself'" (209). In Mrs. Strickland's drawing room the narrator has a final vision of Strickland's son by Ata:

I saw him, with my mind's eye, on the schooner on which he worked, wearing nothing but a pair of dungarees . . . . I saw him dance with another lad, dance wildly, to the wheezy music of the concertina. Above was the blue sky, and the stars, and all about the desert of the Pacific Ocean.

(217)

The vision, however, remains unarticulated, bracketed off from the rest of the text. All narrational strategies in Maugham's text finally lead back to this one point: heterosexual masculinity founded upon homosexuality, upon the presence of the unspeakable. "For as this appalling ocean
surrounds the verdant land," wrote Melville in *Moby-Dick*, "so in the soul of man there lies one insular Tahiti, full of peace and joy, but encompassed by all the horrors of the half known life" (276). Maugham's vision in *The Moon and Sixpence* is a little different. In 1922 he would publish a piece of short prose entitled "My South Sea Island" in which the half-known is already present, indigenous to the island, the "sinister" presence of a leper who is always present at the margins of the narrator's gaze (*A Traveller in Romance* 219). For Maugham, and for his narrators, the half-known is always already there.
2. The Trembling of a Leaf and the Closet of Nostalgia

The Moon and Sixpence was not the only product of Maugham's visit to the South Pacific. His travel diary provided material for several short stories, first published in magazines, the majority of which are collected in The Trembling of a Leaf (1921). Maugham's South Pacific short stories maintain the opposition between modern and premodern expressed in The Moon and Sixpence. Like Maugham's earlier novel, they are also clearly derivative of texts in the European South Seas tradition, particularly the writings of Joseph Conrad and Pierre Loti. The stories differ from the novel, however, in their increased thematic and narrational framing of the colonizer's encounter with the primitive.

Thematically, the stories of The Trembling of a Leaf largely stress the disciplining powers of twentieth-century colonial rule. The time of first contact, of Strickland and Melville's Tomo, of Red and Walker as young men, has passed, and can only be remembered nostalgically. Red and Sally, in Neilson's construction, once enjoyed an interracial "'love pure and simple'" (120); in the narrative present of "The Pool" Lawson is "ignored by the white ladies of the colony" (159) after his marriage to the "half-caste" Ethel Brevard. Yet paradoxically, even as they emphasize rigid social divisions, Maugham's stories teem with characters who elude categorization, Eurasians, Chinese, and white prostitutes who live in a precarious border zone between Self and Other.
An increase in surveillance and police actions at the borders of the European community is thus marked by a need for racially or morally ambiguous characters who may be publicly subjected to colonial discipline and placed on one side or the other of the binary oppositions which anchor the texts.

The thematics of *The Trembling of a Leaf* are related to the structural features of the stories. The narrators and central consciousnesses of the stories are largely educated, middle class men, who identify with twentieth-century constructions of colonizing activity as a matter of competent administration, level-headedness, and emotional and sexual continence. They occupy one corner of a classic Girardian triangle, at the other two apexes of which stand a romantic precursor and the feminized landscape of the South Seas. As in *The Moon and Sixpence*, the narrator or central consciousness expresses desire for the precursor through mutual mastery of the landscape. Unlike the earlier novel, however, the narrative is not apostolary. An immeasurable distance separates narrator and precursor, a distance only bridged by an impotent nostalgia, the repeated description of the aged bodies of Walker, Red, and Lawson in the narrative present to contrast with their beauty in the narrative past. Maugham's narrator in *The Moon and Sixpence*, after the manner of many nineteenth-century travel writers, makes easy entrance into an inviting Tahiti; the skipper in "Red" cannot find "an opening large enough to get his ship
through" (105) in the reef that surrounds Neilson's island, and has to spend the night anchored outside. After examining the production of nostalgia and difference in all the short stories in *The Trembling of a Leaf*, I wish to turn to a close reading of what has commonly been regarded as one of Maugham's most homoerotic short stories, "Red." Its homoeroticism, I will argue, is qualified by elaborate strategies of distancing and nostalgic containment.

1. Narrating Discipline

The underlying binarism in *The Trembling of a Leaf*, just as in *The Moon and Sixpence*, is a division between a primitive, premodern South Pacific (here including Samoa, Tahiti, and the Hawaiian islands) and a modern West consisting of Britain and North America. Walker's island is "'like the garden of Eden'" (15), the sea in Neilson's retelling of Red's life story "'like the sea of Homeric Greece'" (123). Dr. Macphail in "Rain" uses a different, yet temporally equally distancing simile to describe the inhabitants of Pago-Pago:

The natives, blithe and childlike by reputation, seemed . . . , with their tattooing and dyed hair, to have something sinister in their appearance; and when they pattered along at your heels with their naked feet you looked back instinctively. . . . They had a little the look of ancient Egyptians painted on a temple wall, and there
was about them the terror of what is immeasurably old. (270)

"Rain" also dramatizes a temporal dislocation between the linear time of the West and the cyclical time of the South Pacific. Davidson, the story's missionary protagonist, resolves to "set aside a certain number of hours to study and a certain number to exercise, rain or fine" (257), in defiance of the natural rhythm of the endlessly falling rain. In Pago-Pago the short story's protagonists are suspended in time, waiting only for the next boat to leave; they are thus at the mercy of the primitive powers of nature. Similarly, in "The Fall of Edward Barnard," the West (here Chicago) is marked by progressive modernization; "by its position and by the energy of its citizens," Chicago is "destined to become the real capital of the country" (57). In contrast, Tahiti is marked by "'its ease and its leisure'" (94), its "'casual'" atmosphere (98).

The underlying division between primitive and modern remains in place no matter which side of the binarism is subject to narrational critique. In "The Fall of Edward Barnard" and "Rain" the primitive is valorized in opposition to "Western Civilization which has deviated from its own simple and honest past" (Subramani 176). Isabel Longstaffe's visions of "the exquisite house she would have, full of antique furniture, and of the concerts she would give" (104) seem trivial compared to Edward Barnard's vision of his future:

"I shall make a garden out of what so short
a while ago was a wilderness. I shall have created something. The years will pass insensibly, and when I am an old man I hope I shall be able to look back on a happy, simple, peaceful life. In my small way I too shall have lived in beauty." (101)

Similarly, in "Rain," the victory of the "flaunting quean" (294) Sadie Thompson over Davidson's repressive Christianity, presented as the triumph of "primitive powers of nature" (265) over civilization's nurture, is given strong narrational endorsement. In both these stories the primitive is endorsed in order to critique aspects of Western modernity. In "The Pool," in contrast, it is the primitive that is subject to critique. Lawson, marrying Ethel, the daughter of the Norwegian Brevald and his native wife, loses contact with the European community:

From that time his degeneration was rapid. . . . He lived entirely among the natives and half-castes, but he had no longer the prestige of the white man. They felt his loathing for them and they resented his attitude of superiority. He was one of themselves now and they did not see why he should put on airs. (174)

For Lawson, and for the various narrators of his story, contact with the primitive means dissolution, loss of control, alcoholism and eventually death. For all their divergent attitudes towards primitivism, however, the
stories in *The Trembling of a Leaf* keep the modern/premodern binary opposition firmly in place.

As in *The Moon and Sixpence*, the exotic landscape of Samoa, Tahiti, and other South Pacific islands is persistently feminized, and subject to domination by a West gendered masculine. Honolulu, much to the narrator of the eponymous short story's surprise, is "a typical western city . . . filled with all the necessities of American civilisation" (199); it is marked by frenetic activity. In contrast, the native people at Davidson's mission are "'pitifully lacking in energy,'" while in "Red" Neilson's island has "'recently been visited by one of those epidemics which the white man has brought to the South Seas, and one-third of the inhabitants had died'" (121). Such troping reflects late nineteenth-century gender stereotypes of active masculinity contrasted with passive femininity. The South Pacific in Maugham's short-story collection is often represented by a young, pliant Samoan, Tahitian, or Eurasian woman who is the object of desire for a Western man. Eva Jackson in "The Fall of Edward Barnard" is "like a goddess of the Polynesian spring" (86), while Captain Butler's "little girl" in "Honolulu" is, the narrator remarks, "certainly a most attractive creature" (210). Just as in *The Moon and Sixpence*, such women are presented as possessing a natural, unfallen sexuality in contrast to more assertive Western women. In "The Fall of Edward Barnard," Edward reflects on his decision not to return to Chicago to marry Isabel Longstaffe but rather to marry Eva:
"I'm not in love with her as I was in love with Isabel. I worshipped Isabel. I thought she was the most wonderful creature I had ever seen. I was not half good enough for her. I don't feel like that with Eva. She's like a beautiful exotic flower that must be sheltered from the bitter winds. I want to protect her. No one ever thought of protecting Isabel." (99-100)

In the context of the short story's narration, Edward's choice receives strong narrational endorsement.

The stories of *The Trembling of the Leaf*, however, contain a second element in their representation of femininity, one that is not found in *The Moon and Sixpence*, and which seems related to Bernard Smith's analysis of the trope of the transience of worldly passions in European writing of the South Pacific. The native woman's body in most of the short stories in the collection is a site of physical decay and moral deceit. Sally, in the narrative present of "Red," is no longer "'rather tall, slim, with the delicate features of her race'" (120), but rather "a fat old native woman" (137), and leads the narrator to comment that "the women on the islands age quickly" (133). In "Mackintosh," the protagonist feels he is being lured into a possible marriage with the daughter of Jervis, a trader, but is deterred by her mother's physical appearance:

In a moment her mother waddled in, a huge old woman, a chiefess, who owned much land in her own right; and gave him her hand. Her
monstrous obesity was an offence, but she managed
to convey an impression of dignity. (36)
In "Mackintosh" and "Red," the young, beautiful Polynesian
woman awaiting white male succour exists only in the
narrative past; in the narrative present she has been
replaced with an older woman who is not only physically
larger but also wields considerable power--Jervis' wife is a
"chiefess," while Sally has a "commanding presence" (135) in
Neilson's house. The older native woman not only becomes
more powerful, and thus more threatening, but she also
becomes more racially Other. Ethel, whom Lawson marries, is
"no darker than a Spaniard" (146), while Sally, in the
narrative present of "Red," is "dark, for the natives grow
darker with age" (135).

Even the bodies of young native women in the stories of
The Trembling of a Leaf are represented as carrying the
seeds of dissolution and usurpation within them. The
nameless native woman in "Honolulu" is, the narrator
comments, "a very pretty person" (209):

She was a good deal taller than the captain,
and even the Mother Hubbard, which the
missionaries of a past generation had, in the
interests of decency, forced on the unwilling
natives, could not conceal the beauty of her
form. One could not but suspect that age
would burden her with a certain corpulence,
but now she was graceful and alert. (209-10)
Here the native woman's form is gazed at and made to reveal a primitive vitality that the "decency" of modern civilization cannot wholly suppress; at the same time the woman's height, and the potential of her body for change, seem vaguely threatening to the "faint breeze of romance" which the narrator strives so assiduously to detect. In the denouement of the story it is thus a little less surprising for the reader to discover that the woman in Butler's cabin is not the woman whose sacrifices saved him from death, the latter having proved fickle and run "'away with the Chinese cook last year'" (233). Similarly, Ethel Brevald's association with the landscape surrounding her bungalow in "The Pool" undercuts an earlier, romantic, description of her as a "naiad" (148):

Brevald's bungalow, shabby and bedraggled, stood among the coconut trees of the plantation, a little away from the main road that ran up to Vailima. Immediately around it grew huge plantains. With their tattered leaves they had the tragic beauty of a lovely woman in rags. Everything was slovenly and neglected . . . . When Lawson asked for Brevald the old man's cracked voice called out to him, and he found him in the sitting-room smoking an old briar pipe.

"Sit down and make yourself at home," he said. "Ethel's just titivating." (153)
Ethel's titivation seems here to be an attempt to hide an innate propensity to disorder, one that is later expressed in "[t]he carelessness with which she managed her house" (162) in Lawson's native Scotland. Her propensity is infectious, drawing Lawson into a lapse of emotional control in which he leaves his job in Scotland and follows his wife back to Samoa. Having once submitted, Lawson degenerates quickly to a loss of somatic control (his alcoholism) and finally commits suicide.

The threat of disorder embodied by native women is particularly disturbing to a construction of masculinity in *The Trembling of a Leaf* that is based upon somatic control and emotional repression, rather than upon colonizing activity or abandonment to the dictates of an artistic temperament. Edward Barnard's "fall" is attributed by his fiancée in Chicago to the fact that there was always "'something lacking in him, I suppose it was backbone'" (103). Red, who "'had no more soul than the creatures of the woods and forests'" (121) and Walker, who describes his "numberless adventures, commonplace and sordid, with the women of the island . . . with a pride in his own prowess" (11) to his subordinate, Mackintosh, are survivals of a past age. The present is the domain of men such as Dr. Macphail, Neilson and Mackintosh, men who bring a quasi-scientific rationality to their observation of the colonial situation. Any lapse in control or surrender to the native environment, such as those of Davidson and Lawson, may result in a
temporary fulfilment or release, but eventually leads to dissolution and death.

The construction of colonizing masculinity in *The Moon and Sixpence* is a reflection of certain realities in the British Empire of the early twentieth century. John Seeley's proposal in *The Expansion of England* (1883) for a British world state had, to a great measure, been achieved. The task of British men and an increasing number of British women in the colonies was not so much to open up new territories as to rule the territory already held. The imperial freelance in the mode of Gordon, Cecil Rhodes, or Robert Clive was a man of the past, replaced by the administrator drawn largely from "the Public School-Oxbridge Class" (Allen 159). By the 'twenties few blank spaces still existed upon the maps of the colonial powers. From Conrad's Marlow on, protagonists of British fiction of empire mourned the loss of frontiers, or strove earnestly to create new ones:

"True, by this time it was not a blank space any more. It had got filled since my boyhood with rivers and lakes and names. It had ceased to be a blank space of delightful mystery--a white patch for a boy to dream gloriously over. ... But there was in it one river.

("Heart of Darkness" 52)

For Orwell's characters, some thirty years later, there is not even a single river left, and the expansion of England seems to threaten to take on a suburban quality:

"Sometimes I think that in two hundred years all
this"--he waved a foot towards the horizon--"all this will be gone--forests, villages, pagodas, all vanished. And instead, pink villas fifty yards apart; all over those hills, as far as you can see, villa after villa, with all the gramophones playing the same tune. And all the forests shaved flat--chewed into wood-pulp for the News of the World, or sawn up into gramophone cases." (Burmese Days 40)

In this new Empire, as we shall see in Chapter Five, surveillance increased, racial boundaries were more precisely codified, and standards of acceptable behaviour for members of the expatriate elite were tightened. Given the exigencies of the new, less romantic colonial situation, it is unsurprising that colonial fiction and memoirs of the early twentieth century romanticize the earlier period of colonization.

In a recent article, John McClure recognizes two possible fictional responses to "imperialism suddenly becom[ing] the enemy of romance" (115), to paradigmatic changes that stressed administrative competence over individual initiative. The first is a return to the earlier days of imperial adventure, by either "elegaic narratives of the closing of this period" (115), such as Isaak Dinesen's Out of Africa (1938), or a search for new, as yet undiscovered territories where the romance of adventure might still be enacted. McClure contrasts such fictions to
novels which attempt to "challenge the rationalizing romance of empire itself" (115), such as "Heart of Darkness" (1899) and *A Passage to India* (1924), while acknowledging that these texts are compromised as critiques by their preservation of the East or Africa as a romantic, non-Western space. In McClure's schema, the stories of *The Trembling of a Leaf* seem closer to his first category, yet they are cast perhaps even further back into imperial history. The stories do not so much provide an elegy to the closing-out of the period of first contact, as present a nostalgic re-enactment of the period at its zenith, a re-enactment which is framed, bracketed-off from the narrative present. Maugham's second generation colonial administrators, doctors, dilettantes and professional writers look longingly and lovingly back to a precursor in whose footsteps they now cannot follow, and at the same time apply caustic irony to the very romantic narratives they are bound to tell. Thus Neilson delights in telling the skipper the story of Red and Sally while simultaneously professing his cynicism.

The structural features of the stories of *The Trembling of a Leaf* reflect, and amplify, the tropological and thematic aspects of the narratives outlined above. Four of the stories are told in the third person by an omniscient narrator, while the other two are narrated in the first person by the urbane Maugham-narrator. The focalizers of the third person narratives often recount an embedded narrative,
and share with the Maugham-narrator a similar class background and an appreciation of the highly textual nature of their processes of narration. Mackintosh is middle class, from London, and spends much of his time writing up his notes, while Bateman Hunter, middle class although substantially wealthier, consciously remolds Edward Barnard's story for Isabel's ears, hiding "nothing from her except what he thought would wound her or what made himself ridiculous" (101). Neilson is independently wealthy, university educated, and lives surrounded by books, while Dr. Macphail's profession gives him both the privilege of travelling first class, away from the "'second cabin'" (247) inhabited by Sadie Thompson, and the further privilege of the ironic gaze of the pathologist of human emotions.

As in The Moon and Sixpence, the narrator or central consciousness is part of a Girardian triangle involving himself, a native woman or a feminized landscape, and the male object of his narration. The narrator/focalizer is often disembodied, or physically weak: Mackintosh is "an ugly man, with ungainly gestures, a tall thin fellow, with a narrow chest and bowed shoulders" (9), Neilson unhealthy, Bateman Hunter defined by his "horn spectacles" (104). In contrast, the object of his narration is physically vital, and of a lower class or at least engaged in lower-class occupations. Walker is "illiterate," Mackintosh notes, has little sense of etiquette, and "has never learned to put any restraint on his tongue" (10), yet his life has been one of
extraordinary activity. Looking at Edward Barnard, now working in a trader's store, Bateman Hunter is unnerved by his friend's vitality:

Bateman took a glance at him. Edward was dressed in a suit of shabby white ducks, none too clean and a large straw hat of native make. He was thinner than he had been, deeply burned by the sun, and he was certainly better-looking than ever. But there was something in his appearance that disconcerted Bateman. He walked with a new jauntiness; there was a carelessness in his demeanour, a gaiety about nothing in particular, which Bateman could not precisely blame, but which exceedingly puzzled him. (76)

This passage exemplifies Sedgwick's comment that in the relationship between men in a Girardian triangle, "the bonds of 'rivalry' and 'love,' differently as they are experienced, are equally powerful and in many senses equivalent" (Between Men 21). Even as he eroticises Edward's body through a gaze given its power by a constructed class privilege, Bateman becomes uneasy, aware that his rival, through his being outside of somatic and emotional repression, in some manner merges with and possesses the land in a way that he, for all his rationality and self-control, never can.

In the triangles involving old and new style imperialists and a feminized landscape, homoeroticism is
often overt. Neilson's scoping of Red in his narrative is a clear example, but adjectives such as "sensual" (11) are also applied to Walker, and Macphail remarks Davidson's "full and sensual . . . lips," his "finely shaped" hands, and notes that his body burns with "suppressed fire" (242). The eroticisation of a working-class object of desire is, Jeffrey Weeks notes, a common marker of middle-class male homosexual self-representation in England from "the 1880s to 1930s and beyond" (Coming Out 41), and is exemplified in such texts as E.M. Forster's Maurice (1971). Such eroticisation enables the narrator or focaliser to express homoeroticism while containing some of its more epistemologically threatening aspects. The narrator or focaliser still revels in the power of his gaze, which is never turned back upon himself. His weakness and small physique, which are frequently exaggerated in contrast to the physicality of the working class object of desire, serve to make him invisible, and thus to privilege his narration as neutral or objective. This mode of representation, Weeks notes, is expressive of a "strong element of sexual colonialism" (40). The delight that Neilson takes in recounting Red's story, or the Maugham-narrator's in reinterpreting Captain Butler's "in my own words" (211) is predicated upon the distance that they maintain, through class, from the object of their narration.

In the context of the South Pacific, however, such conscious disembodiment on the part of Maugham's narrators
cedes the colonial landscape to the companions who are also their rivals. The stories of The Trembling of a Leaf express a consistent fear that the strategies used by men such as Walker and Red result in a closeness to the landscape and a personal emancipation which is inaccessible to Mackintosh or Neilson. Walker's roads, for example, seem to fit the landscape of his island:

They meandered through those lovely scenes, and Walker had taken care that here and there they should run in a straight line, giving you a green vista through the tall trees, and here and there should turn and curve so that the heart was rested by the diversity. It was amazing that this coarse and sensual man should exercise so subtle an ingenuity to get the effects which his fancy suggested to him. He had used in making his roads all the fantastic skill of a Japanese gardener. (21)

Here Walker, in the focalizer's construction, merges with the landscape and becomes orientalised, a possibility that is always denied to Mackintosh himself, who always insists on propriety and the rule of law. The rival's yielding to the demands of the landscape is often presented as dangerous; indeed, it leads to the death of both Lawson and Davidson. Yet, even here, the narrator has a barely acknowledged investment in their transgressions against propriety. Macphail shares similar erotic fantasies to
Davidson, while for the narrator of "The Pool" Ethel's fascination lies in the fact that she has "excited in Lawson such a devastating passion" (184):

[I]n her elusiveness, like a thought that presents itself before it can be captured by words, lay her peculiar charm: but perhaps that was merely fancy, and if I had known nothing about her I should have seen in her only a pretty little half-caste like another. (185)

The mobility of the rival, although circumscribed by danger, thus seems to threaten the narrator's own masculinity, which consists of "self-control" (89), and continual "vigilance" (13), lest he might "betray" (13) himself.

The capacity of both homoeroticism and rivalry to undermine the narrator's authority to narrate is deflected in the short stories by a strategy of temporal distancing. The activities of the rival are cast back into a narrative past, which is framed by a narrative present that remains the domain of the focalizer/narrator. Walker's past, we have seen, appears to Mackintosh as "extraordinarily romantic," but in the present he is less attractive:

He was a little man, considerably less than of middle height, and enormously stout; he had a large, fleshy face, clean-shaven, with the cheeks hanging on each side in great dew-laps, and three vast chins; his small features were all dissolved in fat; and, but for a crescent of white hair at the back of his head, he was
completely bald. He reminded you of Mr. Pickwick. He was grotesque, a figure of fun, and yet, strangely enough, not without dignity. (6)

The comparison with Mr. Pickwick places Walker here in the middle of the nineteenth century, while his obesity, as in all Maugham's stories, seems to be a trope indicating a giving in to appetite, an absence of somatic control. Captain Butler's story in "Honolulu" is similarly romantic, at least until its ironic denouement, but again the Captain himself is described as "a commonplace little man" (233) by the narrator in the narrative present:

And yet Butler was the last man in the world with whom you would have associated romance, and it was hard to see what there was in him to arouse love. In the clothes he wore now he looked podgier than ever, and his round spectacles gave his round face the look of prim cherub. He suggested rather a curate who had gone to the dogs. (210-211)

Having all gone to the dogs, the rivals in the triangles of The Trembling of a Leaf provide no great threat to the narrator/focalizer's construction of a masculinity based upon repression. Placed back in the past, they find their mastery over the colonized landscape vicariously celebrated while they themselves become objects against which the subject of modernity defines himself.

The textual police action in Maugham's short stories,
confining homoeroticism and the possibility of difference to the closet of the past is not, however, wholly successful. The texts of *The Trembling of a Leaf* teem with characters who do not conform to the arbitrary binarism of colonizer and colonized. At the quay in Tahiti, Bateman Hunter is greeted by "a youth," who leads him to the Hotel de la Fleur. After a brief conversation, Bateman notes that the young man's English has "something in it of the intonation of a foreign tongue," and then, "with a sidelong glance, saw, what he had not noticed before, that there was in him a good deal of native blood" (73). Ethel in "The Pool" can masquerade as both pure native and Spaniard, while Horn, the innkeeper in "Rain," is similarly protean:

As a rule he wore shabby ducks, but now he was barefoot and wore only the lava-lava of the natives. He looked suddenly savage, and Dr. Macphail, getting out of bed, saw that he was heavily tattooed. (290)

Chinese characters also have a similar semiotic slipperiness: the ugly Chinese cook in "Honolulu" has, it transpires, been hired because Butler's previous "'girl ran away with the Chinese cook last year'" (233). "'There's something about a Chink,'" Winter remarks to the Maugham narrator, "'when he lays himself out to please a woman she can't resist him'" (233). If Eurasians disturb the stories' economy of race, Chinese men seem equally unsettling to their constructions of British and North American
masculinity. Finally, Sadie Thompson's presence as a white woman yet also as a "flaunting quean" (294), breaking the bounds of sexual propriety, adds another troubling element which blurs the clarity of the text's binarisms of gender, class, and race. The narrators and focalizers of Maugham's stories in The Trembling of a Leaf are thus caught in an endless reinscription of the borders of difference: this is their work, man's work, and it is never done.

2. Reading "Red".

The homoeroticism of the gaze of Neilson, the narrator of the embedded narrative in "Red" has attracted the notice of several critics. Robert Calder uses the story to argue that more attention should be paid to homoerotic elements in Maugham's works:

Maugham's work, then, may contain more traces of his homosexuality than are recognized by the average reader. Consider, for example, "Red," the story of a young man who falls in love with a beautiful girl but who is shanghaied before they can be married. (Calder, Willie 238)

A lengthy quote of the most homoerotic passage of "Red" follows; Calder then moves on, without analysis, to his next example. Ted Morgan adopts a similar tactic. Setting Maugham's description of Red beside Melville's description of Harry Bolton in Redburn (1849), which Maugham himself
quotes as evidence of Melville's homosexuality, Morgan comments that "[i]f lingering over the hermaphroditic desirability of young men was a proof of homosexuality, Maugham could certainly match Melville" (42). Morgan's discussion of the social pressures upon Maugham's self-conception as a homosexual are more sensitive than Calder's, but his analysis also stops with the detection of homoeroticism. Neither critic acknowledges that the homoerotic gaze in "Red" is connected with the manner of narration, and neither suggests that its presence may be imbricated with the constructions of heterosexual masculinity and race which structure the short story. The homoeroticism of "Red," I wish to argue, is a sign that the work of making and reinscribing masculinity is occurring in the text of Maugham's short story.

"Red" is perhaps one of the more derivative of the short stories in The Trembling of a Leaf. The frame narrative, in which the captain of a ship visits Neilson's island, is very Conradian. The motif of waiting out the night outside the harbour, indeed, seems taken directly from "A Smile of Fortune" (1912). The embedded narrative, describing the American sailor's love affair with, and leaving of, a native woman, is also a common trope; in its sentimentalization of the woman's grief it is closer to Giacomo Puccini's Madam Butterfly (1907) than to the presentations of the same motif in Conrad's Lord Jim (1900) or Loti's Madame Chrysanthemum (1887). Neilson, Swedish,
solitude-loving narrator of the embedded narrative, has many affinities to Heyst in Conrad's *Victory* (1915).

The structure of the short story conforms very precisely to the pattern common to all the stories in *The Trembling of a Leaf* outlined above. In the embedded narrative, a situation very much like that of *The Moon and Sixpence* holds. The landscape of the island at which Red arrives is like "the Garden of Eden" (121), the sea around it "like the sea of Homeric Greece" (123). The temporal space of the island is thus one of mythological time, and it is denied coevalness with the linear time of the West; there, Neilson muses, "one might fancy that the sun stands still as it stood when Joshua prayed to the God of Israel" (121). After the initial disruption of Red's arrival, the passage of time on the island is, just like the passage of time at Strickland's hut, expressed through the iterative "would":

> Often natives would come in and tell long stories of the old days when the island was disturbed by tribal wars. Sometimes he would go fishing on the reef, and bring back a basket full of coloured fish. Sometimes at night he would go out with a lantern to catch lobster. There were plantains round the hut and Sally would roast them for their frugal meal. (123)

The culture of the island is marked by a hunter-gatherer economy, and by orality, two features which suggest its
distance from a West defined by the arrival of trading ships and the books in Neilson's library.

Within the Girardian triangle of the embedded narrative, the land is represented by a native woman whom Red, like an explorer of first contact, mapping out a landscape, gives an English name. "'The girl had a native name,'" Neilson comments in his narration, "'but Red called her Sally'" (122-123). Neilson's elaborate descriptions make a clear connection between Sally and the landscape which she inhabits:

She had the passionate grace of the hibiscus and the rich colour. She was rather tall, slim, with the delicate features of her race, and large eyes like pools of still water under the palm trees; her hair, black and curling, fell down her back, and she wore a wreath of scented flowers. Her hands were lovely. They were so small, so exquisitely formed, they gave your heart-strings a wrench. (120)

Neilson, as narrator, watches and comments upon his protagonist's arrival on the island, and Red's possession of the landscape through his relationship with Sally. Red is clearly a rival and precursor of Neilson. The American sailor is "invited . . . to enter" (119) the "native hut" by Sally (a invitation the significance of which is clearly expressed in an extraordinary "come hither" illustration accompanying the story's original publication in Asia
magazine); Neilson, in contrast, later finds Sally only gives him "what she set no store on" (132). Red lives in a native hut, Neilson in a "European house" (132), which is "more convenient" (132), but which also implies his distance from the landscape.

Unlike The Moon and Sixpence, however, the Girardian triangle of the embedded narrative of "Red" is elaborately framed, both externally, by an anti-romantic frame narrative, and internally by Neilson's frequent comments upon his own process of narration. In Sedgwick's triangles homoeroticism is suppressed through male homosexual panic; in "Red" it is openly expressed but subject to other strategies of containment. Before he begins to recount his narrative to the skipper whose identity neither he himself, nor the readers of the story, yet know, the text authorizes his narration by stressing his class background and education:

Neilson knew the skipper had not an idea what he meant, and he looked at him with an ironical twinkle in his dark eyes. Perhaps just because the skipper was so gross and dull a man the whim seized him to talk further. (113)

Despite the fact that Neilson is said to speak "English with a slight accent" (110), it is the "skipper" whose speech is represented as non-standard, an amalgam of Americanisms and stage Cockney, while the Swede's locution at all times remains standard:

"You ain't drinking nothin'," he said, reaching
for the whisky.

"I am of sober habit," smiled the Swede. "I intoxicate myself in ways which I fancy are more subtle. But perhaps that is only vanity. Anyhow, the effects are more lasting and the results less deleterious." (115)

Even Neilson's flights of romantic diction--"'[h]ere love tarried for a moment like a migrant bird that happens on a ship in mid-ocean and for a little while folds its tired wings'" (115)--have their parallels in the purple descriptions of the narrator of the frame narrative. The coconut trees that the skipper sees on disembarking from his ship's boat are "like a ballet of spinsters, elderly but flippant, standing in affected attitudes with the simpering graces of a bygone age" (109). Clearly, within both narratives, it is an educated, detached, consciously textual voice that is privileged. The near identity of Neilson's voice with that of the narrator of the frame narrative serves to authorize the Swede's own narration.

Comments by Neilson such as "'I wish I could make myself clear . . . . Though I cannot imagine that if I did you would understand'" (115-116) pepper his narrative. They exemplify his stress upon rational comprehension as a basis for colonizing activity and for his own conception of masculinity. Unlike Red, who upon arrival knows "'scarcely two words of the native tongue'" (119), and then proceeds to pick it up without apparent effort, Neilson applies a disciplined approach to the learning of Samoan:
He had a gift for languages and an energetic mind, accustomed to work, and he had already given much time to the study of the local tongue. Old habit was strong in him and he was gathering together material for a paper on the Samoan speech. (129-130)

Neilson's self-constitution through discipline and repression provide him with a means of distancing himself from both the Red of his romantic narrative and the skipper of the frame narrative, two characters who, in the story's denouement, turn out to be the same individual.

Neilson gains distance by turning a rationalizing gaze upon the American sailor in both the frame and embedded narratives. In the embedded narrative, he makes the American sailor part of the landscape, "a happy accident of nature" (119); like the South Pacific and its inhabitants, he is denied coevalness with Neilson. Red "'was made like a Greek god,'" Neison remarks, and the island "took the northern strength from him as Delilah took the Nazarite's" (119). Red's body becomes feminized under Neilson's gaze, taking on a "softness of fibre":

"[H]e was made like a Greek god, broad in the shoulders and thin in the flanks; he was like Apollo, with just that soft roundness which Praxiteles gave him, and that suave, feminine grace which has in it something troubling, and mysterious. His skin was dazzling, white, milky, like satin; his skin was like a woman's
And his face was just as beautiful as his body. He had large blue eyes, very dark, so that some say they were black, and unlike most red-haired people he had dark eyebrows and long dark lashes. His features were perfectly regular and his mouth was like a scarlet wound.

(118-9)

Much of Neilson's metaphorical and metonymic representation of Red in the above passage parallels his description of Sally: her beauty, too, is compared to that of a museum exhibit--"the Psyche in the museum at Naples" (130). Red's feminine softness gives Neilson a justification to look; lest anyone else might consider his gaze symptomatic of a "queer fellow" (111), he is quick to remark that "'I've talked to quite a number of people who knew him in those days, white men, and they all agree . . . his beauty just took your breath away" (118).

Neilson's hasty invocation of racial and gender privilege, an appeal to the collective rationality of "white men" that also, in its second-person address, pulls in the implied reader, hints that his scoping of Red may be more than a simple matter of feminization. His description of Red, in fact, is an attempt to cover over a major fault-line in the series of oppositions which structure the short story. Opening up Red for his gaze, making him penetrable ("his mouth like a scarlet wound"), Neilson is indulging in the sexual colonialism that Weeks, we have seen, identifies
as a common theme in early twentieth-century male homosexual writing. Neilson's narration works to diminish his own bodily presence, reducing himself to an objective seeing eye, and indeed he is so committed to his role as narrator, as a producer of textual evidence, that he ignores the skipper's interruption. Yet if Red is, following the schema Weeks has introduced, one of sexuality's colonized, made equivalent here with the South Pacific landscape and feminized racial Others, he still remains, in a real sense, a colonizer. Even as the text marks off Red as Other, it also accepts him as part of Self: the whiteness of his skin, for instance, is repeatedly emphasized. The two contradictory imperatives of Neilson's narration are neatly expressed in Red's eyes, which manage to be both blue\(^2\) (an important marker of racial difference in Maugham's writings) and black, like Sally's, at the same time, "large blue eyes, very dark, so that some say they were black" (118).

Neilson's embedded narrative thus suggests Red's affinities with characters who straddle the East/West, modern/premodern binarism, with the white women, Eurasians and Chinese who are usually, in Maugham's fiction, confined to the margins of a larger narrative. If Red has taken possession of the land, the land has also taken possession of him, captured him "'like a fly in a spider's web'" (119). Neilson's comment that "'these green hills, with their soft airs, this blue sea, took the northern strength from him as Delilah took the Nazarite's'" (119) seems, like Mackintosh's
reaction to the native "chiefess," to indicate a certain fear of the transformative, not to say depilatory, possibilities of the feminine. Burton's Sotadic Zone, we noted in the introduction, is primarily climatic, not racial in nature. Red's softness and languor, his melting passively into the landscape, hints at a construction of male homosexuality as displaced femininity common in the late nineteenth century.

If Red's semiotic vagrancy floods through the embedded narrative, however, there is still one bulkhead of significance left; the frame narrative. In the frame narrative the third-person narrator stresses Neilson's distance from the objects of his gaze. The Swede is described only briefly, in such a manner as to dismiss his bodily presence, "a man no longer young, with a small beard, now somewhat grey, and a thin face" (110). The skipper, in contrast, is subject to detailed examination:

He was a tall man, more than six feet high, and very stout. His face was red and blotchy, with a network of little purple veins on the cheeks, and his eyes were sunk into its fatness. His eyes were bloodshot. His neck was buried in rolls of fat. But for a fringe of long curly hair, nearly white, at the back of his head, he was quite bald, and that immense, shiny surface of a forehead, which might have given him a false look of intelligence, on the contrary gave him one of peculiar imbecility. (112-3)
This is, the tone of the narration suggests, what one gets if one lets oneself go. Neilson is quite explicit in his use of the skipper in contrast to the youthful Red of the embedded narrative:

There was in his gross obesity something extraordinarily repellent. He had the plethoric self-satisfaction of the very fat. It was an outrage. It set Neilson's nerves on edge. But the contrast between the man before him and the man he had in mind was pleasant. (117)

Neilson's disgust seems here to arise from the fact that the skipper is satisfied with his romantic, unrepressed life: his comfort comes from the fact that he, as focalizer, is able to construct a narrative that hinges upon a clear division between past and present. Homoeroticism thus becomes textualized, consigned to the past and to a narrating gaze that will forever remain unanswered. In the present, in contrast, homosociality is marked by mutual repulsion.

His desire immured within the closet of the past, Neilson can even afford to flirt with the skipper—"Perhaps I knew you in some past existence. Perhaps, perhaps you were the master of a galley in ancient Rome and I was a slave at the oar!" (117). There is, despite Neilson's playful slumming, never any doubt as to who is on top now. The past is past, and it is Neilson's rationality, his ability to absent himself somatically from the scene of narration, that
enables him to keep his distance. This is perhaps why the revelation in the denouement of the short story of the identity of the skipper and Red is hardly surprising; for Neilson it is merely the confirmation of the death of romance. At the end of "Red," the South Seas are exhausted of romantic possibility: men's work has become not movement, but narration, a retelling of stories to apportion meaning. Neilson's last act is to remove himself completely from the picture: he announces his return to Europe.
On May 4, 1919, Chinese students in Beijing held a demonstration against the cession of Shandong to Japan in the Treaty of Versailles. The incident gave its name to a movement of cultural innovation that spread across China. Hu Shi popularised writing in vernacular, rather than Classical Chinese, while Ding Ling, Lu Xun and other authors produced the most innovative Chinese writing of the century. Ba Jin was later to write a thinly-fictionalized account of the effects of the May Fourth Movement journals in remote Sichuan:

When the local paper reprinted articles from the New Youth and Weekly Review magazines, he hurried to the only bookstore in town that was selling these journals, and bought the latest issue of the first, and two or three issues of the second. Their words were like sparks, setting off a conflagration in the brothers' hearts. Aroused by the fresh approach and the ardent phrases, the brothers found themselves in complete agreement with the writers' sentiments. (42)

Through the May Fourth Movement China abruptly entered modernity; for the next few years the country seethed with an intellectual and artistic debate that still resonates today.
In the autumn of 1919, Maugham visited China with Gerald Haxton. He spent some four months there, returning to Hong Kong on January 12, 1920; three years later he published a re-ordered and edited version of the notebook he kept in China, "notes of the people and places that excited my interest" (xi), as *On a Chinese Screen* (1922). Maugham's travel narrative, unlike the other texts in this study, is presented by its author as non-fiction, and is not bound together by the imperatives of a single or multiple linear narratives. Rather, the text indulges in a cutting up of China into representative metonyms (antiques, decaying buildings, representative types of colonizers and colonized), presenting itself as having affinities with the sketchbook or photo album, and thus self-consciously allying itself with tourist memorabilia.

A reading of Maugham's travel narrative first necessitates a brief survey of Europe's tropological representation of China, and a discussion of how, as in the case of British representations of South Pacific, such troping is constitutive of modern subjectivity. Such a discussion leads into an analysis of the structure of *On a Chinese Screen*, and of how Maugham's representation of the writing process through a series of visual metaphors results in a disavowal of China's modernity. I am interested here in how Maugham's acceptance of Western tropings of China enables him to satirise European expatriates in the Orient while simultaneously preserving the epistemological divisions of the discourse that justifies their presence.
Specularity, we have seen in *The Moon and Sixpence* and the Malayan and South Pacific stories, implies an observer. In discussing the peculiar mobility of *On a Chinese Screen*’s narrational voice, I have found it useful to introduce that creature of nineteenth-century urban perambulation, the *flâneur*. The arcade, the *flâneur*’s haunt, wedged between the interior and exterior, public and private, is in Maugham’s text replaced by the similarly marginal spaces of the foreign concession, legation quarter, or mission. Like the *flâneur*, Maugham’s narrator is simultaneously an outcast and an agent of the apparatuses of surveillance, Baudelaire’s "prince incognito" (Chambers 144), in one sense outside both the means of production and reproduction, in another wholly dependent upon both.¹ Occupying a space between the modern and the pre-modern, he looks nostalgically back while his peregrinations take him relentlessly forward, through his topographical and narrational perversities, to an association with another great constructed subject of the nineteenth century, the homosexual.

1. Envisioning China

China, more even than the South Pacific, has provided European culture with one of its most complex images of alterity. From the time of Mandeville or Marco Polo until the beginning of the nineteenth century, China was largely idealized by Europeans as a kingdom obeying natural laws.
For Mandeville, the Great Khan rules over "the race of Ham" (146):

This Emperor and the people of that land, though they are not Christians, nevertheless believe in the Mighty God who made the heavens and the earth. (149)

China thus confirms biblical order; the Chinese live in an immediately postdiluvian world, practising natural religion after the manner of the Israelites of the Old Testament. As with the South Pacific, changing political and philosophical realities in Europe resulted in changing constructions of China. Louis XIV saw China as representative of the best of enlightened despotism, while Voltaire took the country's political system as evidence of Enlightenment beliefs in the natural virtue of human beings.

In the nineteenth century, with growing Western, primarily British, commercial and then military activity in East Asia, constructions of China became increasingly negative. As with the South Pacific, the process of imagining China as dystopia paradoxically made use of tropes that had previously had utopian connotations. China's allochrony, long considered favourably in that it placed the country within biblical time, was viewed less positively in progressivist nineteenth century philosophy. Hegel's denial of China's coevalness also denied it the possibility of modernisation:

China and India lie, as it were, still outside the World's History, as the mere presupposition
of elements whose combination must be waited for to constitute their vital progress. (116)

A similar construction of China informs Marx's writings: China may only be brought forth from its "barbarous and hermetic isolation from the civilized world" ("Revolution . . ." 94) by Western agency through which the "advanced races" will bring about "the annihilation of old Asiatic society" ("The Future Results . . ." 217). Marx maintained this view of China while at the same time sharply criticising the treaty of Nanjing and the other unequal treaties between China and the Western powers in the nineteenth century, an example of the power of forgetting present in every discourse, the power to naturalize and harmonize conceptions that, retrospectively, seem sharply contradictory.

In the early twentieth century ambivalent constructions of China were again current. China might be viewed through lenses similar to Marx's as backward, recalcitrant, and in want of tutelage; it was often thus presented in missionary literature. Yet China's premodernity might also be idealised by those writing in opposition to Fordism, Taylorism, and the perceived impersonality of industrialised European society. The rhythm of nature and closeness to the land are the thematic core of Pearl Buck's *The Good Earth* (1931), the biblical quality of Buck's prose removing China from any possibility of coevalness with the West. The later volumes of Buck's *House of Earth* trilogy do describe contemporary
Chinese urban life and the experience of students abroad, but they emphasize circularity, and a return to the earth. The only Western author to portray China's modernity positively was perhaps André Malraux, writing from an explicitly revolutionary perspective.

A more detailed exemplification of the protean nature of Western constructions of China can be found in Western theories regarding Chinese characters. For William Warburton, in the middle of the eighteenth century, they formed part of "the general history of Writing, by a gradual and easy descent, from a PICTURE to a LETTER:"

[F]or Chinese marks which participate of Egyptian hieroglyphics on the one hand, and of alphabetic letters on the other . . . are on the very border of letters; an ALPHABET invented to express sounds instead of things being only a compendium of that large volume of arbitrary marks. (131)

Warburton does place Chinese characters in a different category to the Western alphabet, but his metaphor is territorial; there is no evaluation here of the relative merits of different methods of writing. Hegel, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, was more judgemental:

The Chinese . . . do not mature the modification of sounds in their language to distinct articulations capable of being represented by letters and syllables. (135)
The rhetoric here is much more clearly progressivist: China's system of writing shows that the nation still remains in the infancy of humankind.

With the advent of Modernism, Chinese characters received a further elaboration through Ezra Pound's publication of Ernest Fenollosa's "The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry" (1920). Fenollosa still stresses the allochrony of China, its civilization "parallel to that of the ancient Mediterranean peoples" (137). Yet he deploys this construction of China to suggest that the Chinese writing system is purer, more essential, than the corrupt alphabet of the industrialized West:

One of the most interesting facts about the Chinese language is that in it we can see, not only the forms of sentences, but literally the parts of speech growing up, budding forth from one another. Like nature, the Chinese words are alive and plastic, because thing and action are not formally separated. The Chinese language knows no grammar. It is only lately that foreigners, European and Japanese, have begun to torture this vital speech by forcing it to fit the bed of their definitions. (145)

Chinese characters are here again presented positively, yet Fenollosa's approval is contingent upon China's antiquity. Pound would make Confucius' Analects the moral centre of the Cantos, using the premodern to critique the modern; one of
the most prominent modernist poets of the century was thus blind to China's own modernity.

All three examples above, although produced in very different situations of writing, and although arriving at very different conclusions regarding the merits of Chinese written characters, nonetheless share the same discursive assumption: China occupies a temporal space antecedent to that of the West. In all three works, a lengthy discussion of China's characteristics serves to amplify or illustrate a thesis which is ultimately concerned with the nature of the West: Warburton's Mosaic Law, Hegel's triumph of the Spirit in History, Pound's (since the poet was responsible for the editing, annotation, and publication of Fenollosa's manuscript) reformation of Western poetical practice. China's significance in these texts, ultimately, seems to lie in the manner in which it reflects the West.

2. On a Chinese Screen as Photograph Album

On a Chinese Screen is, paradoxically, a travel book without a journey. Contemporary European travel writing about China, as the titles of E.J. Dingle's Across China on Foot (1911), or Langdon Warner's The Long Old Road In China (1927) might suggest, frequently stressed linear journeys into the hinterland, followed by a return to the metropolis. A similar structure underpins two later, more widely read accounts: Edgar Snow's Red Star Over China (1937), and W.H.
Auden and Christopher Isherwood's *Journey to a War* (1938). Maugham's other Asian travel narrative, *The Gentleman in the Parlour* (1930), also follows this format, recounting a journey from Rangoon to Hong Kong by way of Bangkok and Hanoi, urban oases interspersed with much toiling away in the jungles of the Shan States. *The Gentleman in the Parlour* is, in fact, a testimony to the power of travel as narrative; it is a literary compost heap, containing much discarded or previously published material written long before Maugham embarked upon his Indochinese travels, yet it still maintains narrative coherence. *On a Chinese Screen* is different. It is a series of fifty-eight vignettes of China that Maugham claims he managed to arrange "into some sort of order" (xii), but which he did not "elaborate" into a narrative. Manuscript evidence bears this out: sections have been rearranged, and placed in a different order, but there is little substantial rewriting (Wing 126).

Rather than representing itself as a diary, or a chronological record of a journey, *On a Chinese Screen* is constituted through visual metaphors. The text's title is a visual metaphor, and the preface introduces the work as making "a lively picture," giving an "impression" (xii) of the East. Maugham's text thus seems less a guide, but closer to other forms of tourist memorabilia, such as the photograph album or sketch book. Like a photograph album, it cuts China up into a series of representative metonyms; the narrator's actual geographical location does not matter.
Section LVII, "A City Built on a Rock," describes Chongqing in Sichuan, but the city is not mentioned by name. Rather, it represents the whole of China, each street demonstrating "what a street looked like in medieval England" (223), filled with "seething throngs" (226) of humanity. Even a specified location, such as the Great Wall or the Temple of Heaven, seems chosen as a metonym for China as a whole, standing for the country's unchanging nature (Section VII, "The Altar of Heaven"), or impenetrable mysteries (Section XXIX, "Arabesque"), rather than constituting a description of a particular locale.

Tourist photographs of landscapes, however, are not very interesting to look at. On a Chinese Screen also contains close-ups, individual portraits, such as the old woman in "A Libation to the Gods," or a young Chinese man in "The Stripling." The title of Maugham's text, On a Chinese Screen, should alert us to another process: something is being projected upon, superimposed upon, the surface of China. Just as our own holiday photographs of Hongkong, London or New York never seem complete unless we ourselves are there, sitting on a park bench beneath Big Ben, or on a rickshaw outside the Star Ferry, so Maugham's narrator insistently pushes Europeans and Americans into the picture. There are individual portraits of representative types again: the British consul (47-49), the expatriate woman on a last "fishing trip" (52-53), various missionaries, all of whom are held up against the background of China. Yet there
are also Westerners who sneak into the foreground of a portrait, such as "Willard B. Untermeyer, [who] wrote his name in a fine bold hand and the town and state he came from, Hastings, Nebraska" (24) on the steps of the Altar of Heaven. Finally, more insidiously, but also far more frequently, the narrator calls upon the narratee to enter the picture through his use of the second person. "You pass through the city gates," he writes in Section IX, "The Inn," and then "you pass through a double hedge of serried curious people" (30).

Such juxtaposition of tourist and toured in the same representational frame highlights a contrast between the modern West and pre-modern China. Indeed, according to Dean MacCannell, the underlying rhetoric of tourism is to contrast modern and pre-modern in such a manner as to confirm modernity:

[T]he best indication of the final victory of modernity over other sociocultural arrangements is not the disappearance of the nonmodern world, but its artificial preservation and reconstruction in modern society. The separation of nonmodern culture traits from their original contexts and their distribution as modern playthings are evident in the various social movements toward naturalism, so much a feature of modern societies: . . . efforts, in short, to museumize the premodern. . . . These displaced forms, embedded in modern society, are the spoils of the victory
of the modern over the nonmodern world. They establish in consciousness the definition and boundary of modernity by rendering concrete and immediate that which modernity is not. (9)

We should be skeptical here of MacCannell's seemingly determinist rhetoric of modernization, and his positing of a global, undifferentiated experience of modernity. At the time when On a Chinese Screen was written, both Britain and China, in very different ways, were spaces undergoing the process of modernization. Yet MacCannell's fundamental point here does clarify Maugham's text: China is made pre-modern in On a Chinese Screen in order to establish Britain's own modernity. Modern China is disavowed. The "Professor of Comparative Modern Literature" in Section XLVIII, "A Student of the Drama," is subject to the narrator's ridicule because of his enthusiasm for Ibsen and lack of appreciation of Zhuang Zi. As Steven Soong has pointed out, his father, T. V. Soong, Maugham's "student of the drama" was, in fact, an intellectual participating in May Fourth Movement modernization. In contrast, In an earlier section, the narrator is favourably disposed towards the "philosopher" (137) Ku Hung-ming. Ku Hung-ming was "a reactionary in the process of China's modernization" (Soong 90), and would not have been considered a philosopher by many Chinese. The narrator's valorization of China's premodern aspects, and his disavowal of China's modernity seems quite clearly here related to MacCannell's concept of establishing the boundary of modernity.
Unlike MacCannell's examples of tourist guides, and unlike most other texts in the Western tradition of denying China's coevalness described in the first section of this chapter, On a Chinese Screen is not held together by a rhetorical or a narrative structure. Its conclusions regarding China's allochrony are made in a slightly different way. Again, the analogy of the photograph album or postcard collection is useful here. In a recent article, Naomi Schor analyzes the representation of Paris in her collection of belle époque postcards. Postcards, for Schor, are part of a system of "lighter forms of social control than the tentacular and invasive disciplines" (193) of the Foucaultian prison, school and asylum. Parisian postcards of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries "produced an iconography that was abundant, systematic, and cheap," a mode of representation that "offered its citizens (and proffered to the world) a representation of itself that served to legitimate in a euphoric mode its nationalistic and imperialistic ambitions" (195). Yet this iconography is markedly different, Schor notes, from that of the Paris-Guide or of the Baedeker. The representation of Paris, like the representation of China in Maugham's text, does not rely upon narrative but is structured on different principles:

[What matters in the case of my postcard collection is not the contiguity between an individual card and the environment from which it was detached; rather, it is the contiguity
I restore between a single card and its immediate predecessor and follower in a series I am attempting to reconstitute, or the contiguity I create between cards linked by some common theme. The metonymy of origin is displaced here by a secondary metonymy, the artificial metonymy of the collection. (199-200)

The cards in Schor's collection thus require rearrangement on the part of the collector/reader, just as Maugham's scenes of China require the reader to "make some use of his imagination" (xii) to restore a contiguity of representation.

2. Mediation and Narrational Authority

Superficially, then, Maugham's text seems to allow its readers more flexibility than Schor's collection allows the collector. China is, we have seen, not differentiated spatially: it is not cut up into arrondissements, as Schor's Paris is. Nor is there a temporal progression in the narrative, only the repetition of day upon undifferentiated day of travel. The sequence of sections describing the narrator's process of travel--"The Inn," "The Picture" (which describes a painting found on the walls of an inn room), "Dawn," "Rain," "The Sights of the Town," and "Nightfall"--reflects the cyclical time of China, the actions of the same day repeated in the next. Yet the
sequence could plausibly be rearranged without major disruption of its signifying function. No Girardian triangles exist in the text; indeed, only two of the sections, "The Taipan" and "The Consul," could plausibly be called short stories. Nor do we find any intimacy between the narrator and his characters which, as in The Moon and Sixpence, might authorise his narration. Yet Maugham's work clearly does channel the reader's gaze; though partaking of Schor's "lighter forms of social control" it is no less successful in reproducing an ideological construction than Maugham's novels and short stories. How, we might ask, is the reader's gaze channelled in a text that initially seems so loosely constructed? And how does the narrator, in the absence of a triangular narrative, authorize his narration?

The answers to these questions make themselves apparent, I think, through a close examination of the process of narration within the individual sections that make up On a Chinese Screen. The contrast between pre-modern China and the modern West which results, we have seen, in a disavowal of China's modernity, is not unmediated. Almost every contact between China and the West is, on the contrary, mediated by the narrator's interlocution. In On a Chinese Screen, the Chinese and Europeans who are the subjects of Maugham's portraits never meet upon equal terms. Locales in which this might happen--commercial and industrial enterprises, the higher echelons of local government, or the putatively national government in
Beijing—are scrupulously avoided. The narrator himself controls intercourse between the two worlds. He interviews representative types on both sides of his modern/premodern binarism, critiquing Europeans for their lack of understanding of China, and then applying the same caustic irony to the Chinese. "My Lady's Parlour" describes the redecoration of an old temple by an English expatriate, until it "doesn't look like a room in London, . . . but it might quite well be a room in some nice place in England, Cheltenham, say, or Tunbridge Wells" (6). "Henderson" is a character portrait of a man who has arrived in China with socialist convictions, refusing initially to take a rickshaw since "[i]t revolted his sense of personal dignity that a man, a human being no different from himself, should drag him hither and thither" (57). At the time of the narrator's visit, however, Henderson has absorbed the values of his local community to such a degree that he gives his rickshaw boy "a smart kick on the bottom" when he misses a turning (59).

A central premise of the narrator's irony in "Henderson" and "My Lady's Parlour" is that he, through his power of observation, portrays China with a veracity inaccessible to China's expatriate inhabitants. Even the eponymous "Sinologue," who, the narrator informs the reader, "knows more Chinese than any man in China" (214) has touched reality "only through the printed page" (215). It is only the narrator himself who can deliver a "truthful" picture
Chinese sources, in turn, may provide the material to be represented, but cannot represent themselves without the narrator's intervention. China moves, we have seen, in cyclical, mythological time. The young man in "The Stripling" walks out from his village like "Dick Whittington, setting out to win fame and fortune" (113), while the old man pulling his pig in "Metempsychosis" is bound up within an endless series of births and deaths. The significance of China is only revealed by the narrator's use of comparisons or annotations. "The Cabinet Minister" shows exquisite taste in Chinese paintings and calligraphy, but the narrator finds his comments "charming . . . [because] I knew all the time that he was a rascal. Corrupt, inefficient, and unscrupulous, he let nothing stand in his way" (16). Even the narrator's enthusiastic endorsement of Ku Hung-ming in "The Philosopher," is predicated upon a display of his own skills in mediation. The narrator alone succeeds in gaining an interview with Ku through an observance of etiquette, after his expatriate host, sending out "'a chit,'" fails.

The narrator of On a Chinese Screen, then, exerts control over the discourse through a fantasy of managed marginalization. He exists upon the border between two clearly demarcated areas of signification; like Larry Darrell or Kipling's Kim, he controls intercourse between them, gaining authority both from his "orientalised" qualities, which are acquired through his intimate knowledge
of the East, and from his lifeline back to the master plot of Western history. He can implicitly criticise the "student of the drama" for not being Chinese enough, and has sufficient discursive freedom to engage in some deft reversal of orientalist stereotypes (the opium den is homely, and there is "in the despotic East . . . an equality so much greater than in the free and democratic West" [132]). He can apply withering irony to colonialists who remain unchanged by China--the skipper of a Yangtze boat who persists in telling the narrator "'I'm not a working man. Hang it all, I was at Harrow'" (155). Yet such irony leaves the fundamental division between premodern China and modern England firmly in place.

The narrator's mediation is made visible by one marked feature: its nostalgia. China reminds him of a rural Europe, a Europe persistently associated with his youth. The plain of Sichuan is transformed, through nostalgic narration, into the Rhine valley:

I came upon it. But it was no Chinese landscape that I saw, with its padi fields, its memorial arches and its fantastic temples, with its farmhouses set in a bamboo grove, and its wayside inns where under the banyan trees coolies may rest them of their weary loads; it was the valley of the Rhine, the broad plain all golden in the sunset, the valley of the Rhine with its river . . . ; it was the great plain upon which my young eyes rested, when, a student in Heidelberg, after
walking long among the fir-clad hills above the old city, I came out upon a clearing. (174)
The Chinese landscape here becomes suffused with nostalgia; although the narrator claims that he does not see Sichuan he then proceeds to describe it in as much detail as he devotes to the Rhine valley, thus firmly establishing the comparison. Like the narrator of Tintern Abbey, Maugham's narrator looks nostalgically back to a childhood he cannot reach. "[T]he road turns and my God, the bamboos, the Chinese bamboos, transformed by some magic of the mist, look just like the hops of a Kentish field" (62). In "the squalid discomfort of a Chinese inn" (93) a "dish of burning charcoal" reminds the narrator of the fire in his "pleasant room in London," and brings to mind memories of his skimming the pages of the Times for "advertisements of country houses you will never be able to afford" (93). From the vantage point of the modern, the narrator looks longingly back at what he constructs as pre-modern, and highlights the contrast for his narratees. His insistent, performative marginality has remarkable affinities to that of the personification of nineteenth century urban tourism, the flâneur.

3. The Return of the Flâneur

The flâneur, Jonathan Rignall notes, is a "composite and overdetermined figure" (113), representing different
things to different critics and, perhaps, in the case of Walter Benjamin, all things to a single critic. For Griselda Pollock, he is representative of the power of the male gaze, while for Elizabeth Wilson he is a personification of masculine anxiety. Ross Chambers identifies him "with members of the classes dangereuses . . ., prostitutes and saltimbanks, . . . especially suspect in the eyes of authority" (142), whereas Michael Hollington compares him to the narrator of realist fiction. Since the flâneur's position of mediation is often compared to the process of writing, it frequently becomes difficult to tell who, finally, is indulging in the most successful performance of flânerie—the object of critical inquiry or the critic. Benjamin's philosophical peregrinations and slippages from political philosophy to literary analysis mime the perambulations of the object of his inquiry, whose "leisurely appearance as a personality is his protest against the division of labour which makes people into specialists" (54)

A genealogy of flânerie is provided by Elizabeth Wilson, who discovers the earliest citation of the word in a pamphlet published in 1806 describing a typical day in the life of a flâneur named, rather appropriately, M. Bonhomme. M. Bonhomme already possesses many of the characteristics noted by Benjamin in his reading of Baudelaire. His time is defined by public clocks; he inhabits cafés and restaurants frequented by bohemian types, and he indulges in gossip.
Although he notes sexual activity, the flâneur himself is without desire; he is a solitary, curiously marginal figure, who resolves to "keep a little diary recording all the most curious things he had seen or heard during the course of his wanderings" (qtd. in Wison 95). The flâneur is differentiated by class from the urban environment at which he gazes: he is independently wealthy, and so "wholly outside production" (95).

In Paris of the Second Empire flânerie became more widespread. For Benjamin, and for critics following his analysis, the flâneur is associated with urbanization and the rise of commodity capitalism:

The flâneur, strolling the streets of nineteenth-century Paris with a cool but curious eye, is . . . a threatened species whom history is about to overtake. Still standing on the margins both of the great city and of the bourgeois class, he is yet to be overwhelmed by either. Balanced as he is on the brink of the alienating system of commodity exchange into which he will eventually be absorbed, he stands as a representative of a phase of nineteenth-century culture. (Rignall 112)

Like Maugham's narrator in On a Chinese Screen, then, the flâneur stands in a liminal zone between the modern and the premodern, loitering in the arcade in defiance of the increasing management of time in industrialised society.
Two features of the flâneur most useful in their application to Maugham's narrator are first, his sense of vision, and second, his function of mediation. Benjamin explicitly links the flâneur's gaze to those of the producers of Parisian physiologies, books of "individual sketches" which depicted "types that might be encountered by a person taking a look at the marketplace:"

From the itinerant street vendor of the boulevards to the dandy in the foyer of the opera house, there was not a figure of Paris life that was not sketched by a physiologue. (35)

In this comparison, the flâneur's gaze is much like that of the narrator in The Moon and Sixpence, emphasizing "visual penetration" (Rignall 114); the flâneur's detachment, Benjamin remarks, turns him into "an unwilling detective" (40), always reading, from an impeccably objective standpoint, the faces of members of the crowd for a significance that lies beneath. Yet, like Maugham's narrator in The Moon and Sixpence, the flâneur is also capable of "empathy" (Benjamin 41) with the objects of his vision, of showing "sympathetic projection" (Hollington 85) and thus merging into the crowd which surrounds him. He shares this split vision with many of Maugham's narrators.

The flâneur's split vision is a function of his position as a mediator placed on the border of the various binary oppositions that structure nineteenth-century Paris. He inhabits the arcade, a space which is neither interior
nor exterior, neither fully public nor fully private. He is alone and yet gregarious, his physiognomic observations separating him from the crowd just as surely as his empathy submerges him in a sea of fellow citizens. In Baudelaire's works, Ross Chambers notes in a recent article, the flâneur is simultaneously a societal outcast and "the unseen agent of princely power" (144). In Chambers' definition, the flâneur is a parasite (carrying in French the meaning of "not only the social and biological parasite but the 'noise' or 'static' in a system of information" [143]). The presence of the flâneur thus makes the process of mediation that occurs in any signifying system visible (or, to extend Chambers' metaphor, audible), clarifying the workings of a discourse that might otherwise appear natural:

[T]here is a form of power that controls those mediations in the interests of what are called stability and order (i.e. the interests of the dominant groups); and this, in essence, is the power to erase from consciousness the mediations that constitute cultural reality and indeed the very fact of mediation itself—the power, that is, to "forget" them and to cause others to forget them, so that mediated reality comes to seem natural and normal. This, then, is a power that induces amnesia. But there is also a power that consists of remembering mediation, so as to be able to make use of it for the purpose of resignifying, that is, of changing established
meanings, and, with them, the real. . . . The parasite is in effect positioned so as to be unable to forget the function of mediation. (143).

Chambers reads the flâneur's persistent nostalgia as a result of the anamnesia of the parasite; "as a kind of nostalgic historical loiterer unwilling or unable to 'keep up with the times'" (151), the flâneur "obstructs the . . . need of controlling power for historical amnesia" (151). Despite initial caution, Chambers is ultimately epiphanic regarding the flâneur's mediation, his role as an "agent of otherness in a world that seeks . . . to deny the very possibility of change" (152).

4. Flânerie in On a Chinese Screen

Maugham's narrator in On a Chinese Screen shows obvious similarities to the flâneur. The text's cutting up of China into representative metonyms seems parallel to the physiognomies that Benjamin describes. The narrator's fantasy of marginality is similar to that of the flâneur, his promenades in the treaty port, concession, or mission analogous to the flâneur's strolling through the arcades. A space such as "The Glory Hole" is liminal, halfway between Britain and China, and it is its very liminality that allows the narrator to exercise his full powers of observation:

It is a sort of little cubicle in a corner of the chandler's store just under the ceiling and
you reach it by a stair which is like a ship's companion. . . . There is everything that a foreign ship can want in an Eastern port. You can watch the Chinese, salesmen and customers, and they have a pleasantly mysterious air as though they were concerned in nefarious business. (34)

The final sentence here hints at another resemblance between Maugham's narrator and the flâneur, their participation, albeit reluctantly, in detective work. Like the flâneur, Maugham's narrator loiters, his wanderings neither absolutely purposeful nor purposeless, but conforming to no routine, and tending towards no established goal. Like Chambers' flâneur, Maugham's narrator is a parasite, independently wealthy and outside the systems of production which he assiduously describes. On a Chinese Screen is full of people working--coolies, doctors, missionaries, merchants and ship's captains--yet the narrator himself does none, only consumes food, hospitality, and finally the whole of the world set before him as material for his writing.

The mediation of the narrator, which we have already noted, makes him a parasite in Chambers' second sense, a mark of noise in the system. Yet it seems difficult to valorize his narration. Like Chambers' flâneur, the narrator of On a Chinese Screen makes great use of nostalgia, yet the nostalgia of Maugham's text seems to have more to do with amnesia than with anamnesia, with forgetting rather than with remembering. The flâneur described by Chambers stands,
as it were, at the moment of modernity, his persistent preservation of pre-modern, pre-industrial memories thus putting a small, but effective, spanner in the works of industrial capitalism. Maugham's narrator looks back from a much more secure vantage point, from a modernization already achieved. His nostalgia is not so much a remembering of the difference of the past in opposition to the tyranny of the same, as a rephrasing of the past so as to confirm the integrity of the present. The nostalgic re-presentation of pre-modern China, we have seen, thus confirms Britain's modernity. Other revivals of flânerie in the 'twenties and 'thirties seem similarly compromised. Joaquin Edwards Bello's Crillos en Paris (1933) makes use of the figure of the flâneur to contemplate questions of national authenticity and exile, yet finally escapes "into the idealized past of the old order" (Jones 146), nostalgia again synonymous with forgetting. Schor's postcards of Paris in the 1930s include one entitled "Paris en flânant," and the significance of the flâneur here seems again to be wholly nostalgic.

Chambers' vision of the flâneur is as a poststructuralist hero, engaging in a semiotic jouissance, celebrating the "general and pervasive indeterminacy of . . . discourse, its loiterly availability to interpretation bespeaking an absence of controlling subject" (150). Such a vision is a persuasive strategic re-reading, yet also ahistorical. Neither poet of Baudelaire's Paris,
nor expatriate writer of Maugham's China revel in their lack of control over their discourse. Features of narration such as nostalgia may, I have argued, be not so much an effort to make "noise" in a signifying system as an attempt to rein in semiotic waywardness. It is significant that the flâneur is very much a male role; a flâneuse, Elizabeth Wilson discovers from her perusal of Larousse, is "a kind of reclining chair, [which] ... welcomes its occupant with womanly passivity" (94). The position of the flâneur thus rehearses some of the conflicting constructions of male subjectivity outlined earlier in this thesis. It is Maugham's narrator's work to apportion meaning, to divide China and Britain, modern and premodern; from this mediating work upon the margins he gains an authority to narrate. Yet that authority is undercut by the plasticity of discourse. No sooner has the narrator drawn a line between Self and Other than he feels compelled to redraw it. There is a suspicion that the work of writing is non-productive, merely decorative, that it is not work at all. Work in the nineteenth century and into the twentieth defined manliness (McClelland 82); to become a parasite is, for Maugham's narrator, not so much an act of heroism as an act which threatens the integrity of masculine subjectivity.

The narrator of On a Chinese Screen is, in the final analysis, unable to successfully perform his act of mediation. China cannot be read:

[T]hese are as strange to you as you are to them. You have no clue to their mystery. For
their likeness to yourself in so much does not help you; it serves rather to emphasize their difference. . . . [Y]ou might as well look at a brick wall. You have nothing to go upon, you do not know the first thing about them, and your imagination is baffled. (225)

Nor, finally, can expatriates be made to signify their difference from China. Playing a game of billiards with a stranger in a Hong Kong hotel, the narrator confesses he cannot "place" his partner. During the game, the stranger asks "a very odd question" (153), inquiring whether the narrator believes in fate. Surprised, the narrator mutters a noncommittal reply:

He took his shot. He made a little break.
At the end of it, chalking his cue, he said:
"I do. I believe if things are coming to you, you can't escape them."

That was all. He said nothing more. When we had finished the game he went up to bed, and I never saw him again. I shall never know what strange emotion impelled him to put that sudden question to a stranger. (153)

Like China, Maugham's expatriates often resist being made into physiognomies, being read for meaning; the narrator loiters, but uneasily, always aware that the purpose of his mediation is to manufacture meaning, yet always conscious of how such meaning escapes him. He cannot, he confesses,
resolve the "coolies" he sees into a "pattern" as "they wend their way" away from his gaze. "Their effort oppresses you," he writes. "You are filled with a useless compassion" (69).

For Elizabeth Wilson, the flâneur is not so much a hero as a sorry figure:

[A] figure of solitude, he is never alone; and, when singled out, he vanishes. He is a figure to be deconstructed, a shifting projection of angst rather than a solid embodiment of male bourgeois power. . . . He floats with no material base, living on his wits, and, lacking the patriarchal discourse that assured him of meaning, is compelled to invent a new one. (109)

The flâneur's angst seems not merely to be connected with economic power, but with the great nineteenth-century truth of selfhood, sexuality. Flânerie, indeed, shows remarkable developmental similarities to the rise of male homosexual subcultures and homosexual identity. Both were primarily urban phenomena, and both were associated with vagrancy and prostitution (see Weeks' "Inverts, Perverts and Mary-Annes . . ."). Just as for the flâneur, life for the independently wealthy homosexual in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was full of the "ambivalence and ambiguity" of a life "within the interstices of the wider society" (Weeks Sex Politics and Society 114). The position of the flâneur may thus be precarious because of its closeness to that of the homosexual. Both flâneur and
homosexual are noise in a system of signification, and both hint at the arbitrariness of the system. The flâneur's inability to read the scene around him hints at the arbitrariness of all reading processes, hints that the realist narrator's reading of surfaces for depth is nothing more than a discursive trope. The homosexual's presence disrupts a heterosexual masculinity based upon Sedgwick's male homosexual panic, and suggests homosexuality's place as an indispensable "interior exclusion," in Diana Fuss's words, within heterosexuality.

The function of mediation performed by the narrator of On a Chinese Screen is, then, not so much an act of mediation between premodern and modern, between West and East, than between two constructions of Maugham himself. The public construction is of the witty, urbane writer in complete mastery over his material, who makes very public forays into liminal spaces while, we have seen, maintaining a lifeline back to the master discourse. The private construction is the W. Somerset Maugham who made the real journey to China with his lover Gerald Haxton. For all the narrational prestidigitation in front of the screen, there are also dimly visible shadows behind its surface, gesturing, questioning the parameters of the performance.
Maugham's novel of Hong Kong, *The Painted Veil*, was published in 1925. It was the writer's last major published work set in East Asia; in the next ten years, he would turn his attention to Malaya, the Straits Settlements, British North Borneo, Sarawak and the Dutch East Indies, a composite area which is now fixed in the popular imagination as "Maugham Country." *The Painted Veil* is unusual among Maugham's published Asian fiction in that it has a woman as both protagonist and focalizer. This feature of the narrative results in a text in which some of the most insistent questions and negotiations of gender and sexuality in Maugham's writings are suspended. It is as if the liminal zones of Hong Kong and, in Maugham's construction, the white woman's body provide a genuine, if temporary "third" place, between the binarisms of race and gender which structure Maugham's Oriental fiction, a space which the position of the flâneur in *On a Chinese Screen* fails to provide.

The difference of *The Painted Veil* requires, like that of *On a Chinese Screen*, a slightly different critical approach from the earlier and later chapters, in order to fully clarify the filiations between masculinity, sexuality, and race in the text. First, it necessitates an extension of the discussion of China and East Asia as Other to the West outlined in the previous chapter. I am particularly concerned here with the manner in which poststructuralist
criticism has valorized East Asia as a space of semiotic
dissidence, outside the insistent signification of the West.
Taking Roland Barthes' poststructuralist travelogue of
Japan, *Empire of Signs*, as a paradigmatic text, and
employing the theoretical perspective of Lee Edelman, who
suggests that male homosexuality, and in particular the
spectacle of sodomy, represents an "assault upon the logic
of social discourse" ("Seeing Things: Representation, the
Scene of Surveillance and the Spectacle of Gay Male Sex" 94)
similar to that posed by East Asia, this chapter argues that
the space of Asia provides a gay writer such as Barthes with
the possibility of textual expression of sexuality free from
the paternal law.

Applying the above theoretical construct to the text of
"The Painted Veil," we may observe that Maugham's novel
exhibits a dissolution of significance, a detachment of
signifiers from their signifieds, which parallels that of
Barthes' text. Maugham is not a proto-poststructuralist, and
indeed much of the narrational energy of "The Painted Veil"
is spent attempting to anchor meaning, to pin down
subjectivity through religious and sexual confession. Such
attempts, however, themselves become sites of semiotic
dissidence. Nevertheless, Barthes' and Maugham's texts only
achieve social critique of their respective societies by a
process dependent upon a production of Japan and China as
Other to the West. Thus, the more they attempt "a revolution
in the propriety of symbolic systems" (*Empire of Signs* 3-4),
the more evidently they are dependent upon the weariest of orientalist tropes to do so.

1. East Asia and Semiotic Dissidence

In the previous chapter, we noted the curious malleability of China as a representation of alterity in Western European and North American discourse. Mandeville's naturally Christian kingdom becomes Voltaire's Empire of Reason, and then the site of Marx's Asiatic mode of production. The protean nature of Western constructions of China continues in the twentieth century: images of Chinese heroically resisting Japanese aggression in the Second World War rapidly gave way to more negative, Cold War stereotypes in the 'fifties. Even at present, with China largely portrayed negatively after the Tiananmen Square incident of 1989, it is perhaps germane to remember that Deng Xiaoping was twice named "Man of the Year" by Time magazine in the 1980s. In a more philosophical vein, poststructuralist criticism has, following Hegel, frequently located China as exterior to the progress of Western history. Yet, as Zhang Longxi has pointed out in two excellent articles, China's "monstrous unreason and its alarming subversion of Western thinking" ("The Myth of the Other" 110) has a certain cachet in poststructuralist discourse.

For Roland Barthes, China's blankness, its disruption of the modes of signification by which the West makes
meaning, is an asset, a tool to be employed in order to
write oneself out of the purview of the paternal law:

On part pour la Chine, muni de mille questions
pressantes et, semble-t-il, naturelles: qu'en
est-il, là-bas, de la sexualité, de la femme, de
la famille, de la moralité? Qu'en est-il des
 sciences humaines, de la linguistique, de la
 psychiatrie? Nous agitons l'arbre du savoir pour
que la réponse tombe et que nous puissions
revenir pourvus de ce qui est notre principale
nourriture intellectuelle: un secret déchiffré.
Mais rien ne tombe. Et un sens, nous revenons
(hors la réponse politique) avec: rien.

(Zhao and Philip 7)

Zhang also notes the crucial function of China as a space
outside Western modes of signification within the works of
Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault. Derrida, in *Of
Grammatology*, valorizes Chinese characters as remaining
"structurally dominated by the ideogram or algebra" and thus
as reflecting "a powerful movement of civilization
developing outside of all logocentrism" (90). Foucault opens
*The Order of Things* with the description of the nonsensical
system of classification used by a Chinese encyclopedia,
apparently unaware of the fact that this encyclopedia is a
fictional creation of Jorge Luis Borges. To Zhang's examples
we might add that of Julia Kristeva, who detects in the
tonal nature of Chinese speech traces of the imaginary
order:
Chinese children begin taking part in the code of social communication that is language at a much younger age . . . than children in other cultures . . . [I]t is thus the psychocorporeal imprint of the mother that shapes tonal expression and transmits it without obliterating it, as the underlying but active stratum of communication. . . . Does the Chinese language preserve, then, thanks to its tones, a pre-Oedipal, pre-syntactic, pre-symbolic (symbol and syntax being concomitant) register?

(Of Chinese Women 55-56)

All of the above theorists, whether they stress feminism, linguistics, psychoanalysis or historiography, produce China as external to the system of signification which defines the West.

The paradigmatic text for an analysis of The Painted Veil is, paradoxically, one written of Japan, one which, like the texts described above, valorises East Asia as a space of semiotic dissidence: Roland Barthes' Empire of Signs. Barthes' 1970 text is, typically, a series of short essays regarding the author's observations during his visit to Japan, a travel book that deconstructs travel. "I am not," Barthes writes, "lovingly gazing toward an Oriental essence" (3); rather, Barthes' invention of his own Japan affords a means of entertaining "the idea of an unheard-of symbolic system, one altogether detached from our own" (3):

What can be addressed in the consideration of
the Orient, are not other symbols, another metaphysics, another wisdom (though the latter might appear thoroughly desirable); it is the possibility of a difference, of a mutation, of a revolution in the propriety of symbolic systems. (3-4)

Like China's tree of knowledge, Barthes' Japan reveals nothing: it is an empire of empty signs, in which signifiers play detached from their signifieds, in which, in contrast to Western metaphysics, "the inside no longer commands the outside" (62). Elaborate Japanese envelopes dismiss their contents into insignificance, haiku represent a suspension of language which resist "interpretation, intended in the West to pierce meaning, i.e., to get into it by breaking and entering" (72), Tokyo itself is centred around the void of the imperial palace. In the "situation of writing" (4) afforded him by Japan, Barthes searches out the "fissure of the symbolic" (4), a suspension of the signifying function of language. The Empire of Signs founds such suspension upon a remission of paternal law, of readings of meanings into surfaces. Barthes' Japanese body becomes "a pure . . . erotic project" (10), "which sustains with you a sort of babble that the perfect domination of the codes strips of all regressive, infantile character" (10). Essences of gender and sexuality dissolve--"The Oriental transvestite does not copy Woman but signifies her: not bogged down in the model, but detached from its signified" (53)--while the
regressive anality of the game *pachinko* destabilises the signifying system of capitalism:

[F]or a few yen, the player is symbolically spattered with money. Here we understand the seriousness of a game which counters the constipated parsimony of salaries, the constriction of capitalist wealth, with the voluptuous debacle of silver balls, which, all of a sudden, fill the player's hand. (29)

Barthes' text then, is a utopian project, a writerly text which produces East Asia as a space of semiotic vagrancy, in opposition to the insistent manufacture of meaning which, in Barthes' construction, characterizes the West.

2. Male Homosexuality and Semiotic Dissidence

While Barthes has been recognized as an important structuralist, and later poststructuralist critic, his work might equally plausibly be seen as a forerunner of present lesbian and gay studies. The insistent coupling of sexuality and signification is a marked feature of not only *Empire of Signs*, but other well-known Barthes texts such as *S/Z* and *A Lover's Discourse*. In articles developing a critical methodology for a lesbian and gay criticism that "need not be restricted to the examination of texts that thematize gay sexuality or dramatize homosocial desire" ("Homographesis" 202), Lee Edelman suggests that male homosexuality is also a
space of semiotic vagrancy in Western culture. Edelman's formulation shares the Foucaultian basis common to much contemporary lesbian and gay theory. Sexuality, through the rise of the modern subject, has become the truth of self, and thus sexuality is imbricated into the space of knowledge in which Western subjects apprehend their world. In his earlier article, "Homographesis," Edelman examines nineteenth-century medical and physiological writings regarding homosexuality, in which their authors would attempt to read homosexual bodies for signs of difference.

The fact that these signs are ubiquitous, Edelman argues, throws the instability of signification itself into stark relief:

[Homosexuality] comes to figure, and to be figured in terms of, subversion of the theological order through heresy, of the legitimate political order through treason, and of the social order through disturbance of codified gender roles and stereotypes. As soon as homosexuality is localized and consequently can be read within the social landscape it becomes subject to a metonymic dispersal that allows it to be read into almost anything . . . . [H]omosexuality comes to signify the potential permeability of every sexual signifier--and finally, by extension, of every signifier as such--by an "alien" signification. Once sexuality can be read and interpreted in the light of homosexuality, all sexuality is subject
Edelman further identifies homosexuality with the homograph, a word that has two separate pronunciations or discrete meanings. Like the homograph, the homosexual body can be read in two ways, and its inherent suspension of fixed meaning hints again at the arbitrary nature of signification in general.

In his more recent article, "Seeing Things: Representation, the Scene of Surveillance, and the Spectacle of Gay Male Sex" (1991), Edelman reads a variety of texts from John Cleland's Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure to Jacques Derrida's The Post Card (1987) which represent sodomy, and in which "sodomy . . . gets figured as the literalization of the 'preposterous' precisely insofar as it is interpreted as the practice of giving precedence to the posterior and thus as confounding the stability or determinacy of linguistic or erotic positioning" (104-105). The sodomite, Edelman argues, is like a moebius loop, sexually active from both before and behind, and enacting "a troubling resistance to the binary logic of before and behind, constituting himself as a single-sided surface whose front and back are never completely distinguishable " (105). Indeed, as Derrida's discovery of a postcard of Plato and Socrates in The Post Card suggests, the act of "penetration from behind" (110) is, in a sense, "behind" all of Western philosophy.

Edelman's theorizations show the concomitant nature of
signification and sexuality in Western discourse, and draw clear parallels between sexual and semiotic dissidence. They thus provide a ready contextualization of both Barthes' and Maugham's representation of East Asia as a space of semiotic dissolution. Thus in both Barthes' and Maugham's texts, we have perhaps an updated version of Burton's Sotadic Zone, a zone now not climatic but textual in nature, a space in which a dissident sexuality may be expressed, but only if the zone itself is kept permanently external to the West.

3. Reading *The Painted Veil*

Two voices are speaking:

"What's the matter?" he asked.

Notwithstanding the darkness of the shuttered room, he saw her face on a sudden distraught with terror.

"Some one just tried the door."

"Well, perhaps it was the amah, or one of the boys."

"They never come at this time. They know I always sleep after tiffin."

"Who else could it be?" (11)

The beginning of Maugham's *The Painted Veil* is a threefold dramatization of the process of attaching signified to signifier, the reading of surfaces for depth. The two characters in the opening dialogue are engaged in detective
work, trying to read significance into the turning of the
doorknob. Simultaneously, they are the objects of
surveillance of an external force which threatens to break
into the room, to expose the truth of their transgression.
Finally, the reader is made decoder, searching the text for
clues that might contextualize the scene to which she has
suddenly been made privy. The personal pronouns indicate a
man and a woman, the vocabulary an area somewhere east of
Suez. There is an atmosphere of transgression; it is
midday, in a shuttered room. As the narrative progresses,
the reader learns more about the protagonists, yet this
decoding is matched by an encrypting on another semiotic
level: Kitty and Charlie put on clothes and shoes, order
their hair, and erase traces of their liaison. On this level
of the narrative, thing are being wrapped up, not opened up
to reveal their significance. Charlie encloses Kitty's mouth
in his fingers so that she does not scream; Kitty's terror
is erased by her being enclosed in her lover's arms, in her
"abandon[ing] herself with a sigh of ecstasy to their
shelter" (15). And the significance of the doorknob's
turning remains tantalisingly unresolved, nor is it given
meaning until after it has set off an avalanche of
frustrated readings of the faces of Walter, Kitty's husband,
and the servants.

The first scene of *The Painted Veil*, then, rehearses
some of the conflicts regarding signification which are to
be performed in the body of the novel. The novel's action
wanders from London to Hong Kong to a town in China, and through several diegetic levels, yet it is centered upon Hong Kong. Hong Kong in *The Painted Veil* is a liminal space between Britain and China, a "third" space, rather like the intersection of sets in Boolean algebra, part of both worlds but belonging exclusively to neither. The novel is also centred upon a second liminal zone, the sexualized body of its protagonist and focalizer, Kitty Fane, a self-confessed "worthless and insignificant" woman (127) whose passionate breaching of colonial decorum does indeed problematize the signifying systems of colonial Hong Kong. Within these liminal zones, Maugham's novel enacts a struggle between the West's insistent making of meaning and China's refusal to signify, a process which, despite the text's insistent attempts to "encounter the social 'truth,' to participate in the proud plenitude of 'reality'" (*Empire of Signs* 30), seems to arrive only at a "central emptiness" (31). The very title of the novel hints at both an attempt to make signification, and an eventual inability to do so. Most critics and early reviewers of Maugham's novel relate the veil of the title to the colonial world of Hong Kong, the expatriate community's continual rounds of bridge, games of tennis, and dinner parties to which only those of a certain social standing are invited. In this reading of the novel, the painted veil of Kitty's life is rent asunder by her confrontation with the sordid reality of the cholera-infested Chinese city of Mei-tan-fu, and there, in a
convent run by Catholic nuns, she finds a spiritual center, "an ardour of belief," a "great white light [to] illuminate her soul" (176). Yet the Shelley sonnet to which the title refers puts a very different construction upon the nature of "reality":

Lift not the painted veil those who live
Call Life: though unreal shapes be pictured there,
And it but mimic all we would believe
With colours idly spread,--behind, lurk Fear
And Hope, twin Destinies; who ever weave
Their shadows o'er the chasm, sightless and drear.

(569)

Shelley's poem seems to suggest that, far from the veil concealing truth or reality, it in fact conceals only emptiness; "there is nothing there to read; here again we come to . . . exemption of meaning" (Empire of Signs 62.

The real exists in the fabric of the veil, and in the manner in which it wraps. Images of penetration in The Painted Veil, of the opening up of mysterious depths to a specular gaze, are matched by a preponderance of images of wrapping, of concealment and a refusal to signify.

Hong Kong's liminality in The Painted Veil is not merely dependent upon the geographical position of the colony, but is also suggested by the internal geography of Hong Kong island. Charlie and his wife live on the Peak, Kitty and Walter in the less exclusive area of Happy Valley "for they could not afford to live on the more eligible but
expensive Peak" (16). When the lovers meet, they descend further to "the Chinese city . . . into the filthy little house off the Victoria Road" (16)). Both Happy Valley and the Peak are sites from which European observers may watch the everyday life of China without personal involvement: from Happy Valley, Kitty can see "the blue sea and the crowded shipping in the harbour" (16), while the Townsends live on the Peak "in a house with a wide view" (208) over the surrounding landscape. When the European characters descend to the Victoria Road, however, they become the objects, not subjects of, surveillance. In the curio dealer's shop, where she and Charlie are accustomed to meet, Kitty is conscious that "the Chinese who were sitting about stared at her unpleasantly" (16). Later, while she waits indecisively outside the shop, Kitty is spotted by a boy who is watching out for customers and he, "recognizing her at once" gives her "a broad smile of connivance" (54). Hong Kong is a place where gazes are reversed, where the colonized looks back at the colonizer, and calls the assumptions upon which the text's racial and spatial oppressions are based into question. The colony is an ordered environment, built upon the firm application of scientific principles to administration and public health by men such as Charles Townsend and Walter Fane, yet it also contains closeted areas of intense, anarchic emotional expression: Kitty and Charlie's bedrooms, Charlie's office, and the house in the Victoria Road.
Much of Hong Kong's liminality centres around the figure of Kitty Fane. Married to the Government bacteriologist, Kitty finds that her social position is "determined by her husband's occupation" (18), and discovers herself outside of the inner circles of Hong Kong society, treated as "of no particular consequence" (18). However, her liaison with Charles Townsend, Assistant Colonial Secretary, places her very much on the inside. Thus, like the mems of Maugham's Malayan stories, and like Sadie Thompson in "Rain," Kitty occupies a "third" position, neither wholly conforming to nor completely out of the purview of the disciplinary systems of colonial society. Walter and Charlie both desire Kitty, but they know how to draw a limit to their desire when duty calls. When Kitty asks Charles to divorce his wife and marry her his reply emphasises the "reasonable" course of action:

"We'd much better face the situation frankly. I don't want to hurt your feelings, but really I must tell you the truth. I'm very keen on my career. There's no reason why I shouldn't be a Governor one of these days, and it's a damned soft job to be a Colonial Governor. Unless we can hush this up I don't stand a dog's chance."

(77)

Kitty's passions, in contrast, are ungoverned by reason, and continually threaten to upset the propriety of colonial society. In contrast to those of Walter and Charlie, who
make measured protestations of love, Kitty's desires are metaphorically represented by madness, illness, torture and captivity:

She leaned towards him. Her body became limp and yielding against his arm. The love she felt for him was almost torture. His last words had struck her: perhaps Walter loved her so passionately that he was prepared to accept any humiliation if sometimes she would let him love her. She could understand that; for that was how she felt towards Charlie. A thrill of pride passed through her, and at the same time a faint sensation of contempt for a man who could love so slavishly. (57)

The hyperbolic language of the above passage associates Kitty with a loss of personal integrity and emotional continence. She herself is limp and passive in Charlie's arms; she is prepared to accept "humiliation" and "torture": at the same time she is aware that she enslaves Walter. Like Edelman's homograph, then, Kitty can be read in two ways; as a slave of desire, as an enslaver, as a private transgressor and public enforcer of morality.

Kitty's and Hong Kong's liminality provide a space in which China's perceived lack of significance may be interrogated. In representing China, the text seems initially to focus not upon the truth behind the veil but the veiling itself; like Barthes' Japanese boxes, it is necessary that "the triviality of the thing be
disproportionate to the luxury of the envelope" (46). In the text's China, for example, whiteness seems to signify not so much a concealing of meaning as an absence:

They saw the white china knob of the handle slowly turn. They had heard no one walk along the verandah. It was terrifying to see that silent motion. A minute passed and there was no sound. Then, with the ghastliness of the supernatural, in the same stealthy, noiseless and horrifying manner, they saw the white china knob of the handle at the other window turn also. (11-12)

The doorknob is both of china and metonymically Chinese; "'[o]nly a Chinese,'" Charlie laughs, "'would turn a handle in that way'" (13). Thinking of the incident later, Kitty elides the whiteness of the doorknob with oriental inscrutability:

It couldn't have been Walter that afternoon. It must have been one of the servants and after all they didn't matter. Chinese servants knew everything anyway. But they held their tongues. Her heart beat a little faster as she remembered the way in which that white china doorknob slowly turned. (19)

China, as whiteness, resists efforts to make it signify. Such whiteness remains a major trope for the representation of China in Maugham's novel. Waddington's Manchu wife has a face "coated with powder"; her hands are
"the colour of ivory" (165)--a comparison which preserves the symbolic repertoire of "white" while at the same time describing the exact colour. On Kitty's entrance into Mei-tan-fu, she sees "a new coffin, unpainted, . . . its fresh wood . . . white in the approaching darkness" (90). China here upsets significances; white here is the colour of death, in contrast to European tradition. The next morning, Kitty awakes to watch the sun rise over a cloud of "white mist":

The morning drew on and the sun touched the mist so that it shone whitely like the ghost of snow on a dying star. Though on the river it was light so you could discern the lines of the crowded junks and the thick forests of their masts, in front it was a shining wall the eye could not pierce. (95)

China's whiteness resists Kitty's detective work, her inscription of English order; she sees a splendid fortress arise from the mist, only to reveal itself, in the garish light of day, as a broken section of the city wall. China remains, in its whiteness, a non-signifying chaos, without a space for the narrating I to "constitute itself as the subject (or master) of space; the center is rejected" (Empire of Signs 110).

The attachment of white to China disrupts a symbolic economy of racial difference which underlies much of
Maugham's oriental fiction. Unlike British colonial texts set in Africa, for instance, Maugham's texts are not so much concerned with the question of absolute racial difference as with the fear of interracial sex and miscegenation. Short stories such as "Red" do not produce a contrast between white and black bodies but rather endeavour to draw distinctions between pure white and various shades of cream and brown; a similar rhetoric underlies "The Yellow Streak" (15). The capacity of homosexuals and white women to be orientalized is thus often represented by the threat of encroaching darkness. The colour white in The Painted Veil having become symbolically indeterminate, at least part of the text's racial economy is disrupted. A few sparse efforts to re-establish it are overwhelmed by symbolic impropriety. Walter stands, looking out over the Chinese city one night, "white in his thin clothes against the darkness" (161); he recollects, perhaps, Jim at Patusan, but seems a rather shrunken and deshabillé version. Waddington's Manchu wife, Kitty thinks, represents "the East, immemorial, dark and inscrutable" (166), but it seems that dark here has much of the function of the whiteness of the woman's face—to emphasise blankness.

Even in the first scene, indeed, the English characters themselves become infected with the insignificance of an East they have themselves created. The doorknob transfers its blankness to the faces of the lovers--"[s]he was as white as the sheet and notwithstanding his tan his cheeks
were pale too" (12). In Hong Kong, and then in China, Kitty finds her husband more and more difficult to read, his face reduced to a "mask":

There was just a shadow of a tremor in his voice; it was dreadful, that cold self-control of his which made the smallest token of emotion so shattering. She did not know why she thought suddenly of an instrument she had been shown in Hong Kong upon which a needle oscillated a little and she had been told that this represented an earthquake a thousand miles away in which perhaps a thousand persons had lost their lives. She looked at him. He was ghastly pale. (156)

The faces of all the Europeans take on Walter's blankness and pallor in reaction to China. Kitty is first white with fear that Walter will discover her; she is later "pale" (134) in anticipation of childbirth. Upon her husband's death she adopts a "white and set" face (194); it is only in Hong Kong that she manages to finally get "'some colour in her cheeks'" (211). Waddington's face is twice described as bare; the fact that the garments of the nuns and the inner walls of the convent are white does not so much differentiate them from the mass of the Chinese population as enmesh them in a web of insignificance. Western symbols are bleached of significance. "[T]here is," as Barthes writes, "nothing to grasp" (Empire of Signs 110).

Maugham's text, unlike Barthes' is not a willing
participant in jouissance. Even as China's absence of signification transfers itself to the European characters, so the text moves to re-establish borders. A primary method used to establish or fix meaning is confession, a mechanism which Foucault describes in The History of Sexuality as "one of the West's most highly valued techniques for producing truth":

We have become a singularly confessing society. The confession has spread its effects far and wide. It plays a part in justice, medicine, education, family relationships, and love relations, in the most ordinary affairs of everyday life, and in the most solemn rites; one confesses one's crimes, one's sins, one's thoughts and desires, one's illnesses and troubles; one goes about telling, with the greatest precision, whatever is most difficult to tell. One confesses in public and in private, to one's parents, one's educators, one's doctor, to those one loves; one admits to oneself, in pleasure and in pain, things it would be impossible to tell to anyone else, the things people write books about. . . . Western man has become a confessing animal. (59)

For Foucault, confession is one of the techniques by which Man is constituted as a subject, one of the primary mechanisms by which the subject begins "to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy . . . be acknowledged"
Confession thus, in Barthes' terms, pierces meaning, it attaches signifier to signified, assuring the confessee that surfaces can be read for depth, that what is veiled, once exposed, will prove more essential than the veil itself.

In *The Painted Veil* there are two distinct forms of confession: religious and sexual. Religious confession is centred around the Catholic convent at Mei-tan-fu. As in *On a Chinese Screen*, the asceticism of Catholicism is valorized: the nuns in the convent, unlike Protestant missionaries, do not return home every few years on furlough, but rather regard China as their true home. They are presented as possessing spiritual truth, "captured by the ardour of belief" (176); at the end of the novel, Kitty makes an explicit contrast between the linear nature of the nuns' faith and the circularity of China in her resolution to follow "not the path . . . that led nowhither [The Tao], but the path those dear nuns at the convent followed so humbly, the path that led to peace" (238).

The Mother Superior's narrative of how she was the subject of a "calling" to serve Christ is presented as a confession. She begins by constructing a closeted identity for herself, which demands that it should be recognized—"[f]or two years I had been thinking of it, but I had suffered as it were a fear of this calling, for I dreaded that I might be recaptured by the spirit of the world'" (172-173). Trying to speak what is inside her, the
Mother Superior recalls that she tried "'to form the words, but my lips would not move'" (173); she attempts again to tell her mother of her desire, "'but such was my weakness I could only say: "... I should not have the strength'" (174). Finally, it is her mother who reads the signs upon her daughter's body, commenting that she is sure her daughter will one day become a "religious," to which her daughter replies "'[y]ou are laying bare the innermost thought and desire of my heart'" (174).

After her arrival in Mei-tan-fu Kitty also feels the desire to confess, "to tell the Mother Superior of her unhappiness and its cause" (176), of her affair with Charlie, her estrangement from her husband, and his death. Her confession is not made to the Mother Superior, however, but to Charlie later in Hong Kong, and it takes a different form from that she has envisioned giving the Mother Superior:

"I don't feel human. I feel like an animal. A pig or a rabbit or a dog. Oh, I don't blame you, I was just as bad. I yielded to you because I wanted you. But it wasn't the real me. I'm not that hateful, beastly, lustful woman. I disown her. It wasn't me that lay on that bed panting for you when my husband was hardly cold in his grave and your wife had been so kind to me, so indescribably kind. It was only the animal in me, dark and fearful like an evil spirit, and I disown, and hate, and despise it. And ever since,
when I've thought of it, my gorge rises and I feel that I must vomit." (224)

The confession above seems also an attempt to pin down meaning; like that of the Mother Superior, Kitty's confession is based upon a Pauline split between body and soul, between the desires of the world and the truth of the spirit, between sensual indulgence and ascetic transcendence. However, unlike the Mother Superior, whose nature can be read from her face, Kitty is unreadable: what is shown to Charlie is not "the real me." Kitty spends her confession detailing what she is, in her own construction, not: she focuses on the outside, "absorbed in the practice. . . of the package, of fastening" (Empire of Signs 45).

The religious and sexual confessions of The Painted Veil, and their efforts to terminate the endless play of signs, are in the end overcome by the semiotic dissidence of the text itself, by China's absence of signification. The efforts of the text to oppose sexuality and religious truth, one as wrapping and the other as content, are undone by their connection through metaphor. A "red heart" burns upon the breast of the Mother Superior, while Kitty and Charlie's final encounter is expressed in the language of religious rapture:

Her eyes were closed and her face was wet with tears. And then he found her lips and the pressure of his upon them shot through her body like the flame of God. It was an ecstasy and she was burnt to a cinder and she glowed as though she were
transfigured. In her dreams, in her dreams she had known this rapture . . . She was not a woman, her personality was dissolved, she was nothing but desire. (218)

The expression of religious rapture as sexual is, of course, not a unusual trope within Catholicism. The effect of its use in *The Painted Veil*, however, seems to be to dissolve the distinction that the text makes between sexuality as surface and religious depth, between the falsity of the body and the truth of the soul. Confession becomes not so much a discovery of truth as a performance, part of the larger process of unwrapping and wrapping that structures the novel.

We can confirm Edelman's thesis that semiotics and sexuality are related, I think, through an example in Maugham's own writing which is readily applicable to *The Painted Veil*. Perhaps Maugham's most lengthy published comment about male homosexuality is in his essay "El Greco":

I should say that a distinctive trait of the homosexual is a lack of deep seriousness over certain things that normal men take seriously. This ranges from an inane flippancy to a sardonic humour. He has a willfulness that attaches importance to things that most men find trivial and on the other hand regards cynically the subjects which the common opinion of mankind has held essential to its spiritual welfare. He has a lively sense of beauty, but is apt to see
beauty especially in decoration. He loves luxury and attaches peculiar value to elegance. He is emotional, but fantastic. He is vain, loquacious, witty and theatrical. With his keen insight he can pierce the depths, but in his innate frivolity he fetches up from them not a priceless jewel but a tinsel ornament. He has small power of invention, but a wonderful gift for delightful embroidery. He has vitality, brilliance, but seldom strength. He stands on the bank, aloof and ironical, and watches the river of life flow on. He is persuaded that opinion is no more than prejudice.

("El Greco" 246)

Maugham's argument here does have a surface of cliche, if not homophobia; the homosexual suffers in comparison to the "normal man" in his innate ability to discover the truth or meaning concealed within things. If we read Maugham's argument through Barthes and Edelman, however, Maugham's homosexual man becomes a practitioner of textual jouissance, a theatrical bricoleur who participates in a dissolution of meaning, refusing to connect signifiers to the same old signifieds. His "embroidery" and obsession with surface "decoration" call to mind Barthes' observations regarding the Japanese focus upon "packages, pouches, sacks, valises, linen wrappings" (46), on the exterior rather than the interior. Thus The Painted Veil's deployment of China to resist what Edelman identifies as a "hermeneutics of
suspicion," disseminating suspicion everywhere, may be seen as a specifically homosexual ploy. In Edelman's terms, The Painted Veil may thus be a successfully homosexual novel even though it does not openly thematize homosexual desire.

The Painted Veil's assault upon signification arises, like the similar assault in Empire of Signs, from an undoing of sexuality. Yet the fact still remains that such unmaking, dissolution, is not carried out within a utopic or dystopic imaginary country, but in China and Japan; it thus cannot avoid examination in terms of the politics of European representation of other cultures in a colonial world.

Barthes does not "imagine a fictive nation . . . , a new Garabagne, so as to compromise no real country by my fantasy" (ES 3). He rather chooses an alternative strategy: I can also—though in no way claiming to represent or to analyse reality itself (these being the major gestures of Western discourse)—isolate somewhere in the world (faraway) a certain number of features (a term employed in linguistics), and out of these features deliberately form a system. It is this system which I shall call: Japan.

(ES 3)

Yet Barthes' Japan does exhibit intertextuality with other Japans, other created spaces within French literature. The Painted Veil, similarly, draws upon reservoirs of representation of China within European culture. If the non-signification of Barthes' Japan and Maugham's China is
positive in terms of the economy of the texts, these places still remain trapped by the necessity of these texts to present them as reservoirs of absolute alterity; like Hegel's China, they are still outside history.

Recent articles by Trinh T. Minh Ha and Dennis Porter have attempted to view Empire of Signs as breaking the mould of Orientalism, as affording new possibilities of representation. Porter praises Barthes for his texts' "experimental openness and pleasurable anticipation" (297):

The question it embodies is not, then, What can I know about Japan? Rather it is, What does Japan enable me to discover by distancing me from myself and from my culture? (297)

Strangely, Porter seems to view this turning back of Japan upon the subject as a new rhetorical strategy, inaugurated by Barthes:

Given the massive misrepresentations of foreign places and peoples to which we are still subjected --what Barthes might have called with characteristic irony "positive hallucinations"--it is difficult to deny that there is a need, not so much for silence as for a writerly ethics of "No comment." Thus, in its way, The Empire of Signs itself is Barthes' contribution to the endeavor to go beyond Orientalism. (304)

Yet Barthes' "no comment" is still a comment, a repetition
of other refusals to comment in the Western tradition of writing on the East, refusals that in themselves form part of Orientalism. Loti, in Japan, delights in discovery of insignificance beneath the surfaces of Nagasaki. Watching Chrysanthemum asleep, he also reduces her to insignificance: what thoughts can be running through that little brain? My knowledge of her language is still too restricted to enable me to find out. Moreover, it is a hundred to one that she has no thoughts whatever. And even if she had, what do I care? (Madam Chrysanthemum 74)

Barthes' Japan is valorised, Loti's played with and dismissed as valueless, yet both are held up as empires devoid of signification, others to France. Barthes' wish to write his Japan as "faraway" assumes added significance in an age in which Japan has become, for Europe, increasingly near. Barthes' Japan outside of the paternal law parallels a Japan inside, and extremely successful inside, the world economic system; a Japan valorised as the end of signification seems not just utopian play, but also, in another sense, symptomatic of a disavowal of Japan's modernity.

Trinh T. Minh Ha's endorsement of Barthes' work as "closer to oriental thinking" (47) in its use of the concept of emptiness, which Trinh sees as analogous to Buddhist principles, is similarly flawed:

[What he seeks here is not to decipher Asia, but rather to assess his own position vis-à-vis
exoticism, ethnocentrism and, above all, to assess his own hermeneutic posture, his position as decoder. . . . Thus the unknown he confronts is neither Japan nor China but his own language, and through it, that of all the West. (48-49)

Barthes' self-reflexivity, it seems here, can only be valorised by, paradoxically, reducing East and West to absolute alterities, oriental thought facing off against Western language. The use of China or Japan to reflect back upon the inadequacies of one's own language and belief system is not new, but as old as Mandeville; it too represents an appropriation of a culture reduced to alterity.

Maugham's movement towards non-signification in The Painted Veil, then, ensnares him in a rhetorical double-bind. Through the China of Maugham's novel insignificance bleeds into European discourse; binarisms are suspended, whitewashed into a vast, unending play of signs. Yet such play is founded upon a production of China as non-sense, as a never-ending supply of disruptive signification. To achieve a rewriting of sexuality in the novel, Maugham must continually reinscribe China as Other. The more the text employs China to shatter sexuality, the more it requires China as an absence of signification: China becomes a stage on which the dramas of the European soul are rehearsed, and it is not allowed to speak. "What can be addressed in the consideration of the Orient," writes
Barthes, "are not other symbols, another metaphysics, another wisdom . . . ; it is the possibility of a difference" (3). In a critical environment that valorizes difference, we should still remember that such difference is also invested with power. Maugham's novel does not exist in a vacuum, but upon the troubling borderland between the British Empire and the Empire of Signs; to achieve its sexual fragmentation, it must employ the weariest of orientalist tropes. The veil may wrap, and unwrap, and a focus upon it may subvert any nostalgia for content, but it is also Freud's primary metaphor for the fetish, and the fetish springs from disavowal.
Even before the publication of *The Painted Veil*, Maugham's creative attention had turned westward. The author's visit to Malaya, North Borneo, Sarawak and the Dutch East Indies in 1921-2, supplemented by a second tour in 1925-6, provided material for some of his most famous short stories, the majority of which were collected in *The Casuarina Tree* (1926) and *Ah King* (1933).*¹ The Malayan short stories² are quintessential Maugham, so much so that colonial Malaya is firmly established in the British popular imagination as "Maugham country."

British Malaya gave Maugham an ideal background for his fiction. Unlike China, which represented ultimate alterity and inversion of the West, Malaya was part of a carefully codified signifying system. The rhetoric of British Malaya, to modify Sara Suleri's phrase, was constituted by medievalism, the representation of Malay society as similar to that of England in the Middle Ages. The sultans of the Malay peninsula were presented as feudal lords, and the general population as yeomen. Industrial production and trade were carried on, out of sight, by Indians and Chinese. Yet this rhetoric concealed a fundamental flaw: it did nothing to justify the presence of the British. Mostly the British represented themselves as tutors of Malay natural gentleman, yet tutelage, if successful, could logically only
lead to the destruction of the surrogate medieval society through industrialization. British discourse on Malaya is thus contradictory, at times accepting the representative Malay as a junior pupil in the process of becoming British, while at others violently insisting upon absolute racial divisions. This tension on the border line between racial constructions, and the resultant need for a continual reinscription of this border, make British Malaya a perfect setting for Maugham's fiction.

British constructions of Malaya are clearly demonstrated in the representation of the expatriate European community in Maugham's Malayan fiction. The typical Malayan short story involves a transaction between two men, a retelling of a story of transgression in the safety of London, or at least the local club. Shocking as this transgression is, it is always covered over, often by an agreement by the two men that, come what may, the show goes on. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the act of transgression most frequently centers upon a white woman. Maugham's memsahibs are floating signifiers that cause trouble within the semiotic system he so carefully builds. On one hand, they are agents of colonial discipline, policing the actions of their menfolk and keeping them morally up to the mark. On the other, like Kitty in *The Painted Veil*, they are invested with ungovernable sexual passions, in contrast to the rationality and control expressed by male administrators and planters. A textual third column, they thus threaten to sabotage the system to which they are integral.
Examination of the figure of the memsahib in British fiction of Malaya and in a number of Maugham's short stories, leads to an investigation of other transitional figures who have a similarly dislocating effect upon the rhetoric of Maugham's Malayan short stories. A close reading of "The Yellow Streak" shows parallels between Izzart's closeted racial alterity and the homosexuality at the heart of contemporaneous British constructions of manliness, a parallel that Maugham's own sexuality makes more acute. Similarly, an exploration of the "doubling" function performed by Chinese figures in "The Letter" hints at further narrational anxieties regarding tutelage and somatic repression.

1. The Rhetoric of British Malaya

The British construction of Malaya seems, in hindsight, driven by two narrative imperatives: first, to justify creeping colonization of the peninsula in terms of modernization; second, to inscribe Malaya nostalgically as a medieval society, in which Sultans and hereditary chieftains become feudal lords, demonstrating gentlemanly benevolence in the administration of rural fiefdoms and domaines. Such imperatives, we shall see, frequently contradict each other, yet they might be wedded together temporarily into a British historiography of the Malay peninsula. In such a historical narrative Malay values, always nebulous and undefined, were
protected under British tutelage; the Advisers in the Unfederated Malay States and the Residents in the F.M.S. became a conduit for modernization, in which Malaya would move from internal feudal strife to a more stable, later medieval period. If China, according to Hegel's construction, was still outside history, the British construction of Malaya allowed the region an entrance, through tutelage, into a period of history that the Mother Country had passed through over half a millenium previously. The British-sponsored meeting of chiefs upon the island of Pangkor, which led to the forcible imposition of the Resident system, was glossed not as an incursion but rather as a second Runnymede.3

British construction of Malaya as a medieval society was pervasive. Hugh Clifford, describing traditional Malay social organization, remarked that it was similar to "that which was in force in Medieval Europe" (In Court and Kampong 4). Clifford's description of the Malayan political system transposes feudal terms such as "fiefdom" and "baronies" onto Malay society; this appellation of Malay communities as feudal slips easily into a justification for intervention:

The chroniclers of Medieval Europe tell only of Princes and Nobles, and Knights and Dames—and merry tales they are—but we are left to guess what was the condition of the bulk of the lower classes in Thirteenth-Century England. If we knew all, however, it is probable that their lot would prove to have
been but a little more fortunate than is that of the Malay raayat of to-day, whose hardships and grievances, under native rule, move our modern souls to indignation and compassion.

(In Court and Kampong 5)

Such compassion was presented as a motive for intervention. Winstedt's The Malays: A Cultural History presents the peninsula as divided into petty kingdoms, continually at war with each other, until Britain "introduced the reign of law" (178). For a European in Malaya before decolonisation such a view amounted almost to a doxology; even the British left, pushing for decolonisation after the Second World War, described Malays as "conservative and unprogressive by nature," needing British tutelage "to avoid being fleeced by . . . other [racial] groups" (Campbell 197).

As an orthodoxy, medievalism was inescapable; it extended to British policy-making. Malays were viewed as forming a rural population in the Malay states; they were feudal rulers, farmers, or fishermen. Capitalist development was the property of other races: trade and mining were the province of the Chinese, Indians largely provided plantation labour, while Japanese prostitutes, before 1919 at least, serviced the European community. In a fascinating article, Paul Kratoska has shown how British images of Malaya as a medieval society in the process of developing a yeoman peasantry led to a complete misunderstanding of rural indebtedness in the Krian rice-growing district of Perak.
Obsessed with the social unrest caused by poverty in English history, and thus fearful of landless peasants posing a threat to the social order, British administrators proposed solutions to a non-existent problem. Cooperative societies, founded upon British assumptions that debt was stigmatising, failed; the old system of Chinese and Indian moneylenders, while not completely satisfactory, was successful enough to persist long after the failure of the administration's initiatives (The Chettiar and the Yeoman, passim).

Maugham's short stories clearly participate in the construction of Malaya as a series of medieval fiefdoms. In "The Outstation," Warburton comments that "'I have been on intimate terms with some of the greatest gentlemen in England, but I have never known finer gentlemen than some well-born Malays whom I am proud to call my friends'" (The Casuarina Tree 87); furthermore, he stresses the importance of lineage in Malay society in his conversations with Cooper. Featherstone's residency in "The Book-Bag" has very much the look of an English country house:

It had one of the most enchanting views I had seen in the F.M.S. The Residency was built on the top of a hill and the garden was large and well-cared for. Great trees gave it almost the look of an English park. It had vast lawns and there Tamils, black and emaciated, were scything with deliberate and beautiful gestures. (Ah King 173-174)

Both "The Outstation" and "The Book-Bag," however, also
express anxieties in their construction of Malaya as feudal England. After Warburton's speech regarding the natural gentility of his Malay "friends," the narrator hastens to reassure the reader that "he never forgot that he was an English gentleman, and he had no patience with the white men who yielded to native customs" (88). Similarly, the narrator of "The Book Bag" is quick to make a sharp distinction between the grounds of Featherstone's residency and the foreign landscape outside:

Beyond and below, the jungle grew thickly to the bank of a broad, winding and swiftly flowing river, and on the other side of this, as far as the eye could reach, stretched the wooded hills of Tenggarah. The contrast between the trim lawns, so strangely English, and the savage growth of the jungle beyond pleasantly titillated the fancy. (174)

The river here is perhaps an appropriate metaphor for the border between Self and Other in Maugham's Malayan fiction, between the trim space of civilization and the forces of dissolution that wait outside. Broad though it is, it is always in a state of flux, and it is never fully successful in keeping the "savage growth of the jungle" out.

The uneasiness regarding transgression of racial boundaries through imitation which structures Maugham's stories was very much part of early twentieth-century British constructions of Malaya. As the European community
grew, so it became more insistent upon maintaining its own integrity. An example of this is the administrative service. It is likely that some of the original Malayan Civil Service cadets were Eurasian Anglo-Indian; by 1904 the leaders of the M.C.S. were already pushing London for a formal ban upon any further Eurasian cadetships (Allen 175). To preserve the illusion of tutelage, a separate service for Malays, the Malay Administrative Service, was formed, and equipped with its own public school feeder system. Its recruits, however, had little chance to exercise real power. Yet communal integrity was concerned not only with keeping those on the borders out, but also with ensuring the conformity of community members. Anne Laura Stoler, in a study of the European community in the Deli valley, Sumatra, during the early years of the twentieth century, demonstrates the extent to which colonialist rhetoric was concerned to define the nature of the category "European":

What I suggest here is that racist ideology, fear of the Other, preoccupation with white prestige, and obsession with protecting European women from sexual assault by black males were not simply justifications for continued European rule and white supremacy. They were part of a critical class-based logic, statements not only about indigenous subversives, but directives aimed at dissenting European underlings in the colonies--the part of the apparatus that kept potentially subversive white colonials in
An important part of this apparatus, and one that takes primary place in Maugham's stories, was the memsahib.

2. White Women and Male Discipline

In order to explore the role of gender and sexuality in Maugham's Malayan short stories it is necessary to first examine the role of white women within British colonial society, and the manner in which male writing constructs the mem as a site of displaced sexuality. Such an examination, I think, enables us to avoid a critique such as that of Ronald Hyam, who maintains that homosexual colonial writers such as Maugham and Forster misrepresented European women in the colonies because their sexuality made them inevitable "misogynists" (19). In his representation of white women in the Malayan short stories, Maugham is putting to work tropes that are omnipresent in British colonial discourse. His sexuality does make a difference, I will argue, but not in the manner that Hyam suggests. If anything, contemporaneous constructions of homosexuality ally it with femininity. To examine Maugham's representation of white women within colonial Malayan society, we first must know the discourse in which he writes.

In British Malaya European women were, in the words of one of Janice Brownfoot's male interviewees, at best "necessary nuisances" to male colonial administrators
("Memsahibs . . . " 190); as a group they contributed to, as Beverly Gartrell and Ann Stoler have noted, the process of stabilization of the European community in the colonies. In the early years of colonial administration in Malaya, the cost of bringing out and supporting European wives threatened to reduce officials and unofficals alike to the status of poor whites; concubinage was widely practiced. The children of such unions, however, threatened the unity of the community; as surveillance, centralization and the urbanization of the European community increased, so did the number of European women, almost all of whom came out from Europe as wives of planters and administrators. Once established in Malaya, European women served as "representatives of the home culture, and of its moral standards" (Gartrell 169), keeping their menfolk up to the mark. The baseless, but pervasive conviction that white womanhood needed protection from predatory native males served to further unify the colonial male community.

Memsahibs in Malaya thus served an important symbolic (and, through their unpaid labour, Janice Brownfoot suggests, an economic) function in the tightening of the boundaries of the European community. In much colonial discourse, they also served as scapegoats for a perceived decline in race relations. The "perhaps too facile formula that race relations in twentieth century colonial Africa, as in nineteenth century pre-Mutiny India, were all the better before the coming of the memsahib" (Kirk-Greene 278) was
present in Malaya too. In retrospect, this seems very much a case of post hoc, ergo propter hoc. European women played a part in the tightening of the European community in twentieth century Malaya, but they were brought out as wives with the explicit intention of achieving that goal. It is probably unrealistic to claim, with Janice Brownfoot, that the majority of mems in Malaya, through "friendships with their Asian sisters . . . helped undermine the European male world and its ethos" ("Memsahibs . . ." 208). In some small respects, Gartrell remarks, the stereotype of the mem may have some basis in historical fact:

The 'policing' of sexual boundaries between the races was, we saw above, part of wives' political function in the British colonies, and a function enthusiastically carried out by women secure in their own definitions of morality and hierarchy. . . . [T]he fear of the unfamiliar remained greater for wives than for their men. Whether through fear or other factors, many women remained profoundly ignorant of, and uninterested in, the life of those beyond the enclave, and even resentful of its penetrations. (182)

Clearly, however, the obsessive representation in texts written by British men of European women as petty, vindictive, racially intolerant and over-sexed is motivated by other factors than merely descriptive ones. Such stereotyping of mems seems to represent an internalization
of the "border conflicts" regarding the limits of the European community explored earlier; the white woman becomes at once the enforcer of and the excuse for racial separation. Conflicts in colonial discourse over questions of racial separation and sexual continence are thus displaced from the body of the male colonist onto that of the female.

An illustration of how such displacement is enacted can be drawn from the memoirs of an official in Malaya during the years between the wars, providing a useful contextualization of the representation of European women in Maugham's short stories. Victor Purcell describes his work as Protector of Chinese in Penang; he presumably came into contact with many European women in the course of his duties. Yet in his anecdotes, Purcell only mentions European women in the context of their transgressive potential:

Mrs. Andrews . . . had been an embarrassment to the Straits Settlements police for over a year. She was a drug addict and had become completely demoralized. She was also an insatiable nymphomaniac, and gave herself freely to anyone who would have her, including the syces (motor-car drivers) who were always hanging about police headquarters and the Chinese Protectorate. This, of course, was bad for the prestige of the orang puteh (white man) and the authorities were anxious to get rid of her at any price. (233)
One of Purcell's subordinates "eventually managed to ship off Mrs. Andrews to Australia, where no doubt she found sexual pastures new" (234). The threat to social order posed by untrammelled sexuality, the possible transgression of social boundaries that it represents, is contained by expulsion. Yet the literal expulsion of Mrs. Andrews from the Straits Settlements mimes Purcell's own expulsion of reflection upon his own sexuality from his memoirs:

As for sex, I have never been able to distinguish between the sexual urge and the urge to live. They seem to me to be synonymous. But if in saying so I give an impression of mere abandoned promiscuity, I shall not be doing myself full justice. Nor was there anything spectacular or notorious enough in my exploits to warrant their inclusion among those I have above mentioned. . . . I should like for my own satisfaction to describe my encounters with women, with their inevitable accompaniments of pleasure, jealousy, regret and misery. But I should need more space—and more detachment than I at present possess. (251)

What seems to occur here is a covert displacement; the "spectacular" figure of Mrs. Andrews standing in for Purcell's own body, allowing him to cover over his own sexuality beneath "detachment," to differentiate himself from those who practice "abandoned promiscuity." Masculine
self-control is thus acted out upon the body of the mem
subject to societal discipline, a fantasy that is
perpetually re-presented in colonial fiction.

3. Sexuality and Gender in the Malayan Stories

The majority of Maugham's Malayan short stories are
carefully framed. In some, the frame merely consists of
repeated action: when Warburton opens his copy of the Times
at the end of "The Outstation" the reader is aware that the
Resident is going back to a routine he happily observed
before the arrival of Cooper and the commencement of the
story time. Other short stories have a metropolitan frame
narrative: Millicent tells her family what really happened
in Malaya while awaiting a party in England in "Before the
Party," while Ann in "The Door of Opportunity," having
returned with Alban to London, recalls her husband's failure
to live up to codes of imperial manliness in an embedded
narrative. The most common frame structure used in the
stories, however, is a framing narrative of a conversation
between two men. In the comfort of the club, residency, or
administrative office, one man listens while the other gives
an account of a transgression against colonial discipline
which he has witnessed, and which centres upon a woman. Both
men become actively involved in a collaborative process of
interpretation, making sense of the incident, and implicitly
making a clear demarcation between their own, objective and
specular narration of the embedded narrative, and the 
un governable passions of that narrative's protagonists. Thus 
the surname of the Maugham-narrator's interlocutor in 
"Footprints in the Jungle", "a man called Gaze who was head 
of the police" (Ah King 7) is appropriately descriptive of 
his narrative function. At the end of the short story, 
transgression is, structurally at least, contained. Like the 
embedded first contact narratives of Maugham's South Sea 
fiction, it is temporally distanced from the narrative 
present. Secrets must be kept, even if, as in "The Letter," 
the law must be broken in order to do so: they cannot be 
allowed to speak in the narrative present. Examined and 
narrated by the protagonists of the frame narrative, 
transgression is placed back in its closet. All traces of 
its presence are erased. "'We must go [to the party], 
mother'" remarks Kathleeen after Millicent has told all. 
"'It would look so funny if we stayed away'" (The Casuarina 
Tree 34).

It is tempting, given the presence of a woman in the 
embedded narrative of Maugham's Malayan stories, to analyze 
them in terms of Sedgwickian trigonometry: two men on the 
base, and a woman at the apex. However, the triangular 
relationship, Sedgwick's "calculus of power" (Between Men 
21), in the Malayan stories is different from that in 
Maugham's earlier fiction. In the South Pacific stories, men 
compete for ownership of a feminized landscape which is 
often directly personified by a native woman. In the Malayan
stories, men compete and, through socially sanctioned bonds, collaborate, in the narration of a story in which a woman is not merely the passive spectator of the action, but rather the protagonist. Narration thus provides a vicarious means of experiencing and curbing passions displaced onto the body of the memsahib, while the device of the framing narrative enables the reinscription of a medievalized Malaya in which ruling passions are sublimated, and everything remains in its proper place.

"Footprints in the Jungle" is an exemplary short story of this type. The narrative begins in the present tense with a medievalizing description of Tanah Merah:

The European quarter is very silent. It is trim and neat and clean. The houses of the white men—Government servants and agents of companies—stand round an immense padang, agreeable and roomy bungalows shaded by great cassias, and the padang is vast and green and well-cared for, like the lawn of a cathedral close, and indeed there is in the aspect of this corner of Tanah Merah something quiet and delicately secluded that reminds you of the precincts of Canterbury. (Ah King 6)

The sense of the orderliness of British Malaya is emphasised in the frame narrative. Gaze, the Maugham narrator's interlocutor, is a policeman; the action of the frame narrative takes place in the club, during and after the Maugham-narrator's quintessential, orderly leisure activity:
"a very pleasant game of bridge" (7). Reference to non-European society reinforces the sense of everything being in its place. Gaze, for example, is keen to exhibit his knowledge of racial psychology by making a clear division between the character of the "'Chink'" and that of the Malay (32).

Within this orderly system, Gaze and the Maugham-narrator are brought together by their mutual interest in the process of narration. Gaze reads the Cartwrights of the embedded narrative for signs of their crime, and the Maugham-narrator reads them through Gaze, commenting upon the latter's narrative technique. "I tried," he comments early in the story, "to construct in my mind a picture of what Mrs. Cartwright--Mrs. Bronson as she was then--looked like from Gaze's not very graphic description" (14). Later Gaze himself confesses "'I'm telling you this story very badly. . . . I seem to be just rambling on" (23), a statement with which the Maugham-narrator does not disagree. Still later in the story, the narrator emphasizes that he has remained intellectually one step ahead of his interlocutor:

I have always thought the detective story a most diverting and ingenious variety of fiction, and have regretted that I never had the skill to write one, but I have read a good many, and I flatter myself that it is rarely that I have not solved the mystery before it was disclosed to me; and now for some time I had forseen what Gaze was going to
say, but when at last he said it I confess that it gave me, notwithstanding, somewhat of a shock.

The Maugham-narrator and Gaze, then, cooperate in the act of narration, Gaze providing the experience, the narrator shaping it though his questions ("'What was Bronson like, by the way?'" (18) "'What's the matter?'"), and sometimes jump-starting it again when Gaze becomes distracted. The overwhelming impression left by the two men, however, is one of a communality of interest. "'You know how many fellows when they come out East seem to stop growing,'" Gaze remarks, after which the narrator hastens to assure his readers, "I did indeed" (19).

The surety of male subjectivity in the frame narrative, in which everything falls into its proper place, is in marked contrast to the representation of masculinity in the embedded narrative. Bronson, Mrs. Cartwright's first husband, was, Gaze recalls, "a great big fellow, very hearty, with a loud voice and a bellowing laugh, beefy... but he had the mind of a boy of eighteen" (18-19). Cartwright himself is "pleasant and unassuming" (22) in the embedded narrative, while in the frame narrative he appears as a "bowed, cadaverous, bald-headed old buffer with spectacles" (17). Mrs. Cartwright is very different:

You saw that here was a woman who knew her mind and was never afraid to speak it... If now and then she uttered a remark so sarcastic that you wanted all your sense of humour to see
the fun in it, you could not but quickly see that she was willing to take as much as she gave. ... I never met a woman who obviously cared so little how she looked. It was not only her head that was untidy, everything about her was slovenly; she wore a high-necked silk blouse, but for coolness had unbuttoned the top buttons and showed a gaunt and withered neck; the blouse was crumpled and none too clean, for she smoked innumerable cigarettes and covered herself with ash. (8-9)

Mrs. Cartwright's slovenliness indicates a certain symbolic vagrancy, a refusal to conform to the role of mem. "'If she'd only taken more trouble with herself,'" Gaze remarks of the youthful Mrs. Bronson, "she'd have been rather stunning" (14).

Mrs. Cartwright's refusal to conform takes clearer shape as the story progresses. Gaze recalls that "she drinks her stengah like a man" (18), and, while she and Cartwright wait at the club for news of her first husband's death to be made public, it is she, not Cartwright, who demonstrates the nominally masculine virtues of emotional repression and control:

"Cartwright had been off his game and when we sat down at the bridge-table Mrs. Bronson said to him: 'Well, Theo, if you play bridge as rottenly as you played tennis we shall lose our shirts.'" (24-25)
Mrs. Cartwright's appropriation of features of colonial masculinity is further shown in Gaze's comments when solving the crime for the benefit of his listener;

"I know that woman. Look at that square chin of hers and tell me that she hasn't got the courage of the devil. She has a will of iron. She made Cartwright do it. She planned every detail and every move. He was completely under her influence; he is now." (49)

Mrs. Cartwright here seems to occupy a space on the border between constructions of masculinity and femininity in the Malayan stories. She outdoes men in her exhibitions of emotional control: at the same time, she puts such a putatively masculine virtue not in the service of community, as both the narrator and Gaze must do, but rather harnesses it to realize the goals of private passions. Her role is curiously performative—she has no name in the story other than those of her two husbands, Bronson and Cartwright—and yet she is also "perfectly in character" (9). The Maugham-narrator identifies with her, thinking her "a very agreeable person" (9), yet he also condemns her actions. Mrs. Cartwright crosses borders of acceptable behaviour, and the two men in the frame narrative recount and interpret her actions, always conscious of the fixity of their own positioning, of borders they themselves cannot cross.

The thematics of "Footprints in the Jungle" are repeated in many of Maugham's Malayan short stories. In
"Neil Macadam" the eponymous hero is presented as sexless, interested only in the scientific taxonomy of the natural history museum run by his mentor, Munro. Munro's wife, Darya, is a site of displaced sexuality, "a monster of depravity" (329). After leaving her to die in the jungle rather than succumb to her advances, Neil returns to Munro's camp feeling "like a surgeon who is forced to perform a dangerous operation without assistance or appliances to save the life of someone he loves" (338). The object of his affections is Munro. In "A Casual Affair" the Maugham-narrator and District Officer Low, in "the imposing stone house in which the Governor had once lived" (Collected Short Stories 4, 395), discuss the fall of Jack Almond, contrasting Jack's "going under without . . . a struggle" (412), his descent into opium addiction and eventual death, to the "cool as a cucumber" (407) demeanour of Lady Kastellan, his former lover. Just as in "Footprints in the Jungle," so in "A Casual Affair," the Maugham-narrator uses his status as a writer to shape Low's narrative, suggesting that interpretation is "'where the novelist comes in. Shall I tell you what I think happened?'" (413) And, in a similar manner to "Footprints in the Jungle," the challenge of the masquerade of the memsahib seems to escape into the frame narrative. The narrator seems to identify with Almond's passivity, remarking that "'there is always a certain weakness attached to such great charm as he possessed. . . . I can't bring myself to blame him'" (414). Significantly, it
is Mrs. Low who usurps the narrator's role and, through her intervention in the two men's conversation, puts an end to the story.

If the boundaries between textual oppositions in Maugham's Malayan fiction are threatened by the presence of white women, they are further disturbed by the threat of racial alterity. Such alterity takes the form of either miscegenation, with its resultant blurring of racial boundaries, or the presence of racial Others, such as Chinese figures, who cannot be readily placed within the framework of a medievalized Malayan landscape. This process of transgression of racial boundaries is readily visible in two of Maugham's most famous short stories, "The Yellow Streak" and "The Letter."

4. Reading "The Yellow Streak"

In Epistemology of the Closet, Eve Sedgwick comments on the relative newness of gay, or antihomophobic critical practice:

[W]e aren't yet used to asking . . . how a variety of forms of oppression intertwine systemically with each other; and especially how the person who is disabled through one set of oppressions may by the same positioning be enabled through others. . .

Indeed, it was the long, painful realization not that all oppressions are congruent, but that
they are differently structured and so must intersect in complex embodiments that was the first great heuristic breakthrough of socialist-feminist thought and of the thought of women of color. (32)

In Maugham's short story "The Yellow Streak" many of these oppressions do seem congruent. Moving from the periphery of the Empire towards its signifying centre, Maugham's narrative is driven by an assumed series of dyads: civilised/savage, male/female, racial purity/miscegenation. The narrative itself has a rigid, almost ritualistic quality: like the Dyak ceremony of welcome that serves as its introduction, it is "hieratic," proceeding through a series of bifurcations that lead to holding sites within the field of discourse. The effect of these bifurcations is to define or place each character. Campion is placed as lower middle class, Hutchinson as upper middle, the Malay woman who lives with him as silent native Other. Izzart, for all his class pretensions, is finally placed as irrational, unreliable native, the "drop of native blood in his veins" (161) overwhelming years of public school nurture. "The jungle," in the words of another of Maugham's regenerate Eurasians, "takes back its own" (East of Suez 218).4

The bifurcating action of Maugham's narrative is made more acute by the omission of figures who have a disruptive function in his other short stories. Chinese minor characters and European women, who disturb the surety of
racial division, are absent. Malay characters are kept very firmly in their medievalized places: Hassan, Izzart's batman, subaltern or fag, depending on which congruence is given primacy, is written in only when the plot demands he make tea or save a life, then surreptitiously erased. "The Yellow Streak" represents a temporal and spatial retreat to the margins of Empire, out of reach of or before the Crewe Circular, to a masculinized world in which the contrast between Savage and Civilized is consciously intensified, with no European woman or urbanized native in sight.

The quotation from Sedgwick above, however, should alert us to a potential incongruence: Maugham's awareness of his homosexuality, or more properly, his efforts to conceptualize his sexual difference. Jeffrey Weeks' studies of sexuality in nineteenth and twentieth century Britain have shown the link made between homosexuality and effeminacy in late nineteenth and twentieth-century medical and scientific discourse. In scientific taxonomy of the late nineteenth century, two categories of homosexual were recognised: "inverts," congenital homosexuals, women in men's bodies, were contrasted with "perverts," men whose sexual desire was so strong that it broke through restraint and unleashed itself upon any object (Weeks, "Inverts . . ." 123-4). Both categories were thus viewed as in opposition to a late imperial construction of masculinity based upon control, rationality, and the repression of the somatic and emotional aspects of men's lives.
Such constructions of male homosexuality obviously touch upon Maugham's characterization of memsahibs in the Malayan fiction. Yet nineteenth-century sexological discourses also drew parallels between homosexuality and racial alterity. Like homosexuals, members of the non-white races were also defined as lacking in self-control and governance. The frequent presence in Maugham's fiction of Eurasian characters who pass as white, yet carry some secret essence of alterity that expresses itself at moments of crisis, provides a suggestive parallel with contemporary constructions of closeted male homosexual identity.

In this regard, the textual history of Maugham's story is worthy of attention. The central incident of "The Yellow Streak," in which the protagonists are caught up in a tidal bore, and nearly drowned, reflects an incident which did happen to Maugham and his companion, Gerald Haxton, during their travels in Borneo. In the original, unpublished manuscript of Maugham's notebook, Maugham and Gerald are accompanied by a white man who is only identified by the initial "G." Maugham provides a detailed description of this man, and remarks upon his Latin complexion, hinting that he may be an Eurasian. "G." is clearly the prototype of Izzart, yet there is no suggestion that he behaves, in crisis, in an unmanly way. In the published version of A Writer's Notebook, this man vanishes: Gerald and Maugham are alone. In the short story, as we will see, the Eurasian character takes on a role that was originally Maugham's. The class
background of the two leading characters in the short story, public school and "common" man, mirror those of Maugham and Gerald. Through the palimpsest that is the text of "The Yellow Streak" the reader may observe, the process of identification of homosexuality and hidden racial alterity, an identification that cuts across the grain of the text, disturbing some of the oppositions that have been so carefully assembled.

Maugham's "The Yellow Streak" depicts a homosocial relationship between two men; Izzart, working for the civil service of the Sultan of Sembulu, guides Campion, a mining engineer, around the state to investigate its mineral wealth. Tied together at first by professional function, Campion and Izzart are bound more strongly by a knowledge of a mutual complicity, in crisis, in failure to live up to codes of imperial manliness, and by their need to concoct a cover story to hide their failure. In the rising action of Maugham's carefully plotted story, Izzart and Campion emerge from the ritualized world of the Sea Dyaks, primitive and timeless, possessing a "monotony" of "entertainment" (151). All this world of darkness, the "serried throngs of brown people" (151) is focused upon reacting to the two men, who are its centre. A comparison between the author's account of his visit to a Dyak longhouse in A Writer's Notebook, upon which this section of "The Yellow Streak" is based, and the completed story show Maugham's rewriting, his moving of the
colonising subject from a marginal position of being almost an eavesdropper at a single feast to the position of being the focus of and pretext for repeated feasts.

Further strategies set up an unequal dichotomy between civilised and savage, colonising and colonised. As Izzart and Campion move downstream towards civilisation, the "strip of blue sky" overhead broadens out (152). The "violently luxuriant" (152) vegetation which imbues the travellers with "passionate wildness"(153) gives way to thoughts of Kuala Solor, and the orderly, rational processes of tennis, golf and billiards. A dead tree, white against the greenness of the forest, foreshadows the appearance of Hutchinson, resident of a downriver district:

In a few minutes they caught sight of the landing-stage and on it, among a little group of natives, a figure in white waving to them.

(155)

In Hutchinson's bungalow, Izzart proceeds from a bifurcation of race to one of class, snubbing Campion with "the faintly malicious intention of putting him in his place" (156). He has attended Harrow, Hutchinson Winchester; the two men share their memories and Campion, "who obviously had enjoyed no such advantage" (155) retires, excluded, to bed. It is here that some of the seamlessness of the narrative is disturbed, Sedgwick's "sutures of contradiction"(Between Men 15) becoming visible. Hutchinson confesses that he lives with a Malay woman, and that they have children with a
"touch of the tar-brush" (158). The woman is summoned by Hutchinson and sits with the men, smokes a cigarette, and answers Izzart's questions "without embarrassment, but also without effusion" (157).

In his bedroom after talking to Hutchinson, Izzart casts off his European ducks, puts on a sarong, and remembers his own Eurasian mother, once beautiful and compliant, like Hutchinson's "good girl," now old, ugly and unruly, "a fat old woman with grey hair who sat about all day smoking cigarettes" (159). Izzart's consciousness of his racial alterity results in a paranoia that produces his own racism:

"You are dark," said Hutchinson. "Do Malays ever ask you if you have any native blood in you?"

"Yes, damn their impudence." (162)

Izzart's articulated racism has, of course, a parallel in Maugham's own expressions of homophobia. Just as the Eurasian's sense of the precariousness of his own inclusion in the category European produces in him an intense desire to exclude others, so Maugham's closeted homosexuality leads him, when he does write of homosexuality at all, to make such comments as "the homosexual has a narrower outlook on the world than the normal man" ("El Greco" 531). Yet Izzart also connects racial alterity to femininity. Hutchinson's Malay woman and Izzart's mother are two halves of the same woman--Maugham's unruly female who moves from submission to passionate activity, and thus disturbs the ordered world of
men. Izzart's complaints against his mother—her "shockingly familiar" (159) way with friends, and her "extravagant" tastes (160)—are the very complaints that would, he feels, be levelled at him if his colleagues discovered his ancestry:

They wouldn't say he was gay and friendly then, they would say he was damned familiar; and they would say he was inefficient and careless, as the half-castes were. (160)

The parallel between the yellow streak of Izzart's race and a similar flaw in his observance of the codes of masculinity is thus written over another parallel, that between homosexuality and femininity, in societal constructions of homosexuality as "a certain way of inverting the masculine and feminine in oneself" (Foucault, History 43). These parallels established, Maugham's short story moves towards its climax.

After leaving Hutchinson's bungalow, Izzart and Campion find their boat caught in the Bore, and they are nearly drowned. Once again, Maugham's textual revisions of the incident work to enhance a division between coloniser and colonised. Izzart's emotional control is maintained even as the boat sinks, in contrast to the activity of the "madly" paddling native crew:

"Are you all right?" Campion shouted to him.

"Yes, enjoying the bath," said Izzart. (165)

After a time in the water, however, Izzart loses control; he
abandons Campion, ignoring his cries for help, and aided by Hassan swims for the bank. Lying in a Dyak longhouse, believing Campion dead, Izzart takes a pleasure in remembering his enforced passivity. It has been Hassan who has helped him to the shore, who has "sank down on it" and lain, stretched out in exhaustion, with him. In the longhouse, Izzart sees "the yellow new moon lying on her back, and it [gives] him a keen, almost a sensual pleasure" (170). In its association with femininity, it recalls the physical bond he has with his mother, despite his "mortification" at her habits, the "deep tenderness . . . stronger than the ordinary feeling of mother and son" (160). Izzart's racial alterity, homoeroticism, and a coded femininity merge in the figure of the yellow moon on its back; they give Izzart a temporary respite, a moment of pleasure, a protected space of counter-discourse within the "wretched" (160) enactment of colonising discourse. Then Campion enters the longhouse, saved by the boat's crew from the river.

The denouement of Maugham's short story is a progress by Campion and Izzart to the comfort of Kuala Solor. Interrogated successively by unofficial, official and Resident, Izzart is always interrupted by Campion's desire to tell the story first, a desire that proceeds, it transpires, from Campion's own fear of having shown the "white feather." Izzart's final conversation with Campion reveals that the prospector is unaware that Izzart failed to
do his ultimate to rescue him, of his failure in the codes of masculinity; his distrust of Izzart is rather based upon racism:

Campion chuckled good-naturedly, and his blue eyes were gay with amusement.

"The yellow streak," he replied, and then, with a grin that showed his broken and discoloured teeth: "Have a cheroot, dear boy." (185)

In appropriating Izzart's public school vocabulary, Campion signals his intent to trade class for race in the economy of colonial masculinity. Campion is "not going to tell a soul" (185); in return he will be treated as a class equal, trading his blue eyes for credit to cover over his broken teeth. The short story ends, then, with the cover story in place, with a conspiratorial papering over of the cracks in colonial discourse.

For all Maugham's papering, however, that discourse is flawed. For in his revisions of the material of A Writer's Notebook, Maugham made one more change. In "The Yellow Streak," when Izzart and Campion are struggling in the water, they are passed by two canoes full of Malays, who avert their faces and pass on. The Malays have no function in the narrative; they pass by, but the wake of their passage is troubling, the introduction of a complicating factor which is not, finally, reducible to significance. Like the passage of the Malay canoes, Maugham's homosexual subtext disturbs the text around it. Unable to conceptualise
an autonomous, independent homosexual identity within a text, Maugham must secretly pursue affiliation with other identities that are defined as absences, as parasitic on the colonial discourse of masculinity. Attached to femininity and racial alterity, Maugham's sexual difference inverts the dyads of the text and threatens to form new alliances at cross-purposes to those the narrative enforces. Finally silenced, it still leaves traces of its passage: there is a "yellow streak" in the monumentalism of Maugham's short story that even the finest sutures of contradiction cannot close.

5. Purloining "The Letter"

"The Yellow Streak" exemplifies racial alterity working its sabotage within the European community; Maugham's short story "The Letter," in contrast, represents a threat posed by a racial group outside that community, the Chinese. Chinese figures make frequent appearances in Maugham's oriental fiction, even when the fiction is not set in China itself. Their role is frequently subsidiary, oiling the wheels of the plot and providing a pretext for the interaction of European characters. "A Chinese who spoke English" (Collected Short Stories 390) points the narrator towards the District Officer's residence at the beginning of "The End of the Flight." The Chinese merchant Kim Ching summons Dr. Saunders to Takana at the beginning of The
Narrow Corner; Jack Almond's body is found in the house of "a middle-aged Chinese woman" (CSS 399) in "A Casual Affair." Yet Maugham's Chinese also threaten racial divisions through their imitation of the West; they are simulacra, possessing all the distinguishing features that mark off European identity as separate, and thus questioning whether such identity is anything more than a performance. Like the Japanese gentlemen who look "very European" while playing deck quoits in "P. & O.", Chinese figures fill Maugham's narrators with "a vague disquiet;" they are "sinister" because they "wear so easily a disguise" (The Casuarina Tree 57). Such cultural transvestism threatens the status of European men. Thus the Chinese cook in "Honolulu" achieves what "Bananas," a more superficially threatening racial Other, cannot: he seduces his European captain's mistress.

Maugham's representation of Chinese figures in the Malayan stories mirrors the anomalous position of the Chinese in British Malaya. The British encouraged Chinese immigration and commercial involvement, yet they did not encourage integration of the Malay and Chinese communities. The prosperity of traditional Malay rulers fitted into British constructions of Malay society; that of Chinese merchants did not. By the 1890s, John Butcher notes, the richest individuals in the F.M.S. were Chinese, and after 1900 many wealthy Chinese set out to live a conspicuously western lifestyle. The most impressive Western-style houses
in Kuala Lumpur were owned not by British expatriates, but by prominent members of the Chinese community (83). The Chinese were also active in opposing racial segregation on the railways (Butcher 97-106), and after the 1911 Revolution were perceived by the European community as more "truculent" and prone to disrupting the colonial order (Butcher 114-115). In this regard, it is significant that the rioters on Prynne's rubber estate in Maugham's short story "The Door of Opportunity" are Chinese.

The story which best exemplifies the troubling presence of Chinese men and women in Maugham's Malayan stories is one of his most famous, "The Letter." On one level, "The Letter" follows the paradigms of race and gender outlined early in this chapter. Two men, Robert Crosbie and Mr. Joyce, uncover a secret of transgression centred upon a woman--in this case Leslie Crosbie's affair with and murder of Geoffrey Hammond--and then proceed to cover it over; they break the law rather than break the urbanity of colonial discourse. Leslie, like Mrs. Cartwright in "Footprints in the Jungle," is invested with both unruly sexuality and the capacity for "'self-control'" and "'determination'" (190). She is, superficially, a model mem, "in her quiet way charming" and "a very agreeable hostess" (192):

Though she was not pretty there was something agreeable in her appearance. She had elegance, but it was the elegance of good breeding in which there was nothing of the artifice of society. You had only to look at her to know what sort of
people she had and what kind of surroundings she had lived in. Her fragility gave her a singular refinement. It was impossible to associate her with the vaguest idea of grossness. (205)

Under Joyce's patient observation, however, Leslie's facade cracks, her face "no longer human . . . distorted with cruelty, and rage and pain" (230), animated by "fiendish passion". Having obtained a confession from Leslie, Joyce is keen that the show should go on. The short story, in contrast to "Footprints in the Jungle," ends with Leslie in her husband's power; he knows of his wife's affair, yet will countenance its suppression for the good of the community. The final scene of "The Letter," significantly, takes place at Joyce's home. The letter destroyed, and the disciplining ritual of confession over, Leslie proceeds to model herself upon Mrs. Joyce, another model mem whose cocktails are "celebrated through all the Malay States" (226):

Mrs. Crosbie's features gradually composed themselves. Those passions, so clearly delineated, were smoothed away as with your hand you would smooth crumpled paper, and in a minute the face was cool and calm and unlined. She was a trifle pale, but her lips broke into a pleasant, affable smile. She was once more the well-bred and even distinguished woman. (230)

The last line of the story is Leslie's apology to Mrs. Joyce for giving her "'so much trouble'" (230).
The triangle between Joyce and the two Crosbies, however, is paralleled by another, congruent triangle, that between Leslie, Joyce, and his Chinese clerk, Ong Chi Seng, who conducts the negotiations for the purchase and suppression of the letter which provides evidence of Leslie's crime. The first few paragraphs of Maugham's short story provide a ready example of Chi Seng's ability to infiltrate textual spaces that would normally, under the medievalist rhetoric of the text, be reserved for whites. The opening of "The Letter" foregrounds an explicit contrast between Asian disorder and European order:

Outside on the quay the sun beat fiercely. . .
Singapore is the meeting-place of a hundred peoples; and men of all colours, black Tamils, yellow Chinks, brown Malays, Armenians, Jews, and Bengalis, called to one another in raucous tones. But inside the office of Messrs. Ripley, Joyce, and Naylor, it was pleasantly cool; it was dark after the dusty glitter of the street and agreeably quiet after its unceasing din.

(186)

Joyce's office, however, has been infiltrated by Chi Seng, "very neat in his white ducks," speaking "beautiful English, accenting each word with precision" (187). Chi Seng's "elaborate accuracy" (200) of speech is matched by his elegant dress-sense:

He wore very shiny patent leather shoes and gay silk socks. In his black tie was a pearl
and ruby pin, and on the fourth finger of his left hand a diamond ring. From the pocket of his neat white coat protruded a gold fountain-pen and a gold pencil. He wore a gold wrist-watch, and on the bridge of his nose invisible pince-nez. (201)

Joyce is keen to damn Chi Seng with faint praise, the narrator commenting that the Chinese clerk's clothing represents "the height of local fashion" (201). Nevertheless, Chi Seng's discreetly extravagant mime of British couture suggests a potential appropriation of constructions of manliness based upon observation and somatic repression. The clerk's appearance is clearly contrasted with that of Robert Crosbie:

Mr. Joyce noticed now the old felt hat, with its broad double brim, which Crosbie had placed upon the table; and then his eyes travelled to the khaki shorts he wore, showing his red hairy thighs, the tennis shirt open at the neck, without a tie, and the dirty khaki jacket with the ends of the sleeves turned up. He looked as though he had just come in from a long tramp among the rubber trees. (187-188)

Not only does Chi Seng have a sartorial advantage over Crosbie, he also appears more self-controlled than Joyce. Joyce is tense; he fidgets, forming "little construction[s]" with the fingers of both hands (189). Ong Chi Seng remains
calm and efficient, putting his "long slim fingers" forward only to open the door. The only flaw Joyce can find in his mimicry is his Chinese assistant's "difficulty with the letter R"; this difficulty only becomes apparent in the last third of the story, Chi Seng having successfully pronounced "Crosbie" as early as the first page. The fact that Chi Seng's pronunciation has already passed without comment for most of the story time only underlines the success of his English impersonation.

Ong Chi Seng's purloining of nominally European characteristics is matched by other examples of impersonation in "The Letter." Leslie Crosbie's self-control is paralleled by that of the Chinese woman with whom Hammond has lived. Leslie oscillates from absolute "composure" to the "'hidden possibilities of savagery there are in the most respectable of women'"; the unnamed Chinese woman, in contrast, walks "with the air of a woman sure of herself" and appears to Joyce to be "a woman of character". Hammond's liaison with her strengthens the case of the defence, since, Joyce comments, "'[w]e made our minds to make use of the odium which such a connection cast upon him in the minds of all respectable people'". Yet she also represents, as Leslie reports, "'the only woman who really meant anything to him'". Her costume "not quite European nor quite Chinese", the woman represents a troubling, unfixed mime of the European, more controlled and singleminded than either Leslie or Robert, with an agenda
that she carries through to a successful conclusion at the expense of both.

Further examples of Chinese doubling and copying resonate throughout "The Letter." The letter itself is a double, since the letter that Ong Chi Seng presents to Joyce is a copy "written in the flowing hand which the Chinese were taught at the foreign schools" (202). The "small square room" in which Joyce and Crosbie pay off the Chinese woman mimics the dark, "private room" (186) in which Joyce conducts his legal business. Both are the sites of negotiation regarding writing; the story that will be written in both sites is a compromised one, a story of mutual convenience. Colonial jurisprudence assumes the status of a necessary lie. Joyce's reflection that he "had lived in the East a long time and his sense of professional honour was not perhaps so acute as it had been twenty years ago" (214) destroys any moral superiority he may feel over Chi Seng. As Joyce twists and turns to cover up Mrs. Crosbie's crime, Chi Seng remains "unmoved" (217): it is the Chinese who now shows the virtues of repression and self-control which constitute Maugham's construction of British manliness.

Yet the most troubling example of Chinese imitation of British discourse in "The Letter" is a brief sentence of a visitation. Early in the short story Joyce recalls the cover story which Mrs. Crosbie has previously told him to explain her shooting of Hammond. The passage is curious in that
Leslie is quite clearly the focalizer of the early part of her cover story, yet the narrative seamlessly incorporates other points of view, especially in its latter half. In Leslie's account, Hammond, "his eyes hot with desire," and now "no longer a civilized man, but a savage" (197) attempts to rape her; she escapes when he stumbles, picks up a revolver upon the desk, and fires at him while her mind goes blank. The account continues, but moves seamlessly to incorporate the points of view of other characters: the servants and the A.D.O. Withers, who interviews Mrs. Crosbie the morning after Hammond's death. Leslie's private recollections thus become public discourse; what is presented as the recollection of one individual is, in fact, the summation of the recollections of many. All speak with one voice; unreliable private testimony has become a public narrative, a univocal story that the European community must and will maintain despite private doubts as to its veracity. At the moment of transition from private to public discourse stands a Chinese man, the Crosbies' head-boy, "a level-headed fellow" (198). Having killed Hammond, Leslie locks herself in her room, and the narrating gaze shifts to the servants watching the door close. Hammond's body lies on the verandah, a fitting marker of the need for sexual continence and repression upon which the rhetoric of British Malaya insists. Yet the personification of the ideals upon which such a rhetoric is based is not a European, but rather the Crosbies' servant. The head-boy usurps the ideal of
rationality to which the British characters aspire; alone of
the fictional Hammond, Leslie, Robert or Joyce, he is truly
able to live up to Joyce's insistent advice to the European
man in the tropics: "'You must pull yourself together, you
know. You must keep your head'" (188).

The examples of "Footprints in the Jungle," "The Yellow
Streak," and "The Letter," show how the rhetoric of
Maugham's Malaya is subject to challenge by affiliations
between femininity, homosexuality and racial alterity,
affiliations which cut across the binary oppositions upon
which the texts are founded. While acknowledging the
presence of these cross-currents, it is nonetheless
important to register that their presence may,
paradoxically, ultimately strengthen the rhetoric of the
Malayan fiction. Masculinity in the Malayan stories is a
police action in which transgressive elements are hunted
down only to be silenced. If the hunt is difficult, then
this only reflects greater credit upon the successful
enforcers of moral and textual discipline. Transgression is
never, finally, allowed to speak as transgression: the show,
after numerous postponements, must go on.
The Narrow Corner, published in 1932, is the last of Maugham's novels set east of Singapore. The work is very different from most of the Malayan short stories, the latter's rigid insistence upon discipline and communal values being replaced by a romantic, inchoate East. In this respect, the novel is closer to the South Pacific fiction, and the few short stories, such as "The Vessel of Wrath," which Maugham set in the Dutch East Indies. Its characters are transients, recycled from the pages of A Writer's Notebook, The Moon and Sixpence, and On a Chinese Screen, and they spend much of the story time hopping from island to island. Yet The Narrow Corner also differs from the earlier fiction in that it makes no distinction between primitive and civilized. The East of the novel is a conglomerate space, figured in terms of intoxication, a space which overwhelms masculine attempts to make it signify.

The Narrow Corner, like so much of Maugham's fiction, features a Girardian triangle, in this particular narrative centred upon Fred Blake, Erik Christessen and Louise Frith. The mutuality of Fred and Erik's infatuation is unusual in Maugham's novels; through infantilization, and association with the tropes of nineteenth-century imperialist boy's fiction, however, the relationship is drained of erotic content. The rhetoric of the text here presents a logical
fallacy, a false dilemma in which the only two possible masculine subjectivities are those embodied by Erik and Fred, each dependent upon a particular construction of Louise Frith's femininity. Louise herself is the site of sexuality displaced from Erik and Fred's relationship; like Maugham's Malayan mems, she is semiotically slippery, a fountainhead of contradictory signification which both Erik and Fred strive unsuccessfully to channel into the racial and sexual oppositions necessary for their own constructions of manliness.

If Erik and Fred fail, the text offers another possibility--a surrender to the intoxication of the East, embodied by the novel's focalizer, the opium addict Dr. Saunders. Saunders' openly homoerotic gaze and his addiction are clearly linked by contemporary sexological discourse: his joys are transient and furtive, centered around the portable closet of the opium den. Addiction and homosexuality remove Saunders from participation in the masculine dialectic of the text. As "lord of space and time" he watches without the possibility of entering the action, or of the desired object returning his gaze. The field is thus open for the continued replaying of tropes of heterosexual masculinity. Removed from the story, Saunders' "cure" is to place his identity in abeyance, to become a cipher, a technician opening up a window on what passes as real.
1. The Conglomerate East

The Narrow Corner begins a tendency in Maugham's writing that will later reach its full expression in The Razor's Edge, the tendency to present Asia not so much as a geographical space but as a philosophical construct. The characters and settings of the novel are recycled from observations made in China and the South Pacific, as well as the Dutch East Indies. Dr. Saunders, the focalizer, appears in On a Chinese Screen, while Captain Nichols and his termagant wife are taken from The Moon and Sixpence. If Maugham's preface to the Heinemann Collected Edition is accurate, the whole text arose from a passage removed from the earlier novel. Several more passages are adapted from the then unpublished A Writer's Notebook: the journey that Saunders, Blake and Nichols make in the schooner from Takana to Kanda-Meria, the description of Kanda-Meria itself--Banda, which Maugham visited in 1922 (A Writer's Notebook 205)--, and even the character of Swan, taken from notes made upon Maugham's 1916 visit to Apia.

The novel's narrative, predictably, thus covers a wide geographical area. Commencing in Fu-chou, and ending in Singapore, The Narrow Corner is largely set in the Dutch East Indies, although embedded narratives on different diegetic levels take the reader as far afield as Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and India, as well as back in time to the golden ages of the Portuguese and Dutch colonial
empires. More surprising, perhaps, is the text's lack of differentiation between these areas. In Maugham's Malayan stories, a variety of racial others are placed within a rigid signifying framework; it is the play at the border of the compartments within the framework that gives the stories their tension. In The Narrow Corner, in contrast, a variety of racial others are rolled into a whole, all basking in the light of a romanticised, temporally distant, East. "All this," the narrator writes in the single sentence of the first chapter, "happened a good many years ago" (11).

The novel's representation of the Orient as an ideation, an undifferentiated mass, is shown clearly in Erik's explanation to Saunders of how the Englishman Frith came to his island:

"He'd read about it in some old travel book. He's told me he wanted to come here ever since he was a kid. . . . [H]e'd forgotten the name of it; he could never find again the book in which he'd read about it; he just knew there was an island all by itself in a little group somewhere between Celebes and New Guinea, where the sea was scented with spices and there were great marble palaces."

(138)

Frith, in effect, has imagined the island before discovering it. Erik notes that when Frith first arrived at Kanda-Meria, he did not recognize it as his island, but since it was "'the only place he could find'" (139), he "'shifted his
standpoint'" and "'forced the reality to tally with his fancy'" (139). Saunders, in response, compares Frith's fantasy to The Arabian Nights, and then proceeds to recollect the conglomerate East of Fu-chou, comparing a Chinese fisherman to Sinbad. The Arabian peninsular, the Dutch East Indies, and a coastal city in China are, through metaphorical attachment, made identical, all part of an imaginary space whose contiguities seem more philosophical than geographical.

Even moments that promise to mark out geographical or racial spaces as distinct from one another are recuperated into the novel's vision of a conglomerate East. Earlier in the novel, Dr. Saunders is called upon to go to the assistance of a dying Japanese pearl diver, a task which enables him to perform the task of imaginative reconstruction so beloved of Maugham's narrators and focalizers:

He did not know why, but he thought of the little boy the dead diver once had been, with his yellow face and sloe-black eyes, who played in the streets of a Japanese town and was taken by his mother in her pretty Japanese dress, with pins in her elaborately done hair and clogs on her feet, to see the cherry blossom when it was in flower and, on holidays, to the temple, where he was given a cake; and perhaps once, dressed all in white, with ashen wand in his hand, he had gone with all his family on pilgrimage and watched the
sun rise from the summit of Fuji Yama, the sacred mountain. (73)
The passage above is a conventional Maugham gambit. It is littered with clichés, but nonetheless achieves its purpose of authorizing Saunders' narration by showing his evident knowledge of the specifics of Eastern cultures. No sooner have these specifics been brought to light, however, than Saunders seizes the moment to attach them to his homogenized East:

Some say that if you believe a thing with sufficient force it becomes true. For that Jap, lying there, dying there, painlessly, it was not the end, but the turning over of a page; he knew, as certainly as he knew that the sun in a few hours would rise, that he was but slipping from one life to another. Karma, the deeds of this as of all the other lives he had passed, would somehow be continued. (68)
The Japanese pearl diver thus lives according to the same laws that Frith discovers in the books on Eastern religions he has brought from Bombay or Calcutta. The specific manifest content of the diver's background is peeled back by Saunders to reveal a latent meaning which again accords with the novel's vision of a romantic, undifferentiated East.

The troping of Asia in The Narrow Corner is very different from that expressed in The Moon and Sixpence. The opposition between primitive and civilized which the earlier
novel insists upon is elided. Asia embodies no dark, undiscovered secrets; Europeans, indeed, become part of the romance. Frith is engaged in translating Camoes' *Lusiads*, while Erik speaks enthusiastically to his visitors of the glories of the Portuguese and Dutch empires. Frith, on his island, with his books and his daughter Louise, suggests a parallel with Prospero; significantly, there is no Caliban, no recalcitrant Native Other, to upset the harmony of the mythical landscape. In a sense, the Asia of *The Narrow Corner* is very like the Africa of Maugham's early colonial novel, *The Explorer*, existing only to give the European imagination scope for expression. Unlike the Africa of the Explorer, however, the Kanda threatens to overwhelm its European visitors with drowsiness and intoxication: the island's air is "heavy with fatigue" (99), the colour of the sea "so bizarre and sophisticated it seemed to belong to art rather than to nature" (100).

The conglomerate nature of Asia in *The Narrow Corner*, like China's refusal to signify in *The Painted Veil*, raises problems for male characters whose masculinity is constructed upon the ability to apportion meaning, to place a Cartesian net over an unruly landscape. Fred Blake comments that the islands in the sea look beautiful from the deck of a ship, so much so that he once asked Nichols to land on one of them:

"When you got to one of them and went on shore, it all went--I mean, it was just trees and crabs and mosquitos. It slipped through
Erik's reply to Fred's statement is perhaps even more revealing:

"I know what you mean . . . . It's always a risk to put things to the test of experience. It's like the locked room in Bluebeard's castle. One's all right as long as one keeps clear of that. You have to be prepared for a shock if you turn the key and walk in." (101)

In one sense, Erik's reply foreshadows his own experience with Louise, the "spectacle of the naked human soul" (212) which so terrifies Saunders. In another, it embodies the fear of another spectacle, that of the closet. The narcotic effects of the conglomerate East may be more comfortable than self-scrutiny.

2. Boy's Own

In The Narrow Corner, the primary motor for the development of the plot is the triangular relationship between Erik Christessen, Fred Blake, and Louise Frith. The most apparent feature of Fred and Erik's mutual enthusiasm is its infantility; passages of The Narrow Corner in which the characters express admiration for each other seem to belong to Victorian children's literature, to R.M. Ballantyne's The Coral Island (1858) or W.H.G. Kingston's The Three Midshipmen (1873) rather than to a novel of the
1930s. "'He's such a big hulking fellow and as strong as
an ox'" (115) remarks Fred, "'you have a sort of feeling you
want to take care of him'" (115). "Simple goodness" shines
forth from Erik "with so clear and steadfast a light" (177);
when talking to him earlier Fred gives "the doctor a puckish
glance that made him look like a mischievous boy" (115). The
fiction for boys of the nineteenth century, which Maugham
read as a child did, Michael Taylor has commented,¹
provide a space in which homoeroticism and homophobia might
be explored within a relatively "safe" environment. Within
the twentieth century, the effects of such exploration are
incorporated within autobiography and adult fiction. Graves'
Goodbye to All That (1930) and Maugham's own Of Human
Bondage (1915) both represent intense homosocial
infatuations between boys at public school: perhaps the most
explicit representation of homoeroticism and its violent
repression by homophobia comes from another, parallel
culture in which questions of masculinity were even more
pressing: Robert Musil's Young Törless (1906). The Narrow
Corner, however, displays an opposite trajectory: distanced
by Saunders' ironic narration, the debate concerning
masculinity is reframed in the terms of Maugham's own
boyhood. In "Red" we saw a contestation of masculinity
around issues of class and emotional repression, in Malaya
the triumph of a masculinity in which "heroes . . . had to
learn to be obedient, to compromise, and to submit to the
greater knowledge of their elders and their community" (Boyd
Maugham's masculine dialectic, however, takes us much further back, back almost to masculinity before homosexuality.\(^2\) It is a dialectic which, I feel, attempts to sidestep the issue of the homosexual, to produce a world in which concepts of masculinity firmly based upon gender difference do battle over a colonial landscape. The return of the repressed, of abject homosexuality, is marked by Saunders' narration.

The dialogue in *The Narrow Corner* is, then, between two constructions of Victorian masculinity. The first, represented by Christessen, is an "androgynous blend of compassion and courage, gentleness and strength, self-control and native purity" (Nelson 530) which represented "manliness" in Victorian fiction until the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Erik is, Fred remarks, "as strong as an ox" (113, 115), but his strength is directed compassionately to the assistance of others. After becoming fast friends, Erik and Fred behave "like a couple of boys" (112) and go climbing; Erik uses his strength to rescue Fred when he slips. Christessen's reluctant strength in arm-wrestling is further representative of his manliness:

"Put your hand up."

Fred placed his elbow on the table and Erik did the same. They put palm to palm and Fred tried to force Erik's arm down. He put all his strength into the effort. He could not move it. Then with a little smile the Dane pressed back and gradually Fred's arm was forced to the table.
"I'm like a kid beside you," he laughed. "Gosh, a fellow wouldn't stand much chance if you hit him. Ever been in a fight?"

"No. Why should I?" (113)

Manliness, Claudia Nelson writes, was often figured by the mid-Victorians as "androgyne (if not outright feminization)" (529) since it was based upon a construction of gender in which "women's hypertrophied morals went hand in hand with their atrophied sexuality" (528). Women were in this sense manly, and the ultimate example of androgynous, self-curbing and sacrificing manliness was Christ. Thomas Hughes, whose Tom Brown's Schooldays (1857) might be thought to have inaugurated a new construction of manliness based upon activity and individualism, nonetheless wrote The Manliness of Christ (1879) some two decades after his famous novel, in which Christ is celebrated as androgynous, tender and thoughtful of others. Christessen's name, and his metaphorical presentation as a source of light in The Narrow Corner, make a parallel of some importance here.

The androgynous nature of Christessen's manliness is expressed in his investment in Louise, and before her, her mother Catherine, as icons of purity and restraint. "'He didn't know it,'" remarks Louise to Saunders after Erik's death, "'but it wasn't me he loved, it was mother'" (209). Seeing Louise on her balcony--"a sarong round her loins, but the upper part of her body was naked" (158)--Erik responds not with desire but with a meditation upon purity:

She did not look a woman of flesh and blood.
She was like a spirit-maiden and Erik, his mind full of the old Danish stories, almost expected her to turn into a lovely white bird and fly away to the fabled lands of the sunrise. (158)

Talking with Saunders about his engagement, Erik confesses that he is ashamed that "'I shall not go to her as pure as she will come to me':"

"When you love someone like Louise it's horrible to think that you've lain in strange arms and you've kissed bought and painted mouths. I feel unworthy of her as it is. I might have at least brought her a clean and decent body." (145)

In Erik Christessen's eyes, then, manliness is equated with continence, with a purity and restraint modelled upon a particular construction of woman. This construction is an essence, hidden beneath the body which may be metonymically cut up into "arms" and "mouths" but which exists only as a cipher for what lies beneath, "the essential flame of an individual of which all the qualities that the world sees are only emanations" (145). Although dependent upon an idealised view of woman as the personification of restraint, Erik's manliness is a quality to which both sexes may reasonably aspire; it is, in a sense, a manliness before homosexuality, before the threat of male homosexual panic made androgyny subject to paranoid scrutiny.

Fred Blake's manliness, in this context, seems closer
to a construction that came into being in the late Victorian era and persisted, although part of a new series of contestations, into the twentieth century. Reading boy's fiction of the eighties and nineties, Claudia Nelson notes the emergence of a new type of masculine hero:

[T]he end of the century . . . "manly" boy increasingly contains an admixture of the animal, as boys' novels spend more and more time dilating on the width of the hero's shoulders and less and less on the depth of his principles. Manliness becomes less a state of mind than a state of muscle, and its new antonym is "effeminacy." The benign unnaturalness of self-controlled, responsible, asexual androgyny seems newly dangerous—degenerate, sterile, and often homoerotic. (542)

The new hero of boy's fiction was "assertive and confident" (Dunae 120); in the John Harkaway stories written by Bracebridge Hemyng and later Edwin J. Brett he might also be sadistic (James 94-95). Fred Blake fits this pattern: he is "shabbily dressed in trousers" and a singlet, and his topee is "grimy" (15), but his physique is subject to continuous narrational scrutiny:

He was tall, with square shoulders, a small waist and slender hips; his arms and neck were tanned, but the rest of his body was very white. He dried himself, and putting on his pyjamas again came aft. His eyes were shining
and on his lips was the outline of a smile.

"You're a very good-looking young fellow,"
said the doctor. (86)

Fred does not appreciate music or literature; he seems, like Swan, to be a "man of action" (131), and, as Saunders calls him, a "'public danger'" (201). Impressed as he is by Christessen's goodness, wishing life to be "'brave and honest'" (203), Blake nonetheless performs a very different form of masculinity from that of his friend, a masculinity based not upon androgyny but upon an opposition of the two sexes.

Fred Blake's masculinity thus seems to be a masculinity after the discursive production of homosexuality in the late nineteenth century, one that insists upon differentiating itself from any feminine, and therefore possibly homosexual connotations. Telling Saunders of the scandal that resulted in his being sent away from Australia on Nichols' schooner, Blake is keen to make a gendered distinction between the sexes foundational to his own particular construction of manliness:

"They'd get furious with me. Girls are funny, you know, nothing makes them so mad as a chap standing off. Of course, I never let it interfere with my work: I'm not a fool, you know, in any sense of the word, and I wanted to get on." (183)

Blake "gets on" by consciously exoticising women, producing them in opposition to his manliness. He describes Mrs.
Hudson, the wife of his father's influential sponsor with whom he has an affair, as having hair "like a gipsy's" and "enormous black eyes" (184). "She didn't look British," he remarks, "she looked like a foreigner, a Hungarian or something like that" (184). In contrast to Fred's own restraint, he characterises Mrs. Hudson as "absolutely shameless" (185), "as jealous as hell" (186), and finally as "a madwoman . . . capable of anything" (189). Blake's manliness is much more familiar to readers of Maugham: fundamentally, it is dependent upon a construction of femininity completely opposed to that of Christessen. Women here represent abandonment, letting oneself go, whereas men embody muscular restraint. Masculine strength is not only in the biceps but also in the sphincters.

In the context of *The Narrow Corner*, Fred Blake's construction of masculinity does gain some narrational endorsement. Fred is much more physically attractive than Erik, and Saunders sympathises with Fred's construction of femininity. The doctor's instincts are "outraged by the unbridled passion of the experienced woman" who has seduced Fred (190), and he describes Louise as "like an enchantress in an old tale whom men loved to their destruction" (218), a remark which clearly dovetails with Fred's misogyny. The two men's masculine dialectic is largely expressed through their rivalry for Louise Frith, a rivalry that extends beyond sexual possession to a contest over the signification of her femininity. Louise's femininity is semiotically mobile. In
some aspects, she seems to satisfy Erik's fantasies of purity: like the Intended in "Heart of Darkness," or Miranda in *The Tempest* she is an icon of virtue and innocence. In others, she much more closely corresponds to Fred Blake's construction of woman as sexually incontinent, and therefore associated with racial alterity. When first meeting Fred, Louise looks at him "not with pertness or brazenly, but as though she were a little surprised" (122): she seems very much a Miranda figure here. Later, in contrast, she remarks to Sauders "'I've lived on this island almost all my life... You don't imagine sex has many secrets for Malay children. I've heard everything connected with it talked about since I was seven'" (209). The contradictory constructions of femininity which Louise embodies are most clearly reflected in the narrative's set-piece descriptions of her, the first when Saunders and Blake first meet her, the second at a subsequent dinner party.

Walking in the grounds of Frith's estate, the protagonists of *The Narrow Corner* encounter Louise for the first time:

She wore nothing but a sarong of Javanese batik, with a little white pattern on a brown ground; it was tightly attached just over her breasts and came down to her knees. She was barefoot. Beside the little smile that hovered on her lips, the only sign she gave that she noticed the approach of strangers was a little shake of the head, almost involuntary, to loosen her hair and an
instructive gesture of the hand through it, for it was long and hung down her back. It spread in a cloud over her neck and shoulders, very thick and of a fairness so ashy pale that, but for its radiance, it would have looked white. . . . The sarong tightly wrapped around her concealed nothing of her form; she was very slim, with the narrow hips of a boy. . . . The girl standing there in an attitude of indolent beauty reminded him of some statue he had seen in a museum of a goddess attaching her peplum; he could not remember it very exactly. Greco-Roman, he thought.

(120-1)

This passage is unusual in Maugham's oriental fiction, in that it is a description of a white woman that does not make an explicit contrast between surface and depth. Mrs. Cartwright and Mrs. Crosbie are gazed at by the narrators and focalizers of their stories who wish to peer beyond the civilized facade into the depths of female depravity. The set-piece description of Louise, in contrast, is much closer to the descriptions of native women in the stories of *The Trembling of a Leaf*. Like these women, Louise is represented as being a natural work of art, unaware of the effect she produces upon those who gaze at her: her beauty is "indolent," like that of a classical statue, while later in the same passage she is said to have "flower-like grace" (121). She wears native dress. At the same time, she is
"ambiguous" (121): the text insists upon the extreme whiteness of her hair, her "blue" eyes (121), and Saunders notes that it is "her fairness in that tropic scene" that produces in him an "exotic sensation" (121). Like the fabric of her sarong, Louise merges from brown into white, from European Self to Other.

In the second passage, Louise wears an antique sarong at the banquet her father gives in his guests' honour:

She was wearing a sarong of green silk . . . .

It was Javanese, and such as the ladies of the Sultan's harem . . . wore on occasions of state. It fitted her body like a sheath, tight over her young nipples and tight over her narrow hips. Her bosom and legs were bare. She wore high-heeled green shoes, and they added to her graceful stature. That ashy blonde hair of hers was done high on her head, but very simply, and the sober brilliance of the green-and-gold sarong enhanced its astonishing fairness. Her beauty took the breath away. The sarong had been kept with sweet-smelling essences or she had scented herself; when she joined them they were conscious of a faint and unknown perfume. It was languorous and illusive, and it was pleasant to surmise that it was made from a secret recipe in the palace of one of the rajahs of the islands.

"What's the meaning of this fancy dress?" asked Frith. (127-8)
Again we see Louise's semiotic mobility: she wears native dress, "'fancy dress'" even, but high heels. She is fair, but associated by Saunders with visions of harems and other orientalist constructions. Such visions link her to the "'intoxication'" (141) which Erik feels when Frith tells him tales of the Portuguese Empire, while Louise's scent recalls the "limpid" air under the nutmeg trees on Frith's plantation (119), and foreshadows the "aromatic" wind which blows when she walks down to the pool with Fred (135). Louise, finally, fits neither Fred's nor Erik's gendered construction of femininity. After Erik's suicide and Fred's departure she tells Saunders that Erik "wanted to imprison me in his ideal . . . And Fred in his way was the same" (211). Having juggled the constructions of masculinity so important to the two men Louise lets them fall: all that remains for Saunders is "bare, ruthless instinct" (212), and "the spectacle of the naked human soul" that Louise embodies fills him with horror.

Empty as they are shown to be, the representations of masculinity embodied by Erik and Fred are still endorsed by the text after the death of both of the men. The alternative to the manful struggle to make meaning, represented by Saunders' "deplorable habits," which "in some parts of the world . . . would have been accounted vices (vérité au-delà des Alpes, erreur ici)" (111) is, like the contents of Bluebeard's room, too horrible to contemplate.
3. Saunders and Addiction

The focalizer who perceives the intoxicating, conglomerate East which Louise embodies, and who has grown to be part of it, is Dr. Saunders. Saunders lives among the Chinese population of Fu-chou, while the other "foreigners" regard him "with distaste" (12) and turn "a cold shoulder on him" (12). The doctor is clearly orientalised: "'I've lived in the East long enough,'" he comments to Nichols, "'to know that it's better to mind my own business'" (51). Listening to Erik's gramophone playing Wagner, Saunders finds in the music "something shoddy, blatant, and a trifle vulgar, a sort of baronial buffet effect," since he has "grown accustomed in China to complications more exquisite and harmonies less suave" (106). Exposure to the East, however, has not so much refined Saunders' moral sensibilities as placed them in complete abeyance. Saunders is clearly decadent: buyable for the right price (14), cynical yet also sentimental (205), taking the attitude that "[r]ight and wrong were no more to him than good weather and bad weather" (24). In this respect, he resembles Maugham's types of Oriental masculinity in On a Chinese Screen, the philosopher and the cabinet minister, whose highly developed artistic tastes conceal an equally acute moral vacuity. Erik's masculinity is one that antedates the constructions of homosexuality and heterosexuality, Fred Blake's masculinity one that defines itself against the homosexual.
Saunders, of all Maugham's characters, perhaps comes closest to being that abject homosexual. Saunders' body is that of the opium addict, the bisexual, in Maugham's construction, addicted to a homoerotic gaze. Yet such a surrender of the body, a turning away from the codes of heterosexual masculinity that Fred and Erik represent, in a sense empowers Saunders to narrate, or at least to focalize, the novel. Saunders's surrender to the intoxication of the conglomerate East gives him both an inside knowledge and a space nominally outside the progressive narrative of the West, a space which he uses to full effect.

The construction of addiction in the Victorian era seems, Geoffrey Harding remarks, a suitable subject for the application of a Foucaultian "general history," seeking "to establish a network of institutional relations whose conditions form a 'regime of truth'" (77). It is thus similar to other nineteenth-century constructions which Foucault has disassembled: sexuality, incarceration as a corrective and confessional process, and the genesis of the clinic. In the early nineteenth century opium taking was tolerated in England across a wide spectrum of classes. Opium eating might remain the preserve of the rich, but laudanum (opium dissolved in alcohol), pills, lozenges and proprietary medicines containing opium were widely used by the working classes (Berridge and Edwards 22). From the 1860s onwards, however, opium addiction came under scrutiny as a disease: success in the definition of "recognizable
physical conditions such as typhoid and cholera" (150) led to a belief that scientific methodology might be applied to "less definable conditions" such as opium addiction, "with a large social or economic element in them" might be treated "on strictly biological lines" (150). Investigation of the effects of opium upon the body's physiology, however, were never divorced from moral considerations: opium was considered to degenerate "the moral character" of the addict (Harding 84), and it was held that people of certain character were more susceptible to addiction. "There are certain men," wrote Fitz Hugh Ludlow, in mid-century, "to whom opium is as fire to tow, and my friend was one of these" (Day 252).

The construction of addiction as arising from immorality tightened in the twentieth century, with the increasing use of opium, morphine and cocaine as recreational drugs rather than as self-prescribed treatment for a variety of illness; it underlies late twentieth century representations of heroin and cocaine use. It is interesting to note here, with reference to Saunders, parallels between the discursive production of addiction and that of sexuality. Jeffrey Weeks notes the use of the word "addict" to apply to the activities of a man charged with male prostitution in the 1860s ("Inverts, Perverts and Mary-annes" 116). The consensus among sexologists that there were two types of homosexual, congenital inverts and habitual perverts ("Inverts . .." 123-4) has a parallel in
T.D. Crothers' attempt to distinguish between habitual "morphinism" and congenital "morphinomania" (Parsinnen 92). Both homosexual and addict were simultaneously a predisposed type, whose body might be surveyed for signs of potential deviance, and morally culpable, suffering from an inadequacy in manliness. The addict, wrote the author of a self-help guide, might "emancipate himself from his bondage if he will manfully accept the conditions upon which he alone can accomplish it" (Day 76).

Saunders' addiction is part of the above contestation of discursive productions, with the moral dimension perhaps made more acute in the years following the Dangerous Drugs Act of 1920. Yet the specifics of his addiction: the drug to which he is addicted and the method by which he consumes it, lead back to questions of colonization and imperialism. Eve Sedgwick links the pathological/moral model of addiction not merely to the addict's body but to larger questions of the constitution of the body of the state:

The "decadence" of drug addiction . . . intersects with two kinds of bodily definition, each itself suffused with the homo/heterosexual problematic. The first of these is the national economic body; the second is the medical body. From the Opium Wars of the mid-nineteenth century up to the current details of U.S. relations with Turkey, Columbia, Panama, Peru, and the Nicaraguan Contras, the drama of "foreign substances" and the drama of the new imperialisms and the new
nationalisms have been quite inextricable.

(Epistemology of the Closet 173)

Sedgwick stresses that the threat of introjection of foreign substances into the national body is raised as a means of production of "reifications of national will and vitality" (173); discourse against addictive drugs stresses not only their debilitating effects but also their foreign origins. Indian Opium was for Britain first a means of staunching the flow of silver to China, then a means of leverage to negotiate the unequal treaties of Nanjing and Tianjin. In the late nineteenth century and on into the twentieth, "the belief that the immorality of Britain's conduct towards China ('The Great Anglo-Asiatic Opium Curse') would somehow come home to roost" (Berridge and Edwards 198) became prevalent. Most opium consumed in Britain was, as late as 1900, imported from Turkey; most of it was eaten or drunk in laudanum, paregoric, or other tinctures or mixtures. Despite this, discourses of bodily purity and racial paranoia concentrated upon Chinese opium dens and the activity of opium smoking, in which Saunders indulges.

The discourse surrounding the opium den in London in the nineteenth century has been explored by both Virginia Berridge and Terry Parssinen. During the first half of the century, little attempt was made to portray the opium den as a social threat (Parsinnen 53); indeed, journalists often wondered whether there was such a thing as an opium den. In the late nineteenth century, the opium den enters British
fiction as a distillation of vice and degeneracy. The opening scene of Dickens' *Edwin Drood* dramatizes not only Jasper's moral delinquency, but also the fear of an erasure of racial boundaries within the "scattered consciousness" (1) of "this unclean spirit of imitation" (3).\(^3\) The opium den in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, "where the memory of old sins could be destroyed by the madness of sins that were new" (184) contains not only Chinese, but also "Malays," and "[a] half-caste, in a ragged turban" (188). The fear here seems not to be just of China but of a composite East--Jasper dreams of a spike, "set up by the Sultan's orders for the impaling of a horde of Turkish robbers," of "ten thousand dancing-girls" and "white elephants caparisoned in countless gorgeous colours" (1)--which threatens to engulf and erase the "Western" observer. Conan Doyle's opium den in "The Man with the Twisted Lip" is a place where "orgies" (307) are enacted under the watchful eye of "a sallow Malay attendant" (308). In all three representations Sedgwick's epistemology of the closet seems at work: all three protagonists who enter the opium den lead double lives (Parsinnen). Jasper's transgressions in the den are immediately followed by an innocent conversation about him by two "venerable persons" (4); Dorian avoids James Vane's murderous intentions there by the impossible youthfulness of his face, doubled with the picture he keeps closeted away; Isa Whitney is, in fact, the eponymous man with the twisted lip. What the opium den seems to offer is
an orientalist closet, a suspension of morality within an imaginary, domesticated orient that may be sealed off from, but the traces of which cannot quite be erased from, the surrounding discourse. Such a construction of the opium den became a common trope in the twentieth century, through sensationalised news reports and popular fiction, such as the writings of Sax Rohmer (Parssinen 117-120).

Before turning to the portable opium den that Saunders carries around with him, we should first examine Maugham's representation of opium in On a Chinese Screen and A Writer's Notebook. The section of On a Chinese Screen entitled "The Opium Den" is a standard debunking of the "stage" image of the opium den through an emphasis upon its domesticity, a debunking which in itself is almost tropological, drawing upon investigative journalism from the 1870s onward (Berridge and Edwards 201). "Fiction is stranger than fact," the narrator remarks (51), having described being led to the den "by a smooth-spoken Eurasian" (50), and finding it to be "a cheerful spot, comfortable, home-like, and cosy" (51). A passage about an "Opium Dream" (A Writer's Notebook 194) of the author's is similarly devoid of moral judgement; the dream is superficially not frightening but curious, involving a high speed trip down a poplar-lined French road which slows to a more "leisurely" pace in English surroundings. What both incidents establish is an authority to narrate. Unlike Saunders, the narrator is not subject to interlocution from characters: he merely
observes, serving as a guide to take the reader towards a seemingly authentic East, towards "fact." Yet the opium den and opium dream in Maugham's non-fiction still maintain an exoticism--one of the characters in the den is defined as an "inscrutable Oriental" (61)--; they are still, like the fictional characters they are set in opposition to, staged. If they are made unthreatening, they are made so by the authority of the narrator as one who is "in the know": an admission of a certain complicity with decadence gives one the strength to narrate.

Saunders' status as addict does result in an isolation from the European community: "the acrid scent of opium" (12) that hangs around Saunders' house in Fu-chou repels all but the most desperate members of the foreign community. Discovering Saunders' habit, Blake remarks that he cannot imagine how "'a man like you could degrade himself by doing such a thing'" (87). Nichols, too, is eager to distance himself from the threat of addiction:

"I've never took to it meself. I've known a good many as did, though. Never seemed to do 'em much 'arm. Settles the stomach, they say. One fellow I knew went all to pieces . . . . Good position and everything. They thought a rare lot of 'im. Sent him 'ome to get cured, but 'e took to it again the moment 'e come back. Ended up as a tout for a fantan 'ouse." (51)

Nichols dramatises both the taxonomy of casual user and
addict, and the interpenetrability of these categories. For Saunders too, there seems to be the ever-present threat that the very substance that gives him the privilege of objective narration, that makes him a "lord of space and time" (39) may also enslave him. The putatively objective narrator who stands behind Saunders emphasises that he uses the drug "with moderation" (12), and that he does "not mind waiting a little. To delay the pleasure was to increase it" (136). However, the doctor is later said to smoke "six pipes" a night (83), and exceeds this on two occasions. His injecting of Fred Blake with another narcotic, morphine, to cover the fact that the Australian has visited Erik's room after the Dane's suicide suggests that addiction may not be bound within his own body, but has the potential to spread to those of others, to pervert the system of colonial justice.

Saunders' isolation from the European community through addiction raises the possibility of other alliances; his consumption of morphine becomes associated with, in the eyes of the European community in Fu-chou, an improperly intimate relationship with the Chinese community, and is also associated with a homoerotic gaze. The Chinese in Fu-chou know that Saunders smokes opium, and he thus seems to them "a sensible man" (12). Kim Ching gives Saunders opium as a present; Ah Kay is Saunders' servant and anaesthetist, and preparer of his opium pipes, but in their preparation the relationship slips from a hierarchial one into one of equality--"'Let's try Kim Ching's chandu,'" said Dr.
Saunders. "'No need to stint ourselves tonight'" (83). Ah Kay is also subject to an eroticising gaze:

He was a slim, comely youth with large black eyes and a skin as smooth as a girl's. His hair, coal-black and cut very short, fitted his head like a close cap. . . . He moved silently, and his gestures had the deliberate grace of a cat. (37)

Ah Kay's preparation of opium, his "knead[ing]" of a pellet which he watches "swell" (38) and then inserts into a "pipe" is erotically suggestive. It is after smoking opium that Saunders' eyes linger on the "naked" body of Fred Blake (86); Blake is earlier compared to "a young Bacchus in a Venetian picture" (70), suggesting a further connection with another intoxication. Saunders' consumption of opium always take place at night within the confines of a cabin or room, which takes on the characteristics of the opium den, an orientalised closet that like the den itself, bleeds traces into the outside world of the novel. The nutmeg trees of Frith's plantation scent the air with "an idle sensuousness" (120), while Frith's presentation of the East to Erik is glossed as an "intoxication" (141). Intoxication, the closet turned inside out, seems to come to stand for the East; as addict, Saunders thus gains an authority to speak.

Saunders' status as legitimated observer is bought, however, by his marginalization; he is enabled to speak only because of the narrative's production of him as an outcast
who may observe, but not participate in the dialectic of masculinity within heterosexuality. Saunders' gaze is not, and cannot be answered. "Dr. Saunders," the narrator of the text observes, "sometimes flattered himself with the thought that Ah Kay regarded him with affection" (37), but mutual, reciprocal affection between the two remains an illusion. During the storm Saunders, though terrified, nonetheless remains on deck because he feels the need of "human companionship" (80), yet it is this very thing that his position as observer denies to him. Saunders' age is repeatedly emphasised in the novel and contrasted with the youth of Louise, Fred, Erik and Ah Kay. All are peculiarly vulnerable, Fred "like a little flower self-sown in a stone wall" (106), Ah Kay with "a languorous elegance that was strangely touching" (37), yet all are incommensurably distant. Homosexuality, we have seen, is foundational to the construction of heterosexuality; Fred's masculinity is poised upon an always slippery slope of a homosocial/homosexual continuum:

To the extent that identity always contains the specter of non-identity within it, the subject is always divided and identity is always purchased at the price of the exclusion of the Other, the repression or repudiation of non-identity. (Fuss, Essentially Speaking 103)

Saunders is called forward into discourse on the condition that his otherness, his non-identity, is opposed to the
masculinity of the text. His subjectivity is a confessional one, called into existence on the condition that it is irredeemably opposed to the events of the text.

Saunders' status as addict who is given the privilege of speech recalls Maugham's statements about Melville and El Greco discussed in previous chapters, in which the homosexual's detachment from the text enables a certain irony and objectivity in narration. In *A Writer's Notebook* Maugham comments that "Dostoievsky reminds me of El Greco":

> Both had the faculty for making the unseen visible; both had the same violence of emotion, and the same passion. Both give the effect of having walked in unknown ways of the spirit in countries where men do not breathe the air of common day. Both are tortured by the desire to express some tremendous secret, which they divine with some sense other than our five senses and which they struggle to convey by use of them. Both are in anguish as they try to remember a dream which imports tremendously for them to remember and yet which lingers always just at the rim of consciousness so that they cannot reach it.

(154-155)

It is the "unknown ways" of the closet, the opium den, the East of "countries where men do not breathe the air of common day" which form Saunders' tremendous, extra-sensory secret; abandoning the somatic, he gains an ability to narrate the imaginary.
The effect of Saunders' empowerment to narrate, however, is to disavow homosexuality within heterosexuality. Masculine ideals, represented by Erik, are those of a construction of manliness before homosexuality; masculine "reality," to which they are opposed, is represented by Fred Blake. The field is thus left open for a naturalised heterosexuality to be tropologically attached to the Orient: Louise, we remember Saunders imagining in Singapore, is "like an enchantress in an old tale whom men loved to their destruction" (218). Sitting outside the Van Dyke Hotel, Saunders meets up again with Nichols, who is then hauled away by his nagging wife. Through Saunders' ironic narration all the tropes come back to roost—woman as commodity and scapegoat, invested as a proxy of male desire. If The Narrow Corner expresses homoeroticism more directly than Maugham's other novels, it does so only to more firmly contain it. With the homosexual safely marginalized, a heterosexuality based upon a rigid opposition between genders is produced as reality.
The last novel in this study, *The Razor's Edge*, is significantly different from Maugham's oriental fiction of the twenties and early thirties. Published in 1944, the book is very much separate from the intertextual universe of the earlier novels and short stories. Characters such as Captain Nichols or Dr. Saunders, who appear in texts written a decade apart, do not intrude upon the autonomous world of *The Razor's Edge*. Nor is Asia the primary setting of the novel: most of the narrative takes place in Chicago and Paris. The novel's Asian element consists at the most of thirty pages of embedded narrative describing the visit of the protagonist, Larry Darrell, to India in search of spiritual enlightenment. Even while he is in Asia, Larry's situation is very different from that of the male protagonists of Maugham's previous oriental fiction. He does not reach an artistic apotheosis, in the manner of Strickland, nor does he conduct a series of complex negotiations over the boundaries of colonial communities, as the male protagonists of the Malayan stories do. The fact that Larry is, as are all of the novel's main characters except for the narrator, American, means that questions regarding masculinity and British identity are, at the very least, rephrased in this text. Larry visits India much like a tourist, acquires enlightenment much as one might select a suitable souvenir, and then returns triumphantly to the
For all the differences between *The Razor's Edge* and Maugham's earlier fiction the text does, I feel, possess enough similarities to its predecessors to justify inclusion in this study. Despite the brevity of the narrator's conversation with Larry regarding the latter's Indian exploits, the narrator insists that "except for this conversation I should perhaps not have thought it worth while to write this book" (261). The Asia of *The Razor's Edge*, and the transcendence that it signifies for the novel's protagonists can be traced back to the China which abolishes signification in *The Painted Veil*, and to the image of a conglomerate East in *The Narrow Corner*. In *The Razor's Edge* the East of *The Narrow Corner* has become even more abstract; its primary function is now philosophical,Larry's Asiatic knowledge enabling him, in the narrator's construction, to transcend doxological masculinity. Yet India also remains Larry's great, unvoiced secret to which none but himself and the narrator are fully privy. Unlike Strickland, Larry returns to the West, carrying with him the secret of his experiences much as Saunders carries his supply of opium. Larry's investment in an East that is both exterior and interior to the West thus bears scrutiny in terms of Sedgwick's epistemology of the closet.

This chapter first notes the similarities that *The Razor's Edge* bears to its antecedents in the Maugham canon, and also the manner in which those antecedents are reworked.
in the novel. It then moves to an examination of the
doxological construction of sexuality which Maugham sets up
for Larry to transcend. Masculinity in The Razor's Edge is
firmly associated with work, and without work men become
feminized. Femininity, as in the Malayan stories, is marked
by essential sexual incontinence; Maugham's female
characters are prey to uncontrollable desire, while his male
characters remain blissfully undesiring. The fear of giving
in to desire is always present in The Razor's Edge,
delineated by the narrator's descriptions of the "tough
joints" of Paris and Toulon. Having described the sex/gender
system which the novel puts forward as representative of the
West, this chapter moves to examine the manner in which
India is made to function as a metaphor of transcendence, a
process of examination which entails study of the
representation of India in other of Maugham's works. Having
established the place of Larry Darrell in this binary
opposition between Occident and Orient, we move finally to
attend to the resemblances between Larry and the narrator.
What parallels can be made here between a masculinity based
upon closeted homosexuality and the act of narration or
writing? And what is the significance of the narrator of
Maugham's last oriental novel calling himself Somerset
Maugham, and proceeding to claim that the book is "a novel"
but also that "I have invented nothing" (1)?
1. The West of *The Razor's Edge*

The most obvious antecedent for the plot of *The Razor's Edge* is the short story "The Fall of Edward Barnard," in *The Trembling of a Leaf*, a story which, like *The Razor's Edge*, features a Girardian triangle drawn between two men and a woman. In both works the cynosural character leaves Chicago in search of alternative wisdom, of a lifestyle more fulfilling than that of a captain of industry, and in both texts this choice receives strong narrational endorsement. Unlike "The Fall of Edward Barnard," however, *The Razor's Edge* does not rely solely upon a primitive/civilized binarism. The book also reworks other Maugham texts: Larry's tramping around Europe with Kosti, for example, recalls both *Of Human Bondage* and Maugham's other novel written during the Second World War, *The Hour Before the Dawn* (1942). The model of sexuality which underlies "The Fall of Edward Barnard," in which repressed West is contrasted to natural East, is subtly transformed in *The Razor's Edge*. The binarism of control/release is in itself contrasted to another element: the possibility of transcendence.

Masculinity in *The Razor's Edge* is defined as work. "'A man must work, Larry,'" Isabel comments early in the novel. "'This is a young country and its a man's duty to take part in its activities'" (49). Later she begs Larry to "'[b]e a man ... and do a man's work,'" and, just in case he might have missed the point, remarks that he is talking "'the way
hysterical, highbrow women talk" (79). Gray Maturin's virility is clearly related to his industrial productivity. As a young capitalist before the 1929 Wall Street crash, he is the object of admiring glances from the narrator:

Gray Maturin was striking rather than handsome. He had a rugged, unfinished look; a short blunt nose, a sensual mouth, and the florid Irish complexion; a great quantity of raven black hair, very sleek, and under heavy eyebrows clear, very blue eyes. Though built on so large a scale he was finely proportioned, and stripped he must have been a fine figure of a man. He was obviously very powerful. His virility was impressive. He made Larry who was sitting next to him, though only three or four inches shorter, look puny.

(25-26)

The narrator is keen here to emphasize not only Gray's physical size, but also the fact that such bulk is perfectly proportioned: Gray is no Captain Nichols. The young industrialist's attractiveness lies in a sense of weight, power and heaviness that lurks in his body.

After the Wall Street Crash, the narrator again has the opportunity to observe Gray:

I was taken aback. His hair had receded on the temples and there was a small bald patch on the crown, his face was puffy and red, and he had a double chin. He had put on a lot of weight during years of good living and hard drinking, and only
his great height saved him from being grossly obese. . . . It was plain that his nerve was shaken. He greeted me with pleasant cordiality and indeed seemed as glad to see me as if I were an old friend, but I had the impression that his rather noisy heartiness was a habit of manner that scarcely corresponded with his inner feeling. (150-151)

Two points regarding masculinity can be drawn from the passage. The first concerns work: clearly, having lost the opportunity to work, Gray also loses some of his masculine attributes, especially those concerning continence and self-control (here represented, as so often with Maugham, by the ability to keep in check physical obesity). Yet there is also a second element to Gray's fallen masculinity which contrasts sharply with his pre-Crash self: concealment. In the first passage, he is self-evidently, "obviously" virile, and if he were stripped, the narrator comments, the body concealed beneath his clothing would be of the same, uniform, masculine nature. When feminized by losing his work, however, Gray is defined in terms of concealment: his outer behaviour no longer corresponds with his "inner feeling."

Normalized masculinity in The Razor's Edge, then seems to be defined through work, and through a certain transparency, a correspondence between the surface and the hidden depths of the masculine body. With a twist of textual
rhetoric common in Maugham's works, the text of The Razor's Edge provides several Others—women and feminized men—against whom this masculinity may be defined. Elliott Templeton, connoisseur, acolyte of nobility, and dilettante, fulfills the role of Other to perfection.

Elliott Templeton is very different from Gray Maturin. He gives the appearance of independent wealth, although his money has been, in fact, made through profits gained as a "dealer" in fine arts (4). Unlike Gray, he is not transparent:

[H]e had enough to live in what he considered was the proper style for a gentleman without trying to earn money, and the method by which he had done so in the past was a matter which, unless you wished to lose his acquaintance, you were wise not to refer to. (5)

Like the prototypical homosexual of whom Maugham writes in "El Greco," Elliott is much more concerned with decoration than with depth. He wears scent (23), and costumes which vary from the impeccably tasteful to the extravagant, and, the author remarks early in the novel, has "certainly not done a stroke of work for ten years" (39). His parties are beautifully staged, the wines he offers to guests carefully chosen with perfect taste. He is ingratiating, and given to flattery:

He took an immense amount of trouble to make himself agreeable to ageing women, and it was not long before he was the ami de la maison, the
household pet, in many an imposing mansion. His amiability was extreme; he never minded being asked at the last moment because someone had thrown you over and you could put him next to a very boring old lady and count on him to be as charming and amusing with her as he knew how. (6)

Elliott performs roles to perfection, but his performance only serves to demonstrate their shallowness. Caught up in a fetishisation of "[t]he glamour of . . . resounding titles" (12), of "passionate romanticism" (12), Elliott exists only on the surface, evading any attempt by the narrator to read him for depth. He gossips wickedly about sexual misdemeanours, offering at one point to act as procurer for Larry, yet he indulges in no liaisons himself.

Though presented indulgently, Elliott is clearly a marginal figure in The Razor's Edge. In Chicago, he confesses, people "'look upon me as a freak'" (23), while even in the London society he has frequented for so long he becomes dispensable:

The fashionable persons who occupied the stage had no use for the elderly man Elliott now was. They found him tiresome and ridiculous. They were still willing to come to his elaborate luncheon parties at Claridge's but he was quick-witted enough to know that they came to meet one another rather than to see him.

(128)
Elliott's closeted bohemia, his foppish tastes, have no place in a masculine world based upon work: he is obliged to retreat, as Maugham himself did, to exile on the French Riviera.

Masculinity in The Razor's Edge is defined not only by the contrast between masculine and non-masculine men, but also by being placed in a binary opposition with a particular construction of femininity, embodied by Isabel Bradley. Unlike Maugham's male characters in his novel, who rarely exhibit jealousy or desire, his female characters strive, with varying degrees of success, to rein in irepressible desires. In Isabel's case, the narrator again dramatizes such a Pauline struggle between flesh and spirit as a fight against obesity. Mrs. Bradley, Isabel's mother, he notes early in the novel, has "lost the battle with the corpulence of middle age" (14). Seeing Isabel for the first time, he notes that she is "a very pretty and desirable young woman, but it was obvious that unless she took care she would develop an unbecoming corpulence" (24). When he meets her several years later in Paris, the narrator again returns to the same topic, speculating that perhaps "she had taken heroic measures to reduce her weight" (145), and that "she owed her beauty in some degree to art, discipline, and mortification of the flesh" (146). In The Razor's Edge, Isabel's "plumpness" is clearly related to her sexuality, the narrator commenting at one point that "[s]he gave me the rather absurd notion of a pear, golden and luscious,
perfectly ripe and simply asking to be eaten" (89). Just as her body requires constant mortification, so too her sexuality also requires constant regulation and governance.

Like the memsahibs of Maugham's Malayan fiction, Isabel is subject to a narrational gaze which peers beneath the surface of her self-control. Driving back from Chartres to Paris, the narrator notices Isabel gazing at Larry's arm:

Her breath was hurried. Her eyes were fixed on the sinewy wrist with its little golden hairs and on that long, delicate, but powerful hand, and I have never seen on a human countenance such a hungry concupiscence as I saw then on hers. It was a mask of lust. I should never have believed that her beautiful features could assume an expression of such unbridled sensuality. It was animal rather than human. (202-3)

The narrator's description of Isabel is reminiscent of Joyce's examinations of Leslie Crosbie in "The Letter." Like Mrs. Cartwright and Mrs. Crosbie, Isabel is also manipulative, orchestrating Sophie Macdonald's return to alcoholism and thus preventing her marriage to Larry. Like the two female characters from the Malayan stories, she also manages to cover over such manipulation, to extract an agreement from the narrator not to tell anyone else. Her sensuality finally bridled, Isabel gives up her pursuit of Larry.
The Razor's Edge differs from Maugham's earlier fiction, however, in presenting a character who represents unrestrained female sexuality: Sophie Macdonald. Sophie comes from the same social milieu as Isabel, yet descends into the underworld of Paris and Toulon. She is associated with many of Maugham's tropes for lack of somatic control—opium addiction, alcoholism, and interracial sex. She is also, unusually for a Maugham character, associated with both male and female homosexuality:

"[S]o I went to Hakim's. I knew Larry'd never find me there. Besides, I wanted a smoke."

"What's Hakim's?"

"Hakim's? Hakim's an Algerian and he can always get opium if you've got the dough to pay for it. He was quite a friend of mine. He'll get you anything you want, a boy, a man, a woman, or a nigger. He always has half a dozen Algerians on tap." (239)

Interestingly, in a text that devotes a great deal of rhetorical energy to produce India as external to sexuality, female sexuality is represented through a metaphor which involves another colonized space, Algeria. Sexuality is here a natural resource, always "on tap," to be set flowing by the injection of suitable amounts of Western capital. Sophie, indeed, has already described her position in the café in the Rue de Lappe as that of a "'remittance man'" (207), exiled from her family in Chicago to avoid scandal at home, but provided with enough money to maintain herself.
Sophie is clearly presented as a representative of the abject aspect of female sexuality, unable to "pull [her]self together" (23), yet she is also attractive to the narrator in a way in which Isabel is not. The narrator always observes Isabel from a distance, with a gaze that is both specular and ironic. With Sophie, he seems to have an unspoken complicity. The tour of the "tough joints" (203) upon which Isabel's party meet Sophie is organized by the narrator himself, who confesses to having "some acquaintance" with the low life of Paris (203). Meeting the narrator later in Toulon, Sophie is keen to show off her new Corsican "boy friend" to him:

She addressed me. "And he's strong. He has the muscles of a boxer. Feel them."

The sailor's sullenness was dispelled by the flattery and with a complacent smile he flexed his arm so that the biceps stood out.

"Feel it," he said. "Go on, feel it."

I did so and expressed a proper admiration.

We chatted for a few minutes. I paid for the drinks and got up. (241)

Despite the texts' efforts to mark off Sophie as an example of female excess, to place her sensual indulgence in opposition to a masculinity based upon work, then, she and the narrator nonetheless share an unvoiced complicity.

The clear division between femininity and masculinity in *The Razor's Edge* is reinforced by the triangular
relationship between Larry, Gray, and Isabel, and by the minor characters in the novel. In a sense, the triangle cannot be called Girardian, since it is not based upon rivalry. Larry and Gray both desire Isabel, but they show no jealousy, since, as Sophie remarks, "'Larry's his [Gray's] best friend'" (26). In contrast, Isabel clearly sees Sophie as a rival in her relationship with Larry, and takes steps to eliminate her. The overwhelmingly ungovernable nature of female desire is also illustrated by Ellie Becker and Suzanne Rouvier. Both these women seduce Larry, Ellie creeping up on him in the loft of the German farmhouse in which he and Kosti were are. "'I didn't want to hurt her feelings,'" remarks Larry to the narrator. "'I did what was expected of me'" (121). Suzanne Rouvier seduces Larry with a similar result. "'When I left him I had the feeling that I should be grateful to him rather than he to me. As I closed the door I saw him take up his book and go on reading from where he had left off'" (199). Women in The Razor's Edge desire and show desire openly: men, even those, such as Gray Maturin, who conform very much to doxological codes of masculinity, do not. Men are defined by work, women by the extent to which they resist "'the horrible degradation of drink and promiscuous copulation'" (212).

In The Razor's Edge, the sex/gender system outlined above, in which men can either work or, like Elliott Templeton, hang parasitically upon the margins of society, is defined in terms of a geographical metaphor. It, and the
mundane world of physical production and reproduction it exemplifies, is the West. Transcendence, the possibility of a release from the physical, is represented by the East. In *The Razor's Edge* the East, represented by India, has become much more of a philosophical construct than a physical space. India is outside the progressive time of the West, and such exteriority gives Larry Darrell the third space so beloved of Maugham's narrators and focalisers, one in which, in the text's construction, he can transcend sexuality. Larry does, of course, journey to many countries, but it seems quite clear that both he and the narrator consider his experience in India as the philosophical centre of the novel. An exploration of the place of Larry and the narrator within Maugham's expression of sexual difference must thus begin with an examination of the construction of India in *The Razor's Edge*.

2. Inventing India

India in Maugham's novel bears many similarities to the conglomerate, romantic, intoxicating East of *The Narrow Corner*. Larry's description of Bombay reprises Singapore in "The Letter" or Fu-chou in *The Narrow Corner*:

"On the third day I got the afternoon off and went ashore. I walked about for a while, looking at the crowd: what a conglomeration! Chinese, Mohammedans, Hindus, Tamils as black as your hat; and those great humped bullocks with their long
The India that Larry visits is thus quite unlike that of Kipling, Forster, and other Anglo-Indian writers. Forster and Kipling explore, in their various perspectives, frictions and imagined harmonies between colonizer and colonized. Their novels' spatial metaphors reflect these frictions: Kipling's grand trunk road cuts across the landscape of *Kim* (1901), and much of the novel is concerned with the activity of surveying, of marking out the landscape. Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924), famously, juxtaposes roads "named after victorious generals, and intersecting at right angles, . . . symbolic of the net Great Britain had thrown over India" (14) with the formlessness of the interior of the Marabar caves. If it draws upon any construction of India at all, Maugham's novel would seem to be closer to nineteenth-century and earlier images of the subcontinent:

> Europeans took dreaming irrationality as a distinctive trait of Indian thought before the field of Indological research was even established. . . . The portrayal of India as a land of fabulous wealth, of miracles, of wishes fulfilled, a Paradise of sensual pleasures and exotic philosophers, apparently constituted a reiterated theme in medieval thought.

(Inden 420)

Like the China of *The Painted Veil*, the India of *The Razor's*
Edge is outside history, a dream-like, undifferentiated landscape that, like the South Pacific of The Moon and Sixpence, is denied coevalness with the West.

The allochthonous nature of India in The Razor's Edge is also reflected in other of Maugham's writings about India. Indeed, Larry's visit, the passages about India in A Writer's Notebook, and Maugham's essay "The Saint," published in Points of View (1958), all originate from a 1938 trip that Maugham and Gerald made to India. The passages in A Writer's Notebook recount the writer's quest for a real India beyond the trappings of the British Raj. Representative colonial administrators or traders, who form the subject matter of most of On a Chinese Screen, for example, are given much less attention in Maugham's account of his Indian journey. The text rather concentrates upon philosophers and yogis, faith-healers and acolytes. Unlike Maugham's China or Malaya, India in A Writer's Notebook does not remind the narrator of medieval or agrarian Europe: it is completely external to the West, marked out only by "something secret and terrible" (276) which the traveller cannot fully approach or comprehend. In "The Saint," Ramana Maharshi is compared to St. Francis of Assisi and Ignatius Loyola from the pages of Baring-Gould's Lives of Saints. It is no longer possible, the author remarks, to hope "to meet a saint in the flesh" (Points of View 56) apart from in India.

The India of The Razor's Edge is similarly marked off
from the linear flow of Western time in the novel. Larry's time in India is an embedded narrative, clearly differentiated from the rest of the text. In India, Larry recalls, "[t]he weeks, the months passed with unimaginable rapidity" (296):

"How could you stand it for two years?" cried Isabel.

"They passed like a flash. I've spent days that seemed to be unconscionably longer."

"What did you do with yourself all the time?"

"I read. I took long walks. I went out in a boat on the lagoon. I meditated." (165)

Time in Larry's India is indeterminate. From the time that Larry abandons his ship at Bombay to the time at which he boards another and sails to Marseilles five years, presumably, pass. Precise measurements of time, however, only occur after he puts on European clothes and catches a ship "[a] week later" (302).

India is not only temporally, but also logically outside the West. Most of the narrator's conversation with Larry about his experiences in India is a discussion of various elements of "the philosophical system known as Vedanta" (292) the narrator playing the Western foil to Larry's Eastern wisdom, always probing with logical questions that are not so much answered but rather turned aside. After a lecture on the nature of "the Absolute" Larry finishes with a rhetorical question to the narrator:

"The Chinese craftsman who makes a vase in
what they call eggshell porcelain can give it a lovely shape, ornament it with a beautiful design, stain it a ravishing colour, and give it a perfect glaze, but from its very nature he can't make it anything but fragile. . . . Isn't it possible in the same way that the values we cherish in the world can only exist in combination with evil?"

"It's an ingenious notion, Larry. I don't think it's very satisfactory."

"Neither do I," he smiled. "The best to be said for it is that when you've come to the conclusion that something is inevitable all you can do is make the best of it." (303)

Larry's replies to the narrator very much consist of the "covenient metaphors . . . current in India for centuries" which, Maugham remarks in A Writer's Notebook, are to an Indian he meets "an adequate means of reasoning. A beautiful image of the Ganges had for him all the force of a syllogism" (264). The narrator's syllogisms and enthymemes are met with metaphors and metonyms: India seems outside the logical, material order of the West.

Yet if India is external to the West it also, in the person of Larry, is made to appear internal. Larry carries his oriental knowledge about with him: his experiences in India differentiate him from the crowd, giving him, in the narrator's words, "'a sort of detachment,'"a feeling that
Larry keeps "'in some hidden part of his soul something I don't know what it is--a tension, a secret, an aspiration, a knowledge--that sets him apart'" (173). When he uses a form of hypnotism to cure Gray of a migraine, Larry remarks that he learned "'to do that sort of thing in India'" (172), but does not offer any explanation of the mechanism involved. At the end of The Razor's Edge, indeed, Larry seems set to smuggle his Orient back into the heart of the West, in his proposal to use a New York taxi as "my instrument of labour . . . [] an equivalent to the staff and begging-bowl of the wandering mendicant" (307).

While on one level, we have seen, India is constructed as a transcendence of Western sexuality, on another level its oscillation between interiority and exteriority seems very much related to Maugham's own constructions of masculinity. Larry's association with India is, in one sense, an association with unmanliness. India is not transparent, and does not submit to being read: Larry, similarly, is like "'a reflection in the water or a ray of sunshine or a cloud in the sky'" (194). Such opacity contrasts with the ease with which the narrator can see into the heart of a real man, such as Gray Maturin. India is also outside all productive labour. Unlike on his travels in Belgium or Germany, Larry does no work in India, only meditation, which seems to be related to the refusal to work, the "loafing" (35) which he practises in Chicago. Again this aspect of India contrasts with the construction
of masculinity based upon work which, we saw earlier, characterizes the West in *The Razor's Edge*.

In another, and contradictory sense, however, India seems very much a masculine space. The subcontinent is, in Larry's travels, devoid of women. Observing the self-control necessary for acceptance of fate, he observes, requires only "'a little manliness'" (286). Full of representative types of masculine behaviour, Larry's India, upon close examination, appears not so much a transcendence of the West as a subtle reflection of it.

Much of Larry's Vedantic philosophy, although constructed as a transcendence of the West, actually has surprising affinities with the sex/gender system which *The Razor's Edge* insistently puts forward as representative of Europe and North America. During their conversation, the narrator asks Larry how he proposes to live in North America:

"With calmness, forbearance, compassion selflessness, and continence."

"A tall order," I said. "And why continence? You're a young man; is it wise to attempt to surpress what with hunger is the strongest instinct of the human animal?"

"I in the fortunate position that sexual indulgence with me has been a pleasure rather than a need. I know by personal experience that in nothing are the wise men of India more dead right than in their contention that
chastity intensely enhances the power of the spirit." (304)

Larry here seems to have gained from India the very detachment from desire that the narrators of the Malayan and South Pacific short stories so prize, a detachment that is also foundational to Maugham's construction of manliness. Similarly, while Larry adopts "the comfortable Indian dress and . . . got so sunburnt that unless your attention was drawn to me you might have taken me for a native" (296), much of his philosophy strongly stresses racial difference:

"The Aryans when they first came down into India saw that the world we know is but an appearance of the world we know not; but they welcomed it as gracious and beautiful; it was only centuries later, when the exhaustion of conquest, when the debilitating climate had sapped their vitality so that they became a prey to invading hordes, that they saw only evil in life and craved for liberation from its return. But why should we of the West, we Americans especially, be daunted by decay and death, hunger and thirst, sickness, old age, grief and delusion? The spirit of life is still strong in us." (301)

Thus the very feature that marks out the West as different from the East, the fact that America is, in Isabel's words earlier in the novel, "'going forward by leaps and bounds'"
(74) and developing a new society based upon work, is paradoxically preserved in Larry's interpretation of the transcendence that India represents to him.

3. Sexual Positions

In the above analysis, The Razor's Edge displays classic features of the Maugham text with which we have now become familiar. Binary oppositions are set up, between normal and deviant, masculine and feminine, transcendent East and mundane West, only to be subtly undone by filiations working across the grain of the text: the narrator's complicity with Sophie Macdonald, or India's troubled identity as a masculine or non-masculine space. In The Razor's Edge, in a development of a trope used in Maugham's earlier fiction, both oppositions and filiations are figured, we have seen, in terms of exteriority and interiority. An opposition between interior and exterior, indeed, is present even at the level of the structure of the narrative. The narrator, Mr. Maugham, is associated with interiors: bars, cafés, drawing rooms and libraries. He travels extensively himself, but his journeys are never described in detail; he merely ends, or begins chapters with remarks such as "[t]he day after my talk with Isabel I left Chicago for San Francisco, where I was to take ship for the Far East" (57). The narratives which his interlocutors recount to him, are larger concerned with exteriors: Larry,
in particular, recounts his travels in Europe and later in India, his wanderings set on vast geographical canvases that escape not only domestic interiors but also, putatively, the restrictions of class, race, and nationality.

The division between internal and external in the novel can be analyzed in terms of Eve Sedgwick's proposition of an "epistemology of the closet" as a foundational epistemology in North America and Europe in the twentieth century. Following Foucault's supposition that sexuality became, in the nineteenth century, seen as expressing the core truth of concerning the nature of an individual human subject, Sedgwick traces how the perversions that Foucault describes as being entomologized by late nineteenth-century psychiatry and medicine, "Krafft-Ebing's zoophiles and zooerasts, Rohdlers' auto-monosexualists" (43) and a plethora of other categories were gradually replaced, in the early twentieth century, with a simple opposition between heterosexuality and homosexuality. Since heterosexuality as a term was created in response to Karl Kertbeny's 1869 coinage of "homosexuality" (Halperin 15), heterosexuality, while produced in opposition to homosexuality, is founded upon the prior existence of homosexuality. Thus, for both Sedgwick and gender theorist Judith Butler, homosexuality is an indispensable exteriority that is also internal to heterosexuality:

[The process by which heterosexual subjects are formed] thus requires the simultaneous production of a domain of abject beings, those
who are not yet "subjects," but who form the constitutive outside to the domain of the subject. The abject designates here precisely those "unlivable" and "uninhabitable" zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject, but whose living under the sign of the "unlivable" is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject. . . . In this sense, then, the subject is constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection, one which produces a constitutive outside to the subject, an abjected outside, which is, after all, "inside" the subject as its own founding repudiation.

(Butler, Bodies that Matter 3)

For Sedgwick, "a whole cluster of the most crucial sites for the contestation of meaning in twentieth-century Western culture" (Epistemology of the Closet 72) are marked by this epistemological foundation; indeed, "male heterosexual identity and modern masculinist culture may require for their maintainance the scapegoating crystallization of a same-sex male desire that is widespread and in the first place internal" (85).

Many of Maugham's works, we have seen, recognise at some level the imbrication of homosexuality within masculinity, and then work to abject it. In The Narrow Corner, Dr. Saunders is thus ostracized from the struggles
over masculinity that occur in the text, while "Red" introduces a series of diegetic levels which deflect the trajectory of passages of homoerotic description. The work of masculinity in Maugham's writing is often presented as that of narration. Narration, indeed, exemplifies many of the qualities valorized by "masculinist culture": rationality, distance, emotional continence, and the ability to peer through surfaces to reach a kernel of truth. Maugham's most frequent metaphorical representation of narration is as medical science, a practice which requires similar, nominally masculine, qualities. Yet Maugham's own situation as a closeted homosexual man makes his writings, I think, acutely aware of the presence of the epistemology of the closet. Elaborately framed narratives, and rhetorics of racial and gender difference, compartmentalize and control, in Maugham's narrators' eyes, the raw material of fiction. Yet they also enact a rhetoric of inside and outside that is fundamentally dependent upon the existence of the closet. Framed narratives are also closeted narratives: the readers of Maugham's fiction are allowed a temporary opening of the closet door, a glance into the abyss, before the door is closed again. There is always a suspicion in Maugham's writings that abjected homosexuality may be, in fact, foundational to his writing process: the homosexual in "El Greco," whose distance from heterosexuality provides the occasion for irony and narrative embroidery, does not seem so very different from Maugham himself.
The Razor’s Edge can thus be seen as the final part of an effort to turn fiction into fact which characterizes much of Maugham’s oriental fiction, an effort to manufacture textually a Maugham persona which will have so much extratextual life that it will cover over, or closet, the life of W. Somerset Maugham as a homosexual man. The narrator of The Razor’s Edge is much less of an active participant in the narrative than the younger narrator of The Moon and Sixpence: he is much more part of the textual furniture, and so the reader tends to look with him rather than at him. At the same time the gap between narrator and writer, which is left to some degree open in Maugham’s earlier fiction (the narrator is not directly addressed as Mr. Maugham in The Moon and Sixpence, the Malayan short stories, or even in the avowedly non-fictional On a Chinese Screen) is firmly closed: 

Many years ago I wrote a novel called The Moon and Sixpence. In that I took a famous painter, Paul Gauguin, and, using the novelist’s privilege, devised a number of incidents to illustrate the character I had created on the suggestions afforded me by the scanty facts I knew about the French artist. In the present book I have attempted to do nothing of the kind. I have invented nothing. (1) 

This disclaimer can be read as a strategy of containment: the Mr. Maugham of the novel is here associated as closely
as possible with the public persona of W. Somerset Maugham, writer and man of letters, an extra-textual persona with which readers of The Razor's Edge are usually already somewhat, if rather hazily, familiar. Such an association also serves, on a rhetorical level at least, to remove any emotional investment that the Maugham-narrator might be presumed to have in the plot. All is merely recorded, not invented, and it is the professional interest of the man of letters that motivates the recording of the characters' actions and their shaping into narrative coherence.

The strategy of bringing an extra-textual Maugham persona into the text can thus be seen as another of Maugham's textual bulkheads which attempt to keep binarisms firmly in place. The presentation of either Middle or Far East as a contradictory area of hypermasculinity, effeminacy, and simultaneously of transcendence of normative systems of sexuality and gender is, in fact, a common strategy in the writing of European homosexual men in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. To Burton and Forster's works we might add T.E. Lawrence's Seven Pillars of Wisdom (1922) and Edward Carpenter's From Adam's Peak to Elephanta (1892). The narrative strategy of The Razor's Edge allows a geographical and spiritual journey on the part of the central character, Larry, while at the same time removing W. Somerset Maugham from personal investment in it. The narrator of The Razor's Edge thus remains always within the scope of the mundane, interrupting Larry's narratives
with many a "gesture of impatience" (306) or ironic expostulation.

The Razor's Edge thus features none of the specularity which distinguishes The Moon and Sixpence: there is no wild pursuit, no peering into the depths of Larry's soul as the narrator of the earlier novel searches Strickland's. Indeed, it is Larry's absolute opacity that makes him attractive to the narrator:

I am of earth, earthy; I can only admire the radiance of such a rare creature, I cannot step into his shoes and enter into his innermost heart as I sometimes think I can do with persons more nearly allied to the common run of men. Larry has been absorbed, as he wished, into that tumultuous conglomeration of humanity . . . That it is all I can tell of him: I know it is very unsatisfactory; I can't help it. (340)

We have seen how Larry's opacity structures The Razor's Edge, a blankness that is external to the systems of signification in the novel and, at the same time, is internal to the West: the fact that Larry can move unidentified through the "tumultuous conglomeration of humanity" in America suggests that the "secret" which marks him out is undetectable, hidden beneath a conforming exterior. In the above passage such opacity infects the narrator: he is no longer able to reshape, or interpret his narrative in the normatively masculine manner of Maugham's
narrators. Rather, he must stand aside and watch as oppositions in the text again break down, as the "conglomeration" of humanity on the quayside in Bombay (281) becomes the conglomeration of American citizens into which Larry will vanish.

The unconscious irony of the narrative of *The Razor's Edge* is that its very structure, its oppositions between exterior and interior, opaque and transparent, and the epistemology of the closet on which these oppositions are founded, are all made possible by the opacity of the narrator himself. He is unshockable, and maintains an ironic neutrality towards all the objects of his narrative, Isabel especially. He is knowledgeable, but his knowledge never proceeds directly from personal experience. Commenting to Isabel that he feels Larry and Sophie's marriage has a chance of success, the narrator remarks that "'I've known two or three fellows, one in Spain, and two in the East, who married whores, and they made them very good wives'" (222). There is no suggestion, however, of the narrator having experienced such a marital situation at first hand. Similarly, when Isabel wants to take her party on "a tour of the tough joints" of Paris she comes to the narrator, who remarks that "because I had some acquaintance with them she asked me to be their guide" (203). The reason why the narrator might be familiar with these areas is again occluded. The narrator is thus, like Larry, opaque, much given to looking himself, to peering beneath surfaces, but
remaining unreadable himself. His gaze is frequently homoerotic, as in his admiration of Sophie's sailor boyfriend, and in his examination of a young priest who is attending Elliott's deathbed:

He stood motionless, looking out, a slender young man, and his thick waving black hair, his fine dark eyes, his olive skin revealed his Italian origin. There was the quick fire of the South in his aspect and I asked myself what urgent faith, what burning desire had caused him to abandon the joys of life, the pleasures of his age, and the satisfaction of his senses, to devote himself to the service of God. (255–256)

Again, the narrator seems very close to fulfilling Maugham's definition of the homosexual presented in El Greco: essentially shallow, observing with a detached irony the stream of life as it passes him by.

Maugham's last oriental novel, then, reprises many of the oppositions and subtle filiations of the earlier fiction. The assiduousness with which India is marked out as a space outside Western discourse only serves, finally, to demonstrate its absolute necessity as an exterior which lies outside, and thus defines, British identity. Within these complex negotiations concerning interior and exterior, writing emerges as a masculine endeavour, a process of imposition of a cartesian grid of rationality upon the undifferentiated flow of language. Yet masculinity in
Maugham's society, and especially acutely for the writer himself, contains also within it the abject spectre of homosexuality. The more the narrator protests his detachment, his own discursive invisibility, the more it becomes evident that he may have something to hide.
Conclusion

This thesis began with the argument that Maugham's works were worthy of attention in the light of contemporary postcolonial theory, and the variety of critical approaches grouped as lesbian and gay studies—or, more recently, queer theory. In analyzing Maugham's texts, I have stressed how such theories need to be local, that the theoretical and the literary text exist in a dialogic relationship, each continually questioning the other. In concluding this study, therefore, it seems appropriate to ask how Maugham's works raise questions concerning the theoretical modes applied to them. How, particularly, do they clarify or occlude the relationship between postcolonial studies and studies of the history of sexuality?

Postcolonial and gay and lesbian studies have much in common philosophically and methodologically. Both aim, through deconstructive work, to call into question naturalized discursive formations of race or nation, gender or sexuality. At the same time both are concerned to theorize resistance, to see homosexual and (post)colonial subjects not merely as passive creations of a dominant discourse, but as agents who intervene in their discursive surroundings, often to startling effect. Thus most textual analysis of homosexuality in a colonial context focuses upon interracial homosexuality as a hole in the real, an act of union that crosses borders and destabilizes oppositions
based upon nation and race. For Abena Busia, the depiction of interracial homosexuality in the relationship between British officer Michael Glyn and his African batman, Sulley, in Michael Caute's novel *At Fever Pitch* (1959) makes visible many of the contradictions of a colonial discourse commonly embodied by a racialized heterosexual binarism:

The chain of events which follows gives rise to the possibility of a radical reinterpretation of the colonial encounter, and transforms this text into one of the very few potentially liberating texts of its kind.

In this novel, as a consequence of his sexual behaviour, the hero faces what conquest can do to subject peoples, and he does not like what he sees. (368)

Jenny Sharpe, reading Forster's *A Passage to India*, is more circumspect in her claims regarding the emancipatory power of such textual faultlines. Viewing Adela's eroticizing gaze upon the punkah puller in the court room scene as a displacement of the author's own desire, Sharpe cautions that "the loving gaze that fixes the punkah wallah is in itself 'in place' by virtue of colonial structures of exploitation and domination" (151). Yet it is this homoerotic moment that gives Sharpe critical purchase upon Forster's novel:

[A] figure of truth and beauty, the punkah puller disrupts preexisting associations of untouchability with filth and pollution. His
disruptive presence in the place of colonial law thus denotes a theater that exceeds historical records. (152)

Again, a whiff of interracial homoeroticism puts the critic on the track of the "ex-orbitant" (Sharpe 152). Like a mine canary, interracial homosexuality provides a means of detecting noxious vapours issuing from fissures in the colonial text. In Sharpe's and Busia's essays, however, no sooner has it performed its task than it is discarded. More extended analysis of the pressure interracial homosexual desire places upon European self-representation is found in the work of Kaja Silverman, Sara Suleri, and Jonathan Dollimore. Working from three different critical perspectives (psychoanalytic, rhetorical, and materialist), and exploring the literary production of three different writers (T.E. Lawrence, Forster, and André Gide), the three critics reach surprisingly similar conclusions. For Silverman, Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* performs a "double mimesis," in which Lawrence projects his own sexuality onto his Arab companions, and then "discovers" this sexuality in them, identifying himself with it. Such a psychic movement, Silverman claims, does destabilize normative categories of race, sexuality, and gender. Sara Suleri, like Sharpe, locates the ability of *A Passage to India* "to demystify the mundanities attendant on colonial exchange" (144) in the novel's depiction of interracial homoeroticism. Suleri notes the ambiguous status of Aziz,
attractive but made diminutive, never looked at directly, in Forster's narrative:

Here, *A Passage to India* reifies a hidden tradition of imperial looking in which the disempowerment of a homoerotic gaze is as damaging to the colonizing psyche as to that of the colonized, and questions the cultural dichotomies through which both are realized.

(136)

Suleri continues her analysis to explore the manner in which the geography of Forster's novel constructs a "presexual space" which problematizes not only "such static categories as the 'English' versus the 'Indian'" (142), but also the homosexual/heterosexual binarism:

Once both visible and invisible caves in the hills of Marabar are rendered equally empty, then the supposed dichotomy between heterosexual and homosexual desire assumes a similarly interchangeable quality. (145)

Jonathan Dollimore, in a reading of Gide's *Amyntas*, emphasises like Suleri and Silverman the extinction of self in narratives which thematize interracial homoeroticism, while reining in excessive utopian impulses. The structure of power that makes these narratives possible, Dollimore emphasizes, should not be forgotten:

[W]e go to the exotic other to lose everything, including ourselves--everything that is but the privilege which enabled us to go in the first
A provisional conclusion that might be drawn from the readings above is that while such interracial homoeroticism may disrupt the binarisms which provide the foundation for concepts of European selfhood, the extent to which such disruption takes place or is recuperated will vary widely from text to text.

In the case of Maugham's writing, a further complication presents itself: homoeroticism is frequently not interracial, and even when it is, the gaze of the colonizer upon the colonized is so textually circumscribed as to contain any threat to the epistemological security of the gazer. A comparison between a homoerotic scene in Forster's *A Passage to India* with the erotically-charged scene of opium preparation in *The Narrow Corner* is, I think revealing of the manner in which Maugham's narratives often strive to contain the dislocations caused by the recognition of homosexual desire. In Forster's novel, Suleri explicates the "erotic interaction" between Aziz and Fielding in the scene in which Aziz puts his collar stud into Fielding's collar:

While the counterimperialist Western gentleman is in the act of dressing, he requires the aid of the "little" Indian who can both charm and complicate the dialogue that follows between them. (138)

The episode is one in which both parties participate, and in
which explores the possibility and impossibility of friendship across "the unavoidable partition" (Suleri 136) of colonialism. The scene between Saunders and Ah Kay in the schooner in *The Narrow Corner* is, although equally erotically suggestive, based on very different premises. For all Ah Kay's "knead[ing]" of the pellet of opium, making it "sizzle and swell" (38), he is very distant from Saunders. Maugham's narrative is very conscious of Ah Kay's status as a servant, and also of the vast disparity in the ages of the two men. There is no comradely friendship or mutuality in Maugham's scene, none of the striving to cross boundaries that characterizes the homoerotic moment in Forster's novel. Rather, Saunders' homoerotic gaze upon Ah Kay, the "comely youth with large black eyes and a skin as smooth as a girl's" (37) is predicated upon distance, and does not demand an acknowledgement or reply.

Much of the homoeroticism in Maugham's works, indeed, is found in glances exchanged within the European community: Neilson's fond gaze upon the remembered body of the young Red, or the Maugham narrator's admiration of a sailor's biceps at Toulon in *The Razor's Edge*. Eroticized glances, we have seen, are never returned: men rather achieve intimacy through the medium of a Girardian triangle, as rivals over a feminized landscape, or over the text and its mode of narration. Even the sexual transgressions--adultery and incest--which stand in for homosexuality, are largely within the European community, and are silenced by police action
within it. A short story such as "The Force of Circumstance," which deals with miscegenation, for instance, is concerned with the impact of Guy's liaison with a Malay concubine upon his marriage, not with a dissolution of the Self within the Other.

Reading Maugham in an antihomophobic, postcolonial context is therefore initially, at least for myself, a disappointing experience. One waits for affirmative depictions of homosocial male friendship, or for direct or peripheral challenges to the discourse of imperialism: one finds nothing. As I have indicated earlier, however, the very blankness of Maugham's texts, the smoothness of the surface which they present to the reader, speaks volumes concerning the success of their naturalization of representations of colonial masculinity. For all T.E. Lawrence's psychic journeys in Arabia, the reason for his presence in the Middle East in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* remains to advance the cause of the British Empire, and his narrative was read by a metropolitan audience as an account of imperial bravado in the manner of George Gordon or Robert Clive. A consideration of the place of homosexuality in Maugham's works runs less risk of valorizing emancipatory impulses, and thus Maugham's oriental fiction may reveal more concerning the abjection of homosexuality within British constructions of colonial masculinity than the texts of more explicitly polemical writers such as Gide or Forster.
From the analyses of Maugham's works of fiction in this study, it is clear that the author was a consummate recycler of orientalist tropes, tropes that are common in nineteenth- and twentieth-century European and North American representations of Asia and Australasia. The strategy of Maugham's fiction is to combine such tropological representations with other tropes of gender and of class, and to assemble them, with the aid of suitable Girardian trigonometry and binary division, into a framework that circumscribes, and so defines, the British male subject. In this respect Maugham's writing is unremarkable, since a similar strategy was used in much contemporaneous popular fiction. In Maugham's work, however, the manufacturing of this framework is closely associated with the writing process. Maugham's novels and short stories always foreground the process of composition: most of Maugham's narrators are either doctors or writers, and the act of narration is presented in clinical, quasi-scientific terms. Furthermore, the values attached to narration in Maugham's fiction—objectivity, irony, control, and emotional continence—are all normatively masculine ones. Through the act of writing, and through his fiction's constant recreation of the figure of "W. Somerset Maugham," narrator, Maugham creates a heterosexual, masculine public persona.

Maugham's situation of writing as a homosexual man, however, makes this creation of a heterosexual British male subject, I would argue, peculiarly artificial. There is
always a suggestion in Maugham's work that patiently-built frameworks are less stable than might at first sight appear, and so need to be repeatedly shored up. Indeed, Maugham's semiotic frameworks, with their rigid insistence upon outside and inside, suggest a metaphor for the masculinizing writing process that supersedes a scientific analogy: the production of a closet. We have seen in Chapter Four that Maugham's representation of the homosexual in "El Greco" seems also to be a comment upon his own writing process. Similarly, the end result of the narrator's pursuit of the romantic male artist in The Moon and Sixpence seems to be a formulation of masculinity based upon the presence of the closet. The presence of this closet, in turn, threatens the integrity of the subject, since what is closeted—homosexuality—has discursive affiliations with femininity and racial alterity, which are placed in Maugham's writings outside the framework of the male subject. Maugham's male British subject might be conceptualized as a torus: seen from one angle, it maintains a spatial integrity, clearly separating a central hole from the outside. If the shape is rotated, however, it quickly becomes apparent that inside and outside are connected.

Much of Maugham's work attempts to re-establish the barrier between inside and outside. In The Moon and Sixpence, many of the stories of The Trembling of a Leaf, and most of the Malayan stories, narrational frameworks, although contested, do close down the play of meaning which
threatens to dissolve the binary oppositions upon which they are based. In *The Razor's Edge* and *The Narrow Corner*, Maugham focuses narrational energy not so much upon the process of inclusion as upon exclusion, upon the abjection of Larry Darrell and Dr. Saunders which preserves the integrity of a heterosexual, masculine world. The two texts in which a connection between inside and outside is most clearly made, which compromise the sovereign position of the narrator, suggesting most clearly an affiliation between Maugham's writing process and homosexuality, are both texts written about China. It may be that the negation represented by China in Western discursive constructions, allied with the absence of devices such as conventional plot, or a male narrator, provides Maugham with more semiotic flexibility in these works, *On a Chinese Screen* and *The Painted Veil*. However, such semiotic dissidence cannot, I think, be theorized with the optimism Suleri, Dollimore and others show. If anything, the production of China as outside of all signifying systems tends to repeat orientalist stereotypes: Maugham's homosexual subject achieves expression through the deployment of an archive of orientalist tropes. Moreover, Maugham's own reading audience seems to have largely read over the dissolution of symbolic systems in these texts; book reviews criticize the unsatisfactory conclusion of *The Painted Veil*, or remark that *On a Chinese Screen* is a charming series of vignettes.

Maugham's oriental fiction thus makes us aware of the
complexity of intersections of gender, race, and sexuality in colonial texts concerned to construct and maintain a male British subjectivity. Though less optimistic than Jonathan Dollimore regarding ability of texts such as Maugham's to challenge a dominant discourse, I would like to end this study, as Dollimore ends Sexual Dissidence, on a positive note. Dollimore writes of love: it seems appropriate, in the case of Maugham's works, to write of pleasure. A pleasure still remains in Maugham's texts, as we saw in the last section of the Introduction, a pleasure that exceeds analysis. In The Pleasure of the Text Roland Barthes distinguishes between two types of text, the "[t]ext of pleasure," which makes no attempt to break with cultural constructions, and the "[t]ext of bliss," which "unsets the reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings to a crisis his relation with language" (14). Maugham's oriental fiction would appear to belong to the former category, and yet Barthes later states that the nature of text is also dependent upon reading practice. He writes of the pitfalls of rigid "socio-ideological analyses" of literature:

These analyses forget . . . the formidable underside of writing: bliss: bliss which can erupt, across the centuries, out of certain texts that were nonetheless written to the glory of the dreariest, of the most sinister philosophy. (39)
For a contemporary reader of Maugham, I would hope that this study makes such bliss at least partially accessible.
Introduction

The term "sex/gender system," introduced by Gayle Rubin, now enjoys wide currency in gender studies. It designates a "domain of social life" (Rubin 166), "a set of arrangements by which the biological raw material of human sex and procreation is shaped by human, social intervention and satisfied in a conventional manner" (165). Recent gender theory has questioned the ease with which Rubin divides biological from social, but the conceptual framework nonetheless remains useful.

Maugham himself termed the writings I discuss in this thesis his exotic fiction. I use the word "oriental" in order to emphasise the constructed discursive and ideological nature of Maugham's East; in the thesis the word carries similar connotative weight to "oriental" in Said's Orientalism, although it does not denote the same geographic area. "Fiction" when used in the phrase "oriental fiction" includes such nominally non-fictional works as On A Chinese Screen and A Writer's Notebook, which I consider to have an equivalent "truth-value" to the novels and short stories.

The two biographies are Morgan's Maugham and Calder's Willie. Both are thorough, scholarly biographies, and their difference is suggested by their titles. Morgan is
less adulatory, building a picture of "a man whose defects were glaring, but . . . should not be used to diminish his accomplishments" (xxi). Calder is more partial, critiquing Morgan's work for its "distaste for its subject" (xvi), and instead attempting "a portrait which recognizes his [Maugham's] sensitivity, wit, loyalty, and numerous kindnesses to many people" (xvii). Morgan received permission from Maugham's first literary executor to quote the writer's private correspondence, whereas Calder, applying to the second executor, the Royal Literary Fund, did not. Calder did, however, conduct extensive interviews with Alan Searle, Maugham's companion and secretary in the last years of his life. The fact that both portraits are plausible, and that both infer biographical information from Maugham's novels and short stories, is in itself an interesting comment upon Maugham's self-manufactured "author function."

4 Representative samples of criticism of Maugham's works are given in Anthony Curtis and John Whitehead's contribution to the Routledge Critical Heritage series, and in various volumes of Contemporary Literary Criticism. The early criticism is summarized in Curtis' article "Maugham and his critics," and a wide-ranging, though not comprehensive, survey of more contemporary critical writing constitutes a section of Stoner's study.

5 Morgan takes Menard's text, The Two Worlds of Somerset Maugham, in which the author recounts several
conversations with Maugham, at face value. It seems to me unlikely that such conversations, even if they did take place, could be subsequently recounted in the detail given in the text. Two letters from Maugham to Menard reproduced in *The Two Worlds of Somerset Maugham* seem to indicate their relationship was somewhat less close than Menard represents it to be.

Interestingly, Calder deploys Maugham's homosexuality to make exactly the contrary point, commenting that the "surprising empathy with the opposite sex" revealed in the author's writings "may have been an aspect of his homosexual temperament" (*Willie* 75). The two arguments thus illustrate the contradictory nature of contemporary stereotypes of homosexuality. Both also provide excellent illustrations of the *non sequitur*.

Fictional treatments of *amok*, such as Clifford's *A Prince of Malaya* are, for example, much more homoerotic than Maugham's "The Outstation," which is clearly a descendant of the genre. The advantage of using Sedgwick's critical approach is evident here; not only is the presence of "homosexuality" in texts written by "heterosexual" men unsurprising but it is, in fact, inevitable (see the proceeding discussion of critical methodology).

A post-Lacanian critique of these analyses might follow three paths. First, it would point out that any connection between femininity and homosexuality is doxological, a product of cultural constructions of
masculinity. Second, "defences," if they do exist, are more likely to be responses to societal homophobia than representative of personal instability. Third, concepts such as "unhealthy individual" are normative in tone, and therefore implicitly homophobic.

9 Brigid Brophy, Michael Levey, and Charles Osborne, *Fifty Works of Literature We Could Do Without* (Stein and Day, 1968), 125-27, qtd. in Riley 204.

10 In French historiography, the Classical Period is usually defined as the century and a half prior to the French Revolution, and the Modern Period as the century and a half from the Revolution to the Second World War. Foucault, however, is substantially looser in his application of these terms, as I will be in this dissertation. For my analysis of Maugham, I wish to make a clear distinction between modernity, modernism and modernization. Modernity, with its attendant adjective modern, stands for the process of foregrounding "Man" as subject and object of all systems of knowledge, of which Foucault writes. Modernism is the literary movement of the first part of the twentieth century. Modernization is the process of industrialization and subsequent development of colonies through imperialism, which continues in the contemporary modernization of the "Third World." Maugham, for the purposes of this thesis, is a modern (but not a modernist) writer who writes about modernization.

11 Said, for example, urges us to "see the humanistic
values that Orientalism, by its scope, experiences, and structures, has all but eliminated" (110). In Foucault's schema Orientalism, as a discourse that puts European "Man" at the center of a system of knowledge would, in fact, be essential to rather than antagonistic to humanism.

Chapter One

1See Calder, Willie 87.

2See Robert K. Martin, Hero, Captain, Stranger. Martin points out that "an examination of the manuscripts reveals that the original language was even more open than the version eventually published" (36). The considerable investment in male homosocial and homosexual relationships in Melville's novels, which Martin documents, contrasts sharply with the absence of mutuality of desire in most homosocial relationships in Maugham's fiction. Melville is writing before the construction--and demonization--of the male homosexual as subject, Maugham in a much more constrained literary and social environment.

3The name "Tough Bill" originally appears in both the published text and the manuscript of A Writer's Notebook as one of the "Kanakas at Wakiki . . . : a tall, dark fellow with protruding lips, boastful like a child or Negro" (99). The interchangeability of the racial designations of "kanaka," "negro," and (in the text of The Moon and Sixpence) "mulatto," in conjunction with infantilization,
speaks volumes regarding Maugham's construction of the "primitive."

4OED gives 1922 as the first appearance of the word "queer" in association with homosexuality, and indicates that it was originally North American slang. Given Maugham's relationship with Gerald Haxton, and his visit to the United States immediately prior to his research trip to Tahiti in 1916, it seems unlikely that in 1918 the author would have been completely ignorant of the word's denotative range.

Chapter Two

1The Trembling of a Leaf collects the major short stories set in the South Pacific. Vignettes such as "French Joe" and "German Harry" were published later in Cosmopolitans (1936), while the Daily Mail article "My South Sea Island" was later published as a pamphlet.

2See Chapter 5, for example, for the significance of blue eyes as a marker of racial difference in the short story "The Yellow Streak."

Chapter Three

1I here use "mode of reproduction" in much the same sense as "sex/gender system" in the Introduction. As Rubin points out, the former term is unsatisfactory because a "sex/gender system is not simply the reproductive moment of
a "'mode of production'" (167). Given that most analytical approaches to the identity of the flâneur derive from Walter Benjamin's Marxist re-reading of Baudelaire, however, it seems to me that the phrase "mode of reproduction," which derives, as much of Benjamin's argument does, from Friedrich Engels, has a rhetorical utility here.

For instance, the conflict between passive observation and regulation with active colonizing activity in "Red."

Chapter Four

The short story "P. & O." has a female character as focalizer, as do some of Maugham's earlier novels, such as Mrs. Craddock and Lisa of Lambeth. The vast majority of his oriental short stories and novels, however, have male narrators and focalizers.

Chapter Five

The Casuarina Tree (1926) and Ah King (1933) contain Maugham's best-known Malayan short stories. A few additional short stories on Malaya written for Cosmopolitan magazine are collected in Cosmopolitans (1936); others, such as "Flotsam and Jetsam," appear in later collections. One story, "The Buried Talent" remained uncollected during Maugham's lifetime, and is published in John Whitehead's
compilation of Maugham's uncollected works, _A Traveller in Romance_.

2 This chapter uses the word "Malayan" to refer to all of Maugham's short stories that make substantial reference to the Malayan peninsula (The Federated and Unfederated Malay States, and the Straits Settlements), Borneo (British North Borneo, Sarawak, and Brunei), or the Dutch East Indies. Those set in the outer islands of the Dutch East Indies, such as "The Vessel of Wrath," are slightly different thematically, with less emphasis upon the omnipresence of colonial disciplinary systems. These, however, form only a small percentage of the total number of stories.

3 Kratoska makes this comparison explicitly (_The Chettiar and the Yeoman_ 4).

4 The word's are Daisy's upon rejecting her English husband and reclaiming her putatively Chinese heritage. One might charitably wonder which jungle the author had in mind, since the play is set in Peking. Maugham applies a similar construction to an incident in the West Indies recorded in his _A Writer's Notebook_, in which the hysteria of a "slightly coloured" planter when ill proves to the narrator that he is "at heart . . . a Negro" (246-7).

5 The first official circular exhibiting the Colonial Office's disapproval of the practice of concubinage was issued by Lord Crewe, Secretary of State for the Colonies, in January 1909. Butcher (206-213) discusses the origin of
the circular and its effects upon British practices in Malaya.

Chapter Six


2See Halperin's title essay in One Hundred Years of Homosexuality (15-40). The Oxford English Dictionary, Halperin documents, credits Charles Gilbert Craddock with introducing the word into the English language in 1892.

3Edwin Drood is a foundational text for Sedgwick's discussion of "the homophobia of empire" (Between Men 180-220).

Conclusion

1For instance, Gerald Gould's comment in the Saturday Review, regarding On a Chinese Screen, that "Mr. Maugham provides something exceptionally good with a gesture almost of carelessness. His technical competence . . . has presumably passed into his subconscousness, and become as effortless as breathing or walking" (Curtis and Whitehead 157). P.C. Kennedy's comment that "[t]he end of The Painted Veil is the silliest ever inflicted by a brilliant writer on
a brilliant story" (Curtis and Whitehead 165) reflects a widely-held opinion of the novel. Maugham did, in fact, revise the ending to make closure more emphatic.


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