# Queer Colonial Journeys: Alfred Russel Wallace and Somerset Maugham in the Malay Archipelago

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THE COLONIAL JOURNEY OF exploration in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries into the interior of territories previously unknown to Europeans was, according to Anne McClintock, typically represented in travel narratives as moving forward in space but backward in time. As the aboriginal inhabitants were held to be "primitive," meaning "undeveloped," they could be cast figuratively into "anachronistic space," and the "empty" lands occupied and exploited. These acts of racial subjugation might be compared to the subjugation of women and the working classes by the European bourgeoisie. For McClintock, the "liberal imagination" was formed in the merging of empire and domesticity.[1] The work of Ann Stoler and others has shown how the intimate and political aspects of colonial cultures intertwined as European colonial regimes attempted in various ways to regulate sexual relationships between Europeans and natives in their bid to maintain control. In the Dutch East Indies in the nineteenth century, for example, the taking of local women as concubines was the preferred means of satisfying the sexual needs of European men. One of its benefits, as originally conceived by colonial administrators, was to reduce the incidence of homosexual relationships, although long-lasting emotional attachments with native women implicitly challenged the racially ordered hierarchy.[2] In British India, the colonial authorities tended to prefer prostitution; marrying local women and taking concubines were strongly discouraged, and these practices declined during the nineteenth

[1] Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 30, 178.

[2] Several authors have tracked this history. See, in particular, Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 2, 48–51; Ulba Bosma and R. Raben, *Being "Dutch" in the Indies: A History of Creolisation and Empire, 1500–1920* (Singapore: NUS, 2008), 113–15, 144–50, 222, 227–28; and Philippa Levine, "Sexuality and Empire," in *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World*, ed. Catherine Hall and Sonya O. Rose (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 139.

*Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol. 26, No. 2, May 2017

DOI: 10.7560/JHS26201

century.[3] In Sarawak in northern Borneo, by contrast, the English rajah James Brooke and his successors permitted concubinage into the twentieth century, and it was also fairly common in the British Malay states.[4] This was the colonial milieu into which Alfred Russel Wallace ventured in 1854 in a journey of exploration initiated for commercial gain. His travels eventually yielded much more than an income for the aspiring naturalist, however, because the archipelago was the site of Wallace's extraordinary intellectual discoveries, including the theory of evolution by natural selection, which he formulated—independently of Charles Darwin—on the East Indies island of Ternate in February 1858.[5]

The immediate aim of Wallace's journey was to collect natural history specimens for sale in London. While he had been born into a middle-class family and received a classical grammar school education, his father had made some bad investments, and the family suffered a humiliating financial and social decline. After leaving school at the age of fourteen Wallace worked in various jobs, including surveying and teaching, but he struggled to establish himself. While living with his elder brother John in London in 1837, he mixed with artisans and working-class men and was exposed to the ideas of the utopian socialist Robert Owen. His belief in the Christian faith of his mother eroded as he began to view humanity through the naturalistic lens of the phrenologist George Combe.[6] Although he continued to identify with the English middle class, Wallace had come to the conviction that social conditions were unfair. In this sense, John Van Wyhe suggests, he had the perspective of an "outsider."[7] It was his decision to go to the Amazon in 1848 to try his hand at natural history collecting that arguably changed

[3] See Ronald Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 123, 125; and William Dalrymple, *White Mughals: Love and Betrayal in Eighteenth-century India* (New York: Viking, 2003), chap. 1.

[4] See Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality*, 158–59.

[5] Wallace sent a copy of his draft essay "On the Tendency of Varieties to Depart Indefinitely from the Original Type" to Darwin, not knowing that the eminent naturalist had come to the same conclusions. Wallace's essay was read, along with excerpts from Darwin's manuscripts on the subject, before the Linnean Society in London on 1 July 1858, and these documents were subsequently published together in the society's *Proceedings* in August the same year. In this way, their joint authorship of the theory was acknowledged publicly. For the best and most complete account of these events, see John Van Wyhe, *Dispelling the Darkness: Voyage in the Malay Archipelago and the Discovery of Evolution by Wallace and Darwin* (Singapore: World Scientific, 2013).

[6] An account of Wallace's early life may be found in Peter Raby, *Alfred Russel Wallace: A Life* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), chap. 1. On Wallace's attraction to the ideas of Robert Owen, see Gregory Claeys, "Wallace and Owenism," in *Natural Selection and Beyond: The Intellectual Legacy of Alfred Russel Wallace*, ed. Charles H. Smith and George Beccaloni (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 235–62. For a firsthand declaration of Wallace's unbelief, see Wallace to Thomas Simms, 15 March 1861, WCP3351, *Wallace Letters Online*, http://www.nhm.ac.uk/research-curation/scientific-resources/collections/library-collections/wallace-letters-online/index.html.

[7] Van Wyhe, *Dispelling the Darkness*, 14.

Wallace's life. Although his collections were lost at sea on the return voyage in 1852, he had seen the potential to make a good living and soon began planning a trip to Southeast Asia. With the help of the Royal Geographical Society, where he had been made a fellow, he obtained a free passage and permission to travel through Dutch territory. He engaged a youth named Charles Allen as his assistant, and the pair departed Southampton on a P&O steamship on 4 March 1854. Wallace was thirty-one years old and single.

Biographers have assumed that Wallace was celibate for the entire period he spent abroad. As Ross Slotten explains, "By all appearances, he exercised rigorous self-discipline in sexuality, as in all other spheres of his life."[8] It is also assumed that Wallace's sexual orientation was unequivocally heterosexual, although Slotten noted that he was unable to appreciate other explorers' attraction to the charms of native women.[9] In the Indies Wallace spent a lengthy period in intimate contact with an array of male servants. This included a stretch of six years with a particularly devoted and esteemed young Malay man by the name of Ali whose very substantial contributions to the success of Wallace's journey and scientific work have been recognized by biographers and historians.[10] Whether or not he had feelings that might in the present day be identified as homosexual is not, in itself, an important historical question. However, the close relationships Wallace enjoyed with native men *are* important. Wallace dissented from the prevalent model of stadial history, which positioned cultures on a progressive scale of development toward industrial society.[11] He believed, for example, that one of the most "primitive" of peoples he encountered in the archipelago, the Dyaks (native to Borneo), possessed greater moral integrity than more technologically advanced peoples, and he was critical of contemporary British society and the ill-treatment of native peoples in British colonies in India, Australia, and elsewhere. Following his return to Britain in 1862, he publicly advocated reform of colonial policies to help save "primitive" peoples from annihilation by European colonizers and to promote their material and intellectual development.[12] His stance

[8] Ross A. Slotten, *The Heretic in Darwin's Court: The Life of Alfred Russel Wallace* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 256–57.

[9] Ibid., 226–27. See also Raby, *Alfred Russel Wallace*, 36. For a colorful semifictional account of Wallace's life based on the belief that he was gay, see William Bryant, *The Birds of Paradise: Alfred Russel Wallace, a Life* (New York: iUniverse Inc., 2006). Since this is a self-published book it has not received scholarly scrutiny, and there is no direct evidence to support Bryant's suppositions.

[10] See, for examples, Van Wyhe, *Dispelling the Darkness*, 103, 137, 301–3; and Jane R. Camerini, "Wallace in the Field," *Osiris*, 2nd ser., 11 (1996): 53–56.

[11] On stadial history in British liberal thought, see Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), chaps. 2 and 5.

[12] Rejecting the British free trade model, Wallace advocated the Dutch Cultivation System, which combined a government monopoly of the production of cash crops with paternalistic rule. See Mark Clement, "Evolution and Empire: Alfred Russel Wallace and Dutch

was underpinned by his experience of a same-sex mixed-race domestic environment in the Indies, at the center of which was his relationship with Ali. I will argue that this relationship should, therefore, be recognized as a historically significant example of the kind of masculine attachment that the pioneering British advocate of homosexual rights Edward Carpenter called "homogenic love."[13]

Wallace's published account of his sojourn in Southeast Asia has never been out of print since its first appearance in 1869. A popular travel narrative that combines adventure, natural history, and anthropology with a polemic against British colonialism, *The Malay Archipelago* became the standard guide book to the region for British (and Australian) readers and travelers well into the twentieth century. Among its more eminent admirers were the writers Joseph Conrad and W. Somerset Maugham, in whose fiction clear traces of Wallace's work have been identified.[14] What has not been noticed before is that Maugham read Wallace through the eyes of a homosexual man. Like Wallace, Maugham was something of an outsider. One of his biographers, Jeffrey Meyers, suggests that Maugham's experience of growing up in Paris "gave him a dual viewpoint that made him feel estranged from both France and England."[15] In addition, he had a humiliating stammer, and although he married Syrie Barnardo in 1917 and they had one child, he became increasingly aware of his sexual attraction to men. In 1926 he moved to France, where he lived with his male secretary and lover, Gerald Haxton, a relationship ended only by Haxton's death in 1944. Although his writing made him a very wealthy and famous man, Maugham's early life had been insecure and unhappy. He was born into a middle-class family but suffered the deaths of both parents during his childhood. Before embarking on a professional writing career, he studied medicine at St. Thomas's hospital in London in the 1890s. During the course of his medical duties in the borough of Lambeth he came to sympathize with the working classes, and his political outlook remained socially progressive throughout his life.

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Colonial Rule in Southeast Asia in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," *Britain and the World* 9, no. 1 (2016): 55–75; and George W. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology* (New York: Free Press, 1991), 100–101. Wallace's sympathetic attraction to the Dyaks became well known in scientific circles in Britain during the 1860s and after. It informed both his antislavery stance and his advocacy of the Dutch Cultivation System. On the slavery question in Britain during the American Civil War, see Adrian J. Desmond and James R. Moore, *Darwin's Sacred Cause: Race, Slavery and the Quest for Human Origins* (London: Allen Lane, 2009), 297–99, 340–42.

[13] On Carpenter's development and promotion of the concept of homogenic love, see Sheila Rowbotham, *Edward Carpenter: A Life of Liberty and Love* (London: Verso, 2008), 183–95.

[14] See Paul Battersby, *To the Islands: White Australians and the Malay Archipelago since 1788* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2007), 6; and Peter Raby, "The 'Finest Butterfly in the World'?: Wallace and His Literary Legacy," in Smith and Beccaloni, *Natural Selection and Beyond*, 223–34.

[15] Jeffrey Meyers, *Somerset Maugham: A Life* (New York: Knopf, 2004), 19.

In 1921 he traveled to Borneo and Malaya, retracing parts of Wallace's journey made some six decades earlier.[16]

Although there is nothing overtly sexual in *The Malay Archipelago*, Maugham read it from a standpoint of natural homosexual desire, and the book had a marked influence on his Malay Archipelago novel, *The Narrow Corner* (1932), and two short stories, "The Yellow Streak" (first published in *The Casuarina Tree* in 1926) and "Neil MacAdam" (first published in *Ah King* in 1933). This is suggestive of the surprising wider cultural significance of *The Malay Archipelago*. My argument about this wider cultural milieu is influenced by Seth Koven's fascinating work on slum philanthropy in Victorian London, which analyzes how some readers interpreted the literary and visual texts of Wallace's contemporaries, particularly the journalist and author James Greenwood and the famous philanthropist (and Maugham's father-in-law) Thomas John Barnardo, to be sexual. For Koven, the "queerness" of a text may inhere in how others read it, irrespective of the author's intention or the actual events that it relates.[17] Given Maugham's enormous popularity and influence in his day—Meyers claims that "he made the East his own and helped to establish the idea of the Orient in the minds of English readers"—Wallace's influence on Maugham's work has to be considered significant for the history of sexuality.[18]

## Alfred Russel Wallace in the Malay Archipelago (1854–62)

The historian Harry Cocks uses Edward Carpenter's term "homogenic love" to describe the affective orientation of the members of the Eagle Street College, a male coterie of followers of the American poet Walt Whitman who met regularly in the northern English textile town of Bolton in the 1880s. The concept of homogenic love is predicated upon the existence of "a spectrum of masculine attachments," and Cocks correspondingly argues that the members of the Bolton fellowship populated a "spectrum of desires and interests which were not necessarily physical, but which shared a common mentality or consciousness."[19] Like Alfred Russel Wallace (who was not associated with the group), some of these men married, but they were

[16] This brief summary of aspects of Maugham's life relies mostly on Meyers, *Somerset Maugham*. On Maugham's political views, see Selina Hastings, *The Secret Lives of Somerset Maugham: A Biography* (New York: Random House, 2010), 272–73. Maugham's first novel, *Liza of Lambeth* (1897), drew on his experience of working as a doctor in Lambeth.

[17] One of Greenwood's interpreters was the homosexual reformer and writer John Addington Symonds. See Seth Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), chaps. 1 and 2, esp. 68, 70–71.

[18] Meyers, *Somerset Maugham*, 343. On the reputation of Maugham's Oriental fiction, see also Hastings, *The Secret Lives*, 313–14.

[19] Harry Cocks, "Calamus in Bolton: Spirituality and Homosexual Desire in Late Victorian England," *Gender and History* 13, no. 2 (2001): quotes on 217; the emergence and characteristics of the Eagle Street College are explained on 191–94.

nonetheless proponents and practitioners of a radical form of masculine solidarity that cut across class boundaries and challenged the social norms of the period. Similarly, in describing the masculine subjectivities of elite men engaged in slum philanthropy in London in the late nineteenth century, Koven finds the binary opposition of "homosexual" and "heterosexual" to be too simplistic for analytical purposes. As in some of the sexual case histories collected by Havelock Ellis and John Addington Symonds, differences of class and sometimes race were important elements of desire, even its "axis."[20] In the colonial environment in which Wallace sought financial and intellectual opportunities, race and class boundaries were arguably more porous than in metropolitan Britain, and there was greater space for fluid expressions of sexual desire.[21] The succeeding analysis will focus on the development of Wallace's subjectivity in relation to a colonial spectrum of homogenic love. This spectrum may be described by considering briefly some other quite well-known intimate interracial relationships between men in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

At one end of this continuum existed relationships characterized by mutual affection and strong intellectual and moral engagement without any erotic charge. An example is the long friendship between Edward Carpenter and the eminent Sri Lankan barrister and civil servant Ponnambalam Arunachalam, a platonic relationship that helped Carpenter to see the situation of colonized peoples as comparable to that of the European working class.[22] At the other end of the spectrum were sexual relationships between men who loved each other in the romantic sense of the term. A good example is the relationship between E. M. Forster and the Egyptian tram conductor Mohammad El Adl; they delighted in transgressing social expectations by walking together in public—"hiding in plain sight"—which was only possible because observers took their relationship to be that of master and servant.[23] In between the two poles of the spectrum were a

[20] Koven, *Slumming*, 275, 72.

[21] Leila J. Rupp suggests that sexual fluidity in the form of situational homosexuality among men may occur in contexts such as prisons and the military. See "Sexual Fluidity 'before Sex,'" *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 37, no. 4 (2012): 854–45. In a pioneering account of sexuality in the British Empire, Ronald Hyam suggested that the colonies were "an unrivalled field for the maximisation of sexual opportunity and the pursuit of sexual variation" (*Empire and Sexuality*, 211).

[22] For accounts of this relationship, see Robert Aldrich, *Colonialism and Homosexuality* (London: Routledge, 2003), 290–98; and Antony Copley, *A Spiritual Bloomsbury: Hinduism and Homosexuality in the Lives and Writings of Edward Carpenter, E. M. Forster, and Christopher Isherwood* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2006), 39–44. Copley defends Carpenter against charges of "Orientalism" and "sexual colonialism" during his visit to Sri Lanka and India in 1890–91, which was recounted in *From Adam's Peak to Elephanta* (London: S. Sonnenschein, 1892), 37–38, 53–56.

[23] Wendy Moffat, *E. M. Forster: A New Life* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), 152–73. Copley argues that Forster's relationships with El Adl and the Indian student Syed Ross Masood "profoundly influenced his response to India" (*A Spiritual Bloomsbury*, 127–34).

range of relationships involving degrees of erotic desire, sometimes more in the experience of one member of the friendship than the other. In all cases the white partner's attitudes and actions showed marked empathy with the local population. It is highly likely, for example, that the "white rajah" of Sarawak, Sir James Brooke, had erotic feelings for the Malay prince Badrudeen, but there is no evidence that this developed into a sexual relationship. Brooke's most recent biographer, Nigel Barley, argues that Brooke sublimated his passion in his strenuous efforts to be an exemplary and beneficent ruler.[24] Similarly, T. E. Lawrence's romantic attachment to the Syrian Arab youth Selim Ahmed (known as Dahoum) may not have been reciprocated, but the pair enjoyed an intimate three-year friendship, and Lawrence took Dahoum on a visit to England. Lawrence's passionate advocacy and action on behalf of the Arabs during the First World War is well known.[25] Although these relationships were inherently unequal and their representation in Western sources does not escape the colonial gaze, they went some way toward bridging racial and class divides and sometimes transgressed gender stereotypes, thereby implicitly challenging aspects of the European colonial order.

The case of Wallace and Ali is especially interesting for its domestic context. None of the other couples referred to above lived continuously in the same household for a long period. The importance of the home as a site for fashioning and representing one's sense of self has been demonstrated by Matt Cook's recent study of queer households in twentieth-century London. Cook uses the term "queer" in order to avoid the limitations of a gay/straight binary paradigm. This usage proves especially convincing for his biographical case study approach, which seeks to understand subjects in their own terms, acknowledging individual and local differences, as well as commonalities. As Cook insists, "The lines between queer and normal and gay and straight in the way homes and families were formed and experienced have always been rather blurred. Queer men have often been judged against an idea of heterosexual normality. But the ways such (supposedly) 'normal' people have lived has been very variable indeed. Moreover, the queer men I examine here have found a sense of 'composure' in their domestic similarities to 'normal' men and women as surely as in their differences."[26] In mid-Victorian Britain, "normal" middle-class men married

[24] Nigel Barley, *White Rajah* (London: Little, Brown, 2002), 48–50, 100–101, 63–64. Brooke's sexuality has been the subject of controversy among historians since J. H. Walker first argued a case for his homosexuality. See J. H. Walker, "'This Peculiar Acuteness of Feeling': James Brooke and the Enactment of Desire," *Borneo Research Bulletin* 29 (1998): 148–222.

[25] Michael Asher, *Lawrence, the Uncrowned King of Arabia* (Woodstock: Overlook Press, 1999), 142–44, 165–68, 179. Aldrich argues that Lawrence loved Dahoum (*Colonialism and Homosexuality*, 71–77, 79). On sexual attraction inciting sympathy for an entire race, see also Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality*, 202.

[26] Matt Cook, *Queer Domesticities: Homosexuality and Home Life in Twentieth-Century London* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 16.

and established households in which they conceived and raised children. As John Tosh insists, the "domestic sphere" was as much the creation of men as of women,[27] and it was constitutive of male subjectivity. In order to be able to support a wife and children and employ servants, a young man might delay marriage until his late twenties or so, but it was only when he married, Tosh explains, that he could feel that he had entered fully into manhood: "To form a household, to exert authority over dependents, and to shoulder the responsibility of maintaining and protecting them—these things set the seal on a man's gender identity."[28]

Wallace's journey to Southeast Asia was made for financial and professional reasons. At least one of his aims was to secure the means to claim the middle-class life and status with which he identified, although it is also possible that his departure signaled an intentional evasion or postponement of the claims of domesticity and that his journey in the Amazon had whetted his appetite for exploration and kindled an interest in living among "primitive" peoples.[29] Until he married, a young man in Britain might seek sexual experience and pleasure from women beneath him in social standing, since aristocratic and middle-class girls were sexually unavailable. This usually meant having sex with prostitutes or domestic servants. In European colonies, too, prostitutes and domestic servants were options, and there was the additional possibility, especially in the Dutch East Indies, of taking a concubine. Wallace certainly saw examples of concubinage. His unpublished field journal refers to a Dutch man who had both a wife in Java and a concubine in the Aru Islands. Wallace described this man, "Herr von Abraham Warzebergen," as "a very respectable Javanese Dutchman [who] leaves his pretty young wife at home but has her place supplied by a Macassar girl of 15–16." "This," he remarked, "is considered quite correct in Aru, as it was by the patriarchs of old."[30] Wallace may have been surprised and intrigued, but there is no expression of disapprobation. Rather, there is a joke in associating the name "Abraham" with the Old Testament patriarch, and Wallace interpreted the practice in culturally relativistic terms. If he were so inclined, then, there was no formidable ideological, legal, or social impediment in the way of him taking a concubine. His almost constant travel around the archipelago did raise practical difficulties, but there was a good opportunity during his three-year residence on the Moluccan island of Ternate (1858–60). Instead of following the example of his compatriots, however, Wallace established an exclusively male household in which the

[27] John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), esp. 27, 50.

[28] Ibid., 107–8.

[29] On Wallace's journey to South America, see Raby, *Alfred Russel Wallace*, chap. 3. In later decades of the nineteenth century young men sometimes sought employment opportunities in the empire to postpone marriage. See Tosh, *A Man's Place*, 176.

[30] Alfred Russel Wallace, *Malay Archipelago Journal*, 2:102, the Linnean Collections, http://linnean-online.org/wallace_notes.html, MS178b.

role of sexual expression is uncertain. His alternative "family" nevertheless went a long way toward simulating the Victorian middle-class ideal and so satisfied the most relevant criteria for Wallace of conventional domesticity while at the same time permitting a singularly unusual life free from some of the common domestic constraints.

Wallace's creation of his own domestic sphere in the Indies is an insistent element in his travel narrative, as we can see in his detailed descriptions of several of the dozens of houses he occupied. In spite of his busy peripatetic lifestyle he habitually pondered and later recorded for readers of *The Malay Archipelago* the location, layout, and amenities of these houses, and there are many references to domestic routines such as taking tea in the evenings, washing clothes, and bathing.[31] Wallace described the house named "Mamajam," near Macassar at the southern tip of the island of Sulawesi, which was provided by his neighbor, the prominent Indo-Dutch merchant Willem Mesman, as "my country abode," and each morning he brightened his breakfast table with flowers picked from the garden. On the Moluccan island of Ternate he kept the same house for three years, using it as a base for voyages eastward to New Guinea. It was conveniently situated only five minutes' walk from markets where he was able to buy fresh milk, bread, meat, and vegetables, yet it afforded privacy from other European houses and easy access to the mountain slopes where he liked to ramble.[32] Sometimes Wallace's shelter was makeshift, to say the least, but even in rough conditions he took pleasure in making a shack into a temporary home. On arrival at Dobbo in the Aru Islands, for example, he was anxious to furnish the structure he had rented:

> I immediately had it cleared out, and by evening had all my things housed, and was regularly installed as an inhabitant of Dobbo. I had brought with me a cane chair, and a few light boards, which were soon rigged up into a table and shelves. A broad bamboo bench served as sofa and bedstead, my boxes were conveniently arranged, my mats spread on the floor, a window cut in the palm-leaf wall to light my table, and though the place was as miserable and gloomy a shed as could be imagined, I felt as contented as if I had obtained a well-furnished mansion, and looked forward to a month's residence in it with unmixed satisfaction.[33]

Despite the short duration of his stay, Wallace saw himself as an "inhabitant" of Dobbo, and simple boards and benches became "a table and chairs . . . sofa and bedstead." Wallace's self-fashioned identity was grounded in the domestic sphere he created. Many accommodations were made to local

[31] Alfred Russel Wallace, *The Malay Archipelago, the Land of the Orang-utan and the Bird of Paradise*, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1869), 2:13, 134, 1:388, 362, 132.

[32] Ibid., 1:221–22, 314.

[33] Ibid., 2:197.

conditions, but he always managed to craft a materially and psychologically comfortable lifestyle, right down to the wearing of slippers in the house.[34]

Keeping servants was a key marker of bourgeois status in Britain, where master-servant relationships encoded a range of values concerning class, gender, and sexuality and sometimes involved intimate personal connections. The well-known case of the maidservant Hannah Culwick and her lawyer husband, Arthur Munby, who continued to act out the master-servant paradigm after marrying, has become a classic example of the tensions and erotic possibilities that these class distinctions created in nineteenth-century English society.[35] As I have already noted, Wallace took an English youth with him to the East to act as his assistant, but Charles Allen left his employ early in the journey, remaining behind in Sarawak when Wallace departed in early 1856. He was replaced by the Malay youth Ali, whom Wallace had met sometime during 1855.[36] Wherever he went, Wallace hired additional help to perform both domestic duties like cooking and cleaning and work-related duties like hunting and collecting. The master-servant paradigm is clearly represented in the allocation of space in his house at Bessir, on the Moluccan island of Waigiou. This house was unusual in having a loft to serve as Wallace's bedroom, while Ali and another servant slept below on mats. It was more usual, however, for Wallace to share the same floor space with his servants, as he did at Baliba, on the island of Timor, where "an inner enclosed portion [of the house] served us as a sleeping apartment."[37] The latter practice is an example of the way in which a peripatetic colonial life entailed a relaxation of boundaries within the conventional paradigm.

There were similar adaptations of other aspects of the typical middle-class English home in the domestic life of Wallace and Ali. A man expected his wife to make him comfortable, which included taking care of him when he was sick. This occurred in Wallace's household when Ali and the other servants attended to Wallace's needs during his fairly frequent bouts of fever and other illnesses, which sometimes incapacitated him for weeks or even months. When Ali or another servant was stricken, however, the roles were reversed, and Wallace contributed to caring for them. At Dorey the entire household shared the experience of bereavement when one of the servants, an eighteen-year-old man called Jumaat, died from illness despite weeks of solicitous care and administration of the few medicines Wallace possessed. As all his servants at that time were Muslims, he allowed them to bury Jumaat according to their custom; Wallace contributed "some new cotton

[34] Ibid., 1:364.

[35] Tosh, *A Man's Place*, 19; McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 133. On sexual relationships between masters and servants in the colonial world, see Aldrich, *Colonialism and Homosexuality*, 406; and Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality*, 59, 106.

[36] The reasons for Charles Allen remaining in Sarawak are unknown. See Wallace's account in *Malay Archipelago*, 1:136.

[37] Ibid., 2:360, 1:298.

cloth for a shroud."[38] In Wallace's domestic sphere, then, class and gender differences were somewhat blurred, and relationships were characterized by a higher degree of mutuality than might usually have been the case in a conventional middle-class home in Britain.

A sense of camaraderie was often felt at the end of the day when stories were traded. There are some fragments of these conversations in *The Malay Archipelago*. Wallace reports the beginning of one discussion: "Just as I got home I overtook Ali returning from shooting with some birds hanging from his belt. He seemed much pleased, and said, 'Look here, sir, what a curious bird,' holding out what at first completely puzzled me."[39] (It turned out to be a variety of the bird of paradise formerly unknown to European naturalists.) Another time when Ali was out hunting he unwittingly stepped on the largest snake he had ever encountered. Wallace paraphrased the story, but it seems likely that Ali's description of the snake moving off "like a tree being dragged through grass" is an English translation of his actual words.[40] Their common experiences also provided conversation starters. For a short time in 1857, they shared a house with some local people in the Aru Islands. One evening Ali observed of their neighbors' constant noise: "The Aru people are very strong talkers."[41] Of the many servants employed by Wallace, only Ali's words were ever reported. Their relationship was characterized not just by the respect and regard that might often have existed in a long-standing master and servant relationship but also by a more atypical and ambiguous camaraderie. In 1858, during their residence at Ternate, Ali married. Yet he continued to live and travel with Wallace until he returned to England more than three years later.[42] There was no onus on Ali to do that. Wallace employed numerous servants who came and went in accordance with their personal needs and circumstances. It would have been understandable if Ali had decided to leave Wallace's employ and live with his wife, as did one of Wallace's other servants. In fact, Ali identified closely with Wallace for the rest of his life. When the American herpetologist Thomas Barbour visited Ternate in 1907, he recounted: "We were stopped by a wizened old Malay man. I can see him now with a faded blue fez on his head. He said, 'I am Ali Wallace.'"[43] Ali would have been around sixty-seven years old at that time.

And Wallace cherished the memory of Ali for the whole of his life. In his 1905 autobiography he paid him this tribute:

[38] Ibid., 2:322, 1:336, 2:284, 86.

[39] Ibid., 2:40.

[40] Ibid., 2:132.

[41] Ibid., 2:240.

[42] Alfred Russel Wallace, *My Life: A Record of Events and Opinions* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1905), 383.

[43] Thomas Barbour, *Naturalist at Large* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1943), 42, quoted by Van Wyhe, *Dispelling the Darkness*, 302.

> When I was in Sarawak in 1855 I engaged a Malay boy named Ali as a personal servant and also to help me to learn the Malay language by the necessity of constant association with him. He was attentive and clean, and could cook very well. He soon learnt to shoot birds, to skin them properly, and latterly even to put up the skins very neatly. Of course he was a good boatman, as are all Malays, and in all the difficulties or dangers of our journeys he was quite undisturbed and ready to do anything required of him. He accompanied me through all my travels, sometimes alone, but more frequently with several others, and was then very useful in teaching them their duties, as he soon became well acquainted with my wants and habits. During our residence at Ternate he married, but his wife lived with her family, and it made no difference in his accompanying me wherever I went till we reached Singapore on my way home. On parting, besides a present in money, I gave him my two double-barrelled guns and whatever ammunition I had, with a lot of surplus stores, tools, and sundries, which made him quite rich. He, here, for the first time, adopted European clothes, which did not suit him nearly so well as his native dress, and thus clad a friend took a very good photograph of him [fig. 1]. I therefore now present his likeness to my readers as that of the best native servant I ever had, and the faithful companion of almost all my journeyings among the islands of the Far East.[44]

The story of their relationship is rendered here in a brief summary tailored for public disclosure by a man noted for his reticence about personal matters. Its predominant paradigm is that of the master and servant, in which the more private aspects are submerged, although the term "faithful companion" points to the intimacy that naturally developed during years of living and working together. The passage indicates that Ali first performed the roles of servant and language tutor, then went on to become a skilled assistant in collecting specimens for sale in Britain, acted as a head servant (Wallace sometimes referred to him as "my head man"),[45] and finally was a beneficiary. When Wallace returned to Britain in February 1862 his life assumed conventional social forms. He married Annie Mitten, the daughter of a botanist friend, in 1864, and while he probably loved her, there is no comparable written appreciation of his wife. More than forty years after leaving the archipelago Wallace was delighted to hear news of Ali from Thomas Barbour, and he chided him for failing to send a photograph.[46]

For Wallace, the experience of travel, work, and daily life in the Indies was highly rewarding, and no small measure of his satisfaction derived from

[44] Wallace, *My Life*, 383.
[45] Wallace, *Malay Archipelago*, 2:299.
[46] Wallace to Thomas Barbour, 21 February 1908, WCP4257 5439.

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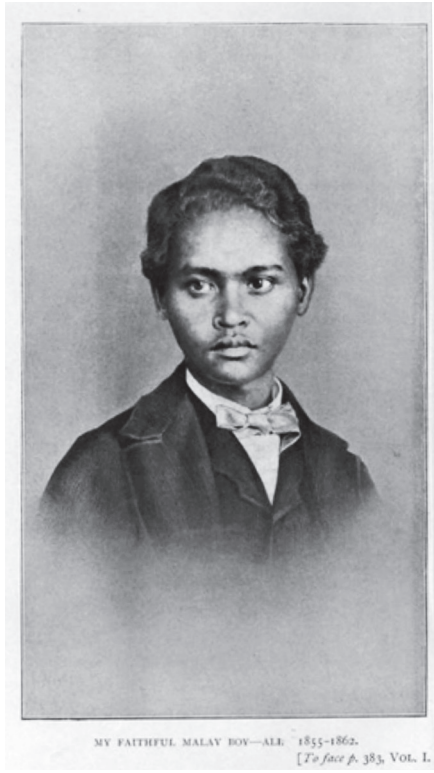


Figure 1. This photograph of Ali in Western clothing was taken in Singapore shortly before Wallace's departure for Britain on 8 February 1862. Alfred Russel Wallace, *My Life; a Record of Events and Opinions* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1905), 383.

the unique subjectivity that was nurtured in the context of the household he created and shared with Ali and his other servants. This is exemplified by an eloquent passage in *The Malay Archipelago* in which he described an epiphany experienced during 1857 while he was deep in the interior of the Aru Islands:

> As I lie listening to these interesting sounds, I realize my position as the first European who has ever lived for months together in the Aru islands, a place which I had hoped rather than expected ever to visit. I think how many besides myself have longed to reach these almost fairy realms, and to see with their own eyes the many wonderful and beautiful things which I am daily encountering. But now Ali and Baderoon are up and getting ready their guns and ammunition, and little Brio has his

> fire lighted and is boiling my coffee, and I remember that I had a black cockatoo brought in late last night, which I must skin immediately, and so I jump up and begin my day's work very happily.[47]

In this passage, the thrill of exploration and an appreciation of beauty are nicely juxtaposed with the comforting elements of domestic life, for which the paternal term of endearment "little Brio" might stand for the affectionate nature of Wallace's relationships with his servants. By the end of his journey the deep satisfaction of his domestic life had actually altered his view of the ideal marriage partner he began contemplating when he was about to leave Southeast Asia and return to Britain. In a letter to his long-time friend George Silk at the end of 1861, he wrote: "On the question of marriage, we probably differ much. I believe a good wife to be the greatest blessing a man can enjoy and the only road to happiness but the qualifications I should look for are probably not such as would satisfy you. My opinions have changed much on this point. I now look at intellectual companionship as quite a secondary matter, and should any good stars now send me an affectionate, good tempered and domestic wife, I should care not one iota for accomplishments or even for education."[48] In many parts of his sojourn in the archipelago, Wallace had lacked "intellectual companionship," but he had experienced the comfort of affection, good temper, and domesticity, qualities present above all in Ali, who had shared the long journey with him. It is no exaggeration to suggest that Ali had acted as a kind of cherished concubine to Wallace, providing familial affections in the context of his unique adaptation of Victorian domesticity in the tropics. If one reason Wallace left Britain was to evade the restrictions of domesticity in the metropolis, it is ironic that in the course of his scientific adventure in the tropics he had nevertheless been afforded an opportunity to appreciate something of its affective value.

Whether or not Wallace and Ali enjoyed any kind of sexual intimacy is impossible to determine. There were plentiful opportunities for sex, living together as they did, sometimes alone, for extended periods of time. The only known reference to homosexuality in Wallace's writing condemns the open practice of sodomy among Amazonian Indians he observed inland from Para, Brazil.[49] In that context, homosexuality had a ritual component and involved cross-dressing.[50] Whether Wallace had any kind of sexual feelings for Ali at all (or Ali for Wallace) is uncertain. If he did, his public declaration of contempt for what he saw in Brazil does not preclude acting on those feelings in a different context, and he could have still construed a pragmatic

[47] Wallace, *Malay Archipelago*, 2:226.

[48] Wallace to George Silk, 22 December 1861, WCP378.

[49] Wallace, *A Narrative of Travels*, 264, cited in Rudi C. Bleys, *The Geography of Perversion: Male-to-Male Sexual Behavior Outside the West and the Ethnographic Imagination, 1750–1918* (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 173.

[50] Bleys, *The Geography of Perversion*, 173.

cultural interpretation of his own intimacy. As a Malay, Ali belonged to the Muslim faith. There are official proscriptions of homosexuality in Islamic texts, but, as Rudi Bleys argues, also "a vast and rich literature, describing the beauty of boys and techniques for seducing them."[51] Sexual relationships between a man and a youth where the younger partner took the passive role were not very unusual in premodern Islamic societies.[52] Visitors to Sarawak sometimes remarked that Muslim codes and values, including in the area of sexual relationships, were rather loosely observed there.[53] Any suggestion of sex between Wallace and Ali, however, remains entirely speculative. What is certain is that their relationship may be placed on the colonial spectrum of homogenic love described earlier. Even excluding a possible erotic element, the length of their association, its unique domestic context, the several ways in which class, race, and gender boundaries were breached, the depth of enduring affection between the two, and its contribution to the formation of Wallace's subjectivity make it a very good example of this type of intense and affectionate attachment between men.

## The Malay Fiction of Somerset Maugham

When Somerset Maugham opened his copy of *The Malay Archipelago*, he saw a drawing of a group of Dyak men hunting an orangutan (fig. 2). In the foreground is a young man engaged in a life-and-death physical struggle with a large and powerful animal. The hunter appears in profile, his twisted torso and splayed legs showcasing an athletic body in movement. The reflected sunlight penetrating the jungle clearing paints a dappled white line along his right side, highlighting the muscular contours of his lean body. He is wearing only a loincloth and a headpiece; his buttocks are exposed. At this point in the struggle the orangutan is getting the better of the hunter, who is leaning backward. The animal has one hand around the man's left shoulder, the other firmly directs his spear to the ground, and one of the orangutan's feet is stamping on the man's left thigh; the formidable creature is tearing the flesh of his arm with its teeth. In the background, four other hunters are emerging from the jungle armed with spears and axes. As one of Wallace's biographers, Peter Raby, noted, Wallace usually avoided penning exciting descriptions of encounters with dangerous creatures, but this image may have evoked "sensational responses" in Victorian readers

[51] Ibid., 20.

[52] Sabine Schmidtke, "Homoeroticism and Homosexuality in Islam: A Review Article," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 62, no. 2 (1999): 261.

[53] See, for example, Hugh Low, *Sarawak: Its Inhabitants and Productions: Being Notes during a Residence in That Country with H.H. the Rajah Brooke* (London: R. Bentley, 1848), 123, 127–28, 146–48; and Ida Laura Pfeiffer, *A Lady's Second Journey round the World from London to the Cape of Good Hope, Borneo, Java, Sumatra, Celebes, Ceram, the Moluccas, etc., California, Panama, Peru, Ecuador, and the United States* (New York: Harper, 1856), 35–36.

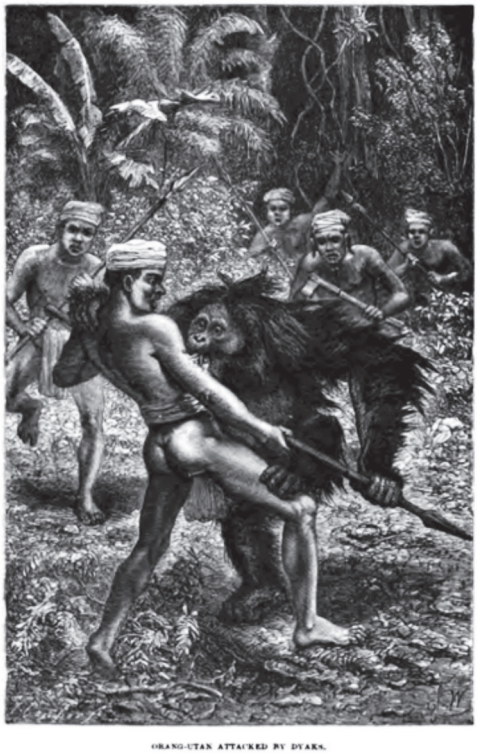


Figure 2. *Orang-utan Attacked by Dyaks*, in Alfred Russel Wallace, *The Malay Archipelago, the Land of the Orang-utan and the Bird of Paradise*, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1869), frontispiece.

thrilled by popular adventure narratives.[54] To a reader like Maugham, these responses might rather have been homoerotic. In the late Victorian years (when Maugham first read Wallace), the primitive or "animalistic" sexuality associated with both the figure of the "savage" and the metropolitan urban poor was not infrequently the object of middle- and upper-class voyeuristic interest.[55] And Maugham's interest is known to have been decidedly homosexual, even if this took some time to surface. This brief examination of the image raises the broader question of the reception of Wallace's travel book, which may be discussed more fully in relation to the text.

[54] Raby, "The Finest Butterfly," 234. The London journalist James Greenwood published a sensational adventure story about a British youth who was captured by Dyak hunters, *The Adventures of Reuben Davidger, Seventeen Years and Four Months Captive among the Dyaks of Borneo* (London: S. O. Beeton, 1865). See Koven, *Slumming*, 60–61.

[55] See Koven, *Slumming*, 61, 78–79, 254.

The possibility of divergent readings is nicely captured by considering a fairly well-known passage in *The Malay Archipelago*, where Wallace arguably exhibits marked appreciation of the physique of the male "savage." Similar to passages in his journal where he admires the Dyaks of Borneo and the Indians of the Upper Amazon,[56] Wallace describes the native people of the Aru Islands:

> Here, as among most savage people I have dwelt among, I was delighted with the beauty of the human form—a beauty which stay-at-home civilized people can scarcely have any conception. What are the finest Grecian statues to the living, moving, breathing men I saw daily around me? The unrestrained grace of the naked savage as he goes about his daily occupations, or lounges at his ease, must be seen to be understood; and a youth bending his bow is the perfection of manly beauty. The women, however, except in extreme youth, are by no means so pleasant to look at as the men.[57]

Raby argues that in its exclusion of the possibility of the reader's gaze resting upon women's seminaked bodies, the final sentence intentionally avoids offending Victorian modesty.[58] This implies that Wallace admired the bodies of native women but was coy about admitting it. Even if this is true, the eloquent description of male bodies (the native hunters) is striking.[59] It may plausibly evoke homoerotic sensibility in some readers, while the allusion to classical sculpture ("Grecian statues") and the use of the term "manly beauty" submerge a possible homosexual reading within broader aesthetic ideals.[60] Emerging homosexual identities among educated European men were sometimes nurtured by such ambiguous literary descriptions well into the twentieth century. Classically educated homosexuals very often made sense of their feelings by associating with the ancient Greek idealization of male bonds.[61] And "manly beauty" was a physical standard, even if it did not

[56] Wallace, *Journal*, 2:83.

[57] Wallace, *The Malay Archipelago*, 2:254. Other Victorian travelers, including Charles Darwin, were not so circumspect and almost routinely referred to the beauty of native women. See Charles Darwin, *The Voyage of the Beagle* (London: John Murray, 1889), 41, 238, 314.

[58] Peter Raby, *Bright Paradise: Victorian Scientific Travelers* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1996), 161.

[59] For a comparable appreciative description of male Amazonian Indians, see Alfred Russel Wallace, *A Narrative of Travels on the Amazon and Rio Negro, with an Account of the Native Tribes, and Observations on the Climate, Geology, and Natural History of the Amazon Valley*, 2nd ed. (London: Ward Lock, 1890), 179.

[60] See Graham Robb, *Strangers: Homosexual Love in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004), 110–11, for an explanation of the concept of "submersion," that is, the ways in which certain forms of homosexual expression passed unnoticed by the wider society.

[61] See Linda C. Dowling, *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994); and Martha Vicinus, "The Adolescent Boy: Fin de Siècle Femme Fatale?," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 5, no. 1 (1994): 94. Edward Carpenter compared Tamil stevedores in Sri Lanka to "the bronze Mercury of Herculaneum" in *From*

possess inherent erotic connotations.[62] The point is that *The Malay Archipelago* is susceptible to culturally significant homoerotic readings. Somerset Maugham was one influential homosexual reader whose interpretations can be documented in some detail.

It is surprising that Maugham is scarcely known to the historiography of homosexuality in European colonial territories. He is not mentioned in Aldrich's *Colonialism and Homosexuality*, although there is a reference to his nephew Robin Maugham.[63] D. E. Mungello discusses Maugham's and Haxton's visit to China in 1919–20, but only briefly.[64] Maugham's fictional representations of colonial Malayan society caused offense to many British expatriates at the time, and the historian Margaret Shennan has more recently suggested that Maugham created cultural stereotypes on the basis of limited acquaintance and selective examples.[65] But, as Koven insists, fictional representations "constitute attempts by their authors to organize self-consciously what they saw, thought and read"; "they register not just what can be said, but also what cannot be said"; and "they give us access to cultural attitudes."[66] Among other things, Maugham's Malay fiction gives us access to a previously unknown dimension of the cultural significance of Wallace's *Malay Archipelago*—that is, as a resource for homosexual readers in a period in which queer identities were often registered only covertly. I turn now to a discussion of the small but rich vein of these allusions in the

*Adam's Peak to Elephanta; Sketches in Ceylon and India* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1910), 14. See also Anna Clark, "Anne Lister's Construction of Lesbian Identity," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 7, no. 1 (July 1996): 31, which shows that even a lesbian identity could be fashioned, in part at least, from classical sources evoking male beauty and love between men.

[62] The explorer Henry Morton Stanley similarly used the term "manly beauty" as well as a classical allusion in his admiring description of the eponymous hero of his novel *My Kalulu*. See Henry M. Stanley, *My Kalulu: Prince, King, and Slave: A Story of Central Africa* (1873; London: Forgotten Books, 2013), 136–37. While Aldrich and others read *My Kalulu* as a homosexual love story (Kalulu was one of Stanley's servants whom he adopted), the biographer Tim Jeal does not, observing that sentimental relationships between boys were "routine" in novels about Victorian public school life. See Tim Jeal, *Stanley: The Impossible Life of Africa's Greatest Explorer* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 151, 53. Jeal's point about public school romances overlooks the well-known fact that by some accounts sexual activity among boys occurred routinely in Victorian boarding schools. See Charles Upchurch, *Before Wilde: Sex between Men in Britain's Age of Reform* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 55–61.

[63] Aldrich, *Colonialism and Homosexuality*, 398.

[64] D. E. Mungello considers Maugham an unskilled and inexperienced interpreter of Chinese culture and society and believes that his motivation to market his travel book *On a Chinese Screen* (1922) undermined its cultural value (*Western Queers in China: Flight to the Land of Oz* [Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2012], 57–61).

[65] Margaret Shennan, *Out in the Midday Sun: The British in Malaya, 1880–1960* (London: John Murray, 2000), 246.

[66] Koven, *Slumming*, 204–5. For an argument urging historians of empire to use fiction as a source, see Cora Kaplan, "Imagining Empire: History, Fantasy and Literature," in Hall and Rose, *At Home with the Empire*, 190–211.

archaeology of cultural expressions of sexuality, including homosexuality, in European empires in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

As noted earlier, Maugham was somewhat of a social outsider. During the course of his medical training in fin de siècle London he became intensely skeptical of the general Victorian faith in progress and the superiority of European civilization. Consciously disregarding the popular evolutionary philosophy of Herbert Spencer, he declared, rather colorfully, that the world "was going from bad to worse, and I was as pleased as Punch at the thought of my remote descendants, having long forgotten art and science and handicraft, cowering skin-clad in caverns as they watched the approach of the cold and eternal night."[67] In an entry in his commonplace book for the first year of the new century, he ruminated: "What is the advantage of progress? How does it benefit the Japanese that they have assumed Western Civilisation? Are not the Malays, on the borders of their forests, the Kanakas, on their fertile islands, as happy as the London slummer? What does it all end in? What is the use of it? I don't know the answer."[68] Here was the germ of his desire to travel to Asia to experience life stripped of the veneer of civilization. Meyers suggests that a character in Maugham's 1904 novel *The Merry-go-Round*, Dr. Frank Hurrell, "who observes rather than participates in the action, speaks for Maugham: 'My whole soul aches for the East, for Egypt and India and Japan; I want to know the corrupt, eager life of the Malays and the violent adventures of the South Sea Islands. . . . I want to see life and death, and the passions, the virtues and vices, of men face to face, uncovered.'"[69] His first venture outside Europe (November 1916–May 1917) took him to the islands of the South Pacific, including Samoa and Tahiti. Reflecting on the importance of this journey several decades later, Maugham wrote:

> What excited me was to meet one person after another who was new to me. I was like a naturalist who comes into a country where the fauna are of an unimaginable variety. Some I recognized; they were old types that I had read of, and they gave me just the same feeling of delighted surprise that I had once in the Malayan Archipelago when I saw sitting on the branch of a tree a bird that I had never seen before but in a zoo. For the first moment I thought it must have escaped from a cage. Others were strange to me, and they thrilled me as Wallace was thrilled when he came upon a new species.[70]

The explicit reference to Wallace points to the importance of *The Malay Archipelago* to Maugham's sense of self as a writer, suggesting by analogy

[67] W. Somerset Maugham, *The Summing Up* (London: Vintage, 2001), 71. This autobiographical work was first published in 1938.

[68] W. Somerset Maugham, *A Writer's Notebook* (New York: Vintage, 2009), 77. This is a recent edition of Maugham's commonplace book, which was first published in 1949.

[69] Meyers, *Somerset Maugham*, 52.

[70] Maugham, *The Summing Up*, 193–94.

that he approached his travel in Asia with intense interest and an eagerness to discover, and indeed study and record, new things beyond the rigid confines of the codes of European civilization.

In an appreciative critical reappraisal of Maugham, Don Adams has convincingly argued that his fiction is defined by the quality of "ethical earnestness" grounded in the philosophy of Baruch Spinoza. The period of the First World War, when Maugham met Gerald Haxton and traveled with him to the Pacific, marked a decisive stage in Maugham's maturation. His autobiographical novel *Of Human Bondage* (1915) may plausibly be interpreted as signaling the acceptance of his homosexuality, and during the course of his travels he "learned to put the precepts of Spinoza's *Ethics*—acceptance of one's own nature and necessitous circumstance and tolerance of that of others—into practical action and effect in his own life and experience."[71] Contrary to a critical tradition that spurns Maugham's fiction as psychologically shallow, Adams urges us to read his work figuratively as "ethical parables" exemplifying the application of Spinozan precepts in real-life situations. Adopting this approach, the reader appreciates Maugham's rejection of the conventional socially determined morality of his time in favor of the liberation of the individual to act in accordance with naturalistic principles.[72] This includes the right to sexual expression, which some of Maugham's novels championed explicitly in relation to women, while homosexual desire was encoded in ways that avoided the risks of disclosure.[73] The following analysis of the relationship between Wallace's *Malay Archipelago* and Maugham's Malay fiction is informed by Adams's admonition.

Maugham's nautical journey through the Malay Archipelago in 1921 is documented in *A Writer's Notebook*. The itinerary concentrated on a number of places visited by Wallace, including Singapore, Borneo, Macassar, and the Aru Islands.[74] It proved to be an exciting and sexually fulfilling adventure. Both Meyers and Hastings repeat Maugham's confession to a friend that "the most memorable sexual experience of his life had been a moonlit night on a sampan with a boy in Malaya."[75] At Sarawak they were

[71] Don Adams, "Somerset Maugham's Ethically Earnest Fiction," *Cambridge Quarterly* 45, no. 1 (2016): 56, 50.

[72] Don Adams, "'What Then Is Right Action?': Somerset Maugham's Ethical Parables," *Soundings* 99, no. 2 (2016): 105–35.

[73] See the readings of *The Painted Veil* (1925) and *The Narrow Corner* (1932) in Adams, "Somerset Maugham's Ethically Earnest Fiction," 50–53. It should be remembered that all homosexual acts (not only sodomy) were deemed criminal in Britain until 1967. For a discussion of Maugham's homosexuality in the context of his life and time, see Hastings, *The Secret Lives*, 4–5.

[74] Maugham, *Notebook*, 199–226.

[75] Hastings, *The Secret Lives*, 263. In Meyers's account this experience took place in Indochina (*Somerset Maugham*, 105). Maugham visited the countries now called Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam in 1922–23, a journey he recounted in *The Gentleman in the Parlour* (1930; London: Vintage Books, 2001). He returned to Malaya for several months during 1925.

hosted by the British rajah Vyner Brooke, as Wallace had been hosted by Sir James Brooke. This visit almost ended in total disaster when, during an excursion up the Skang river, their boat was overturned by a tidal wave (known as a bore). The pair might have drowned.[76] A fictionalized version of this event appears in Maugham's short story "The Yellow Streak," but he drew also on an account of an uncannily similar event retold by Wallace in *The Malay Archipelago*. In Wallace's narrative, he and his servant were assisted by some Malays who had passed them in another boat and who, seeing their predicament, sent one of their party back to help them. In "The Yellow Streak" the hapless adventurers are similarly assisted by a passing boat, although in the actual incident Maugham and Haxton and their crew had to fend entirely for themselves. When they got to shore Haxton had a heart attack, and they had no option but to wait until the crisis passed. They then found their way to the Dyak village where they had previously arranged to spend the night.[77] The story connects Wallace and Maugham in other ways too; these relate to the central sexual theme of the tale, which I now examine.

"The Yellow Streak" indicts the hypocrisy of the colonial society and affirms the naturalness of interracial sexual relationships. The protagonist, Izzart, an employee of the local sultan, had a British father and a "half-caste" mother, whom his father had married and later taken to England to live. At all costs Izzart attempts to conceal his mixed blood. Educated at the prestigious English public school Harrow, he had internalized the values and attitudes of a society that considered the native peoples and half-castes to be inferior in character to full-blooded Europeans. He craves popularity and is terrified that his status and reputation would be destroyed by disclosure of his racial origins. During the incident on the river he acts to save himself and fails to respond to the frantic call for help of his companion, a visiting mining engineer by the name of Campion, whom Izzart had been charged to take care of. In a moment of reflection afterward, he wonders whether his cowardice could be attributed to his native blood. The "yellow streak" of the story's title refers both to Izzart's cowardice in failing to assist Campion and to his later attempt to cover it up. It may refer, too, to the Asian blood flowing in Izzart's veins. An irony of the tale is that it was the Dyak boat crew who had risked their lives to save Campion. This, Meyers suggests, disproved Izzart's (and the colonial society's) racial theory.[78] The irony is rendered in a symbolic inversion in the story when Izzart and Campion emerge from the river covered in black mud (as Maugham and Haxton had done); they are given sarongs to change into and then sleep that night

[76] For accounts of this incident, see Hastings, *The Secret Lives*, 271–72; Meyers, *Somerset Maugham*, 152–53; and Maugham, *Notebook*, 204–7.

[77] Wallace, *Malay Archipelago*, 1:115; W. Somerset Maugham, "The Yellow Streak," in *Collected Short Stories* (London: Vintage, 2000), 1:418–41; Maugham, *Notebook*, 204–7.

[78] Meyers, *Somerset Maugham*, 154.

in a Dyak longhouse. Wallace and Maugham, too, slept in longhouses on their journeys, and Maugham donned a sarong. In "The Yellow Streak," Maugham's racial attitudes are clearly consistent with Wallace's well-known admiration of the Dyaks, as well as his acceptance of the many mixed-race people and relationships that were a part of his everyday life in the Dutch East Indies.[79]

A more telling, if less obvious, reading of the story may be apprehended by focusing on Izzart's relationship with his Malay servant, Hassan, whose presence is noted more than a dozen times. Indeed, it is Hassan who takes charge during the crisis and saves Izzart's life. Izzart's anxiety about his identity may be interpreted to refer not only to race but also to homosexuality. In *The Malay Archipelago* Maugham had read of Wallace traveling in Borneo, often alone except for a Malay or Chinese servant, and he followed this practice himself on his Asian journeys (although Haxton was there too).[80] The sexual ambiguity of relationships between masters and servants is represented more fully and suggestively in what Maugham privately referred to as his "queer" novel, *The Narrow Corner*, set in the Malay Archipelago.[81] The story is told from the point of view of an expatriate British doctor by the name of Saunders who, like Wallace, admired male but seldom acknowledged female beauty.[82] The most graphic example in the novel occurs when one of the main characters, an Australian by the name of Fred Blake, bathes naked on the deck of a boat, in full view of Saunders, with the assistance of a crew member who throws water over him. This evokes Wallace's preferred method of bathing in Macassar by having servants scoop water out of a stream and then pour it over his body.[83] Saunders "saw the blackfellow [*sic*] lower a bucket by a rope into the sea, and then Fred Blake stripped his pyjamas and stood on deck naked while the other threw the contents over him. The bucket was lowered again and Fred turned round. 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." Saunders remarked to Blake: "You're a very good-looking young fellow."[84] But it is Saunders's relationship with his own Chinese "boy," Ah Kay, that shows more fully and significantly the influences of Wallace on Maugham's novel. Ah Kay

[79] Wallace saw miscegenation not as degrading Europeans but, potentially, as a means of raising less-developed peoples and culminating ultimately in the uniting of all races in a single common race superior to the Europeans of the industrial age. See Clement, "Evolution and Empire," 72–73.

[80] Wallace, *Malay Archipelago*, 1:103, 81.

[81] According to Robin Maugham, his uncle called *The Narrow Corner* his "queer novel" (Meyers, *Somerset Maugham*, 213). On *The Narrow Corner*, see also Hastings, *The Secret Lives*, 385–86.

[82] Saunders admired the androgynous beauty of the daughter of one of the main characters; she "was slim, and had the narrow hips of a boy" (W. Somerset Maugham, *The Narrow Corner* [New York: Vintage International, 2009], 168).

[83] Wallace, *Malay Archipelago*, 1:362.

[84] Maugham, *The Narrow Corner*, 115.

"was a slim, comely youth with large black eyes and a skin as smooth as a girl's."[85] Hastings informs readers that the character is based on the Chinese servant whom Maugham hired to accompany him on his journey across peninsula Southeast Asia in 1922–23, Ah King, and whose name he gave to the volume of short stories he published ten years later. But Maugham also drew on the relationship between Wallace and Ali in his portrait of Saunders and Ah Kay.[86] Like Ali, Ah Kay was in Saunders's employ for a long time (about six years at the time of the events of the novel), and their relationship was characterized by an unusual degree of mutuality, represented in their sharing of pipes of opium and smoking "alternately."[87] It appears that *The Malay Archipelago* had alerted Maugham to the possibilities of intimate master-servant relationships in the East. Reading the book as a self-aware homosexual, he had sought similar opportunities, which probably had a sexual dimension. In turn, he blended elements from Wallace's account and his own real-life experiences into his fiction.

The most explicit reference to Wallace in Maugham's work occurs in the short story "Neil MacAdam." Set in Borneo, it tells the story of a young Scottish naturalist who goes there to work as the assistant curator at a museum in a fictional town called Kuala Solor. On the sea passage between Singapore and Borneo the eponymous protagonist rereads Wallace's *Malay Archipelago*. Like Maugham when he visited Borneo, he "had read it as a boy, but now it had a new and absorbing interest for him."[88] Unlike Maugham but possibly something like Wallace, MacAdam is a qualified naturalist and a raw, sexually inexperienced young man. Early in the story his masculinity is drawn into question because of his smooth white skin, which "would have been beautiful skin even for a woman."[89] He resolutely resists the attractions of Singapore's fleshpots, to which he is introduced when he first arrives in Asia. He intends, he says, to wait until marriage for his first sexual experience. In Kuala Solor his resolve is put to the test, as the Russian wife of his boss and friend, Angus Munro, takes a fancy to him and does everything in her power to seduce him. Darya's wiles are facilitated by various opportunities embedded in the ordinary practices of domestic life in this tropical setting. Many of these Maugham had noticed in *The Malay Archipelago* (in which context they were unrelated to sexual opportunity). Their uses in "Neil MacAdam" are indicative of how Maugham read Wallace. Such opportunities included limited privacy in small makeshift houses (Darya had to pass through MacAdam's room to go outside); going about indoors in bare feet (Darya kisses MacAdam's "naked feet"); the wearing of sarongs (which were easily removed); bathing in rivers (on

[85] Ibid., 41.

[86] On Ah King, see Hastings, *The Secret Lives*, 312–13.

[87] Maugham, *The Narrow Corner*, 111.

[88] W. Somerset Maugham, "Neil MacAdam," *Collected Short Stories* (London: Vintage, 2002), 4:426.

[89] Ibid., 4:428.

an occasion when MacAdam was bathing, Darya turned up, stripped off all her clothes, and joined him); and administering comfort to a person suffering fever (Darya sponged the whole of MacAdam's body twice a day when he suffered fever, causing him great embarrassment).[90] The turning point in the story occurs when MacAdam has a sexual dream about Darya; this precipitates his absolute rebuff of her attentions during an extended field trip into the "primeval" forest. Darya is scared of the forest but accompanies the two men on their journey in order to be with MacAdam. While alone together on a walk one day, she and MacAdam argue bitterly, and Darya threatens to tell her husband that MacAdam had made sexual advances toward her if he goes ahead with his declared intention to leave Kuala Solor. MacAdam flees the scene, and when he realizes that Darya, alone in the forest, would be terrified and probably get hopelessly lost, perhaps even die, he willfully fails to rescue her, convincing himself that it is "the hand of God."[91]

The story alludes, of course, to the biblical account of the temptation of Adam by Eve in the Garden of Eden. But Maugham subverts conventional Judeo-Christian mythology and values. Darya is presented as a cultured woman who is passionate about art, literature, and life—she spends all day reading Russian novels—and her strong sexual desire is an integral component of her nature. By contrast, the colonial enclave at Kuala Solor is depicted as small-minded in its nasty gossip about the habitual promiscuity of the married Russian woman. And MacAdam, in the end, is stripped of his mask of charming innocence. After Darya declares her love for him and proposes an assignation, he is incensed: "It was all very well for men to make advances, that was what men did, but for women to do so was disgusting. His modesty was outraged. The passion he had seen in her face, and the indelicacy of her gestures, scandalized him."[92] Here MacAdam is made the bearer of the double standard of morality, which allowed men considerable freedom of sexual expression while denying the same to women. Yet he is unable to accept the sexual part of his own nature: "Love was sacred. The sexual act horrified him. Its excuse was the procreation of children and its sanctification marriage."[93] It seems ironic that the trained naturalist, who has the knowledge and authority to recognize and name new species, is so uncomfortable and indeed inept in dealing with such a fundamental characteristic of human nature as sexuality. Moreover, his unnatural fear and loathing prove culpable: MacAdam is responsible for what the reader assumes is Darya's death. And his callousness is underlined by contrast with the compassionate response of Darya's husband, Angus, whom we suspect must have known of his wife's affairs. The final words of the story are given

[90] See ibid., 4:455, 453, 445, 452, 445–46, 450–51.
[91] Ibid., 4:462.
[92] Ibid., 4:455.
[93] Ibid., 4:459.

to him: "Poor child. Poor child."[94] So it is not the East that turns out to be primitive and corrupt in this story. Rather, in line with Maugham's own disgust with and desire to escape Western society to see life in a more authentic state, the East, symbolized by Darya, who considers herself to be "Oriental," represents sound naturalistic ethical values that the West lacks. In this way, individual sexual self-expression, particularly for women but also for homosexuals, is touted as an ethical desideratum. MacAdam's extreme sexual repression and androgynous appearance may be read as encoding homosexuality.

## Conclusion

This essay has explored the interrelationships among several queer colonial journeys. At the center of Wallace's personal and scientific odyssey of 1854–62 was a same-sex interracial household that embodied what for its time was quite a radical vision of humanity's shared progress. The relationships in the household were structured according to the conventional hierarchical paradigm of master and servant, but the usual boundaries of gender, class, and race were blurred, and there was a significant degree of mutuality, especially between Wallace and Ali. The significance of their relationship may be appreciated both by placing it on a spectrum of homogenic love and by examining its unique characteristics. In its historical context of the Dutch East Indies in the nineteenth century, it might be compared to concubinage in that it was a close domestic relationship that served some of Wallace's emotional and psychological needs for the duration of his stay abroad. For Wallace, this fairly unusual experience of domesticity helped him to make a psychological transition from a single male explorer to a husband and father in the context of what looks like an unexceptionable middle-class domestic life in late Victorian England. But if this irony appears to diminish the queer character of his islands sojourn, it should be remembered that the radical social and political values that Wallace exhibited at that time marked his subsequent public career.

From the 1860s onward Wallace supported a range of progressive causes, including antislavery, land nationalization, women's suffrage, socialism, environmentalism, and anti-imperialism (he decried the new imperialism of the late nineteenth century). In this respect, his later career had much in common with that of Edward Carpenter, with whom he had some association.[95] It is not known whether Wallace became acquainted with Carpenter's sexual radicalism or if he ever pondered the meaning of homosexuality in terms of evolutionary purpose. In what was a disappointing about-face for

[94] Ibid., 4:464. The word "child" may evoke innocence and vulnerability.

[95] Wallace contributed an article to a publication edited by Carpenter. See Wallace to Edward Carpenter, 26 September 1899, WCP3773, and Carpenter to Wallace, 1 October 1899, WCP 2132.

evolutionary scientists like Charles Darwin and Thomas Huxley who held a materialist view of the origin and development of life, Wallace came to believe that there was a higher power directing evolutionary change of all kinds, including in the social and political spheres into which he ventured. He saw spiritualism as one means of achieving progressive social change superintended by the guiding intelligence.[96] In 1869 he published the account of his travels in the Malay Archipelago, a project intended not only to help address his financial problems but also to present an argument in favor of the reform of British colonial policy.

Wallace undoubtedly inspired Maugham's journey to the Indies in 1921, which facilitated further exploration of his emerging homosexual identity free from the constraints of British legal and social prohibitions. It also afforded an additional opportunity to examine human nature in a very different cultural setting. In "The Yellow Streak," Maugham indicts the conventional prejudices of the time and urges readers to embrace their individual racial and sexual identities. In "Neil MacAdam," readers are confronted with the devastating consequences of sexual repression and hypocrisy and are urged to accept as natural the various sexual desires and agency of both men and women. In these stories and in the novel *The Narrow Corner*, homosexuality is encoded in the androgynous descriptions of several of the characters who are the objects of desire, as well as in hints about some of the master-servant relationships. These represent an implicit argument that heterodox expressions of sexuality should be considered legitimate too. Some of the elements of these stories have their genesis in *The Malay Archipelago*, which Maugham read through the lens of a homosexual man in the early twentieth century yearning for personal and social liberation. He took the story of Wallace and Ali as a suggestion of the range of creative possibilities, and he incorporated these inspirations into his ethically earnest fiction. Maugham's appropriation of *The Malay Archipelago* makes it a queer text, irrespective of Wallace's conscious intentions. Studying the consonance between the two texts, we also learn something about the history of the language and symbols deployed to encode homosexual desire and relationships.[97]

Finally, it might be observed that all these journeys depart from McClintock's model of the typical European colonial journey of discovery, which moved forward in space but backward in time and garnered ideological justification for the subjugation of other races. The imaginations of these two outsiders, Wallace and Maugham, drew from the materials

[96] See Martin Fichman, *An Elusive Victorian: The Evolution of Alfred Russel Wallace* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), chap. 6, on Wallace's theistic evolutionary teleology.

[97] This might be compared to the ways in which John Addington Symonds's "appropriation and reworking" of James Greenwood's slum journalism helps "to shed some light on the covert language necessarily deployed in discussions of same-sex desires" (Koven, *Slumming*, 70–71).

and insights of their journeys into colonial societies to fashion individual visions of a fairer and freer social and political order enriched by racial and sexual differences. The "liberal imagination" that McClintock argued had formed in the merging of empire and domesticity was more elastic than her model allows. Wallace and Maugham, and others like them, were unable to prevent racial subjugation, but they did suggest how liberal values might and should, in their view, lead to a far more respectful and humane kind of colonial—and metropolitan—praxis. Their journeys are suggestive of a historical conjunction between sexual unorthodoxy and a more authentic liberal response to race and gender relations in the modern era of industrialized society and European colonial empires.

## About the Author

Mark Clement has a DPhil from the University of Oxford and has taught history in Australia, Britain, and Vietnam. He has published journal articles on nineteenth-century British and colonial history and contributed to the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.*