

SECTION IV

FILM: ANALYSIS

The Painted Veil: Analysis of the motion picture film based on the book
by Somerset Maugham

Introduction

Somerset Maugham's *The Painted Veil*, like all his other writings is very well structured. The film has done equal justice to the narrative by giving the audience images of stunning cinematography. While the narrative flows through beautifully descriptive passages, the film on the other hand, condenses the story into brilliant visual images.

In motion pictures, the film must take a few liberties so as to hold the patience of the audience. It really does not matter when the main scenes appear in the film, as long as the audience remains thoroughly engaged with what is happening on the screen. Usually, it shows efficient cinematic direction when the emotional tension is gradually relieved for otherwise the film loses the rapt attention of the audience. On one hand, the activities of reading a film or reading a book are similar in nature as both evoke emotions generated by the affects of watching and reading, for they either constellate or diffuse complexes the watcher / reader may be experiencing in life. On the other hand, the film must engage the audience in an active, cathartic viewing that is short yet fulfilling. If the film tends to be overly serious, it may lose the audience altogether. While films are means of entertainment they also contain the germ of identification for sometimes films work as mirrors, reflecting back to the viewer certain attitudes of personal importance. Hence, when in the film *The Painted Veil*, we see the addition of scenes that were not in the book, we must remind ourselves that the film is condensing emotions within a three hour period as compared to the book which may take many hours of reading. It is not to devalue the book but to keep the level of interest high so that the audience leaves having engaged with the full spectrum of emotions. For example, Tolstoy's *War and Peace* consists of two volumes but the movie is shot in four hours. There are bound to be changes, additions and eliminations of scenes.

Another important factor is the method of conveying the story to the audience. To maintain the level of both entertainment and interest, the film uses the technique of flashbacks as well as the introduction of visual images to convey in a short space of time, emotions that take lengthy narrative passages to explore. Whenever there is a film based on a book, it is wise to read the book first before viewing the film. The contrast between the two mediums of execution then becomes doubly enjoyable. There is one other aspect that cannot be forgotten, which is the script of the film. Words, like images convey a great deal of meaning. Again, long dialogues must be condensed and narrative passages reduced to a few pertinent words all taking place at the same time as the visual images are being enacted. The film attacks the sensation aspect of the psyche, first and foremost while the feeling and thinking aspects take hold after the film has ended. It is to the credit of the director that he can be faithful to the book while translating its deeper meaning through images and cryptic sentences.

The film, *The Painted Veil*, is well executed and follows the narrative in almost every detail except in the conclusion. The addition of a scene, not in the book, is introduced in order to hold the interest of the audience. This scene is pertinent as it helps to soften the sharp

edges of emotion that is of an ice-cold indifference, almost bordering on cruelty, which, if prolonged indefinitely can make the audience uneasy. I wish to focus on the addition of this scene in order to explicate the necessary liberty and deviation the film must take from the book itself. In the concluding passages of the book, the female character, Kitty Fane, comes to a profound understanding of herself: that she has been a rather superficial person; and secondly, but most importantly, that Kitty needs to raise her still unborn baby in a manner different from the way she was raised. Kitty wishes for a girl so that by raising her she will redeem her own mistakes. All this happens as an outpouring of emotion that takes the form of a confessional made before her father whom she had undervalued as a person. She regrets that her husband, Walter Fane, dies before she gets a chance to tell him how terribly mistaken she had been about everything and everyone.

It is difficult to dramatize this scene which consists mainly of personal cogitations fraught with painful emotions. The director therefore takes as the main focus the essence of Kitty's confession - her desperate need to be forgiven. It is not her relationship with her father, who is her listener only, but Kitty's relationship with her husband who is the main reason Kitty is able to learn about her true self. So, the director takes the liberty of changing the confessional narrative and replacing it with a dramatic scene of equal value. The husband and wife break the icy barrier of indifference and reconcile their differences. This scene beautifully shows Kitty's need to be loved as well as Walter's need to regain his lost love. This gives the film an impetus to move forward with a hopeful intention. It also gives the audience a cathartic moment of relief and hope. This addition is crucial, for later, when Walter is dying, Kitty is able to show the courageous self she thought she never had. Had the director not introduced this romantic relief but followed the book faithfully, the film would have been tedious to watch and instead of a catharsis, the audience would have departed with a feeling of unmitigated anger. And psychologically, this well executed departure reveals the beauty of repairing a damaged relationship as well as gives the audience its money's worth of both hope and entertainment.

The Story

Somerset Maugham's inspiration for writing this novella came from an Italian story he heard in which a famous lord punishes his wife of infidelity. He actually imprisons her in a tower but seeing that she refuses to die, the lord later drowns her. This heartless story can either make one laugh or cry. The sheer bestiality of the punishment far surpasses the initial intention, reducing the story to a mere sensation. To give the story meaning, Maugham changes the ordeal of punishment into a learning experience where the female character learns to forgive herself and love others. The film however, goes one step further by showing that the male character too learns to forgive his wife and love her despite her mistakes.

Kitty Garstin, at the age of twenty-five precipitates into a marriage with Walter Fane. She accompanies her husband to Hong Kong (Shanghai in the movie) where he works as a doctor and researcher in bacteriology. Kitty likes the luxurious life style of colonial expatriates but finds her marriage boring. Walter is a serious type who works hard and dislikes parties which to him are a waste of time. But Kitty is brought up by a mother to love the fun of dancing and partying. It is inevitable that Kitty soon falls madly in love with Charles Townsend, the popular Vice Consul with a flair for flirting. When Walter discovers

their affair, he gives Kitty two choices: either to divorce him or go with him to Mei-tan-fu, an interior region of China infested with the cholera epidemic. Kitty is confident that Charles will divorce his wife and marry her. But when she discovers that Charles has no such intention of deserting his wife, Kitty has no choice other than to accompany Walter to Mei-tan-fu. There Kitty, working alongside the convent nuns learns the true personality of her husband which in two years of married life she had totally neglected. Inwardly she is furious that Walter chooses to punish her in this cruel way but soon Kitty realizes that this punishment is actually a blessing for she learns about things and people she would never have deigned to know before. When Kitty finds out that she is pregnant she is faced with the bitter truth of not knowing who the father is. This uncertainty forces Walter to see himself as the one being punished. Having loved Kitty and then having despised her for her infidelity, he feels totally betrayed by her pregnancy. Adding fuel to fire, Walter punishes himself by becoming even more of a recluse, working himself literally to death. Kitty on the other hand, is beginning to respect Walter and even be in awe of him if not in love with him. She craves forgiveness but cannot melt the icy demeanor that is both a barrier to reconciliation and a punishment that Walter, like a martyr opts for himself. His death finally releases Kitty of all her personal anxieties. Returning to England she begins a new life with a promise that, having failed to be a good wife, she is determined to be a better mother to her unborn child.

Analysis of the following topics:

The Setting and the Other
Abandonment and Alienation
Perception and Revelation
The Title

The Setting and the Other:

In *The Painted Veil*, I shall attempt to focus on the main themes and analyze them using Jungian psychological terms. At the same time I shall give a synopsis of the passages in the book while showing the changes the film makes in order to transfer the story line from narrative to dramatic. This is a story of female individuation not unlike a *bildungsroman* where a child develops into an adult. However, in this story, an adult female of twenty-five years of age, develops from the *puella* or childlike stage into a mature adult. One of the aspects of growing up psychically, involves learning to assimilate and integrate *'the other'*, people who are ethnically and socially different, as equal human beings on the same path of life.

The book, *The Painted Veil* was published in 1925, and covers the period when Hong Kong was under British colonial rule. As such the atmosphere retains much of nineteenth-century colonial prudery and arrogance. In all of Maugham's stories, character development takes place in alien settings. This forces the character to quickly get into a learning curve. Jungian psychology will say that the stuck character learns to quickly 'unstick' itself and begin to individuate consciously. The *setting* acts as an important character itself, as the *other* that confronts and immerses the character on all fronts making escape into familiar surroundings impossible.

Setting therefore is crucial in any Maugham story. The characters are transported from a familiar surrounding to an unfamiliar one. Everyone and everything that happen to be outside this area of familiarity is known as the *other*, that which is totally different. Changing the setting from familiar to strange, forces the character to see the other not as something to ignore but as someone from whom they may learn about themselves.

Kitty Fane, the female character leaves her familiar England and travels to Hong Kong (Shanghai in the movie), an independent British colony in China. There she lives amongst the British expatriates, socializing in the manner she has been used to in England. Looking at these expatriates, one is reminded of the British presence only while the foreign country and its people are almost absent or invisible. The film projects this by foregrounding the British and keeping everything Chinese in the background. Even though Kitty is now living in Hong Kong, she is not seen to take any interest in the Chinese people. The British social hierarchy as well maintains this imbalance by portraying the indigenous people as too inferior to associate with. One is the ruler and the other the ruled, hence the gap is socially inappropriate. It is as if Kitty is living in England and not in Hong Kong. Colonel Yu of Mei-tan-fu tells Walter that it would be nice if the British would leave Hong Kong and allow them to govern their own country. Colonel Yu can confide in Walter because to him Walter is not like the British officials; he is one of them, a Chinese.

To Kitty, Hong Kong's otherness is bearable because it is well masked by the British expatriate way of living: clubs and sports, dances and other socials. But things become very strange and frightening when she goes to Mei-tan-fu leaving behind her familiar expatriate community. The film opens with Kitty being carried in a sedan chair across the rice fields on her way to Mei-tan-fu. The opening scenes foreground the richness of the Chinese country side. The gorgeous scenery, lush with green rice fields dotted with working peasants dressed in blue clothes with the misty mountains in the background, do not at all evoke an ounce of interest from Kitty. She is shown bored with this strange mode of travel, and angry for being held a prisoner. Her thoughts are a series of flashbacks. The audience is given a wonderful view of the contrasts: British and Chinese ways of living; Kitty's earlier life in England and Hong Kong and now Kitty's present move to Mei-tan-fu. That Mei-tan-fu is in the interior of China further reinforces the idea of otherness. The setting drastically changes from British foregrounding to Chinese foregrounding of scenes. This contrast in setting focuses on the total otherness that Kitty is forced to confront. The familiar status of hierarchy of the ruler and the ruled is also broken. Here rules the plague of cholera that kills both the British and the Chinese. Ironically the pathology of disease makes everyone equal.

In her new home, Kitty is not only surrounded by the Chinese other, but by the otherness of the convent nuns and by Waddington's Manchu wife. Waddington is a British trade representative working in the interior regions of China. Since he does not have a wife, his Manchu lady friend may be considered his partner or his wife in the ideal sense. It is their love that instills the true feelings of connection in Kitty for the other. In this group of total otherness, Kitty's husband, Walter Fane stands out as the one who is the most other. Kitty so far has not made any effort to know *who* Walter Fane is. According to Jungian psychology, the *puella* lives a life filled with possibilities. She dare not look further because the effort may damage her self-image. James Hall says that the puella (or puer aeternus) loves "the provisional life" and is afraid of the unknown because it may cause her pain. *Peter Pan* and *The Little Prince* are literary examples of people stuck in the childlike stage. Kitty is afraid of knowing Walter's true personality because she is afraid of the unfamiliar. Walter is different

from the people she knows and psychologically she places Walter in the same category as the *other*. Now, in Mei-tan-fu Kitty must confront the other, especially in Walter, the other whom she could ignore while in Hong Kong for there she had her provisional life to amuse her. Now the other is foregrounded and Kitty cannot escape but face the strange other. In other words, Kitty cannot remain a Peter Pan all her life. It is the unfamiliar *other*, whether in the form of the shadow or anima / animus that Kitty needs to acknowledge and integrate into her psyche in order that conscious individuation may take place. Here it is her shadow and animus other Kitty knows little of.

Abandonment and Alienation

When Kitty decides to go with Walter to Mei-tan-fu, she feels *abandoned* by her mother. Kitty blames her for not teaching her to recognize Charles' real nature; to foresee the deep side in Walter. She blames her mother for the way she is brought up. This is a typical *puella* outburst, blaming the mother for all her ills. In Mei-tan-fu, Kitty comes to realize that she is just as much to blame in the way she was raised. Kitty regrets that she participated with her mother in being amorous and dallying with prospective men thinking they would take care of her. This is the attitude she adopts towards Charles, believing this to be true love. She regrets how she had participated with her mother to ignore her father as a person, but at the same time had expected him to provide for her because he happened to be her father. This attitude is what Kitty adopts towards Walter. When Kitty realizes she is just as much to blame for her shallow attitudes towards men, her notion of abandonment changes to one of *alienation*. Kitty feels alienated from her old self which now appears to her shallow and inferior. She dissociates from her old self by looking for other means whereby she can discover positive potentialities within herself.

In Mei-tan-fu, Kitty must decide for herself what kind of life she is to lead: to mope around or participate in some form of help. Working with the nuns and the orphan girls, Kitty finds another side of herself she did not know she possessed. As she grows to like this new person, Kitty also grows in self-confidence and maturity. In the book, Kitty follows her new path without much appreciation from Walter. What appreciation she receives is not for herself but for the position she holds as the wife of a hard working doctor. In the film, however, Kitty is shown in a few scenes, where her own efforts at helping out are appreciated by all especially by Walter. This all too human episode where the taciturn husband finds time in his busy schedule to stop and listen to his wife play the piano is not only romantic but aesthetic as well. It shows that both partners must learn to work at the marriage, not just the erring wife.

The book was published in 1925 and the film was produced in 2007. A gap of almost eighty years means a definite change in marital beliefs. An unrelenting husband will surely make the audience hate the male character and minimize the waywardness of the female character. To give equal sympathy for both characters, there must be genuine effort made on both sides. They must appear to be fallible human beings. Hence the scenes where Walter, despite his anger over his wife, shows that he still loves her where as Kitty, despite feelings of fear, learns to love the person she has so insensitively wounded. In a sense, Kitty reverses her mother complex where instead of blaming her mother, she blames herself for abandoning and alienating Walter. When Kitty sees herself as an accomplice, rather than blaming others and making excuses, she is on her way to conscious individuation.

Perception and Revelation

Perception is important in how people look at and evaluate the world around them. The revelation they receive from such perspectives informs their psyche as to how they are going to react to the outside world. The most important function of perception is becoming cognizant of the opposites in life. And the function of revelation is to evaluate the deeper meaning contained in these opposites. In the film, *The Painted Veil*, we shall examine three major issues of opposites: *superficiality versus depth; desire versus love; appearance versus reality*.

The first pair of opposites we shall discuss here is *superficiality versus depth*. In the beginning of the story, we see Kitty enamored with the romantic life in Hong Kong. But when she begins helping out in Mei-tan-fu, she quickly realizes how superficial life was in Hong Kong as well as in England. Charles Townsend is the personification of this ostentatious life, a life that excludes the deeper side of living – care, love, work, struggle and so on and so forth. What Kitty learns in Mei-tan-fu is that life is how you make it. In life, you must struggle, work diligently in order to achieve the kind of fulfillment you desire. Kitty learns from the nuns and from Walter the meaning of ‘work’. It is very difficult to blend work and play but if you can make work seem enjoyable like play then you have found the secret to life’s fulfillment. Maria Montessori believed that work can translate into play given that one makes the genuine effort to correlate the two, with a sense of love liberally thrown in. If and when that happens, true contentment is the result. In other words, Kitty learns to love her work. She overcomes her distaste of mingling with the ‘other’ orphans and her dislike of the ‘other’ severe life of the nuns; she climbs the hurdles of these meaningless trivialities to find the fulfillment she lacks in life. Even after Walter’s death, Kitty shows a great willingness to stay back with the nuns. This attitude proclaims her break with her superficial past. She has found the depths of spiritual contentment.

The next pair of opposites that Kitty must overcome is *desire versus love*. Kitty learns from her mother that in order to receive the proper things in life one must desire it desperately: husband, wealth and social status neatly sum up her desires. Soon however, Kitty learns that desire does not bring happiness. What does bring happiness is a sense of responsibility. But even so, any responsibility will soon become tedious like enforced duty if it lacks the content of love. Kitty thinks she is in love with Charles but later realizes that true love does not play hide and seek. She cannot understand how the nuns could give up their lives in France and live amongst the poor in China. But working with a mentally handicapped child, Kitty realizes how great it is to love, for true love asks nothing in return except the courage to see the beauty in everyone and everything. Mother superior tells Kitty that one must do one’s responsibility or duty with love for without love no duty can be properly completed. Whether it is one’s duty to god or duty to husband, without love, the duty fails to have meaning. This is a simple way of defining the Buddhist belief in detachment and attachment to life. It simply means that one must not attach too much meaning to superficial aspects; that one must detach oneself from superficialities and concentrate on the deeper aspects of life however much they may disgust or pain you.

On the personal front, it is very similar to the Jungian idea of the shadow where dark, unpleasant feelings are repressed and ignored. According to Jungian psychology, it is imperative that one confront these dark aspects for, however distasteful they may at first appear, nevertheless they are true helpers in the path to self-knowledge. Learning to mix with the orphans and the nuns, Kitty finds that she actually enjoys their company and that she is loved for whom she is. Kitty learns how superficial desire for the romantic life can be and how much more meaningful her love is for the beauty she sees in these orphans. In a sense, the orphans and the nuns metaphorically represent two aspects of Kitty. While they are both her shadow, the orphans represent the side that is crying for love while the nuns represent the side that is defining the meaning of responsibility. Love and responsibility must work together in order to make life meaningful. Desire with no responsibility is totally meaningless. Desire is superficial while love is the deeper aspect of feeling. Relying only on desire and not venturing towards the all encompassing love, can leave one stranded on the brink of unfulfilled agony. Kitty learns to move from just desiring to giving and receiving love from others.

The shadow is the dark side of a person's psyche, but the negative animus as well can raise the specter of persistent fear. Kitty is afraid of Walter because she has never allowed herself to appreciate the hard working side of a man. She took for granted that her father would provide for her and later extended this belief to include her husband, Walter. But she had not been raised to appreciate the hard work that her father put in to earn the money and prestige for his family. To Kitty, provision by the male is a given. But providing is another kind of responsibility that without love can become a chore. This is what happens to her father and later to Walter: doing their responsibilities without love. Marriage for them becomes a chore. Just as Kitty is crying out for love, so also is Walter asking to be loved but neither knows how to work towards it. Soon however, Kitty's work at the convent helps to thaw Walter's ice-cold exterior. He sees his wife in a different light and she sees her husband for the true person he is. As her distaste for the life in the interior of China fades away so also Kitty's fear of Walter melts. Kitty is able to assimilate her shadow feelings and integrate her negative animus feelings to work towards her psychic well being. The nature of the *puella* is passive and desires not to move out of the circle of perpetual childhood which is an unreal life that seemingly shelters and provides security. For the *puella*, growing up involves the need to learn to participate and interact with the outside world for then only can she learn about responsibilities not only for others but most importantly for herself.

The third pair of opposites is that concerning *appearance versus reality*. Although this is a philosophical concern, nonetheless, it bears heavily on psychic growth. For Kitty, life in Hong Kong seems to promise her a world of happiness. Coming to Mei-tan-fu, she continues to fume and fester in suppressed anger. She blames her mother for who she is; then blames Charles for not liking that persona; and later accuses Walter for expecting her to be the woman she is not. These are signs of an immature woman living in a world of appearance only, a world of make believe she desperately wants to hold onto. In such a world, fulfilling one's dreams appears to be the real motive for living. A very common saying, *Keeping up with the Joneses*, seems to aptly describe the shallow side of wish fulfillment. While wishing for the things you want, you list them according to priority – husband, house, status, romance. When not receiving the things on the list, you blame others and make excuses for yourself. This is a typical *puella* attitude – desiring things without a sense of commitment or responsibility.

It is only when Kitty begins to participate in living, that is, working with the orphans, helping out with the nuns, that she begins to perceive the other side of life. The functions of

blaming and accusing seem trivial to the functions of recognizing one's own inferiority, to accepting and loving others and most importantly to finding out the hidden potentialities within yourself. This is work for Kitty and work that is more fulfilling than lying around dreaming. The new self is the real self and the old self is only appearance. The *puella* nature is shed for a mature one made possible by a change of setting, participation in work ethics, and an altered perception of opposing values in life. Kitty's world becomes more meaningful to her as the reality of work and responsibility, coupled with effort and love, reveals to her that life is not a given. It is what you make of it yourself.

The scene when Kitty discloses her pregnancy to Walter is very revealing, especially the part that concerns the paternity of the unborn child. In the book, both Walter and later Charles are curious to know who the real father is. In the film, only Walter's curiosity is focused on. In the book, Kitty wants a girl so she can raise her without making the mistakes her mother made. This is her only chance at redeeming herself. In the film, however, Kitty is shown with a son who carries his father's name, Walter. This is another way of redeeming herself. In the film, the scene is poignant. Here Kitty is true to herself; she tells Walter she simply does not know who the father is. Maugham intentionally makes the disclosure shrouded in uncertainty. Both the book and the film play upon this uncertainty beautifully for while it credits feminism it reduces the notions of patriarchal legacy. It is a credit to feminism that Kitty focuses on the unborn child rather than its paternity, for it is the child who metaphorically cements a true bond between man and wife. It is not the blood so much as the one who raises the child properly who should be considered the true father. By naming her son, Walter, Kitty reinforces the bond between herself and Walter, thus closing forever any trace of kinship with Charles. In the film, the presence of Walter Junior reveals the complete transformation that Kitty undergoes from a *puella* like woman to one who takes on the double responsibilities of mother and father.

In the film, patriarchal entitlement as well is minimized. In the book Kitty seems to take the full brunt of the punishment – going to infested Mei-tan-fu. In the film, however, both Kitty and Walter bear the repercussions of this enforced punishment. Kitty's punishment is redeemed when she participates in life in Mei-tan-fu. Bearing a child is figurative of her involvement with life in general. Walter's punishment (not knowing who the father is) is redeemed when he begins to love his wife again. He is not the cruel lord who feels entitled to kill his wayward wife, but a human being who learns to overlook a passing romance. Surrounded by death, disease and poverty, Kitty and Walter learn that love, trust, responsibility and respect are sentiments with far more enduring power than the trivial sentiments of pumped up self-importance. Revelation involves the insight into life's opposites and absorbing the values of their significant differences.

The title

I left the title for last so that we will be better able to appreciate the significance of Maugham's intention in giving this story the title of *The Painted Veil*. Veil suggests a curtain like covering to something that is painted. What do we paint with our personal brushes, speaking in a figurative manner? The answer I think is the kind of life we wish to lead. A prologue to the novella reads,

“...the painted veil which those who live call life.”

We live behind a curtain we call life which we paint in different colors to portray our joys and our sorrows, and basically our personas. We convey meaning through brush strokes that are strong or light, vivid or faint in color, thereby coloring our personas the way we wish to be seen living our lives. Life for most of us is what we choose to make of it, consciously or unconsciously. Jungian psychology says that in order to consciously individuate, we must confront the opposites in life by diffusing the complexes we have regarding our shadow and anima / animus. This means that we need to integrate our conscious with our unconscious selves. This requires effort and work on our part but the result is usually a gift of greater insight that elevates our understanding of ourselves and turns us into better human beings. To put abstract theory into artistic brush strokes, we can say that the canvas of our lives is ready to be painted in the colors of our choice: some bold, some light, others curved, still others in linear geometric lines. Whatever shape or color we choose, the canvas faithfully reflects our innermost selves which show us progressing or individuating in leaps and bounds. In fact, such a canvas is truly interesting to behold.

But if we choose to remain a *puella* or a *puer aeternus* forever, the canvas of shapes and color hardly changes. It contains the strokes of a childlike persona, interesting for awhile but dull and troubling later on, for it refuses to portray any growth or development in personality. So we need to get on with our learning process and live the colorful life of an interesting person. We need to find our identity, the path that reveals our true and innermost selves.

I mention here the Manchu lady we meet in Mei-tan-fu, the wife of Mr. Waddington. She paints her face bright red and wears a head-dress denoting the insignia of the Manchu clan. Her hands are long and tapered and her feet are very small. She stands before Kitty as an emblem of great value. What does she signify? She is one of the lost treasures of the Manchu family, recovered during a rebellion and protected with great care by Mr. Waddington. To me she signifies life itself, a life lived to the fullest, with love and beauty. She represents life lived to the fullest; she chooses that particular painted veil of the Manchu clan to represent her identity. Kitty meets her when she herself is on the verge of a transforming life. This meeting reinforces the notion of otherness and piques Kitty's curiosity to courageously go forward and solve the mystery of the other. The Manchu lady acts as a catalyst in Kitty's eventual transformation. She learns to live life in a deeper and fuller way.

The veil also suggests illusion which brings our meaning of life to one of illusion. A painted veil or a painted mask gives the illusion of mystery. To live life to the fullest means to live life with its attendant mystery which is nothing short of saying that one learns to experience the spiritual benefits that life conveys in mysterious ways.

Conclusion

While dying of the dreaded cholera, Walter too must have been given an insight into one of life's meanings. Walter's dying words are enigmatic, "The dog it was that died." Kitty is mystified and asks for an explanation. But the shrewd Waddington refrains from explaining the line. Instead, he gives only the poet's name, Oliver Goldsmith (1728 – 1774).

Oliver Goldsmith's poem, titled "An Elegy on the Death of a Mad Dog" celebrates the life of a good and charitable man who befriends a stray dog. Tragically the dog goes mad

and bites the man. The villagers are afraid that the man will surely die but the opposite takes place.

“ The man recovered of the bite,
The dog it was that died.”

The poem tells of a good man, “ A kind and gentle heart he had / To comfort friends and foes.” It seems uncannily to be talking about the good man Walter and his help with the sick and dying people of Mei-tan-fu. But the dog that bites him in the poem is, in the story, Walter’s animal instinct gone awry. At one point we are told that he experiments late into the night. Smarting from his wife’s duplicity, Walter is driven to experiment on himself. Constant work reduces his immunity and makes him vulnerable to the disease so that he dies a wretched death. The two lines above, taken from the poem, can be interpreted thus: the dog is Walter’s animal instinct that goes mad and fittingly dies a quick death. A dog represents blind loyalty and love for his master so also Walter had blindly loved Kitty despite her faults. So it is his loyal instinct that is hurt and dies in the process. But the man who lives is the changed Walter who loves anew the new person that Kitty becomes. This changed Walter lives on in the person of his son, the junior Walter. Walter lets Kitty know, with the help of the poetic line that it is not he who is dying but his driven instinct, the blind and loyal doggy nature. The reason why Waddington refuses an explanation is because he suspects that Kitty’s unfaithfulness had driven Walter to his death. Kitty has suffered enough and to reveal the true reason of Walter’s death is putting unnecessary fuel to keep the fires of resentment burning. In their separate ways, Kitty and Walter are both punished but in the end it is Kitty who emerges a mature and transformed woman.

The film very nicely shows what a completely changed person Kitty has become. But the book gives Kitty one last chance to prove herself. Like the narrative confession, this proof of change cannot be filmed dramatically. It was wise of the director to change it into a short cryptic scene which speaks volumes through images alone.

The film, *The Painted Veil* is worth seeing but before one heads off to view the DVD, it will be very satisfying to read the book first. As I mentioned earlier, the film’s cinematography as well as its excellent direction can be better appreciated if compared to the narrative standard of the book.

Joya Manna