

Proposed Roads to Salvation: Narrative Analysis of *The Painted Veil*

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Abstract: *The Painted Veil* is a novel written by the famous British writer, William Somerset Maugham. It depicts the love tragedy of the couple, Kitty Garstin and her husband Walter Fane, which shows the themes of love and betrayal, plague and salvation and explores how Kitty struggled on the road to salvation. This paper firstly traced back to the source of her salvation, the human emotional instinct, which led to Kitty's betrayal of marriage and Walter's punishment. In order to revenge, Walter took Kitty to Mei-tan-fu, where the people were in the face of the outbreak of a terrible plague, cholera, which naturally resulted in Kitty's death perception in a foreign land. Under the awful death threat from the plague in a strange place, Kitty was deep in thought. Especially after she worked in the monastery, she constantly reflected on herself and found she had reformed and broken the shackles of her original feelings influenced by her driving force from the death crisis of the plague and the nuns' positive attitude and efforts towards the plague. By tracing back to the source of her salvation, death perception and her salvation from the plague, the author carried out narrative analysis of Kitty's thoughts in exotic locations in the "other" mode of thinking, aiming at criticizing the utilitarianism and worldliness in western modern concepts.

Keywords: Emotional Instinct, Death Perception, Salvation from Plague, Utilitarianism

1. Introduction

The Painted Veil is a work written by William Somerset Maugham, a famous British writer in the 20th century. It takes oriental culture as its spiritual background and mainly describes the love entanglement between the couple, Walter Fane and his wife Kitty Garstin. The love story is filled with ups and downs, which shows Maugham's modern aesthetic view based on romance. Maugham was called the best storyteller at that time [1]. With the characteristics of both "devil" [2] and "angel" [3], Maugham integrated modernism [4] and naturalism [5], and won the recognition of a large number of readers for his story plots with ups and downs and narrative with twists and turns [6].

In China, the introduction of *The Painted Veil* was relatively late, and the scholars carried out few studies on the work. They mainly explored it from the perspectives, such as character images [7], Orientalism [8, 9], the image of China [10, 11], creative techniques [12, 13] and the writer Maugham. They lacked the extended understanding of narrative style in the "other" mode of thinking from the modern perspective,

which made the understanding rather limited. From Maugham's life experience and personal thoughts, it can be found that Maugham's own creation comes from the acquisition of commercial value, which can be analyzed from Maugham's return to London at the end of the story. Therefore, Maugham's creation starts from exploring foreign cultures to tracing back to European modern culture.

In the 1930s, novels, as a literary style dominated by narration, had a major change in the selection of themes. In order to get rid of people's fear of guns and shells left by the war, post-war literature highlighted the aesthetic redemption function in the creation of works and criticized the limitations of the social modernity model. The narrative style in the "other" mode of thinking breaks the original writing mode and makes it the "savior". In *The Painted Veil*, the "other" mode of thinking is an important part of the work. Maugham fits his own experience, experiences the perception of foreign culture with his love for oriental culture, presents the themes of responsibility and love, betrayal, plague and redemption in it. It reflects the life concept of modern people who entered a strange region lacking modern elements and experienced the

aesthetic perception presented in foreign cultures through the life of the protagonist Kitty in a foreign country, which further conveys people's thoughts and feelings.

2. Tracing Back to the Salvation: Emotional Instinct

Under the deep influence of the Victorian regime, the social trend of utilitarianism spread across all fields of Britain, and it became the foundation of the marriage contract. This utilitarianism regarded marriage as a market transaction, and love was no longer the key to marriage. After comprehensively considering the exchange of their own values, the couple could obtain what they needed in the utilitarian trading market, and also signed a marriage contract, forming a utilitarian marriage combination to jointly make up for various defects in the secular world. This marriage model ignored the emotional instinct, making marriage a shackle for both sides, which is also the background of the theme of *The Painted Veil* and the origin of the ups and downs of the story.

As the main character of *The Painted Veil*, Kitty, her father Mr. Garstin was a Liverpool lawyer with traditional thinking, and her mother Mrs. Garstin was a scheming, ruthless and ambitious woman. She tried her best to make her husband Mr. Garstin act according to her wishes, pandered to the wives of prominent politicians, and propelled her daughters to establish a marriage relationship with their children, which could help her daughters to live in a rich and famous family. Kitty had long understood her mother's thoughts, which coincided with her ambitions and desires. Kitty kept entering the social circle, but after four years, she still hadn't found a suitable partner. In addition, when her younger sister Doris was engaged through the social circle she had established, Kitty was even more worried. At this time, when facing the proposal of Walter, a bacteriologist working in Hong Kong, she considered that Walter would leave for China before her sister's wedding and she didn't have to be the bridesmaid at her sister's wedding ceremony. At the same time, after her wedding ceremony, she could escape her mother's endless nagging and change a new living environment. After careful consideration, she agreed to marry Walter. Kitty's marriage, which was derived from utilitarianism, left the danger of disaster for the follow-up.

After three months' marriage, Kitty found that her status depended entirely on her husband's social status. When material interests and social utilitarianism cannot meet Kitty's inner needs, she had regret about her marriage. Being extroverted, energetic and vain made her uneasy about living with Walter, who is not good at emotional expression and introverted. After they got married, "he treated her not as Kitty had seen most men treat their wives, but as though she were a fellow-guest in a country house." [14] Although he was really considerate, it was difficult for Kitty to fall in love with him, which also foreshadowed Kitty's involvements outside marriage.

When Kitty came into meet Charles Townsend, who had a

prominent social status, Townsend's handsome appearance made Kitty fall in love immediately. As described in the text "she noticed Townsend's cuff-links and waistcoat buttons; she had seen similar ones at Cartier's..... His face was deeply sunburned, but the sun had not taken the healthy color from his cheeks." [14] From the description above, it could reflect the attitude that Kitty pursued from both the utilitarian perspective and the emotional feeling with Walter. When Townsend observed Kitty's actions, his eyes also showed a look of surprise. "When she shook hands with him on leaving he gave her hand a pressure that she could not mistake." [14]. From the description, it can be seen that the attraction between Kitty and Townsend was more an attraction originating from the instinct of both sexes, and Townsend showed Kitty his inner intention through specific movements. Townsend's outstanding appearance and his status as an assistant to the colonial governor made Kitty love him deeply. However, Kitty faced with a moral choice. Her inner traditional concepts and upbringing made her frightened to break. She knew that she was Walter's wife and Townsend had his own wife, so that they couldn't have affairs, otherwise it was a confrontation against social ethics. However, under the control of desire, Kitty crossed the moral bottom line and became Townsend's lover, but all these were based on the agreement that Kitty and Townsend reached. However, when it came to fulfilling his promise, Townsend changed his words "There's no reason why I shouldn't be a Governor one of these days, and it's a damned soft job to be a Colonial Governor. Unless we can hush this up I don't stand a dog's chance." [14] At this time, Kitty was disillusioned and could only accept the punishment from Walter for her mistakes. She had to come to Mei-tan-fu in China which was a plague bound city and faced the threat of death.

Unlike London, which Kitty was familiar with, Mei-tan-fu was described as an "other" place combining natural disasters, wars and natural beauty. Natural beauty and widespread plague had brought spiritual impact to Kitty, completely arousing her own intuition and emotional instinct. When she entered Mei-tan-fu at the beginning, Kitty found that Mei-tan-fu was a place of death through internal thinking and comparison with the original living environment. Because she was in close contact with death for the first time, Kitty was tested and tormented by both death and morality, and desperately tried to escape. This kind of strong consciousness was reflected in the recurrent dreams, which mirrored Kitty's inner state. In her dream, Kitty was deeply immersed in different thoughts. Led by the bearers, Kitty saw the chastity archway, the virtue symbol of Chinese women. Suddenly this strange building came into being, whose shape resembled the arm of an Hindu god, calling her and laughing at her. When Kitty passed under the memorial arch, she found Townsend walking towards her. "..... and took her in his arms, lifting her out of the chair, and said it was all a mistake, he had never meant to treat her as he had, for he loved her and he couldn't live without her. She felt his kisses on her mouth and she wept with joy,....." [14] In the work, by the waving arms and the echo of mocking laughter, it showed that Kitty had found her

own mistakes subconsciously and had deep self-retrospect. However, through the dialogue with Townsend, it was found that Kitty had not really gotten rid of the dual shackles of sexual passion and emotion, and still had fantasy and attachment to Townsend. The appearance of the coffin showed that the relationship between Townsend and Kitty was a crime and would be severely punished, which also provided material for subsequent salvation.

The mystery and tranquility of Mei-tan-fu deeply shook Kitty's mind. When Kitty woke up and walked to the river, she was faced with the lifeless river and the quiet environment surrounded. Kitty was not interested in appreciating the beautiful scenery in the river, resulting in a sense of obscurity and fuzziness, which was contradictory. Bathed in the sunshine, this kind of optical illusion of flickering light and darkness just mirrored a temple on the wall of the city. Because of her mood and emotional instinct, Kitty marveled at the natural scenery of a strange city in foreign country, forgot the fear of death brought by this city, and felt the beauty of nature, which was magic and colorful. Kitty's mental perception was closely related to her own practical experience, and not everyone could have it. In the strange and dangerous environment where material desires were rampant, Kitty saw the fairyland-like natural beauty and obtained intuitive visual experience and emotional perception. Her was suddenly overjoyed with a bright mind and clearly felt the compatibility of her soul and body. Kitty took the external natural landscape as the source in the Mei-tan-fu, which made her suddenly find that the material body was only an external image, and only when her heart or spirit combined could she achieve transcendence. The natural beauty made Kitty arouse the expectation of a better life, which also paved the way for Kitty to accept moral punishment and move towards spiritual detachment.

3. Death Perception in the Foreign Land

In the process of human evolution, as time goes by, science and technology have achieved unprecedented development, which has changed people's thinking, enhanced people's yearning for a better life, and also strengthened the confidence of human transformation, so that they can be pointed the way in future life. In the work *The Painted Veil*, Kitty's husband Walter was a bacteriologist from Hong Kong. He was not plausible at all and had a rational thinking mode. He was also the embodiment of ideal and science in the novel; and Kitty was a woman who violated the moral bottom line of modern society and was spurned by civilized society. It was precisely because Kitty had an affair with Townsend, who was married, that Kitty was punished and came to the exotic place Mei-tan-fu, China. Here, with the outbreak of cholera and incurable diseases, human was facing the threat of death at any time. While perceiving the threat of death, Kitty constantly reflected on her heart which once lost the human nature and human morality, and her rational thinking was constantly developed, which made her life begin to change.

After Walter brought his wife Kitty to the Mei-tan-fu, he

was busy all day, and he became more introverted with fewer and fewer words, which resulted in a cold war with Kitty. In addition, the strange environment in a foreign country and the ruthless abandonment by Townsend made Kitty thoughtful all the way and dreamed all night. In her dream, Kitty saw the chastity archway, which was the highest praise for Chinese women for abiding by social morality. Kitty also learned that the chastity memorial arch was a classic building in ancient China to commemorate the women's virtues. It reflected the absolute recognition of women's adherence to the moral principles and guarding their own chastity. After seeing that, Kitty felt a deep sense of uneasiness. The reason for the uneasiness was that Kitty had expected that her behavior of deviating from the moral bottom line would cause her to face many hardships. It was also the first time that Kitty felt the coming hardships and threats. At that moment, the sedan bearers hurriedly flashed towards the wall, which made Kitty tremble in the chair. Kitty looked out and found that four farmers carried a coffin in a hurry, making her heart beat strongly. This writing method, which used coffins, cemeteries and chastity archways, depicted Kitty's guilt and fear for breaking through the moral constraints, and made her have a clearer understanding of ethics and life. Subsequently, in order to show Kitty's inner thoughts more vividly, the writer Maugham gave an image description of her journey to Mei-tan-fu. A group of people dressed in old blue rags were as short as dwarfs and emaciated; In order to survive, people discarded infants and young children who could survive by themselves on the roadside. Although Kitty had received regular education and training, as an exiled girl who violated morality, her heart was full of fear, so that she sighed that death was really terrible. She thought about what she had done before and got the cost of deviating from the bottom line of morality. This clearly showed that Kitty's heart was filled with fear when facing death in the exotic Mei-tan-fu. In the face of the constraints of life and morality, Kitty recalled her own experience again, found her personal insignificance, and made her mind to save her soul, turning her original unconstrained behavior against morality into a spiritual transformation with high respect for life and conformity with morality.

Kitty accepted the experience of death in her dream, which made her regret for breaking the moral bottom line, changed the subjective thinking of the original utilitarian marriage, began to reflect on her marriage with her husband Walter, and developed her thinking concept in the direction of rationality. At the beginning, Kitty was punished by her husband because she betrayed her husband. In order to satisfy her vanity and lust, the immoral misconduct between her and Townsend led to her coming to the Mei-tan-fu. The plague and disease were rampant here, which threatened Kitty's life. Kitty's betrayal made Walter's heart filled with hatred and didn't want to give her a chance to change. In order to know a person, it was necessary to understand him comprehensively. From Maugham's writing, it's found that Walter's friends all spoke highly of him. For example, Waddington, the customs officer, set a high value on Walter: "He's doctoring the sick, cleaning the city, trying to get the drinking water pure. He doesn't mind

where he goes or what he does.... And the nuns at the convent swear by him. They think he's a hero." [14] At the same time, the nuns also actively communicated with Kitty, changing her inner wrong understanding of her husband through the explanation of his deeds, eliminating Kitty's hatred of her husband, and gradually transforming it into a real understanding of him. When the nuns came to persuade Kitty to cherish her good husband, her inner defense disintegrated. She realized that she had a deep sense of her original mistakes, and found that her infidelity to her husband Walter had caused harm. In the process of saving her heart, Kitty was aware of the transition between life and death, and her insignificance when death came, especially the harm to her husband caused by her vanity and utilitarianism. However, Kitty's own regret had been unable to save her husband Walter's revenge mentality. Walter had fallen into the abyss of revenge and couldn't forgive his wife's betrayal deeds in his heart. He believed that this was the collapse of his ideal family and emotions, which made Walter frustrated and difficult to accept Kitty again. At the same time, Kitty really came to realize that her fantasy of her husband had been disillusioned and he gradually moved towards a vicious circle of revenge. Maugham contrasted the psychological perception between Kitty and Walter. Although Kitty made the moral and ethical mistake by her affair with Townsend, she realized that she was so tiny in the face of death, released her inner heart, and started to think in a rational way through the persuasion of others and the thorough understanding of the arrival of death. In the face of his wife's infidelity, Walter, the husband, had always kept a revenge in his mind, and couldn't get rid of his obsession with it. This also made Kitty fully realize that Walter had fallen into the abyss of revenge and couldn't forgive what she had done.

The desire for revenge made Walter live in pain, and Kitty, who was threatened by the plague, gradually moved towards rational cognition, developed a sense of justice and dedication. Walter was infected with the plague cholera in the exotic Mei-tan-fu and died in a foreign land. This was also the final road of Walter, who had a strong desire for revenge. He was a tragic character in the whole novel. Before Walter died, he said to Kitty, "The dog it was that dead." [14] "Dog" came from the allusion - A warm-hearted man had a dog. At first, the dog and the owner got along very well. However, one day, the dog and its owner had a grudge against each other, and the dog frantically bit his owner. At that time, everyone expected that man might get sick and died, but he survived in the end and the dog died. Maugham used this story to mirror the miniature of the relationship between Walter and Kitty. Walter compared himself to the "dog", which also explained the emotional status between Kitty and Walter to a certain extent. Emotionally, Walter was in a passive and inferior complex position, and he had love and gratitude for Kitty. It also showed that he could not forgive Kitty's mistakes. His dream was broken, and he should punish Kitty, which depicted the absurdity of morality and rationality and also provided a direction for Kitty to realize salvation from the plague in the future.

4. Salvation from the Plague in the Foreign Land

In the process of moving forward and growing up, either individuals or social groups will inevitably face the trauma caused by non-interpersonal natural disasters which include plagues, accidents, interpersonal violence, abuse and other difficulties. Only by constantly reflecting on themselves, keeping a lookout for risks and challenges and enhancing the love for life can trauma and tragedy be avoided to the greatest extent. Therefore, people should be tolerant to others in social life, and pass on kindness through interpersonal communication. Compared with external etiquette and regulations, people's inner purity is more important, and people's subjective initiative plays a guiding role in their behavior consciousness. Therefore, in order to achieve salvation, the most essential thing is to achieve spiritual self-salvation, eliminate the influence of anger, jealousy, revenge and other bad factors on ourselves, and master one's own thoughts more reasonably.

Because of Kitty's betrayal to love and marriage, Walter's anger and jealousy inside gnawed at his soul like a snake. In order to revenge, Mei-tan-fu with the rampant cholera became his last choice, where he was absorbed in his work day and night, forgetting food and sleep. The plague became the best excuse for him to paralyze himself and punish Kitty. Even the plague with the death threat could not help him eliminate his inner obstacles, and eventually he died of the plague.

After Kitty arrived at Mei-tan-fu, she was really frightened and desperate at the sight of the people infected with cholera. When she was sent to the monastery, the positive attitude of the nuns in the face of the plague deeply touched Kitty. It was because of this invisible power that Kitty actively explored for self salvation. The monastery became the lucky place for Kitty to save herself. Through the work and tests in the monastery, she could understand her own behavior more rationally to achieve good mental control and regain spiritual freedom.

In the monastery, the main character Kitty was mainly responsible for taking care of young girls or little children from different parts of China. Because of her own experiences and life feelings, she broke the original way of dealing with people and things by relying on her own feelings, overcame her disgust for girls, and gradually realized the rationality and fraternity in human nature. She could even show the positive impact on these kids with love. "There is only one way to win hearts and that is to make oneself like unto those of whom one would be loved." [14] It was precisely because of this inner change that Kitty broke the barrier the ice between her and the girls and enhanced their happiness in working in the monastery. This was also an inner experience that Kitty never felt in her original life. The Mother Superior was a plain and mild-tempered confidant who often communicated with Kitty. She had a positive attitude towards the plague, which made Kitty forget the bad environment around her. The Mother Superior gave Kitty some spiritual advice in her work and life. When Kitty first worked in the monastery, she said to Kitty, "You know, my dear child, that one cannot find peace in work

or in pleasure, in the world or in a convent, but only in one's soul." [14] It was Kitty's pursuit of her own soul that made her heart calm. The attitude and spirit of the nuns to face the plague bravely was the source of power that affected Kitty's behavior. It was just because of this power that Kitty thought about the essence of life and the meaning of survival in an all-round way. As a sinner, the Mother Superior and nuns let her know a free world, the spiritual world, that she had never thought of, and provided her with endless reveries for freedom and regeneration. Therefore, after much work and life perception, Kitty gradually found that she had some essential changes: "The constant occupation distracted her mind and the glimpses she had of other lives and other outlooks awakened her imagination. She began to regain her spirits; she felt better and stronger." [14] Then Kitty was very excited and immediately felt that there was a driving force in her life and that she was also pursuing something she didn't know in her daily life. When Kitty faced the death crisis of the plague, she had a new understanding of herself and found that she had reformed and broken the shackles of her original feelings [15]. She was completely different from herself who had just entered the monastery at the beginning. When she thought of Townsend, she found that she no longer loved him and had gone out of the original narrow thinking mode. She remembered in the past, she devoted all her heart and energy to yearning for Townsend, but he was cruel enough to discard her and she even had the idea of committing suicide. At the same time, she felt the darkness of the world and hatred for him. She had no choice but to go to Mei-tan-fu to receive the punishment from Walter. Now she was suddenly enlightened. Just as the words in the novel "A worthless creature. What a fool she had made of herself!..... She was free, free, at last, free!" [14] From this, it was found that it was because of the salvation from the plague in a foreign country that Kitty broke down her emotional bondage to Townsend and truly got freedom and liberation of her heart.

After Kitty learned that Walter died of the plague, although she felt upset and thought it was really a pity, Kitty had no love for him and their marriage came to an end. This also meant that Kitty's marriage based on utilitarianism was dissolved, and the last constraint had disappeared. She set out to return to Britain, and immediately felt that she really started to run for freedom. "Freedom! That was the thought that sung in her heart..... freedom, not only from the death which had threatened, but freedom from the love that had degraded her; freedom from all spiritual ties, the freedom of a disembodied spirit;....." [14]. At this time, Kitty realized her true salvation in the exotic land, completed her self-transformation, and obtained freedom.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, this paper took the heterogeneous marriage derived from utilitarianism - free from the personal love in the moral field - self-salvation and freedom in a foreign land (Mei-tan-fu) as the research idea, and described the growth experience of the main character Kitty. Maugham used the the

plots full of ups and downs to render the love story of Kitty and Walter, and carried out the narrative analysis of salvation in the foreign land from three dimensions: emotional instinct, spiritual salvation and the pursuit of freedom. The novel *The Painted Veil* talked about the tenacity and fragility of life, the impermanence of the unexpected world, the uncontrollable love and the final forgiveness of hatred; it deeply revealed that it was rather difficult for the individuals to control their passions in the complex society, which was also a reflection of the current civilized world, and warned us to achieve accurate control of the balance point of value pursuit in our hearts. In *The Painted Veil*, the present and history, one self and others, light and darkness, life and death, spirit and flesh mirror each other. Having combined what he saw and heard in China with his own emotional experience, Maugham added his own understanding, imagination, criticism, etc., to feel the contradiction between "tradition" and "modernity", which verified the ideological conflict between adherence to tradition and the pursuit of freedom, and reflected the active exploration of Western thinkers on cultural migration and the evolution of the times.

British woman Kitty had been thoroughly baptized both spiritually and mentally, embarking on a road to save herself in the foreign land. Finally, she also realized the family reunion and harmony, carried out the key change in her life, found inner peace and happiness, which help her get spiritual salvation through plague, and came to understand the true meaning of life. As the super animal, the uncontrollable nature of emotional instinct would also make the road to self-salvation and freedom full of twists and turns, which was also a basic reflection of the law of human development. Maugham's work *The Painted Veil* showed that human's cognition of emotion needed to follow the principle of continuous learning and gradual progress. Twists and turns were not pessimistic, and they were inevitable to achieve freedom. Mei-tan-fu was a milestone of the whole novel, which not only showed the beauty of the primitive natural scenery, but also reflected the desolation and the fear of death caused by plague because of the lack of modern technology. It was the "other" for modern British society at that time. Endowed with a kind of development potential presented to western enlightenment modernity after criticism and repair, a foreign land provided the most primitive space for life and art, so that it could reflect the trace of European modern culture through the typical comparison between foreign lands and local lands.

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