

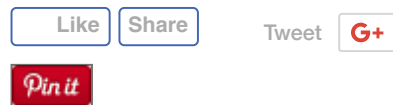


(/)

## THE PAINTED VEIL

PG-13

By Erica Abeel ([Http://Www.Filmjournal.Com/Taxonomy/Term/93](http://www.filmjournal.com/Taxonomy/Term/93)) Dec 18, 2006



### Reviews

[C//www.pinterest.com/pin/create/button](http://www.pinterest.com/pin/create/button)  
*The Painted Veil* draws from the same gene pool as *The English Patient*, *Brokeback Mountain* (and the misconceived *The White Countess*). Wedding intimate story to epic scope, the film, adapted by Ron Nyswaner from the novel by W. Somerset Maugham, sets the portrait of an embattled young English couple against the mystical grandeur and languid waterways of remotest China in the 1920s, at a moment when political unrest made the country especially hostile to foreigners. Occasionally, this anatomy of a marriage between two ill-suited people fails to integrate with its exotic cultural frame. A small quibble, though. Making good on the Maugham literary pedigree, *The Painted Veil* offers a soaring, tragic tale of transcendence and forgiveness that resonates long after the credits roll.

The story follows Walter (Edward Norton, also on board as producer), a middle-class bacteriologist/doctor who becomes smitten with the upper-class Kitty (Naomi Watts). Bored and longing to escape, she cynically consents to marry him. The couple relocates to Shanghai, where she quickly falls for the English Vice Consul (Liev Schreiber). When Walter sniffs out her adultery, he seeks vengeance by accepting a job in a distant village in China ravaged by a cholera epidemic, and drags his wife along.

Once installed in this desolate outpost, Kitty and Walter's marriage from hell gets gradually turned around by a mix of selfless labor, newfound mutual respect, the presence of death--and sheer proximity. Indirectly supporting this amorous rebirth are an unrecognizable Diana Rigg as a nun who runs a home for Chinese orphans (and can uncork with perfect aplomb the line, "When love and duty are one, then grace is within you"), and a free-spirited Brit (Toby Jones from *Infamous*)

whose ongoing bacchanal with his gamine Manchurian lover helps unthaw Walter and Kitty. In its soaring third act, the film becomes a love story in reverse.

Nyswaner's expert hand is visible in the film's intriguing shape: The action opens in the middle, as the despairing Kitty gets schlepped by litter through the heat and green rice paddies of rural China, while Walter, powered by hatred, leads the way. Then, after quick flashbacks to their dubious courtship, followed by Kitty's affair, the film tackles its main theme: a couple finding each other out of the wreckage of their past. Director John Curran (*We Don't Live Here Anymore*) favors giant, pore-revealing close-ups, as he peers into his characters' hearts. Watts, in her '20s coif and shifts, has lovely pores, yet she relies too much, until the end, on a single expression of outraged petulance, and Schreiber is underused in an underwritten role.

But as an innately cold, repressed scientist, Edward Norton adds yet another layered portrait to his gallery of unlikely and inscrutable heroes. Not only is it rare to watch an actor's intelligence beam through his features, it's a godsend to find a story, in the epoch of *Saw III*, with such humanistic resonance. The score--of the doomed-romantic-adventure sort--is spot-on, and the orphans' song at the end ("*Jamais je ne t'oublierai*") rends the heart. As an added bonus, this Chinese co-production shot in Guangxi Province in Southern China displays towering, dreamy tableaux seldom viewed by Westerners.

---

## Movie Reviews, Box Office News, and More

**SHOWEAST** (<http://www.filmexpos.com/showeast>)    **CINEEUROPE**  
(<http://www.filmexpos.com/cineurope>)    **CINEASIA** (<http://www.filmexpos.com/cineasia>)



**ABOUT US** (</about-us>)    **CONTACT US** (</contact-us>)    **ADVERTISING OPPORTUNITIES**  
(</advertising-opportunities>)    **MOVIE REVIEWS R** (<http://www.filmjournal.com/filmjournal/about-us/rss.jsp>)    **SS FEED** (<http://www.filmjournal.com/filmjournal/about-us/rss.jsp>)

---

© 2018 FilmJournal International. All rights reserved. Read our **[TERMS OF USE](http://www.filmjournal.com/terms-of-use)**  
(<http://www.filmjournal.com/terms-of-use>) & **[PRIVACY POLICY](http://www.filmjournal.com/privacy-policy)** (<http://www.filmjournal.com/privacy-policy>).