



Bittersweet Surrender

Strangers (to each other) in a strange land

THE PAINTED VEIL: Directed by John Curran. Written by Ron Nyswaner, based on the novel by W. Somerset Maugham. Music by Alexandre Desplat. Starring Naomi Watts, Edward Norton, Toby Jones, Diana Rigg and Liev Schreiber. Warner Independent Pictures, 2006. 125 minutes. PG-13. ★★☆☆☆

Rich, beautiful and subtly wrenching, the latest adaptation of W. Somerset Maugham's 1925 novel *The Painted Veil* is both a polished period piece and a lyrical, unlikely romance. As you watch the relationship between Kitty and Walter Fane, an unhappily married couple played to precision by a sulky Naomi Watts and a stiff-lipped Edward Norton, you may feel a bit torn between the classic sense the film creates visually and the sassy modernity that Watts offers at times. Adding to this rift is Alexandre Desplat's Golden Globe-winning score, which stretches across the space between the English couple and the Chinese setting. But both of these rifts are purposeful, adding depth to the divide between Kitty and Walter.

The Painted Veil hopscoches through the Fanes' early years, in which he falls in

love with the spoiled, upper-class beauty and she falls for the chance to get away from her mother. They marry so swiftly we aren't even shown the wedding. In Shanghai, where Walter works as a bacteriologist, unhappy Kitty has an affair with Charles Townsend (a wonderfully self-possessed Liev Schreiber). Walter's decision, when he discovers her adultery, is one of shocking cruelty: He will divorce Kitty, or she will accompany him to a remote village stricken with cholera. What follows is never surprising, but surprise is not the point in this story, which depicts the absorption (she in herself, he in his work) that allows Kitty and Walter to live so distantly from each other and to seem so blind to the tumult of 1920s China. In pristine garments, holding a delicate parasol, Kitty seems unlikely to ever adapt; Walter, his thin face turned determinedly away from Kitty, seems as if he will never really see her again. When change comes, in director John Curran's detailed, layered film, it comes hard, for better and inevitably, for worse. **EW**

Death in the Jungle

JONESTOWN: The Life and Death of Peoples Temple: Directed by Stanley Nelson. Written by Marcia Smith. Music by Tom Phillips. Seventh Art Releasing, 2006. 86 minutes. Not rated. ★★☆☆☆

Director Stanley Nelson's elegantly told film about the rise and terrible fall of Jim Jones and his Jonestown settlement is an affecting, engrossing document, horrifying and fascinating to watch. Beginning with Jones' childhood and pacing swiftly through the years, *Jonestown* slows in the '70s, when Jones established himself in California before fleeing to Guyana on the eve of a revealing article's publication in *New West* magazine. Told in large part through interviews with



former Peoples Temple members, Jonestown survivors and carefully used archival footage, the film offers a portrait of the contradictory persona of Jim Jones: cruel, charming, manipulative, racially progressive, unpredictable, welcoming, hypocritical. But it fails to satisfyingly explore or explain how Jones' charisma was enough to convince more than 900 people to follow him to the middle of nowhere and then, on a dark day in November 1978, to death.

As the film reaches its bitter conclusion, bits of the story slip through the cracks; it would have been more illuminating to hear a Jonestown survivor describe how he escaped than to see that explanation in plain text on the screen at the film's close. *Jonestown* is largely a historical document, with little by way of analysis; the story is told by those who were there, with little commentary from those who, later, might have studied what took place. Still, *Jonestown's* calm tone — there isn't a hint of sensationalism — is welcome; it would be even harder to watch the film were the filmmakers not so gentle with both their interviewees and the audience.

This most lurid of stories is presented both historically and personally, and if it is hard to want to take anything away from the film when you leave the theater, well, perhaps that is, in part, the point. We think we're smarter than this; we think this could never happen now. But the bright, intelligent people who fell under Jones' thrall appear to have thought exactly the same thing. **EW**

Weekend matinees of Jonestown begin Saturday, Jan. 20 at the Bijou.

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