

An Analysis of Narrative Relationship of The Painted Veil

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Abstract: The purpose of the paper is to explore the narrative relationship in Maugham's well-known novel, *The Painted Veil*. This paper explores the narrative structure of Maugham's *The Painted Veil*, focusing on the heroine's journey from dependence to autonomy amidst a love tragedy. By employing both global and micro narrative analyses, the study examines character development, plot, themes, and rhetorical techniques, offering readers a comprehensive understanding of the novel's stylistic features and narrative coherence. An analysis of the narrative relationships in *The Painted Veil* not only reveals the situation of lacking autonomy the heroine in family life and love due to dependence but also demonstrates the clear storyline, vivid descriptions, the grasp of the characters' mind activities in the work and the talent of the author. Through the analysis of character setting, plot development, theme, narrative techniques and language style, this paper provides a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of *The Painted Veil* for readers.

Keywords: *The Painted Veil*, feminism, autonomy, global analysis, micro analysis

1. Introduction

William Somerset Maugham, one of the best authors in Britain, is well-known for his plays, essays, novels, poems, and short stories [1]. Maugham is good at telling stories and his prose is sharp and plain, calm and sarcastic. He creates a vivid portrayal of the individuals' psychological activity by using his acute observation of human nature [2]. One of Maugham's great works is *The Painted Veil*. The novel is Kitty's journey of self-discovery. It recounts her conflicting views on life and social acceptance, her struggle between her desire and social morality, her reliance and independence, her traumatic past before arriving in the cholera village in southern China, and her courageous and determined attitude towards the future following the outbreak, beginning with Kitty's self-awareness coming to light and ending by the ultimate transformation of female growth. Some scholars, Wang et al, used Beauvoir's feminist theory to analyse *The Painted Veil*'s feminism-related content in order to understand it more deeply [3]. Despite the significance of *The Painted Veil* in literary discourse, contemporary feminist research on this work remains scant and underrepresented. Furthermore, there is a noticeable absence of analysis that employs Segmented Discourse Representation Theory (SDRT) to explore the novel's feminist themes.

The text below contains an investigation into how SDRT might be used for logical analysis of literary genres, particularly focusing on novels. In the last thirty years, SDRT has been developed in linguistics, connecting the coherence of discourse through rhetorical relations [4]. Kehler categorized

rhetorical relations into three categories: resemblance relations, cause-effect relations, and contiguity relations[5]. Common rhetorical relations include explanation, result, parallel, contrast, and narration. This research aims to apply SDRT to literary studies on novels with intricate plots and lengthy texts.

SDRT research focuses more on linguistics, including discourse corpora, multi-person conversations and other aspects. For example, Asher et al published a paper named Discourse Structure and Dialogue Acts in Multiparty Dialogue: the STAC Corpus[6]. Literary criticism and analysis are not well-researched, and most concentrate on functional texts. The exploration of discourse structure in literary texts includes segmentation of narrative episodes and examination of verbal cues to discern shifts in pragmatics and the author's intent. The style of literary texts and the evolving writing techniques result in the same words and sentences carrying varying and intricate meanings[7]. This underscores the significance and uniqueness of interdisciplinary research. The benefit is that such interdisciplinary research has injected fresh blood into the research of formal semantics, SDRT, and traditional literary analysis, which is conducive to their development. The study of literary works by SDRT is still in its infancy; therefore, interdisciplinary research is much more important to increase the depth and accuracy of SDRT and add new research angles to conventional literary analysis.

The Painted Veil differs from other novels because it has a single, easily analysed main line and perspective of the heroine, Kitty, which is the centre of the narrative. Her early tragedy is the result of her lack of autonomy and always compromising with her limited choices rather than rebelling in her life. According to Green, feminist consciousness emerged as a recognisable and distinct process[8]. Therefore, from the perspective of feminism, the focus of the analysis is on whether she has developed her own self-consciousness and built her autonomy. Veltman and Piper point out that autonomy refers to the ability to endorse and live with authentic commitments[9]. The exploration, based on her love stories and her mother-daughter relationship, finds how she changes in her self-growth.

To examine the logical connections between the plots, this paper will integrate the linguistics theory of SDRT. Interdisciplinary research examines how the text's discourse supports logical expression, and global and micro-analyses are conducted using the novel's major events. Individuals can identify various connections between different environments, allowing them to derive their immediate meaning and aid in understanding the deeper meaning of discourse and text. People build such inferences to understand and analyse. This logical analysis is reflected in literary appreciation under SDRT, describing how discourse coherence and events interact. Therefore, event structure research is essential to language theory and provides a theoretical basis for its application in literary analysis [5]. The reason why SDRT is used to organise the words we want to understand into text and code them is that in the process of appreciating literary works, we need to understand the author's intention, that is, to understand the discourse goal in this case. Language research focuses on how language affects the audience because language is a tool to achieve goals [10]. By studying discourse goals, we can better understand the problems that discourse behaviour aims to solve.

According to SDRT, which holds that there are logical connections between discourses, researchers split the text into two categories for analysis: global analysis and micro analysis—select the discourse to be examined and make an assumption that there is a certain logical relationship between them. After the selected text has been encoded and analysed, the logical relationship will be discovered. We will look into the text's logical relationships using SDRT to see if a conclusion complies with the hypothesis. This theory can be applied to literary analysis if it is consistent; if not, it cannot be used to analyse literary works. This study aims to analyse the unique interpretation and value of feminism in *The Painted Veil* using the coherent relation analysis of SDRT to help fill the gap in related research and promote the development of interdisciplinary research on the combination of SDRT and literary works.

The essay consists of five sections. It starts with the introduction as Section 1. Then, a summary of the novel is given in Section 2. Section 3 as follows is the reason for the choice of the novel and the analysis is explained. Then, a global analysis and a micro analysis are given separately. The last section is the conclusion of the whole essay, discussing the main components and the key unsolved challenges.

2. Summary of *The Painted Veil*

The plot of the novel *The Painted Veil* can be summarised as follows: *The Painted Veil* describes a story about Kitty, the main female character. Kitty was born into a family where her father is weak and her mother is strong. Her father's career is not going well, so her mother places all her hopes on her and her sister. She hopes the two sisters will achieve her dream and finish her goals. Therefore, what she learned from her mother, a control freak, is the pursuit of vanity and external validation. Her mother highly values her beauty and believes that Kitty would marry a rich man with her looks. After she turns twenty-five, Kitty's mother reproaches her for being a single woman and spending the family's money. Kitty cannot bear the anger and pressure of being single, so she panics and decides to marry Walter Fane, a bacteriologist who works for the British colonial government in Hong Kong. Kitty regrets entering into a relationship. After three months, she begins to complain about her mother's decision to choose Walter. Kitty relies on the support of her parents and hopes that her husband will be a romantic and interesting man. But a reserved and shy Walter does not suit her. She has an affair with Charles Townsend, a married secretary of the government. Kitty denies the mistake and believes that Walter should be responsible for it. But Walter does not file for divorce but asks her to go to Mei-tan-fu, a cholera-stricken village in southern China. Walter uncovers Kitty's adultery with Charles, but Charles refuses to divorce his wife. Kitty has no choice but to go with Walter. Mei-tan-fu is undergoing a cholera outbreak. She befriends Waddington, the Deputy Commissioner of Customs, and helps the French Catholic nuns care for orphans. She has heard many compliments about Walter from the nuns, which makes her reconsider her opinions of Walter. The self-sacrifice of the nuns at the convent influences her to think about her self-worth and ask for a position at the convent. Her pregnancy makes her relationship with Walter even more complex. Her ambivalence towards Walter makes her struggle more. Walter dies of cholera, but Kitty offers one last apology. She returns to Hong Kong and is greeted by Dorothy Townsend, who invites her to stay at their house. Charles, polite and distant, attempts to seduce Kitty again, but she succumbs. Kitty flees to England, where she receives letters from her mother indicating health problems and learns of her mother's death. Kitty visits her father, who wants to move to the Bahamas, and for the first time, has an open conversation with him. Kitty aims to raise her child as a strong, independent woman.

3. Global Analysis

3.1. Global Analysis Proposal

Regarding global analysis, key narratives are fundamentally summarised according to the storyline. The novel begins with a flashback leading to an affair and then unfolds chronologically so there is cohesion between each chapter. There is primarily cause-effect relation between these incidents. The global analysis compares the experiences Kitty has throughout the book. If we assume that the following discourse units are coherent, we will find two right-angle structures in the graph that illustrate her mental struggles. This structure includes elements such as expected violation and background, indicating the significant events that shaped her psychology, such as her regrets over her marriage and her husband's death. We can see the combination of result relation and narrative relation marking her gradual transformation, which proves that it is a slow process for women to develop self-consciousness and truly control their own lives.

The entire text of *The Painted Veil* can be divided into sections:

- IIa Kitty is lovely but spiritually empty; she wishes for love but is vain. Kitty's sister and mother continuously pressure her, so she swiftly marries Walter, whom she does not love, and moves to Hong Kong.
- IIb Her husband's personality does not match hers, so she has an extramarital affair with a married guy.
- IIc Her spouse finds her adulterous affair and revenges her by promising to travel to the epidemic area with Kitty. But Kitty disagreed. Her spouse proposed a condition: if Charles is prepared to divorce and marry Kitty, she may marry Charles. Kitty is mercilessly abandoned by Charles; therefore, she chooses to travel to the epidemic area.
- IId She arrives at a convent and is impressed by the commitment of the nuns, so she comes to work there and apologises for her previous actions. Then she discovers that she is pregnant.
- IIf Her spouse dies of illness, so Kitty leaves the epidemic region and goes to Hong Kong to see Charles again.
- IIg She cannot resist the temptation and reignite her previous love for Charles, something she regrets later.
- IIg She chooses to live alone and have children to grow up independent after attending the funeral and refusing her father's suggestion to leave away.

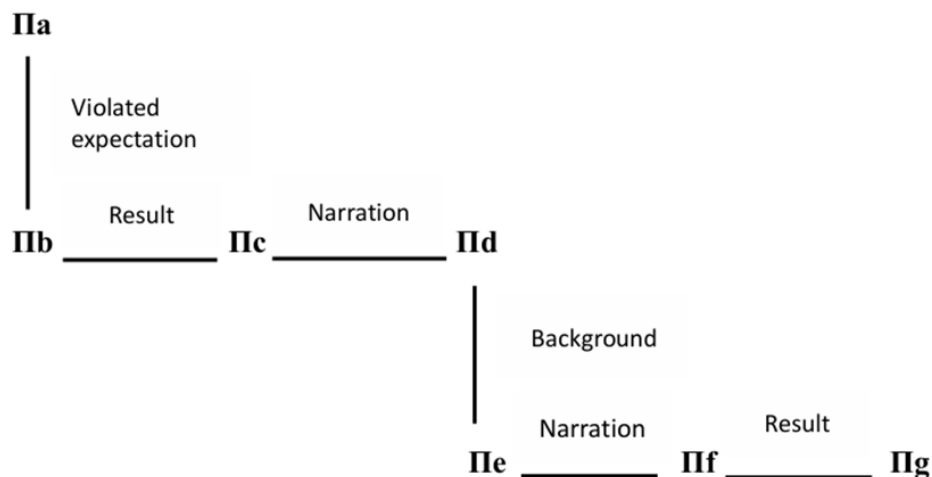


Figure 1: for global analysis

The characteristics and challenges of the global analysis of the narrative analysis of the general plot in the novel *The Painted Veil* are primarily expressed in the following aspects:

3.2. Characteristics of global analysis

The characteristics of global analysis in the narrative analysis of some of the episodes in *The Painted Veil* novel can be summarised as follows:

Rich characterization: The novel presents various personalities, events, and outcomes by portraying numerous characters such as Kitty, Walter, Charles, and Mrs. Gastin. The global analysis can be used to look into the characters' roles and influences in the story, as well as their connection to the theme.

Profundity of themes: Through the story of the painted veil, the novel deeply reveals the loss of autonomy for women caused by unbalanced autonomy structures in different kinds of relationships. In addition, women mistakenly believe that having riches and the respect of socially connected

individuals comes with being loved by men, rather than taking the place of autonomy. Then women are taught by the norms to become obsessed with men's flattery and compliments and unable to leave the toxic relationship. Another theme that emerges during the marriage is the intricacy of human nature. Even those with excellent reputations may behave dishonestly and unethically. The sarcasm is throughout the novel, not only in the rhetorical structure but also in the plot setting. The turning of Kitty's self-consciousness is at the cost of Walter's death. Such a high price still cannot complete the ultimate transformation.

Global analyses need to dig deeper into the profundity of these themes to understand the author's critique and reflection on social reality. However, due to the profundity of the themes, the analyser may need to put more effort and thought into the reading and comprehension process. To fully comprehend the author's critique and reflection on social reality, global analysis must go further into the profundity of these subjects. However, because of the themes' profundity, the analyser might have to read and comprehend the text with greater attention and consideration.

3.3. Challenges of Global Analysis

Narrative Techniques: The beginning of a work is the suspense of spotting the affair. The start raises the reader's curiosity. The plot of revenge is the biggest suspense. Due to his reserved characteristics, Walter decides to put himself and his betrayed wife in a fatal environment. The opening chapter is a flashback, which means scenes are inserted to shift the story's focus from its present point in time. Kitty engages in an affair with Charles and is afraid of being discovered by her husband. The story then unfolds in chronological order. Events connected closely in a logical order lead to the climax of the death of Walter and the end of the awakening of her self-consciousness.

Complex Storyline: The developments of the plot in the novel are complex and diverse, involving several stages of the heroine's self-growth including receiving the pressure of finding another man as her supporter from her mother before marriage, the disappointment with the husband in her early marriage, cheating being discovered, going to Mei-tan-fu, resisting the fact of being dumped by Charles, finding her value in the convent's work, the death of Walter, returning to Hong Kong to have an affair again, the death of his mother, and reconciliation with her father, admitting mistakes and courageously launching a new chapter in life.

Diversity of Theme Interpretation: There are numerous ways to interpret themes. In the text, the author has no particular emotional preferences. When summarising the theme, different themes will be interpreted according to the reader's perspectives, such as the complexity of human nature, the stereotype of China from the perspective of Western colonialism, and the choice between true love and material possessions. The perspective I chose is the process from women's loss of autonomy to their seizure of autonomy, the reasons, and their self-awakening after losing autonomy. Combining feminism with the novel is difficult because the author's writing perspective does not include feminism.

Under the Victorian regime, the social trend of utilitarianism spread throughout British society and became the cornerstone of marriage. A couple signed a marriage contract, creating a utilitarian combination to jointly atone for different flaws in the secular world after carefully weighing their values. Marriage is turned into a chain for the couple under the marital model, and this is the background for *The Painted Veil* [11].

Maugham, as a homosexual, falls in love with and marries four women who have achieved accomplishments in his life. Although he criticises unfaithfulness in human nature for embracing material at the cost of hiding true needs, his wives are typically good partners for a wedding. But Maugham's marriage ends in tragedy, like many marriages in his writings. According to Xia, Maugham has the prejudice that marriage is full of lies and utilitarianism, which is true of marriages[1]. At a time of moral decay and the rapid development of productivity, he believes that

desperation for material and social status are the main factors determining whether women marry instead of considering love.

From the background of the time and his marriage experience, it can be seen that the author himself is full of contempt for some women's materialistic marriage choices. He believes that women can accept loveless marriages for money but may cheat for sweet talk and emotional value that they have not received. However, the author neglects the trap women face. It should not be an either-or situation. Women fall into the dilemma due to the design of marriage as a social and well-accepted convention in its long history. Traditional social norms require women to become carers in the household. Based on this norm, instead of having economic power, women are only allowed to be in dyadic relationships [12]. Being attached to a wealthy husband becomes the primary way to access an ideal and decent life. Besides, the unfair status and little societal recognition have led to women's loss of their power while complying with the conventional societal norms in various interpersonal relationships. They long for love because men are usually active in courtship and comparatively low in status. But women have the right to say no. The obsession with their power makes many women mistakenly think they have encountered true love, leading to a series of failures in marriage and love and the tragedy of life [13].

This novel has a strong sense of dissatisfaction for married women. The writing design does not start with feminism. In analysing the loss of autonomy caused by the original family of the heroine, there is not much text to compare her material needs before and after marriage. In addition, her expectations of men before marriage are not very detailed, and it is impossible to compare them with Walter, Charles, and her ideal husband in terms of wealth, status, and emotional supply. Kitty's complex love story shows that individuals struggled to restrain their impulses in a complex society, mirroring the intricacies of today's civilised world. It also cautions us, in particular women, to seek autonomy in achieving a balance of values within our hearts [14].

In conclusion, the global analysis of the narrative analysis of the whole plot in the novel *The Painted Veil* is characterised by rich characterization, and profundity of themes, whereas the challenges are primarily reflected in narrative techniques, complex storylines and the diversity of theme interpretation.

4. Micro Analysis

4.1. Micro Analysis Proposal

The micro analysis compares the different expectations Kitty's mother has for her and Kitty's expectations for her children. If we assume that the following discourse units are coherent, then we will find the prominent contrast relation, indicating the self-growth of Kitty.

According to Goslin & Koons-Beauchamp, the relationship, attachment, and communication level of a young woman with her mother may have a great impact on her health [15]. Furthermore, the quality of the relationship influences daughters' self-perception and level of confidence in their abilities, values, and accomplishments [16]. One particularly harmful kind of symbolic violence that marriage inflicts on women is the belief that they are worthless if unmarried [17]. This toxic perception is also held by Kitty's mother. The belief ensures that many single women yield to marriage even without the other one fitting. Autonomy for women means against pressure caused by multiple sources. Among them, the relationship with their mothers is one of the most significant. In this story, although Kitty's mother did her best to get Kitty a ticket to the upper-class ball, she was dissatisfied with Kitty's unmarried status and stopped providing financial support. The mother's attitude and practice cast a shadow on Kitty's tragedy in the early days. In addition, insecure relationships between the two generations that begin in infancy increase the risk of mental health problems and functional decline, such as reactive attachment disorder, personality disorders, and interpersonal relationship

problems [16]. Kitty reflects on her chaotic emotional life when her mother died, and she no longer followed the educational path and beliefs set by her mother for her, teaching her children to be self-sufficient and that women should not rely on men.

The contrast between the two shows Kitty's disappointment with money and the mother-daughter bond in her original family. Kitty acknowledges that her mother values money more than her daughter and Kitty doesn't think money can keep family ties intact after completing her self-consciousness. The contrasting relationship highlights Kitty's transformation in the mother-daughter relationship, from losing autonomy to awakening and then taking control of her own life.

The plot of the mother-daughter relationship in *The Painted Veil* can be divided into parts:

- Πα Mrs. Garstin aimed at a brilliant marriage for her daughter.
- Πb Mrs. Garstin performed prodigies in getting herself invited to dances...
- Πc ...her daughter could meet eligible men at dances
- Πd Kitty...was still unmarried.
- Πe (Mrs. Garstin) did not want her expected her father to support her.
- Πf (Kitty) wants her child not to expect a man to support the rest of her life.
- Πg (Kitty) wants her (daughter) to be fearless, honest, and live life better than she has.

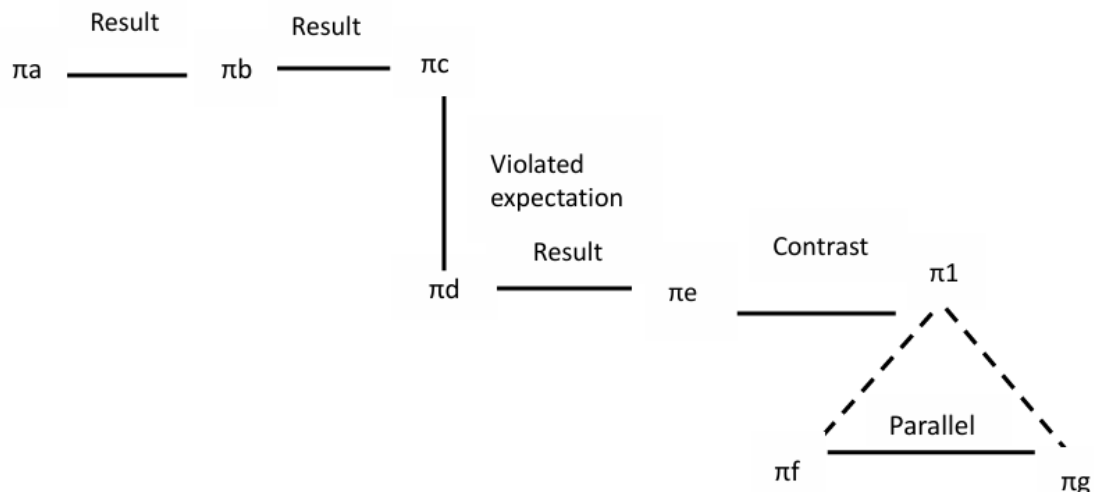


Figure 2: for micro analysis

4.2. Characteristics of Micro Analysis

The characteristics of micro-analysis in the narrative analysis of some of the episodes in *The Painted Veil* novel can be summarised as follows:

Rich in details: Micro analysis requires a thorough interpretation of the novel's storyline, emphasising characters' behaviours, dialogues, and relationships with one another.

Plot Logic Sorting: Micro analysis also entails sorting out plot logic; the use of narrative techniques makes plot logic sorting difficult. Some cutting or remaining plots are necessary for the fluency of the plot logic. This way, we can better understand how storylines flow from one to the next and how they work together to move the story. Micro analysis also entails sorting out plot logic; the use of narrative techniques makes the plot logic sorting difficult. Some cutting or remaining plots are necessary for the fluency of the plot logic. This way, we can better understand how storylines flow from one to the next and how they work together to move the story.

High degree of comprehension required: Micro analysis needs both a deep understanding of the novel's plot and the ability to identify underlying, more profound meanings. Reading this requires a high degree of literary literacy and critical thinking skills.

Strong subjectivity: Micro analysis is inherently subjective since it interprets the plot's logic and the characters' psychological states. The same narrative may be understood and interpreted differently by various readers. Certain narratives are mentioned in the novel's micro analysis to bolster its concepts. Plots and characters that are specific to the novel aid readers in comprehending the micro analysis of the book on a deeper level.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Narrative Relationship Analysis of *The Painted Veil* Essay Questions Research

Complexity of Characters and Narrative: *The Painted Veil* has several figures, in particular the female protagonist, with complicated characteristics. To gain a more in-depth understanding of the tale's logic and character interactions from autonomy of feminism perspectives, an interdisciplinary approach and considerable literary literacy are necessary.

Significance of Allusions: The novel's title refers to a poem, and Walter recites a line from another poem before dying. Both are references. This makes it difficult to understand and investigate their inherent relationship with the narrative. Understanding the origins of the original sentence and the meaning of the original poetry is essential. Literary knowledge is required to fully comprehend the protagonist's unforgiving attitude towards the protagonist's infidelity, as portrayed in the novel, as well as the author's attitude in the title, which reveals the complexity of the characters and how they serve the narrative relationship.

This essay starts with an introduction to the author, the novel, and SDRT. The complexity of her love and mother-daughter relationship is followed by global and micro analysis of the transformation of the heroine. Kitty's desperate desire to be married is a direct result of her low self-esteem. She wholeheartedly agrees with the notion that she would exchange her attractive youth for a place marrying a nice guy; Kitty's obsession with Charles Townsend is her adoration for strong, manly masculinity. Charles is a cunning and strong man. But Kitty grows fixated on Charles despite his shortcomings. These are presentations of the lack of autonomy.

While people with autonomy first can reflect on their motivations for doing, which entails asking themselves why they are acting a certain way and determining whether they are in line with their views, values, or desires. Then they act based on meticulous considerations [18]. Every woman has the right to lead her own life and make changes according to her own wishes. As the narrative progresses, Kitty undergoes an inner transformation from indulgence to restraint and from perception to rationality [19]. Her self-growth lies in two aspects: her struggles with intimate relationships and the mother-daughter relationship. At the end of the novel, she takes control of their own lives and confronts the hardship. Accordingly, Kitty finds her autonomy back.

Women's empowerment is integral to preventing tragic circumstances. Through the story, it becomes clear that when facing challenging relationships, women must not tether their self-worth to family members or partners. The only salvation is to develop a determined self with autonomy and strength.

SDRT has been proven useful for analysing the logical structure of discourse units, helping to analyse the logic of an essay and understand the expression of a theme. SDRT, however, has limitations when it comes to analysing non-monologue texts. In terms of text selection, when analysing literary works, intentional text selection is crucial for analysis.

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