

Painted veil and racial issues



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Consciously or unconsciously but quite often we come across racial issues in our globalized world. What is racism? In my understanding, it looks like that some people are better simply because they have a different skin color. Yet another phenomenon that does have in common with racism is eurocentrism. Eurocentrism as Lois Tyson puts it is the belief that European culture is vastly superior to all others (Tyson 363). So taking into account Tysons words, we can see that these two terms overlap as they both mean that some people or nations believe in their supremacy above others (Tyson 59).

Now let us go deeper and look at Somerset Maughams book *The Painted Veil* which is just teeming with examples of eurocentrism and race inequality. We should say a few words about the book and historic period it was created in. So, it was finished in 1925 then the British Empire was flourishing and every Briton was sure it was their holly duty to colonize other nations and spread the English culture all over the world. The events take place in Hong Kong, one of the British colonies, that is struck by epidemic of Cholera. Walter Fane, a bacteriologist, married Kitty Garstin and both go to Hong Kong to save people.

The first examples of European dominance and subtle forms of racism which Tyson in his book determines as material determinism we see from the first pages (Tyson, 45). We witness that all government positions in Hong Kong predominantly are held by Englishmen while Chinese people occupy only serving jobs. Lois (371) explains that as financial interest of upper-class

whites who exploits Chinese labors by paying them less than their white counterparts. Another example He had lived for many years in outposts, often with no man of his own color to talk to, and his personality had developed in eccentric freedom (Maugham 93). Here Maugham narrates about that Walter lived with people of different race background and considering them inferior to himself he had no worthy person to talk to. We understand that in colonial times colonizer treated people in their colonies often unfairly considering them as uncouth and uncivilized. And Walter went to China not because he cared for Chinese, but he pursued his own ambitions and the Chinese were those on whose he could carry out his experiments Your husband isn't here because he cares a damn if a hundred thousand Chinese die of cholera (Maugham 153). It is another example of eurocentrism that exemplifies the dominance of European race and its right to take advantage of others.

However, we could have cited more examples of racism and imperialistic attitudes espoused by the characters. I would not call the text itself racist. It is clear that Kitty's and some other characters' attitudes are unenlightened ones. This novel is constrained to that social and historic context. We cannot blame Somerset Maugham for his xenophobic and eurocentric examples. It was not his aim to stir up racial conflicts or something in that way. It was simply a eurocentric point of view dominated in that time.

Works cited

Maugham, Somerset. *The Painted Veil*. London: Penguin Books, 1995.

Tyson, Lois. *Critical theory today : A UserFriendly Guide* . 2nd ed. New York and London: Routledge, 2006.