Hello, I’m Amber and this is bbclearningenglish.com.

In Entertainment today, we listen to a review of a new Hollywood film, *The Painted Veil*, and we hear how the film – which stars Naomi Watts and Edward Norton – is different from the classic English novel on which it’s based.

Somerset Maugham’s novel *The Painted Veil* tells the story of Kitty and Walter Fane, a young English couple in the 1920s, who marry for the wrong reasons. Kitty is a shallow rich girl who doesn’t love Walter, but wants to escape from her family. Walter is a doctor, an expert in infectious diseases, and he’s a serious, rather uptight person, although he loves his new wife very much. The Fanes move to China, and Kitty meets Charles Townsend, an older, married British diplomat and has a passionate affair with him ...

We asked the novelist Francis King (who knew Somerset Maugham) if he agreed with critics that the new film of *The Painted Veil* doesn’t show the powerful passion of Kitty and Townsend’s affair, and this is surprising as films today have a greater freedom to depict sexual love.

As you listen to his answer, try to catch the expression Francis uses to stress the strength of Kitty’s desire for Townsend.

**Francis King**

‘Yes, with the affair between Kitty and Townsend, they could have shown much more of that because it is a tremendous, passionate affair. She’s absolutely obsessed with sex with him – that never comes across really. You just see them once, when the door handle is turning, and that’s all. So it is very old-fashioned in many ways, and the slowness of pace, I thought, was old-fashioned.’
Amber: Did you catch it? Frances says Kitty is ‘absolutely obsessed with’ sex with Townsend. ‘To be obsessed with something’ is a very current expression in English and it means that you’re unable to stop thinking about something. Frances calls the film ‘old-fashioned’ – this expression is usually (as it is here) used disapprovingly – he means it’s not a modern film, and he thinks it should have been. For example, he says it had a ‘slowness of pace’ and most films today are very fast-moving! Listen again.

Francis King
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Amber: To punish Kitty for her affair with Townsend, Walter takes his wife to a remote Chinese village where cholera has broken out … and we learn a lot more about this terrible epidemic in the film than we do in the novel.

Next, the BBC interviewer, Mark Lawson, asks Frances to comment on the language in the film and how he thinks it sounds to us today. Most of the dialogue in the film is taken directly from the ‘vintage’ (old) novel and it conveys how repressed the characters are – remember the story is set and was written in the mid-1920s.

Notice the description ‘anachronisms of language and delivery’ – an anachronism is something which exists out of its time in history.

Mark Lawson and Francis King
‘One of the objections that some people have when stories of this vintage are done now is that there are anachronisms of language and of delivery. I wondered about the language – at one point the doctor says, ‘I need to speak with you,’ which sounded slightly wrong to me. Completely wrong, yes. ‘I need to have a word with you,’ he’d have probably said, yes.’
Amber: While Walter works selflessly to help the Chinese villagers, Kitty begins to see her husband in a new light, and their marriage slowly blossoms into love. But then tragedy strikes … and Kitty is forced to examine the choices she has made.

Most of *The Painted Veil* was filmed in China, and Frances says the scenery in the film is ‘absolutely superb’ – it’s excellent – although there is very little description of the landscape in the novel. But he says the film doesn’t really show Kitty’s ‘spiritual’ journey – how her deep feelings and beliefs change – and how she ‘ends up’ a ‘totally changed’ person.

Francis King

‘Here it was absolutely superb, but I get rather tired of all those jagged mountains and the water underneath them – they seem to keep coming back, those mountains, and I felt what the film didn’t bring out was that it’s not just a geographical journey for Kitty, the heroine, it’s also a spiritual one – at the end of the novel, she ends up totally changed, she’s a different person, and I don’t think you got that feeling from the film at all.’

Amber: Now let’s recap the language we focussed on.

to be obsessed with something – to be unable to stop thinking about something

old-fashioned – not modern, more typical of a time in the past

vintage – old, and of high quality and lasting value

More entertainment news stories and language explanations next time at bbclearningenglish.com