Realism Essay, Research Paper

Realism, like beauty, is in the eye s of the beholder. Theodore Fontane s realism in Effi Briest is based on his broad knowledge of different classes of people and their environment, as well as a vivid imagination. Realism is an issue that can play a prominent role in the way events can be presented. In Theodore Fontane s Effi Briest s role we see the literary movement known as Realism. The story takes place in and around the small Baltic sea-port and resorts of Kessin in Prussia. The plot unfolds in the latter part if the nineteenth century at a time when a distinction between classes was keenly evident. Fontane s novel is an excellent example of realism. His different versions of events and his presentation of individual perspectives present social issues as they really exist. The story is based on a time when women like children were to be seen and not heard. Women were restricted and were not expected to have an opinion. It was a time when marriages were arranged between wealthy families, usually orchestrated by one or both parents.

Social issues occupying the everyday conversations of the characters demonstrate the first example of Realism. The issues involved may not be familiar to modern day readers. The ideas discussed were very popular during the time period of the novel. The matter of proper behavior, especially the double standard regarding men and women was a current issue then, and remains so even to this day. Effi dreams of a beautiful black Japanese bed screen reflected in the glow of a red lamp, but this object is not considered to be proper by her mother. One can see that Effi is a dreamer not a realist. She envisions marriage to be like a fairy tale and her mother attempts to bring her back to reality. In her diplomatic manner, Effi s mother points out to her daughter that her ideas are lovely and poetic, but she emphasizes quite firmly Reality is different and is often a good thing, instead of a red glow, to have it quite dark. When Effi tells her mother she thinks of herself as a princess, her mother cautions her:

Yes, so you are. I know that. But Effi dear, we must be careful how we live, above all because we are women. And when you arrive in Kessi, a little place where you ll hardly see a street lamp at night, people will laugh at that sort of thing. And they won t just laugh! The people who aren t very fond of you and there always are such people-will say that it is bad upbringing and a lot of them will say worse things than that.

Effi s mother is telling her daughter that marriage is exactly what it is and not what

Effi would like it to be.

After a visit from her doctor, Effi writes a letter to her husband saying: Medically he is not said to be in the first rank-his rivals and critics say he s a ladies doctor. But that expression is praise as well because not everyone knows how to handle us. Effi s reference to the doctor and his treatment of us is a clear indication of her recognition that women are generally treated as inferiors, which is a realistic notion. The us to which Effi is referring is the female gender and although she is chiding her husband about his treatment of her specifically, Effi is disguises the broad hint by lumping women together. She is trying to make her husband understand that he does not know how to treat her the romantic way she wants to be treated. At the same time her use of the pronoun us indicates that Effi thinks women in general are not treated properly.

Telling about the Bible jokes at the time of Effi s adulthood is another good example of Realism. Well, cousin, it s a strange thing .It s not everybody s liking. At the moment, they have Bible jokes. Not everyone approves of this practice that suggests disrespect, for holding ideals in high regard. Bible and jokes do not go together, this belief is Realism to some people. Jokes about the Bible were being written and widely distributed in Germany in this time period. One example of a Bible joke is The first inefficient cupbearer was Satan, because in the Bible it says, Satan setteth up a gin for the righteous; but the lot shall fall upon the wicked. You see gin and lot in different senses. This example demonstrates that respect for the Bible is a past social issue. Controversy over the Realism of the Bible has been an issue since the Bible s beginning. Some hold it as literal truth and reality, while others think otherwise.

The presentations of individual perspectives adds to the Realism of Fontane s work. There are occasions where a single character can help enhance the Realism in the novel. The central individual presentation of issues comes from the many letters that are written. These letters show great detail and description. The letters tell us how people lived and what they thought. The words help us visualize the happenings in the novel:

Dear Effi, the nearer we come to our wedding day the less you write to me. When the post comes, the first thing I always do is to look for your handwriting but, as you know (and I admit I agreed to it), usually there s nothing .My urge to see you is unbearable, and at the same time good old Kessin is becoming quieter and quieter, and more and more lonely. The last bather left yesterday and the last bathes he took were at temperature of 48(degrees) My regards to your parent and a very tender kiss.

It is through these letters, and the individual descriptions, that the reader derives a realistic view of everyday life.

There are occurrences in the novel where issues are discussed and accepted, only to find out later that the accepted outcome has been changed to characterize another person s view on the same issue. One instance is that, Innstetten and Effi have different views about what they want in a new home. Both have different opinions on the best time to purchase a house. The following example gives us a realistic view of happenings in the real world. This Realism shows clearly in one conversation between Innstetten and Effi:

I ve been thinking it over, Effi, Innstetten said. You weren t really as wrong as all that about the things you said against this house. It was all right for Captain Thomsen but not for a spoilt young women; everything so old-fashioned and not very much room. You ll be better off in Berlin with a drawing-room too, but not like this one, and with tall, stained-glass windows in the hall and staircase.

One detects a note of sarcasm in Innstetten s speech. Effi reply is Yes, lets do that, but who s looking for a place for us? I can t send Cousin Briest out searching for us. The conversation continues like this and suggests different dates for moving. Effi s mother affects the outcome of their decision, where and when to move. Although Innstetten and Effi live in a luxurious life style they still debate commonplace occurrences like when and where they will move.

Letters, conversations, social issues, behaviors, and descriptions all contributed substance for the literary movement known as Realism. Happy endings are not always realistic and usually exist only in fairy tales and other fiction. Fontane does not take the easy way out. He does not give way to the pleasing fiction of a happy ending. Effi Briest, closes with a hint of sadness when Effi dies, which strongly reflects the movement of Realism.