

Effi Briest Study Guide

Effi Briest by Theodor Fontane

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Plot Summary

Effi Briest tells the story of a young Prussian girl in the 1880s, who marries a rising politician incapable of love, loses everything in the aftermath of a brief affair, and makes peace with leaving too brief a life early.

Seventeen-year-old, free-spirited Effi Briest lives happily in the quiet Prussian town of Hohen-Cremmen. She agrees to marry her mother's 38-year-old ex-suitor, a rising politician in Eastern Pomerania. Hectic preparations include shopping in Berlin for a trousseau. Honeymoon letters home show enthusiasm but little joy. Effi's delight at her new "oriental" surroundings in Kessin is brief. Innstetten and maid Johanna are uncomfortable talking about the upstairs "gallery," where Effi hears noises. When work takes the groom away, fear of a ghost debilitates Effi. Nevertheless, she adapts but is truly comfortable only with Gieshübler and his protégée, the singer Marietta. Effi knows that she is too young to become a mother, but Annie is born, cared for by Roswitha, who Effi rescues from unemployment and depression shortly beforehand.

Major Crampas comes to town, Innstetten's former comrade, a flirtatious gossip with a jealous wife. Crampas becomes a riding companion, first of Innstetten, then of Innstetten and Effi, and finally of Effi alone (albeit chaperoned). He talks obliquely of Innstetten's "mystical leanings" and being a "born pedagogue," wanting to improve Effi. After Christmas, Crampas and Effi begin an affair, during which Effi hears Roswitha's story about the youthful pregnancy that nearly destroys her life. Effi knows the danger of what she is doing, does not justify herself, but cannot stop. Only when Innstetten is transferred to Berlin is Effi delivered from Kessin and the affair. Effi adjusts to another new life, determined to be a good wife. They enjoy a vacation on the Baltic Sea, but Effi's parents sense something is wrong.

In Berlin over the next seven years, Effi is pursued by the shadow of her affair. At her mother's insistence, she takes the cure, and, while she is away, Annie, as wild as she, has an accident that results in Crampas' letters being discovered. Innstetten commits himself to the unwanted path of honor, and in the aftermath of the fatal duel, Innstetten does what honor demands, divorcing Effi and taking sole custody of Annie. The von Briests take his side. Roswitha alone sides with Effi, who again adjusts to a new life, until she happens to see Annie and becomes obsessed with meeting her. The reunion is tragic because Innstetten brainwashes the child into needing permission for anything. Effi now hates him for being so perfectly proper.

As her health continues to decline, Effi's parents resist social pressure and allow her to come home. Innstetten relents when Roswitha requests the one thing that Effi needs for the last summer of her life: Rollo. He has gotten over his obsession with work and honors but cannot find how to put his loveless life together. On her deathbed, Effi lets go of anger at him and accepts her fate, hoping that knowing this will help him, too. At her request, Effi is buried with her maiden name. Papa gets the final word: what could have been done differently is entirely too vast a subject to discuss.



Chapters 1-3

Chapters 1-3 Summary

Facing the village street of Hohen-Cremmen stands the von Briest ancestral home. Mother and daughter are in the garden. Effi epitomizes grace and abandon, good sense, a zest for life and kindness. When three friends, the good-natured Jahnke twins, Bertha and Hertha, and boring, conceited Hulda Niemeyer, approach, Mamma gives them privacy, noting that company is due in half an hour. Effi explains that Mamma's old friend is coming, a handsome, manly Landrat. Baron Geert von Innstetten at age 20, loses Mamma's hand to the better-established von Briest, leaves the army, studies law, reenlists for the war of 1870, attracts the attention of Bismarck and the Kaiser and is named Landrat for Kessin District. The girls give leftover gooseberry skins a solemn burial at sea. Effi recalls how women used to be drowned for infidelity. Mamma waves her in. Effi objects, saying that gentlemen are never early and guarantees to be Cinderella in five minutes, but Mamma decides Effi looks fine and announces Innstetten wants to marry her. He is older but possesses character, position and morality—not refusing him will let her go far.

Innstetten and Effi become engaged that day. After dinner, Effi visits the Niemeyers, where Hulda is composed, but her uneducated mother rails about the daughter taking what the mother cannot have and aristocrats sticking together. Hertha Jahnke worries about the haste. Effi declares that any good-looking aristocrat will suffice. She comes home to find Papa pacing with Innstetten, declaring why he turns down the Landrat post and digging at officialdom.

When Innstetten's leave ends, he writes substantial letters to Effi daily and receives delightful trivia in return.

Chapters 1-3 Analysis

The first three chapters introduce the protagonist, 17-year-old, free-spirited Effi Briest, her aristocratic parents and three childhood friends. Believing that one good-looking aristocrat is as good as any other as a husband, she agrees to marry her mother's 38-year-old ex-suitor, a lawyer and rising politician in Pomerania. Going forward, recall that she believes romantic "tales of renunciation" are never bad and has no patience with second-best.



Chapters 4-5

Chapters 4-5 Summary

Dagobert sees them off after four days. Briest is happy to have them home, has questions in profusion, approves of the chic purchases and does not protest the cost. When he suggests that they also take a honeymoon, Mamma calls him "incorrigible." With the wedding date set for 3 October, preparations for Wedding Eve proceed. Mamma advises caution in new situations. Effi pockets a new letter from Innstetten to worry about homesickness, but Mamma reminds her to read it. Effi smiles at his letters and convinces Mamma that their marriage will be ideal. Brilliance, honor and diversions must accompany love, for Effi hates boredom. Work on the house is nearly complete. In four weeks, the newlyweds will sail to Venice. Mamma admires the letter's balance, but wonders if Effi loves Innstetten. Effi claims that she loves anyone who wishes her well, is kind and spoils her.

After breakfast on the day after the wedding, Briest wisecracks about marriage, wards off an argument and recalls how his wife opposes a honeymoon. He imagines Innstetten dragging this "child of nature" through art collections and declares Mamma would have been a better match. Effi does not appreciate Innstetten, and he is not one to charm her into love. Innstetten will seek promotion, pleasing Effi, but will not be able to cope with her reckless desire for fun and adventure.

Three days later, a card arrives from Munich. They visit picture galleries. Innstetten is attentive and knowledgeable. Such cards arrive daily, talking about galleries, arenas, or churches, before a proper letter comes from Padua, recalling their visit to Vicenza. Innstetten treats Effi well without condescension. She is tired, but looks forward to Venice. The parents agree that Effi is homesick, but Papa points out that she is the Baroness Innstatten. Mamma is glad he finally admits that women are constrained, but he says this is too vast a subject.

Chapters 4-5 Analysis

These chapters cover the final, hectic preparations for the wedding and through cards depict the honeymoon. Note how Fontane deals with the Wedding Eve and wedding proper as past events, whose memories are briefly summarized. Effi ignoring and finally reading Innstetten's letter is examined in real time and then in Mamma's recollections to her husband as they consider that Effi may have made a mistake. They describe precisely the dynamics that will tear the marriage apart. The parents' constant squabbling about women's plight is shown, and it is made clear that for Herr von Briest, almost all subjects are too vast to discuss.



Chapters 6-8

Chapters 6-8 Summary

As Innstetten's leave runs out, they take an express train to Berlin, where Dagobert entertains them until the train to Kessin. The Landrat's old-fashioned residence stands at the far end of town. The Landrat's office is across the street. Innstetten introduces Friedrich, who has been with him since university. He also introduces Johanna and Christel, the cook. Innstetten leads Effi to her room. The chemist, Alonzo Gieshübler, has sent flowers. The next day, Effi wakes up disoriented and feels comforted to be in her own new home. Johanna answers the bell saying it is 9 AM, and the Master is up early, awaiting her for coffee. Effi mentions noises overhead, sounds like long dresses sweeping the floorboards. Johanna replies that they have gotten used to the sounds of long curtains scrapping the floor in the breeze. After wondering why no one removes or shortens them, Effi freshens up and goes to Innstatten's office. Effi declares that Innstetten looks like an oriental prince minus the swords, leopard skins and shields.

When Effi asks about life in Kessin, Innstetten fears that she will be disappointed. When Effi mentions the upstairs gallery, Innstetten asks how she knows about it and suggests a tour before Gieshübler visits. When Gieshübler fails to arrive by 11 o'clock, Innstetten leaves for work, warning Effi not to make Gieshübler feel self-conscious, lest he get tongue-tied and say odd things. The upstairs room had best be forgotten for now. Left alone, Effi studies the barren road to the beach and the thatched cottages beyond the Plantation. Effi sees a deformed, elegantly dressed man stroll past and is surprised it is Gieshübler. He effuses about the virtues of youth, saying that sadly, he has never been truly young but has grown old alone, too fearful to ask a woman to dance. Effi knows they'll be friends.

Chapters 6-8 Analysis

These chapters bring Effi to her new home in Kessin, show her delight in her new surroundings and introduce her to the best friend she will make in the port town. It also introduces the mystery of sounds upstairs and the Chinaman, who will haunt her. Note Innstetten and Johanna's discomfort talking about the "gallery." The groom appears still to be trying to accommodate his young bride but hints that his work will frequently take him away. The fear she now denies soon debilitates her.



Chapters 9-12

Chapters 9-12 Summary

Innstetten gives Effi half a week to settle and write home before scheduling visits to the landed aristocracy. Several say she is "infected with rationalism," and the Grasenabbs, led by old maid Sidonie, declare Effi at least a deist if not an atheist. The visits end on 2 December, with Gülденklee. Effi complains that her husband is "frosty as a snowman." Innstetten promises to try harder and hopes she can become well liked to help his political fortunes. Effi says that only Gieshübler can prevent her becoming a hermit, and that will lower her further in Sidonie's estimation. Innstetten observes that Effi is very discriminating.

When Bismarck invites Innstetten to Varzin, Effi faces their first long separation. She writes Mamma and settles to read something at random. Hitting upon the Hermitage's painting of the "White Lady," of whom she has long been afraid, she recalls her Wedding Eve. She believes Mamma could have fit in here, while she is and will remain a child. Effi falls soundly asleep, only to sit up at Rollo's bark. Something flits past and Rollo runs to her side. She tells Johanna that she has seen the Chinaman, but Johanna holds it is just a dream.

Innstetten arrives at 6 AM. When Friedrich tells him about the night's drama, Innstetten summons Johanna, who says that either a dream or "the other thing" has Effi beside herself. Innstetten dismisses the nonsense, calling for Effi. Looking pale but charming, she rushes to Innstetten, begging him never to leave again. Innstetten reminds her that he cannot beg off invitations because she is lonely or afraid. She agrees, but wants to move to an unhaunted house. Their first quarrel might have ensued, had Friedrich not delivered a note from Gieshübler, inviting her to a reception for Fräulein Marietta Trippelli. Effi feels better instantly. To aid her recovery further, Innstetten suggests a long sleigh ride before the reception. Effi apologizes for her childishness and asserts that ambition moved her to marry him. By noon, they are on their way to the station.

As they pass the churchyard, Effi shudders to learn that the Chinaman is buried on the opposite side of the lane beneath a pine tree. Innstetten explains that the Chinaman cannot be buried in the churchyard, but his friend, Captain Thomsen, arranged a plot and inscribed stone. This is before his time, but people still talk about it: Thomsen gets rich on the "China run" before arriving in Kessin at the age of 60, sells his ship and settles in this house. He is accompanied by 20-year-old Nina, either his granddaughter or his niece, and the Chinaman, at first a servant and later a friend. Nina marries a sea captain but then disappears, and the Chinaman dies two weeks later. Pastor Trippel, who performs weddings and funerals, is willing to bury the good Chinaman in the churchyard, but others oppose. Trippel dies before they can fire him. Effi agrees with excluding the Chinaman and marvels that a pastor's daughter would Italianize her surname. Innstetten says Marietta studied in Paris, where she meets an enlightened Russian prince, Kochukov, who with "uncle" Gieshübler makes her who she is.



The Innstettens enjoy a lunch at the Prince Bismarck Inn, where Golchowski fills the Landrat in on local gossip. Effi asks excitedly to watch the Danzig express pass and says nothing when Innstetten asks if she would like to be on it, bound for Hohen-Cremmen. Inwardly, she feels alien to this new world; the places and people here are simply not home. However, Effi is nearly exuberant as they reach Gieshübler's door, joining Frau Trippel, Pastor Lindequist and Marietta. She claims that Kochukov is a minor prince primarily interested in religious music. Marietta prefers to sing before dinner and rejects a half-dozen scores singing several romantic pieces. Effi says she is "all a-quiver" at her serenity and power and asks if Marietta has considered the theater. Marietta says it destroys careers. She has experienced ghosts in Kessin, Russia and Romania, wherever bad people are. Her late father says that spirits lurk all around. Marietta insists she can catnap on the train, so the soirée lasts until midnight and on the way home, they continue telling stories about her.

Afterwards, Christmas preparations begin and keep Effi too busy for dark thoughts. Presents arrive from her parents and friends, and the Landrat puts up a tree and crèche. The first day of Christmas is spent in church and the second at the Borckes'. New Year's Eve features the mandatory Club Ball. Johanna works a day on Effi's gown, and Gieshübler sends camellias from his hothouse. Effi writes Mamma about shedding sentimental tears on Christmas Eve. She is certain the baby, due in July, will make a difference, but worries about her youth. After the birth, Effi is coming to Hohen-Cremmen, finding Kessin too touristy and the house too small for visitors. Johanna says that the ghost returns whenever someone new appears. Innstetten wants Effi to ignore old wives' tales but believes them and considers it a distinction.

Chapters 9-12 Analysis

These chapters show Effi adapting to an alien world, socially and religiously. She is comfortable only with the nonconformist Gieshübler and his protégée, Marietta, whose liberal pastor father dies before being fired for burying a Chinaman, whose ghost apparently haunts the house. The story is narrated in real time and then repeated in Effi's year-end letter to Mamma. Her husband equivocates, but is truly concerned only about the political impact. Effi reveals many vexations, including the suggestion that her baby will be a "darling toy." She concedes it will be but resents the attitude. She knows that she is too young. She does not tell Mamma but contemplates that Mamma should have had this job.



Chapters 13-17

Chapters 13-17 Summary

Effi is admired at the New Year's Eve Ball but then hibernates for the long winter. When forced to socialize, she rues church politics, recalling Niemeyer's restraint and modesty. She cannot abide Sidonie and looks on Gieshübler as her personal "providence." Effi mentions him so often in letters that Mamma kids her about being "in love with an alchemist," making Mamma think that Innstetten is no lover. Effi and Rollo spend their evenings alone together, and sometimes she plays the piano for her husband. She looks forward to the crowds of summer and almost misses the ghost when Innstetten visits Bismarck.

In April, the district commandant is replaced, but it brings no social relief, for Frau Crampas is melancholy and suspicious of her husband. Without his wife, Major Crampas can be animated and suave. Effi decides to take a walk. She is hot and tired by the time she reaches the Strand and recalls Jahnke's teaching about ancient Visby across the Baltic. Hearing the lunch crowd leaving the dining room, Effi hastily leaves to avoid seeing anyone and walks through the churchyard. Near a fresh grave, she sees Rode's faithful companion sitting on a bench. When Effi warns her about sunstroke, the woman says that would be the best thing to happen. The woman says her ex-mistress is quarrelsome and penny-pinching like her relatives, who hardly give her enough money to return to Berlin, so she intends to sit there until she dies. Effi asks if Roswitha is fond of children, and, hearing of her experience and believing she is a good, faithful (albeit blunt) person, invites her to care for the child she is bearing. Roswitha kisses Effi's hand and accompanies her home. Effi seeks her husband's consent to the arrangement. When Innstetten agrees, Effi declares she is no longer afraid. Roswitha moves her few belongings into the alcove and falls promptly asleep. In the morning, Roswitha laughs at the suggestion of a ghost upstairs; Effi believes Catholicism better protects against such things. She quickly adjusts to Roswitha, laughing at stories about her penny-pinching former employers. Effi gives birth on 3 July. Roswitha calls the baby "Wee Annie," and the parents agree. The christening is on Napoleon's birthday, followed by a banquet for the gentry at the Club House on the Bulwark. Effi rejoices that by evening next day she, Annie and Roswitha will be in Hohen-Cremmen.

During Effi's six weeks in Hohen-Cremmen, she sometimes misses her haunted house. She gets on badly with jealous Hulda, but plays with the twins, enjoys her swing, chatting every morning with Mamma and strolling with Papa. Papa is not pleased that Innstetten fails to stroll with her, as she needs fresh air and exercise. For that, she has Rollo. Effi disagrees that Rollo is closer to her heart than husband or child, but admits she could not have survived without him. Animals, says Papa, are a vast subject: They are known to rescue their masters who slip through thin ice or sit beside their bodies until someone comes by. Papa wonders at Innstetten not visiting, but Effi understands his ambition.



Returning to Kessin in September, Effi's initial melancholy gives way to Innstetten's affections and Gieshübler's notes. While they breakfast on the charming new veranda, Effi asks how he could have left her so long like a widow. He sees a change in her since the birth; she is more seductive, no longer a child. Crampas approaches from the beach. Innstetten notes it is irresponsible to swim this late in the season; he is tempting Neptune. Crampas declares that he is not rich enough for the gods to bother with. Effi changes the subject to the club evenings that Gieshübler says Crampas is organizing.

The weather holds well into October and the Major drops by the veranda daily to gossip and go riding with Innstetten. Effi often walks to the copse with Roswitha and Annie. One morning, Effi announces she wants to join in the ride, and Crampas finds an appropriate ladies' horse. It is bliss for Effi to ride and walk along the beach with the men and Rollo. Crampas suggests a seal hunt, which Innstetten says is illegal, but the Major laughs at such boring regulations and Effi applauds him. Innstetten lectures him on abandoning military discipline and warns of one day finding the heavens cave in on him. The election campaign in late October prevents Innstetten from riding, but Effi, Crampas and Rollo continue. Crampas talks about the war and Innstetten's stiffness. Effi sees that he would put respect above affection but is surprised to hear about his "mystical leanings," but he prefers to discuss his ideas in Innstetten's presence. When Effi objects to the cruelty of whetting her interest, Crampas says Innstetten tells ghost stories as a way of standing out. He ventures that Innstetten aspires to a senior ministerial post and declares that Innstetten is a "pedagogue," who wants to "improve" Effi. Irritated that Innstetten conjured a ghost to distinguish himself, Effi knows Crampas' remark is meant to frighten her and decides he is malicious and unreliable.

When Effi suggests that they enjoy the remaining warm days, Innstetten agrees, but must investigate an arson. Effi disbelieves that Knut has the mumps, to which Crampas replies young women often disbelieve true things and believe things they ought not to believe. Effi says Crampas would believe it if she made a declaration of love to him. He asks if she knows Heine's poem, "Sea Spectre," about a poet wanting to dive in to join underwater hooded women on their way to church. Because he understands love, Heine is Crampas' favorite poet. The Major talks of Heine's later, "romantic" poems being filled with gross motives and politics, and the grisly story of Vitzliputzli, the Mexican god, who claims Spaniards as sacrifices. They reach the bench where Kruse has set out lunch. Crampas tells about Pedro the Cruel whose wife is secretly in love with a handsome Knight of Caltrava. When the jealous king finds out, he throws a party for the knight, who fails to show up until the dog places his severed head across from the royal murderer. Effi, who initially agrees that the knight should be executed, sours and orders Kruse to pack up for the return home. When Crampas keeps one of the wine glasses, Effi reminds him that he is not the King of Thule and ought not to think of compromising her, for she intends to tell Innstetten.

Chapters 13-17 Analysis

This section introduces three new characters: Maj. Crampas, Roswitha and "Wee Annie." Crampas, a former army comrade of Innstetten in France, is a flirtatious gossip.



Effie is frustrated because his wife is standoffish, consigning Effie to another boring winter, but she finds and takes in, based on intuition, Roswitha as a nurse. Roswitha, being a Catholic, offers a new perspective on many things going forward. After the baby's christening, Effi, Crampas and Gieshübler form a triangle. The trip home, no matter how anticipated, is skipped over in a few sentences to return to unfolding events in Kessin. Innstetten finds Effi more seductive, which she enjoys hearing. Crampas emerges from the frigid sea, talks about "an honourable soldier's death" and becomes a riding companion, first of Innstetten, then of Innstetten and Effi, and finally of Effi alone (albeit chaperoned). Crampas tells Effi obliquely about her husband's "mystical leanings" and being a "born pedagogue," who wants to improve Effi. His making these characterizations return later. Crampas' reference to the "cherub with a sword" foreshadows the coming Fall of "little Eve." The section ends with a particularly literary exchange between Crampas and the supposedly ill-read Effi.



Chapters 18-21

Chapters 18-21 Summary

Effi is relieved when the outings end for the year. With Bismarck not wintering in Varzin, Innstetten can devote time to his family and proposes that with Gieshübler they recap their Italian trip to fix its details in their minds. Such evenings would have continued, had Crampas not decided to produce "One False Step" and cast Effi as Ella. She jumps at the chance for novelty. In two weeks of rehearsal, Crampas is strict with everyone but Effi. Innstetten is proud of her enchanting performance, as he appreciates what he has and is glad she is not like Frau Crampas. Innstetten sees Crampas' good points besides being a womanizer and a gambler. Effi is amazed when he advises against overdoing caution. She recalls Crampas' calling Innstetten a pedagogue.

Christmas Eve is like the previous year except that Innstetten is affectionate towards Annie, while Effi is inwardly depressed. She is pleased and displeased to receive no greetings from Crampas. Innstetten says ambiguously that one gets in the end what one deserves. On the day after Christmas, Innstetten leads a convoy of sleds to the head forester's at Uvaglia. They are greeted by Ring, a self-assured man in his 50s. He and his wife have two daughters. The elder, Cora, flirts with Innstetten and Crampas, who play along, embarrassing and annoying Effi. Crampas finally talks to Effi, saying they may get snowed in. Effi has always liked the idea of being snowed in. She asks if he knows a poem called "God's Wall," which she memorized as a child: During a war, a widow prays for a wall to protect her from the enemy, so God buries the house in snow. Dinner is grand and everyone enjoys it except Sidonie, who is offended by Cora's affectations and Crampas' leering at her. She suggests that the pastor is not doing his duty keeping young souls from trouble. People do not do their unpleasant duty any more. She says how the forester lives inappropriately for his station and spoils Cora. Gùldenkleee, the best orator, offers a toast to the forester. The company sings the Prussian anthem and disperses for the ride home. Gieshübler's driver has been injured and cannot travel, so Innstetten volunteers to drive his sleigh. Sidonie claims the empty seat beside Effi; Effi is in no hurry to hear what criticisms she has readied. Hypocritical materialists such as the Rings make it hard for people who seek to save their souls.

The sleighs halt before the "Schloon," a bog dangerous to horses and sleighs but not big-wheeled carriages. Innstetten favors challenging superstition and driving through, having Crampas sit with the ladies to help, should they overturn. Sidonie rejoins her family, and their carriage makes it through safely. As the sleighs take a detour, Crampas sits alone beside Effi. She is fine on the open road but shudders when they enter the dark forest, praying that God will build a wall around her but also not wanting this spell to end. When Crampas begins covering her with kisses, she is ready to faint.

In the morning, Innstetten is upset by Effi and Crampas riding alone together, but she reminds him that he had sent Crampas over and that he has allowed them to ride many times together. Innstetten accepts responsibility for placing them together but warns her



to be on her guard; firmness is not her specialty. When a note comes from Gieshübler, Effi asks if Innstetten is also jealous of him. If not, it is because he takes Crampas too seriously and Gieshübler not seriously enough.

On New Year's Eve, Effi sits with the older aristocratic ladies. Effi blushes when Crampas approaches to pay his respects and to be introduced. They chat a while, and Crampas looks momentarily at Effi, then departs. One woman remarks on his beauty and pride, and when Effi says he is 44, notes that Effi knows him quite well.

When Innstetten is finally called away, Effi weeps over Annie's cradle and feels again like a prisoner. The mysterious and forbidden hold her in thrall, and Effi slides further into "duplicity and play-acting." She sees what she is doing and considers herself a lost woman, but cannot stop. Mid-month, when invitations to four social gatherings arrive, Effi refuses to go. Dr. Hannemann is treating her for anemia. She will accompany Innstetten to the corner of the woods and then stroll back through the dunes and Plantation. Not a day passes that Effi does not take a prescribed walk, arranging to meet Roswitha and Annie halfway, but this rarely happens. Cramps writes to his patron about his sudden disappearance and sends best wishes to Effi, who comments that it is just as well he is away. Innstetten announces he, too, must go to Berlin for a week and may return with something new for her. His reassurance that the ghost will not return makes her again resent pedagogy. The notables begin wondering if they are going to lose their popular Landrat to a higher post in Morocco. Effi would earlier have laughed at the rumor, but she is not the same free-spirited girl. She resumes her daily walks. Roswitha shares the story of getting pregnant young, being threatened by her blacksmith father and thrown out of the house, giving birth in a stranger's barn and having the baby taken away from her. Someone in Erfurt rescues her by hiring her as a wet nurse. She then works for the registrar's widow and finally for Effi. She would drown herself rather than go through birth again.

Innstetten's homecoming is delayed a day, but he arrives unusually excited. Dagobert sends greetings, after confessing that he has at times been tempted to challenge Innstetten to a duel and claim beautiful Effi. When Innstetten asks her if they would have gotten along well, she believes not. Innstetten announces he is being offered a ministry job in Berlin. Effi's eyes widen, she quivers, and thanks God. Innstetten pales, certain this is an admission of guilt for what he has suspected. She confesses there have been happy days but never days free of fear. She has seen the ghost, and Roswitha and Rollo have heard it. When she tells him she knows the ghost is part of her pedagogy, he wants to know whence this comes, but backs off, saying he has been too wrapped up in his own affairs. Effi calms, believing she has gotten out of the danger of her own making.

Chapters 18-21 Analysis

Effi's deliverance from Kessin arrives, but only after her affair with Crampas becomes an uncontrollably regular thing. It begins on the day she endures moralisms from Sidonie aimed at a teenager. She lectures Roswitha when she catches her and Kruse



"chatting familiarly"—and hears Roswitha's story about the youthful pregnancy that nearly destroys her life. Effi knows the danger of what she is doing, does not justify herself, but cannot stop. The move to Berlin will not only deliver Effi from Kessin, but also from the affair. Her overreaction nearly gives her away. Innstetten talking about Effi's cousin half-seriously wanting to duel over her prefigures later developments.



Chapters 22-24

Chapters 22-24 Summary

At breakfast, Innstetten says Effi will be better off in Berlin in a proper house. She must do the house hunting, soon. She insists on taking Roswitha and Annie. A letter arrives from Mamma, postmarked Berlin. She has learned of their posting in Berlin, where she is seeing Dr. Schweigger about her eyes. She has a private apartment in Schadowstrasse. She will leave Friday and aim to return Monday. Roswitha is happy to be returning to civilized Berlin. Effi says to take all of her and Annie's belongings. Only Effi will return to Kessin. On Thursday, Effi visits the chemist's for smelling salts and says goodbye to Gieshübler. She thanks him, declares he is the best person here, and promises never to forget him. She has not always done what is right here, but he has never failed to raise her spirits. Before Innstetten comes home, Effi writes Crampas a formal note to say goodbye and asks him to forget her. His behavior might be excusable, but hers is not. She feels guilty and hopes moving away will help.

The Innstetten party boards the small sailing ship with more luggage than needed. Effi is startled and pleased to see Crampas on the dock. He is visibly moved and waves earnestly. Effi retires to her cabin, where she remains through Breitling. Innstetten takes her topside to enjoy the scenery, which she recalls from 15 months earlier and considers how many things have happened. Golchowski meets them again and sees them to the platform. Innstetten wants her to find a place between the Tiergarten and Zoological Garden, so he can hear finches and parrots.

Mamma and Dagobert wait at crowded Friedrichstrasse Station and take them to Schadowstrasse. Effi insists that marriage has changed her. Mamma has been thinking about homes in elegant, but not too expensive, neighborhoods, since Innstetten's position is prestigious but not too lucrative. The next day, they find an apartment in Keithstrasse that they like but rule a health risk because the new plaster is still damp. Effi needs to stall, to avoid going home. Dagobert avoids her because Effi is dangerous for him. Innstetten writes increasingly sharp letters about Effi's return. She decides to take the first apartment they see; if it gives her rheumatism, she can recover in Hohen-Cremmen. Effi signs the lease, writes that she is returning and packs, but awakens too stiff to travel. She sends Roswitha to the library with a list of books. On the third day, Mamma sends for Dr. Geheimrat Rummschüttel. Effi says the pain is neuralgia, inherited from Papa. Appreciating the performance but not letting on, the doctor says to rest, keep warm, take nerve medicine and avoid reading. After the fourth visit, Effi writes Innstetten to say she is cleared to travel but believes she should wait for him. She said goodbye to Gieshübler, and leaves it to Innstetten to attend to the others. Effi hopes to God that things will change and a new life will begin. Innstetten arrives three days later and approves of the apartment. Effi is determined to behave more to his liking. He proclaims her a genius, but Effi credits her mother and downplays her illness. When she asks about Gieshübler, Innstetten passes along Crampas' regards, along with the pastor



and country people. Only Johanna is moving to Berlin; Christel and Friedrich are too old, and carriages are passé in the city.

On 1 April, Innstetten reports for work at the Ministry, where his immediate superior suggests they will get on well. Effi sees her Mamma off for Hohen-Cremmen the same day Johanna arrives and splits maid duties with Roswitha, who now runs the kitchen. Effi takes charge of Annie herself. Innstetten is happier than in Kessin, partly because he sees Effi is more cheerful and relaxed. She is no longer afraid but seems apologetic, as though she wants to get something impossibly heavy off her chest. The Innstettens arrive too late to enter into the social season, so they keep one another company afternoons, strolling arm in arm. When she asks about stories of ghosts at Belvedere, Innstetten clarifies that apparitions are always staged, while hauntings are natural. He believes such things exist, but is unsure about Kessin.

They want to see the Oberaumergau passion play, but his standing in for an ailing colleague holds them until mid-August. They go to Rügen Island and Sassnitz, while Roswitha takes Annie to her grandparents and Johanna visits a half-brother. Enchanted, recalling Capri and Sorrento, Effi wants to find something less formal than the Fahrenheit Hotel but learns rooms are impossible to find in Sassnitz. They ride to Lake Hertha, where a guide explains three ancient sacrificial stones, which upset Effi. She asks to visit Copenhagen, where she enjoys the museum and the acquaintance of fellow tourists, the von Penzes. Traveling in stages to Hohen-Cremmen, they part when Innstetten's leave ends. Effi intends to be home by their anniversary.

Annie thrives in the country air and learns to walk. Briest is the doting grandfather but cautions against both strictness and permissiveness. He wonders why Effi seems happier in Hohen-Cremmen than with her husband. He has always felt that that Effi respects rather than loves Innstetten. Mamma notes that he returns to the topic often with naïve questions, but Effi has not shared her secrets. She probably figures God is a "good fellow" who will not be too hard on her. The Innstettens do seem to be closer since the move. Effi admits he seems less remote. He is too old and too good for her, but she is "over the hump."

It is quiet in Hohen-Cremmen, the twins having married teachers and Hulda caring for a rich aunt in Friesack. Packing on the eve of her anniversary, Effi thinks about playing with friends, getting engaged and Crampas. She must live with her guilt as they celebrate their anniversary, but the guilt does not weigh heavily enough on her soul; she feels too little shame and remorse but plenty of fear. She once prided herself on honesty, but now she lies constantly. Niemeyer told her that if one has right feelings, bad things cannot happen, otherwise, one is in the Devil's power. Effi weeps, asking God if this is true.

Chapters 22-24 Analysis

Effi leaves hated Kessin for Berlin and gets back the feelings she experienced while shopping before the wedding. Dagobert continues fighting feelings for Effi. Avoiding a



return to Kessin she had promised but never intended, Effi seems to adjust to her new life and is determined to be a good wife to Innstetten. They enjoy a vacation on the Baltic Sea, darkened only by the coincidental name of a local town, Crampas. Her parents sense something is wrong and engage in their usual banter before the feverish contents of Effi's mind pour out as she reviews all that has followed that sudden engagement. She misses the train to Berlin and her anniversary.



Chapters 25-28

Chapters 25-28 Summary

Innstetten and Rollo meet Effi at the station. He thought she would not keep her word. He has professional and social matters on his mind. They are obligated to entertain, and she must delight officialdom. Occasions remain rare, and they spend time mostly at home with Wüllersdorf, Dagobert, and the Gizickis, a young married couple who live above them. They often share anecdotes about small-town life, including "good old Kessin," among whose characters Major Crampas numbers first. Effi is hard-pressed to join in the laughter about her fancying him. She feels pursued by a shadow. Her anxieties are less frequent and less severe than before, and she receives affection from her husband. The Briefts visit occasionally and are happy Annie's growth, but are concerned that it appears she will be an only child and the family name will die out. In their seventh year in Berlin, Mamma asks Dr. Rummschüttel's opinion. He prescribes three weeks in Schwalbach followed by three at Ems, to benefit an old chest infection. The older Frau Zwicker goes as chaperone since Innstetten is again tied up by work. Ems is refreshing after an all-female Schwallbach, and the amusing, well-read Frau Zwicker seems inclined to talk about the "worst things" she has done in life. Reading this, Innstetten is amused but put out at Effi having a chaperone with her same tendencies. He longs for Effi's return. Annie spends her free time in the kitchen with Johanna and Roswitha. Decorum and propriety give Johanna a sense of superiority over the half-peasant Roswitha. They divide Annie's education: Roswitha handling stories and fairy tales, and Johanna manners. Annie wants to be a "lady of quality," and treats the two equally.

One day, when Innstetten is at work, Roswitha meets Annie after school at the foot of the stairs and is challenged to a race. Annie bolts, trips and cuts her forehead. The maids carry the girl indoors and look for a long bandage that Effi has used. Johanna tells Roswitha to wrench open the locked sewing-table and find it. Roswitha finds many things, including a bundle of letters hidden at the bottom but no bandage. Innstetten arrives, orders them to call Rummschüttel and asks what has happened to the table. Innstetten comforts Annie, saying she gets her temperament from her Mamma, who writes that she loves and misses Annie. Annie senses her father's mind is elsewhere. The doctor drops by to learn about Ems, approves the first aid and orders rest. As Annie rests, Innstetten cleans up the jumble around the sewing table and examines the letters, recognizing the Major's handwriting. He pockets the notes and goes to his room. Johanna gets no response when she knocks and hears him pacing. When Innstetten goes out, Annie sees he is pale and annoyed. Innstetten returns after dusk, checks on Annie, reviews pictures taken during "One False Step" and rereads select letters: Crampas describing how they can meet at Frau Adermann's house; life is not worth living if conventions are always observed. He cannot leave his wife. They must enjoy their fate frivolously. What if they had never met? He contemplates life without Effi but admits their parting is also their salvation.



Wüllersdorf is announced and sees instantly something is wrong. Innstetten needs a second for a duel. Wüllersdorf is shocked to hear that Effi has a lover, suggests that the lover will destroy "life's happiness" doubly. Innstetten does not feel hatred or thirst for revenge, declares he loves Effi's "delightful nature" and "vivacious charm," and wants to forgive her, but has decided that if he fails to keep society's code, he will despise, and might as well shoot, himself. Wüllersdorf bows to the inevitable and takes the evening train to Kessin. Innstetten arrives a day later, on the steamer, considering the reversal from the honeymoon trip: now the sky is clear, but his heart is filled with November's chill. Wüllersdorf is waiting and has ordered a carriage. The duel will be fought on the beach. He reports that Crampas initially goes deathly pale, then masters his emotions, and registers "melancholy resignation." The carriage takes them toward the mole, past Innstetten's old house before turning toward the beach. They walk into a gully and agree on the rules. Both men fire. Crampas falls, gestures Innstetten, but says only "Would you..." before succumbing.

Chapters 25-28 Analysis

The Innstettens settling into Berlin over the next seven years is compressed to paragraphs. Effi feels pursued by the shadow of her affair. At her mother's insistence, she takes the cure and, while she is away, Annie, as wild as she, has an accident that results in Crampas' letters being discovered. By impulsively confiding in a colleague, Innstetten commits himself to the unwanted path of honor. Wüllersdorf plays devil's advocate to present the objections to a duel but bows to the inevitable. Crampas' demise is described with exquisite brevity. The rest of the novel is haunted by the specter of duty trumping emotion.



Chapters 29-33

Chapters 29-33 Summary

While the seconds deal with the authorities, Innstetten takes the train back to Berlin. He imagines Crampas chiding him for being a stickler and agrees. He should have burned the letters, divorced Effi emotionally, but kept her at his side. In the morning, Innstetten reports the incident to his gracious chief and comes home to be shaken by Wüllersdorf's note about Gieshübler's tears and the terrible scene at the Major's house. He writes letters, which he asks Johanna to post, adding that Effi will not return and asking her, in good time, to break the news to Annie. She must not let Roswitha "ruin things." Johanna is proud to enjoy the Master's confidence until Roswitha shows her the newspaper's brief report of a duel over a Ministerial rat's beautiful, young wife. Roswitha feels sorry for Effi and the Major, killed for something so long ago. Johanna cannot blame Roswitha for breaking into the desk but insists that in proper houses honor is important and points out that Roswitha's conflict with her father also took place "long ago," but she keeps repeating the story. Johanna laughs when Roswitha accuses her of being in love with the Master and insists they make peace.

Effi and Frau Zwicker share the ground floor of a charming villa in Ems for three weeks when Effi wonders aloud about letters from Innstetten halting. Effi declares that she believes in the moral code and asks if there are painful events in the charming Frau Zwicker's past. Pain is far too strong a word, she responds. Effi distinguishes passing sinful thoughts from habitual concern that invades oneself and home. Frau Zwicker still feels pangs from the past's "country outings," which take place all around Berlin, affecting a moral revolution. The postman delivers a registered letter to Effi from Hohen-Cremmen, addressed in her mother's handwriting. Inside are banknotes and a note. Effi takes it into her room and reaches the bed before fainting. When she comes to, Effi realizes that she is an outcast. Her lover is dead; her parents' home is closed to her; the divorce will come in weeks, and Annie will go with her father. Mamma advises her to stay in Berlin, where scandals are common; they must stand up and condemn Effi's deeds. Effi tells Frau Zwicker she must leave to dispel her Mamma's worries and convinces her not to see her off at the station.

Three years later, Effi is living in a small flat on Königgrätzerstrasse, enduring frequent ailments that Rummschüttel treats. Immediately after returning from Ems, Effi lives for two weeks in a stuffy rooming house, increasing her breathing trouble. She has decided to move when Roswitha shows up, having watched Annie during Innstetten's six weeks at Glatz for killing Crampas and now wants to help Effi get back on her feet. Effi is overjoyed but reminds Roswitha of how constrained their life will be. Her parents are generous but not rich. From the start, Effi enjoys the solitude in her new flat. Roswitha cannot talk about intellectual matters but knows how to comfort Effi's fears. Christmas and New Year's Eve are melancholy. Roswitha observes that Effi spends too much time playing the piano; she is breaking out in red blotches. When she suggests Effi visit Christuskirche across the street, Effi says she has, several times, but cannot endure the



preacher's dwelling on the Old Testament. Effi has considered joining a society that trains girls to be a teacher or nurse, but they would not be allowed to accept her. Roswitha rejects the idea that Effi is not good and says something will come up. Effi signs up to take painting lessons from an elderly, religious art teacher, who treats her like a daughter. Effi feels renewed to be back among people and longs to see Hohen-Cremmen and Annie, whom she sees one day by chance on the horse tram. Thereafter, the desire to meet Annie reaches "pathological proportions." Unable to write Innstetten, Effi calls on the Minister's wife. She accepts that she must sleep in the bed she has made, but wants to see Annie with the knowledge and consent of all involved. The Minister's wife believes Innstetten may be right in preventing contact, but sides with Effi.

Innstetten thinks it unwise and improper but will send Annie at noon. Roswitha admits Annie and leads her to her mother's room. Effi runs to her. Annie remembers seeing her mother on the tram and listens to her babble. Annie does not want to keep Johanna waiting long downstairs. To each activity that Effi suggests, Annie replies she will go, if allowed. Frustrated, Effi sends her to Johanna, tears upon her dress. She is angry that noble Innstetten turned small and cruel, shot someone she has forgotten, and now sends the child only because he cannot refuse a Minister's wife.

Chapters 29-33 Analysis

In the aftermath of the duel, Innstetten does what honor demands, and Effi's parents take his side. Johanna and Roswitha also debate honor and mercy. Roswitha chooses Effi and moves in with her. Effi seems to adjust to her new life until she happens to see Annie and become obsessed with meeting her. The reunion is tragic because her pedagogic, ex-husband has brainwashed their daughter into needing permission for anything. Effi now hates him for his need to be so perfectly proper. She looks forward to not living long.



Chapters 34-36

Chapters 34-36 Summary

Dr. Rummschüttel is concerned by Effi's nervous complaints. He writes Frau von Briest about her need to be with her parents, lest loneliness on top of a tendency to tuberculosis claim her life. Papa is tired of playing the Grand Inquisitor with his daughter; parental love means more than broken laws, commandments and society's views. Society looks the other way when it suits. He wants to wire her to come home. After six months at home, Effi recovers as much as possible. Innstetten and Annie are never mentioned. Effi busies herself in household tasks and aesthetic improvements, reads, paints and forgets what life she has thrown away. Effi most enjoys visiting Jahnke to talk about Scandinavia. Effi enjoys even more talking with Pastor Niemeyer, with whom she walks in the park, since unpleasant Frau Niemeyer takes a high moral tone. When she asks what he thinks of life, he says sometimes a great deal and sometimes very little. She asks her old friend's help getting to heaven. He believes she will go there.

Dr. Wiesike agrees that Effi should get fresh air, but in May, she catches a cold and spikes a fever. Wiesike wants to send her to Switzerland or Menton. Mamma agrees that it is time to end their reclusive life and take Effi south, but Effi is sure it would only do her harm. Effi never wants to leave Hohen-Cremmen again. Wiesike advises they respect her whim, for people suffering illness develop an acute sense of what they can endure. Effi recovers, puts on a bit of weight and loses her irritability. Some days she walks for miles. Effi wishes she had Rollo as a companion.

A few days later, Johanna brings Innstetten his newspapers and mail. He opens first the letter from the Minister announcing Innstetten's appointment as a Permanent Secretary. Since the Crampas affair, Innstetten has looked differently on promotions and distinctions. Time and circumstances always determine pleasure, and Innstetten believes he is in the exact place he belongs and only the little things in life truly matter. Any day he makes it through without annoyance is a happy day. As he opens the second letter, Wüllersdorf arrives to congratulate him, but Innstetten is unable to enjoy anything any more. He hands Wüllersdorf Roswitha's letter asking that Rollo be sent to keep Effi company. Having made a mess of his life and no longer valuing honors, he wants to be a teacher, but his soul is flawed and his hands stained. He is considering going to Africa, where people are unconstrained by culture and honor. Wüllersdorf argues he should resign himself to depression like everyone else and hold on, enjoying the little pleasures in life such as violets and little girls skipping rope, and visit Potsdam. He can join them for beer.

May and June bring fine weather and Rollo fills Effi with joy. During the late summer, however, she catches cold. Mamma sits with Effi, who is praying quietly. Mamma holds Effi's hand, remarks that she seems calm about dying and asks if she would not prefer to cling to life. Effi recalls a story about a man called away from a festive dinner



returning to learn that he has missed nothing. Effi does not mind being called away. She is dying reconciled with God and Innstetten, no longer considering him cold, calculating and cruel, but seeing that he is right. She wants him to know this, to be consoled, strengthened and perhaps reconciled. He is as good and noble as one can be without a capacity for love.

By late September, as the leaves turn colors, the sundial is removed and replaced with Effi's white marble gravestone. At her request, her old surname is used: Briest. Rollo lies beside it. Mamma wants no philosophizing about such things but an answer to whether they are responsible for Effi's tragedy: His risqué remarks, her allowing Effi to marry too early. Papa says it is too vast a subject.

Chapters 34-36 Analysis

Effi's declining health dominates the final chapters. Her parents relent to allow her to come home and seem to mind little when moral sticklers avoid them. Innstetten relents when Roswitha requests the one thing that Effi needs for the last summer of her life: Rollo. Innstetten has gotten over his obsession with work and honors but cannot find how to put his loveless life together. On her deathbed, Effi lets go of anger at him and accepts her fate, hoping that knowing this will help him, too. Herr von Briest gets in the final word: what could have done differently is too vast a subject to discuss.



Characters

Effi von Innstetten née Briest

The novel's protagonist, Effie Briest is a pampered, 17-year-old aristocratic girl, something of a tomboy in playing with the daughters of the town pastor and schoolteacher. In school, Effi's best subject is mythology. Everything changes in the course of an hour as her mother's former suitor, 38-year old Geert von Innstetten, comes to Hohen-Cremmen and asks for Effi's hand in marriage. Her parents worry about the age difference and her reckless desire for fun and adventure but consent. Effi is exhausted and somewhat bored by their pedantic honeymoon touring art galleries in Italy and quickly gets over the apparent charm of Innstetten's house in backwater Kessin, a coastal resort in Eastern Pomerania. She makes only one good friend, the chemist Alonzo Gieshübler. Led by Sidonie Grasenabb, the religious faction in town considers Effi a deist if not an atheist. Effi is not impressed by the local gentry.

Shortly before the delivery of her baby Annie, Effi hires Roswitha Gellenhagen as nurse, plucking her from a cemetery bench and trusting her (Effi) intuition that Roswitha is a good person. Motherhood agrees with Effi; during a visit to Hohen-Cremmen, she gets homesick for Kessin. Still, there is nothing to do there, so when Innstetten's old army comrade, Major Crampas, is assigned as district commandant, Effi is hopeful of finding a friend in his wife. The wife, however, is jealous and unsociable, but the Major becomes a regular visitor at the Innstetten home, and the trio (Innstetten, Effi and Crampas) rides horses together during the fall. When the election season comes, and Innstetten is too busy to ride, Effi rides (chaperoned) with Crampas and hears stories about her husband's mystical ideas and efforts to change her. She takes them to heart. After Christmas, she and Crampas are put together in a sled, and he makes his first pass. They begin a tryst that lasts until Innstetten is transferred to Berlin. Effi reproaches herself for becoming dishonest and sneaky.

In Berlin, Effi makes a greater effort to be a good wife, but opportunities to socialize are few. In an effort to have a second child, she takes a cure at Schwalbach and Ems, during which Crampas' aged love letters are discovered locked in her desk. Innstetten kills Crampas in a duel, divorces Effi and claims sole custody of their daughter. Effi accepts her fate, lives for several weeks in a rooming house and then moves into a modest flat on Königgrätzerstrasse, enduring frequent ailments that Rumschüttel treats. Having not forgotten how Effi rescued her in the graveyard, Roswitha moves in to help her get back on her feet. Effi finds some relief in painting but wishes she could find something to do with her life. Desperate to see Annie, Effi turns to Innstetten's boss' wife to intercede but becomes furious when Innstetten coaches their daughter to say "If I'm allowed" to every suggestion of activities. Convinced her ex-husband is cruel and vindictive and at fault for forcing her to do the things she does, Effi cuts off contact.

Worsening health leads the doctor to request Effi's parents take her back into their home, flaunting social conventions. Effi improves markedly for a time, helped by her



reunion with the dog, Rollo, but in the fall catches cold watching shooting stars and wondering about her fate after death. Effi does not mind being called away from life early. She is reconciled with God and Innstetten and wants him to know this—to be consoled, strengthened and perhaps reconciled. As requested, she is buried under her maiden name, Effi von Briest.

Geert von Innstetten

The aristocrat who at age 38, enters into a marriage of convenience with Effi Briest, 21 years his junior, Innstetten at age 20, pays frequent visits to the Belling estate in Schwantikow, wooing Effi's mother-to-be. Losing out to the better-established von Briest, Innstetten resigns his commission and studies law, but reenlists during the war of 1870, serves in France and attracts the attention of Bismarck and the Kaiser. As a result, Innstetten is named Landrat for the district of Kessin, a coastal resort in Eastern Pomerania. He goes to Hohen-Cremmen to marry Effi, and after a busy honeymoon visiting art galleries southward into Italy, installs her in his haunted house in the backwater town Kessin. He is frequently called to attend Bismarck in Varzin, which keeps him out until late, leaving young Effi alone and afraid. Innstetten treats her kindly, but with paternal condescension and no real love. While too dignified to be a true careerist, Innstetten seeks promotion (which Effi supports wholeheartedly) and does not cope well with her reckless desire for fun and adventure.

When Major Crampas, Innstetten's comrade in France, moves to town and becomes a frequent visitor, he tells Effi about her husband's mystical experiences and tendency to be a pedagogue. Innstetten, in turn, warns his young wife that Crampas is no gentleman. Frau Crampas' jealousy is warranted. One of Crampas' arms is shorter than the other following surgery to repair damage inflicted in a duel over a fellow officer's honor. When Innstetten gallantly insists on driving a friend's sled home after a holiday party, Effi and Crampas are thrown together in another sled, and Crampas plants the first kiss that leads to a full-blown affair. Innstetten may have had inklings that something is going on but is busy with his career. His promotion to the Ministry in Berlin ends the tryst, much to guilty Effi's relief. She precedes him to Berlin to find an apartment and makes excuses not to return to Kessin, leaving it to Innstetten to say goodbyes. In Berlin, the couple seems to get along better, as Effi makes a greater effort.

In an effort to have a second child, Effi goes to a gynecological spa and then takes the waters at Ems. In her absence, daughter Annie injures herself, and the maids, searching for a bandage, rifle Effi's writing table and find a packet of love letters from Crampas. Reading them, Innstetten is incensed, and, although 6-7 years have passed, he calls out and kills Crampas in a duel. He returns to Berlin, reports his actions, and serves six-weeks at Glatz for the killing. He divorces Effi and gains sole custody of Annie. Three years later, Innstetten gives in to the entreaties of his boss' wife to let Effi see her daughter, but instructs Annie to say "If I'm allowed" to every suggested activity. Effi is so disgusted that she cuts off contact with both. Years later, when Effi has moved back with her parents to regain her health, Innstetten honors a request from her maid, Roswitha, to send the elderly dog Rollo to keep Effi company. On her deathbed, Effi



realizes her ex-husband is not cold, calculating and cruel as she has believed but correct in what he has done. She wants him to know this, to be consoled, strengthened and perhaps reconciled. He is as good and noble as one can be without a capacity for love. For his part, Innstetten is disillusioned with civil service and considers missionary work in Africa but is likely simply to struggle on with an average life.

The von Briests

Effi's parents, the aristocratic von Briests have been married 18 years and live on an estate in Hohen-Cremmen, where he is a Ritterschaftsrat ("a land-owning aristocrat with a seat in the Prussian provisional parliament" - Notes). Herr von Briest is a well-preserved man in his 50s, 12 years older than both his wife, Luise née Belling and her former beau, Geert von Innstetten, who early in the novel becomes their son-in-law. Herr Briest is prosaic and sometimes frivolous, given to philosophizing but in the end declaring that virtually every subject is "vast." A native of Schwantikow, Frau von Briest is at 38, still beautiful, poised, refined and has arranged life to her tastes. She never "puts her foot in it" like Papa. They squabble constantly, but their married life is tolerable. When Baron Geert von Innstetten shows up looking for a bride, they arrange for her to marry Effi despite concerns about her age. Von Innstetten at age 20 pays frequent visits to Schwantikow to court Luise Belling, now known as Frau von Briest, but loses Luise's hand to the better-established von Briest,

When Innstetten learns about Effi's affair with Major Crampas, he writes the Briests to announce the divorce and his taking custody of his daughter. The Briests send money to support their daughter modestly in Berlin but refuse to allow her to come home. They must maintain society's moral standards or share being outcasts. As Effi's health continues to decline, Dr. Schweigger, who cares for Luise as a girl and is treating her eyes, intercedes for Effi's readmission to the parental home. Luise cannot resist, and her husband is not far behind. They risk losing their friends in welcoming Effi home. As her health improves, Mamma hopes they can soon travel around the south of Europe, but Effi catches a cold and rapidly declines. According to her wishes, they bury Effi under her maiden name in front of the mansion.

Dagobert Briest

Effi's swaggering, witty young cousin, a lieutenant in the Alexander Regiment. Dagobert shows Effi and Mamma around Berlin to "assemble her trousseau" and later helps find an apartment for Effi and Innstetten. Dagobert has to fight a strong physical attraction to Effi, which her husband notices and asks if she shares.

The Chinaman

A character seen only in a small picture upstairs in Geert von Innstetten's home, the Chinaman wears a blue jacket and flat hat with a shiny button on top. The maids put the picture in the back of a chair. Effi learns that the Chinaman accompanied Captain



Thomsen, the previous owner of the house, as his servant and later as his friend. The Chinaman falls in love with his niece/granddaughter and dies of grief when she marries another. Thomsen buries the Chinaman outside the Christian cemetery, although the Lutheran minister declares he is a good man and worthy of burial in holy ground. Effi is afraid of his grave and his ghost moving through the house.

Christel

Innstetten's cook in Kassin. Christel is a good soul, but does not talk much. She is too old to move with the Innstettens to Berlin.

Major Crampas

Sent at age 44, to Kessin as a replacement for the monstrous district commandant, Crampas was Innstetten's acquaintance in Paris during the war of 1870. He is half-Polish, a gambler and a ladies' man, who has one arm visibly shorter than the other, following surgery for a bullet wound suffered in a duel over a comrade's wife. Frau Crampas is a commoner, melancholy and jealous of her playboy husband, so Effi's hopes of female companionship are dashed. Away from his wife, Crampas can be animated and suave. He tells Effi about the war and her husband's stiffness, which prevents him from being one of the boys. He plants in Effi's mind that her husband is a pedagogue at heart and out to remake her. Crampas convinces the Innstettens to ride horses together during the fall and continues to ride with just Effi (chaperoned) during the busy election season. They all attend a holiday celebration on Boxer's Day at the Rings, and on the ride home Effi and Crampas are thrown together in a sled. Crampas kisses Effi passionately, beginning a tryst that lasts almost until Innstetten's transfer to Berlin. Innstetten appears to have suspicions but looks the other way, only cautioning Effi that Crampas is no gentleman. Effi keeps Crampas' love letters and after 6-7 years, they fall into Innstetten's hands. He feels obliged to challenge Crampas to a duel. The Major accepts his fate and dies in the dunes of Kassin. Innstetten divorces Effi and keeps their daughter, leaving Effi embittered over the need to kill someone she does not love and has left behind.

Friedrich

Innstetten's butler in Kessin, Friedrich has served him since Innstetten's university days. Dim and cautious, Friedrich is too old to move with Innstettens to Berlin.

Roswitha Gellenhagen

A native of Eichsfeld, Roswitha finds herself in Kessin serving the widow Rode, who dies soon after their arrival. Roswitha seems the only sincere mourner at the tiny funeral. Effi finds her sitting beside the fresh grave, warns her about sunstroke and hears that that would be the best thing to happen to Roswitha. Although it is wrong to



speak ill of the dead, Roswitha proclaims her ex-mistress as quarrelsome and penny-pinching as the relatives who hardly give her enough money to return to Berlin. She intends to sit in the cemetery until she dies. Roswitha cheers up when Rollo lays his head on her knee. Effi has a feeling about Roswitha and hires her to be nurse to the baby she is expecting. Just before their move to Berlin, Effi catches Roswitha and the married coachman Kruse "chatting familiarly," and tells her that nothing can come of it. Women like Frau Kruse live the longest and her scary black hen sees everything. Roswitha shares the story of getting pregnant young, being threatened by her blacksmith father and thrown out of the house, giving birth in a stranger's barn and having the baby taken away from her. Someone in Erfurt rescues her by hiring her as a wet nurse. In Berlin, Roswitha takes over the kitchen and laughs at Effi's efforts to handle Annie. After the duel, divorce and Innstetten's brief incarceration, Roswitha moves in with Effi. She accompanies her to Hohen-Cremmen and writes Innstetten to ask that Rollo be sent to provide non-judgmental companionship to Effi in her last days.

Alonzo Gieshübler

The chemist in Kessin, Gieshübler sends flowers from his hothouse to welcome Effi to town when she marries Geert von Innstetten, who describes him to Effi as a character, an aesthete and all-heart. Innstetten is correct in predicting Gieshübler and Effi will become good friends. Gieshübler is physically disfigured, wears an expensive coat and high hat and passé white jabots, has a doctorate but does not use the title lest medical practitioners take offense. Gieshübler is considered religiously suspicious by orthodox Lutherans and when self-conscious becomes tongue-tied and says odd things. His mother is an Andalusian beauty and his family is four generations in the Baltic region. By the end of their first meeting, Gieshübler is ready, like El Cid, to declare his love and willingness to fight and die for Effi. Gieshübler laments his "niece" Marietta Trippelli's lack of social refinement, a virtue he cultivates. The day before she leaves Kessin forever, Gieshübler is the only person Effi visits personally. She thanks him, declares he is the best person in Kessin and promises never to forget him. She has not always done what is right here, but he has never failed to raise her spirits. They must keep in touch. Dazed, Gieshübler walks her out, not having picked up on several odd things Effi says.

The Grasenabbs

Aristocrats living in Kroschentin, the Grasenabbs, led by the 43-year-old, old maid, Sidonie, declare Effi at least a deist if not an atheist. The old Frau, a South German, is more tolerant but because of problems with her own daughter is silenced by Sidonie. When Pastor Lindequist toasts mother and daughter at the reception following Annie's christening, Sidonie von Grasenabb grumbles about his lukewarm sermons. At a Christmas celebration at the Rings' home, Sidonie grumbles about modern childrearing and while riding partway home with Effi warns against the cult of nature. Hypocritical materialists such as the Rings make it hard for people who seek to save their souls. Effie is silent after Sidonie declares freshly that some people are easy to read.



The Jahnkes

The Hohen-Cremmen assistant schoolmaster, Jahnke is interested in the Hanseatic League, Scandinavia and the writer Fritz Reuter. In the latter's honor, he names his plump, freckled, golden-red-haired and good-natured twin daughters Bertha and Hertha. They take the roles of Mining and Lining from Fritz Reuter's Ut mine Stromtid for Effi's Wedding Eve. While Effi is in Berlin, the twins are married in a double ceremony and move away. Effi asks to be godmother to their babies, due at Christmastime. After her return to Hohen-Cremmen, divorced and in failing health, Effi enjoys talking with Herr Jahnke about his favorite subjects but prefers the more intellectual talk of Pastor Niemeyer.

Johanna

Geert von Innstetten's plump, pretty, blond maid who hails from Pasewalk, Johanna is "no longer entirely youthful" when Effi becomes mistress of the household. Johanna sits with her when the Chinaman's ghost frightens her and does her best not to reveal the secrets. Johanna enjoys reading the fashion magazines that Gieshübler sends to Effi and grumbles about not being able to afford nice things. She alone moves with the Innstettens to Berlin, where she is appreciated for selfless good humor, deft service and self-assured reserve toward men. She takes over as housemaid and Effi's lady's maid, while Roswitha takes over the kitchen. Decorum and propriety give Johanna a sense of superiority over Roswitha. They cooperate in educating Annie, with Roswitha handling stories and fairy tales and Johanna manners. After the duel, Johanna seems quite taken with herself, and Innstetten remarks about her being statuesque, proud and all-conquering, with a "firmly corseted bosom." She cares for Annie alone when Roswitha returns to Effi.

The Kruses

Geert von Innstetten's coachman, Kruse, is punctual and deferential. Frau Kruse spends all of her time in an overheated room holding a black hen. They tell Effi about the Chinaman's ghost haunting the house of Capt. Thomsen, pining for his niece/granddaughter who marries another. When the Innstettens move to Berlin, they do not even consider taking the Kruses.

Pastor Lindequist

The Lutheran pastor in Kessin, successor to the liberal Pastor Trippel. Lindequist quips about Marietta Trippeli's views on religion. Bigoted Sidonie von Grasenabb grumbles about his lukewarm sermons, which will get him cast into hell.



The Niemeyers

The Niemeyer family consists of Hohen-Cremmen's 57-year old rather liberal Pastor, his uneducated but outspoken wife, a former housekeeper and their flaxen-haired, bulgy-eyed daughter, Hulda. Effi plays with Hulda on a par with the wilder Jahnke twins but finds her stupid. On the day of her engagement, Effi is surprised to find Hulda composed, while her mother rails about the daughter taking what the mother cannot have and aristocrats sticking together. The pastor is often embarrassed by his wife. Hulda plays in a scene from *Das Käthchen von Heilbronn* for Effi's Wedding Eve, as rewritten by her father and is the delight of the young officers. After Effi returns to Hohen-Cremmen, divorced and with her health broken, Effi enjoys walks with the Pastor, who baptized, confirmed, and married her and who will bury her soon. He assures her she will go to heaven. Frau von Briest wonders after Effi's death if the lax pastor is not one reason for her tragedy.

Frau von Padden

The widow of a Ritterschaftsrat, Frau von Padden is a true eccentric, more strictly religious than Sidonie Grasenabb but having a sense of humor. On New Year's Eve, she perceives that there is hostility in Effi's marriage - for women must always struggle with their natural instincts - and recommends reading Luther's Table Talk. Frau von Padden remarks on Crampas' beauty and pride, and, when Effi says he is 44, notes that she knows him quite well.

The Rings

The Head Forester at Uvagla, Ring is a self-assured man in his 50s, who hosts a Boxer's Day celebration for the local gentry, who arrive in a convoy. Ring and his timid wife have two pretty daughters. The elder, Cora, 14, flirts with Geert von Innstetten and Major Crampas, both of who play along, embarrassing and annoying Effi. Effi mentions this to her table mate, Sidonie, who opines that such lack of discipline is the sign of the times. During an after-dinner tour of the game enclosure, Cora vainly poses in a fairy tale as a deer. An accident forces Innstetten to drive Gieshübler's sled home, putting Effie and Crampas alone together, initiating their affair.

Rollo

Geert von Innstetten's wonderful, loving Newfoundland dog, Rollo takes instantly to Effi when she arrives as a bride in Kessin. He protects her against the house ghost and accompanies her on walks and horseback rides. Rollo misses Effi after the divorce in Berlin but is restored to her in Hohen-Cremmen, when Roswitha writes to Innstetten of Effi's need for a non-judgmental companion. Effi disagrees that Rollo is closer to her heart than husband or child but admits she could not have survived without him. He is a good friend, albeit just a dog. Animals, says Papa, are a vast subject: they are known to



rescue their masters who slip through thin ice or sit beside their bodies until someone comes by. When Effi dies, Rollo lies slowly dying of grief at her grave.

Dr. Rummschüttel

Elevated to the rank of Geheimrat but still youthful at age 70, Rummschüttel is the physician who treated Effi's Mamma 20 years earlier at Hecker's Boarding School. When called to check on Effi's supposed rheumatism when she simply does not want to return to Kessin from Berlin, Rummschüttel notes the resemblance between mother and daughter and plays along with Effi. He returns the next day and then skips two, seeing that his visits embarrass Effi. She is better by the fourth visit and wants him to become their family doctor. He has a reputation for being a "ladies' doctor," not in the "front rank," but she likes that.

Capt. Thomsen

Unseen in the novel, Thomsen is a veteran of the lucrative "China run," who settles in Kessin at the dapper age of 60, sells his old ship and buys what becomes Geert von Innstetten's house. The crocodile, shark and ship are Thomsen's. He is accompanied by 20-year-old Nina, either his granddaughter or his niece and by an unnamed Chinaman, who at first serves as his servant but later becomes more of a friend. Nina marries another sea captain and suddenly disappears. The Chinaman dies two weeks later. Thomsen arranges a plot and an inscribed stone outside the Christian cemetery. Frau Kruse confirms to Effi that the Chinaman is in love with Nina.

Marietta Trippelli

A Paris-trained singer, Marietta is the daughter of Kessin's late Pastor Trippel, whose old friend, Alonzo Gieshübler, she considers like an uncle. She stops in Kessin overnight en route to a series of recitals in St. Petersburg, Russia, where she will be the guest of Prince Kochukov. At Gieshübler's she sings songs of his choice. She is in her 30s, masculine looking and given to joking, warning Effi against sitting on the ancient couch, which swallows people. Gieshübler laments Marietta's lack of social refinement, a virtue he cultivates. She tells Effi that she is able to catnap anywhere to refresh herself, does not constrict her chest and makes the same money in Russia and America but prefers Russia. She believes in nothing personally, but insists on public orthodoxy and is a bit of a Torquemada.

Wüllersdorf

Geert von Innstetten's colleague in the Ministry, Wüllersdorf serves as his second in the deadly duel with Major Crampas, challenging Innstetten first to decide whether the passing of 6-7 years does not eliminate the need. Wüllersdorf promises to be "as silent as the grave," but Innstetten insists that Wüllersdorf will know and show signs of



judgment any time a moral question arises. Wüllersdorf bows to the age-old "cult of honour" - a form of idolatry, and takes the evening train to Kessin. He remains to deal with the authorities and notify the widow Crampas. On the day that Roswitha writes to ask for Rollo, Wüllersdorf comes to congratulate Innstetten on his promotion and advises him to be like everyone else—accepting his fate, doing what he must, joining in tippling and enduring people's perennial stories.

Sophie von Zwicker

Effi's nosey, but charming, chaperon at Schwalbach and Ems, the Geheimättrin Zwicker has the kind of charm that fascinates men and says subtle things that make Effi suspect she also has had love affairs in her past. She suspects Effi is having an affair even before it is confirmed in the newspapers after Innstetten kills Crampas, and Frau Zwicker is pleased not to have misread the young woman.



Objects/Places

Berlin

The capital of the unified German Empire, Berlin is a bustling city when young Effi Briest and her mother visit to "assemble her trousseau." They stay in the expensive Hôtel du Nord and are taken to fashionable restaurants and cafés at appropriate hours by their chaperon, Cousin Dagobert Briest. They shop in Spinn, Mencke and Goschenhofer, visit the Zoological Garden and the National Gallery, so the future bride can view The Isle of the Blessed.

After years in Kessin, Innstetten is posted to Berlin, and Effi comes ahead to find an apartment. Innstetten specifies that he wants to live between the Tiergarten and the Zoological Garden, so he can hear finches and parrots. Effi finds a suitable new building on Keithstrasse, off Unter den Linden, the main east-west boulevard through Berlin. After Innstetten learns of Effi's adultery in Kessin and divorces her, she settles in a small but stylish flat on Königgrätzerstrasse, enduring frequent ailments. It overlooks Christuskirche, which Effi visits but cannot endure the preacher's dwelling on the Old Testament. When she signs up for painting lessons, life looks up. Nevertheless, her health remains weak and her doctor convinces her parents to allow the prodigal daughter back home to Hohen-Cremmen.

Hohen-Cremmen

The county seat of the von Briest family since the 17th century, Hohen-Cremmen provides the opening and closing scenes of the novel. The ancestral home faces the village street, forming a U with a new wing and the churchyard wall. An ornamental garden opens to a pond. Near the jetty stands a swing, concealed by plane trees. Effi Briest loves to swing dangerously high on the uneven swing. A terrace fronts the house, but on sunny days, mother and daughter prefer the garden. Effi is playing tag with her friends when Geert von Innstetten visits and proposes marriage. The gala Wedding Eve and wedding proper are celebrated in Hohen-Cremmen, after which the newlyweds head to Italy and then settle in Kessin in Eastern Pomerania.

When Effi is expecting a baby, she longs to bring it to Hohen-Cremmen, which contrasts strongly with the desolate backwater village where she lives. She moves next with her civil servant husband to a posting in Berlin. After a vacation that reaches as far as Copenhagen, Effi spends a few more days in Hohen-Cremmen after Innstetten's leave ends, intending to be back in Berlin by their anniversary. Annie, who spends the vacation time with her grandparents, thrives in the country air and learns to walk there. The parents wonder why Effi seems happier in Hohen-Cremmen than with her husband, who she seems to respect rather than love. After Innstetten learns of Effi's adultery in Kessin and divorces her, social pressures prevent her parents from allowing her home until her health deteriorates to the point that her doctor intercedes. Back in the good air



of Hohen-Cremmen, Effi improves until the autumn, when she catches cold while watching shooting stars. At her request, she is buried in the garden under a stone bearing her maiden name, Effi von Briest.

Kessin

A coastal resort in Eastern Pomerania, Kessin is a backwater town that young Effi Briest pictures as being halfway to Siberia. The handsome locals are Slavic Kashubians, while the town folk are immigrants from around the world. Effi is initially delighted by her exotic new world. Ships flying the flags of many nations tie up at the quay at Bulwark and are helped in trading by national consuls, shrewd, small tradesmen. In the summer, the beaches, segregated by sex, are crowded with tourists. The Strand Hotel does a brisk business and houses are rented for the season. There is a small Lutheran cemetery in the dunes and a Catholic Church has been recently built. Gieshübler runs a pharmacy and the presence of other stores is implied.

The Landrat's plain, old-fashioned, half-timbered residence stands at the far end of town. The front faces the road to the beaches and the gable end overlooks the "Plantation," a copse stretching between town and the dunes. The Landrat's office is across the street. The household consists of Friedrich, who has been with Innstetten since university; Johanna, a plump, pretty, blond maid, Christel, the cook, and Kruse, the coachman. His reclusive wife spends her time in an overheated room with a black hen on her lap. Effi learns over time that the previous owner, Captain Thomsen, had a niece/granddaughter marry and disappear; shortly afterwards; the Thomsen's Chinese servant and friend dies shortly after that. Everyone in the household believes that the Chinaman's ghost haunts the vacant second floor. A model crocodile, shark and ship hang in the vestibule of the house, remnants of Thomsen's day. Effi and Major Crampas meet in the woods during their tryst, and years later, Crampas dies on the beach in a duel with Innstetten.

Klein-Tantow

The railway station ten miles from Kessin, Klein-Tantow is reached during the summer months by the old paddle steamer, Phoenix. By land, the road runs diagonally to the Prince Bismarck inn, where it forks to Kessin and Varzin.

Prince Bismarck Inn

An eating establishment at the fork between Kessin and Varzin, the Prince Bismarck is owned by Golchowski, a half-Polish starost, who runs elections, lends money and knows every piece of gossip.



Rügen / Sassnitz

Scenic vacation locales on the Baltic, Rügen and Sassnitz, which are the Innstettens' choice when he cannot get away from work in time for the Oberaumergau passion play. Effi is enchanted, recalling their honeymoon in Capri and Sorrento, but she wants to find something less formal than the Fahrenheit Hotel. Learning that rooms are impossible to find in Sassnitz, she panics hearing she should look in Crampas or further north - that being the name of her abandoned lover. They ride to Lake Hertha, where a guide explains three ancient sacrificial stones, which also upset Effi. She asks to visit Copenhagen, where she enjoys the museum and the acquaintance of fellow tourists, the von Penzes, who invite them to Aggerhuus Castle.

Schwallbach / Bad Ems

During the Innstettens' seventh year in Berlin, Frau von Briest asks Dr. Rummschüttel's opinion why Effi cannot become pregnant again, and he prescribes three weeks in the spa at Schwallbach followed by three more at Ems to benefit an old chest infection. Ems is refreshing after an almost all-female Schwallbach, and the amusing, well-read Frau Zwicker, Effi's chaperone, seems inclined to talk about the "worse things" she has done in life. Effi is at Ems when daughter Annie suffers a cut and the maids rifle Effi's desk hunting for a bandage. This brings to light old love letters from Major Crampas, resulting in the latter's death and Effi's divorce and exclusion from society.

Schwantikow

A town near Hohen-Cremmen, Schwantikow is home to the aristocratic Bellings, Effi Briest's maternal grandparents.

Uvagla

The site of the head forester's station in Pomerania, Uvagla is a two-hour sled ride from Kessin. Ring gives a party for the gentry on Boxer Day (the day after Christmas).

Varzin

Prince Otto von Bismarck's estate in Pomerania, Varzin is three hours from Kessin. On the strength of his service in the War of 1870, and his own good manners and astuteness, Innstetten is often invited to Varzin, without his wife.

Visby

A Swedish resort town across the Baltic from Kessin, Visby is the focus of Jahnke's teaching about the ancient days in Scandinavia. Effi longs to see the northern lands.



Themes

Duty

Duty is all that matters to Baron Geert von Innstetten, who at age 20, loses out to the better established von Briest for the hand of Luise née Belling. He leaves the army, studies law, reenlists for the war of 1870, attracts the attention of Bismarck and the Kaiser and is named Landrat for Kessin District, Eastern Pomerania. When seventeen-year-old Effi Briest is told Innstetten wants her hand, she sees his character, position, morality and potential to go far. She declares that any good-looking aristocrat will suffice. Her Papa certainly lacks such ambition, having repeatedly turned down the Landrat post. He often digs at officialdom.

One of Innstetten's most consistent traits is punctuality about returning when leaves end. He leaves his frightened young wife overnight in a house he knows is haunted, reminds her that as a civil servant he cannot beg off invitations because she is lonely or afraid. Innstetten declares the ghost an hallucination and germs more dangerous than "spectral activity" - if such a thing even exists. When his former comrade in arms, Major Crampas, suggests an illegal seal hunt and laughs at boring regulations - and Effi applauds him - Innstetten lectures him on abandoning military discipline and warns of one day finding the heavens cave in on him. When Effi suggests that they enjoy the remaining warm days, Innstetten agrees but must investigate an arson fire. This trip sets up a tryst between Effi and the Major. Innstetten learns about it only 6-7 years later, from letters that Effi has failed to burn. Warned by his second, Wüllersdorf, that shooting the ex-lover will destroy "life's happiness" doubly, Innstetten without hatred or thirst for revenge, admits that both God and man can forgive anything. He declares he loves Effi's "delightful nature" and "vivacious charm," and wants to forgive her but has decided that if he fails to keep society's code, he will despise himself and might as well shoot himself. Wüllersdorf bows to the inevitable and takes the evening train to Kessin.

Crampas accepts the challenge with "melancholy resignation" and dies on the beach. While the seconds deal with the authorities, Innstetten returns to Berlin, reports the incident to his gracious chief and arranges for the divorce. He advises her parents, who stand up for their beliefs and condemn Effi's deeds. Only when Papa grows tired of playing the Grand Inquisitor with his ailing daughter does he decide that parental love is more important than broken laws and commandments and that society looks the other way whenever it suits. Those who drop them are free to do so. Meanwhile, having made a mess of his life, Innstetten no longer values honors and wants to be a teacher, but his soul is flawed and his hands stained. Wüllersdorf argues that he must resign himself to depression like everyone else and hold on, enjoying the little pleasures in life. He should visit Potsdam to let Kaiser Friedrich III's 99-day reign snap him out.



Religion

Religion is a constant in Effi Briest, but not portrayed with any sympathy. Pastor Niemeyer who lives in Hohen-Cremmens, baptized, confirmed, married and ultimately buries Effi, is said to speak as well as a court chaplain, but Frau von Briest after Effi's death wonders if his laxity does not contribute to Effi's tragedy. When forced to socialize with religious bigots after her marriage, Effi recalls Niemeyer's restraint and modesty. Kessin is filled with Lutheran bigots, particularly the old maid Sidonie von Grasenabb. Sidonie grumbles about Pastor Lindequist's lukewarm sermons that will get him cast into hell, claims he is not doing his duty keeping young souls from trouble and sees his claim that the spirit of the times is too strong as a "declaration of bankruptcy." Lindequist's predecessor, Pastor Trippel, dies before parishioners can fire him for being willing to bury a good, but non-Christian, Chinaman in the churchyard. Effi, considering the fact that people consider her "infected with rationalism" and a deist if not an atheist, surprisingly agrees with excluding the Chinaman. Effi pictures God is a "good fellow," who will not be too hard on her. The late pastor's daughter, Marietta Trippeli, believes nothing personally but outwardly insists on orthodoxy. Effi's husband, Baron Geert von Innstetten, says he avoids dogma and cares only about moral issues. From Major Crampas, who knows Innstetten in Paris, Effi learns that her husband has "mystical leanings" - not prayer meetings or prophesizing, but things such as ghosts.

Two lay, religious characters are attractive. The widow von Padden has a sense of humor—suspecting hostility in Effi's marriage, she recommends reading Luther's Table Talk. Also attractive is Roswitha, who has found that people do not want to hire "papish" maids like her because those maids are always in church. Roswitha, however, is lapsed. She used to go to confession but like her friends, never mentions anything important. Since her father attacked her with his red-hot iron, she fears only him, not God, who she figures will help a "poor mite" like her. Although thoroughly Protestant, Effi believes Catholicism better protects against things such as ghosts.

After Effi breaks off her affair with Crampas, she lives with guilt that is surprisingly light; primarily she fears being found out. Earlier, she prides herself on honesty, but now she lies constantly. She recalls Niemeyer telling her as a child that if one has right feelings, bad things cannot happen, while without them, one is caught in the Devil's power. Effi weeps bitterly, asking God if this is the case. In Berlin, Effi visits Christuskirche but cannot endure the preacher's unedifying dwelling on the Old Testament. Effi considers joining a society that trains girls to be a teacher or nurse but knows they cannot accept an adulterer. In her final months, Effi enjoys talking with Pastor Niemeyer. When she asks what he thinks of life, he says sometimes a great deal and sometimes very little. Effi jumps on her old swing with youthful agility, swings high, and jumps off. He believes she will go to heaven. Effi recalls Innstetten reading a story about a man called away from a festive dinner returning to learn that he has missed nothing. Effi does not mind being called away. She is dying reconciled with God and Innstetten, no longer considering him cold, calculating and cruel, but seeing that he is right. She wants him to know this and to be consoled, strengthened and perhaps reconciled. He is as good and noble as one can be without a capacity for love.



Adultery

The pivotal moment in *Effi Briest* comes when the protagonist enjoys a two-week tryst with Major Crampas while her husband, Baron Geert von Innstetten, is in Berlin on business. Innstetten returns with the news of a promotion, and Effi is relieved to escape the affair. Throughout the novel, incidents of adultery are seen as being dealt with by dismissal from one's job. Frau Zwicker, Effi's chaperone at the time her affair is discovered, hints that all of Berlin is, under the guise of "country outings," experiencing a moral revolution. When she comes to, Effi realizes that she is an outcast. Her lover is dead; her parents' home is closed; the divorce will come in weeks, and Annie will go to the father. Mamma advises her to stay in Berlin, where scandals are common; they must stand up for their beliefs and condemn Effi's deeds.

The set-up for Effi's crisis comes when she marries an older man expecting to be spoiled. After the betrothal, Effi admits to loving Cousin Dagobert but cannot consider marrying a boy instead of a man who she can show off and who is going somewhere. She worries that Innstetten is too good for her, for she has no principles. Effi copes badly with her boring new life and receives from Innstetten at best some "tired if well-intentioned caresses." Into town comes an old comrade, Major Crampas, whose wife is a melancholy woman, rightly suspicious of a husband whose one arm is shortened by corrective surgery after a duel over a comrade's wife. Innstetten warns Effi of Crampas' reputation as a womanizer and gambler, and she senses from the start that Crampas is dangerous, malicious and unreliable, but also attractive. Innstetten is too busy to join them for a late-autumn picnic, at which Crampas makes suggestive comments, knowing she will not tell her husband. After a holiday party, Effi and Crampas are thrown together for the ride home. When Crampas begins covering her with kisses, Effi nearly faints. In the morning, Innstetten warns Effi to be on her guard; she is charming but firmness is not her specialty. When a note comes from her friend Gieshübler, Effi asks if Innstetten is also jealous of him; if not, it is because he takes Crampas too seriously and Gieshübler not seriously enough. Innstetten wags his finger at her in jest.

Innstetten is called away to Berlin, and Effi and Crampas begin meeting at an isolated house to enjoy their rights, for life is not worth living if conventions are always observed. Crampas cannot leave his wife as Effi wants. They must enjoy their fate frivolously. What if they had never met? In another, Crampas contemplates life in the backwater without Effi but admits their parting is also their salvation. These sentiments come out only years later, in love letters that Effi has failed to consign to the fire. Innstetten notifies Effi's parents, who undertake to support her but decline to take her in, for fear of social pressure. During the affair, Effi finds her maid Roswitha speaking intimately with the unhappily married Kruse and lectures her on the dangers of being involved with a married man. Roswitha reveals how she is impregnated as a young woman, disowned and has the baby taken away from her. Effi is upset when Roswitha carelessly says she hopes this never happens with her.



Style

Point of View

In his most famous novel, *Effi Briest*, author Theodor Fontane adopts a third-person past tense narrative broken at intervals by dialog and letters among the characters, which are reproduced in the present tense. Events as major as Effi and Innstetten's marriage and the birth of their daughter, Annie, are introduced in the briefest of terms as a *fait accompli* and then explained through narrative, conversation or correspondence. Occasionally an event is described in real time and then reiterated in more detail. The most vivid example is Effi's first encounter with the ghost in the Kessin house; she feels the presence pass by, hears noises and is protected by Rollo. She then summons Johanna and tells her about it. Johanna tells others including Innstetten, who gets Effi to repeat the story. Closely guarded background about Captain Thomsen and the dead Chinaman slowly come to light and are woven into the story.

Momma and Papa von Briest frequently argue together, with Momma taking offense at some philosophizing remark, and Papa explaining he does not mean it that way and declaring the topic too vast. That this has been the pattern of most of their married life becomes clear. Geert von Innstetten proves himself pedantic and mildly condescending towards his young wife almost from the start, although at first he fights the tendency to be cold. Her letters home from their honeymoon, expressing her exhaustion at making the rounds of art galleries and her admiration for her husband's knowledge, show Effi determined to be what he needs her to be. He does not comprehend the effect his absence has on her in the haunted house. Conversations with Major Crampas bring out elements of Innstetten's personality that Effi has not seen and stick in her head, causing problems. She believes she is being remade by her pedagogue husband. Despite Innstetten's warnings about his old army comrade being no gentleman, Effi finds herself seduced into an exciting love affair that ends only with their move to Berlin. The dynamics of the doomed relationship come out only when yellowed love letters are accidentally discovered: Effi had wanted Crampas to leave his shrew of a wife, but he had refused on the grounds of honor. He wants them to take whatever joy they can while they can and is devastated at the thought of being left behind. Still, he sees the transfer as their only means of salvation. The resignation that comes from the letters is the same reported by Innstetten's second on the day he issues the challenge to a duel. Some of the most effective dialog in the book takes place between Innstetten and the second, before and after the duel, and late in the novel when Innstetten has lost professional ambition and wonders what to do with his life.

Setting

Effi Briest is set in the 1880s, in the newly-united German Empire. The von Briest hereditary estate in Hohen-Cremmens is fictional and Geert von Innstetten's Landrat post in Kessin is fictionalized. Berlin and various honeymoon and vacation spots are



real and aristocratic life in them is shown in rich detail. The endnotes are useful in getting a feel for what Theodor Fontane is suggesting through the place names he drops into the text, particularly during Effi's first visit to Berlin as a gawking bride-to-be, picking out her trousseau.

When Effi first hears about Kessin in Eastern Pomerania - modern day Poland - she imagines it somewhere near St. Petersburg, Russia. In fact, it is only 70 miles north of Hohen-Cremmens. The ordinary people, however, are Slavic, and the German aristocrats are uninteresting. Initially, the "oriental" air, with ships, flags and consuls and stories of pirates and Chinamen, charm young Effi, but the delight and charm quickly fade. In the summer, Kessin is a busy tourist resort, but in the winter, it is a dead backwater filled with uninteresting old people - no place for a free-spirited young girl.

Kessin is near Prince Otto von Bismarck's estate at Varzin, which makes it convenient for Innstetten to be called away overnight or for extended periods, allowing the horrors of the haunted house to sink into Effi. Never seen in the novel, Bismarck and the old Kaiser and their political opponents are forces changing German society and occasioning grumbling among the secondary characters. The coming of Major Crampas as district commandant brings hope for improved social life, but he is a womanizer whose wife is jealous of every woman she meets. Crampas helps fill in Innstetten's background in the army during the war of 1870, where they serve near Paris. Crampas and Effi have a brief affair in Kessin before Innstetten is transferred to Berlin. Social life there is also frustrating. Effi needs to take the waters at two spas, briefly described, and while away, old love letters from Crampas surface. Innstetten returns to Kessin for a deadly duel on the beach. Effi is cut off and takes a modest flat in Berlin before eventually, in failing health, being allowed back into her parental home to die. Honor and duty in a modernizing society are thus emphasized as major concerns in the era depicted in this novel.

Language and Meaning

Effi Briest is rendered into British English from German by Hugh Rorrison and Helen Chambers. The translators note that they have labored to keep the novel from seeming old-fashioned, for to Fontane's contemporaries in the 1890s, it is anything but old-fashioned. They have labored to preserve the author's "verbal and symbolic echoes and patterns," consistent with a flowing English style. Spellings and punctuation are British. Extensive use is made of dialog to move the story forward. Only in the case of the maid Roswitha is an attempt made at suggesting an accent (by eliding initial H's). Otherwise, the lower classes address their masters politely, and the masters and ladies are in return diffident. Place names are left in German as are a few commonly-known German words and phrases. Historically or culturally important references are concisely described in ten pages of notes following the text, keyed to the pages involved. Some reveal the minute detail into which Fontane goes in bringing realism to the story. Chambers observes that compiling them gives her fresh insights into the subtle structure of the book.



Dealing with members of the Prussian aristocracy in the 1880s, the book takes an upper-class view of a changing society. Particularly prevalent are references to the Lutheran Church and the degree to which its clergy are orthodox or grown lax with modernity. Innstetten and Crampas are both veterans of the War of 1870, and serve outside of Paris in the town where Joan of Arc is martyred. It is a "good" war that over a decade later is still yielding nostalgia. The regions in which the novel is set have changed sovereign hands many times and references to victories, defeats, parades and monuments are frequent and their significance admirably brought out in notes.

Innstetten is said to be a born pedagogue, and he does, indeed, make frequent references to plays, books, paintings and other intellectual matters, many times waiting for his simple, young wife Effi to fail to get the point so he can explain; in other instances, the Chambers obliges in notes. The morality and legality of the Innstetten-Crampas dual is given a rather large amount of space, as is the related topic of the value of honors and distinctions. Bismarck's role in remaking German attitudes is left as a matter of background chatter

Structure

Effi Briest consists of 36 numbered, but untitled, chapters without any larger structure. The novel is preceded by a useful introduction by co-translator Helen Chambers. It outlines Theodor Fontane's career, describes the writing process for this novel, compares it with *Madame Bovary* and *Anna Karenina* and discusses a few themes. There is also a brief translator's note. Following the novel are several pages of notes keyed to page numbers in the text. They provide factual information on cultural and historical details in the text, including Fontane's misuse and conflating of references. There is no indication in the body of the novel when a note has been provided, so the reader is advised either to familiarize him- or herself with the notes before reading the book and referring back whenever a name or title is unfamiliar.

It launches immediately into 17-year-old Effi sewing an altar cloth with her mother, who leaves when friends arrive to play. Called indoors, Effi learns that she is to marry Mamma's former beau, the Baron Geert von Innstetten. She accepts her fate, but her friends yell for her to come back. The wearying honeymoon to Italy is shown briefly as the young girl's eyes are opened to a larger world. The couple settles in Kessin, a Baltic seaport in Eastern Pomerania, where the country folk are Slavic, and an uninteresting group of gentry provide little company for an energetic young girl. Effi is frightened of the ghost who haunts the upstairs. Pregnant, she on a hunch hires a nanny, who otherwise has resigned herself to dying of sunstroke in the cemetery, having buried her previous employer and being left destitute. The baby is born and life goes on.

After a Christmas party, Effi begins an affair with the unhappily married Major Crampas, who has been a frequent companion of both Innstettens through the autumn months. Effi's guilt fills this section of the novel. Innstetten's transfer to a ministerial position in Berlin provides an escape, and Effi is determined to be a good wife and mother. The social scene is little more scintillating and Effi's health declines. The novel skips forward



seven years, removes Effi to a spa and has a packet of Crampas' old love letters discovered. Innstetten does not hate the man nor need revenge, but honor demands that he act. He kills Crampas, divorces Effi and takes charge of his daughter. Effi in declining health and renounced by all, is given psychological support by faithful Roswitha. As her health worsens, her parents take her back home. She briefly rallies but dies and is buried under her maiden name, reconciled with God and her ex-husband.



Quotes

"I think so too Mamma. But can you imagine, I'm almost ashamed to say it, I'm not really in favour of what is known as an ideal marriage.'

'That's just like you. What are you actually in favour of then?'

'I'm ... well, I'm for share and share alike, and naturally for love and affection too. And if it can't be love and affection, for love, as Papa says, is just stuff and nonsense (which I don't actually believe), well then I'm for wealth and a grand house, a very grand house, where Prince Friedrich Karl comes for the shooting, either elk or capercaillie, or where the old Kaiser will call and have a gracious word for all the ladies, even the young ones. And when we're in Berlin I'll be for court balls and gala evenings at the opera, always close to the big central box.'

'Is this just high spirits or a mood talking?'

'No Mamma, I'm absolutely serious. Love comes first, but right after it comes brilliance and honour, and then come diversions - yes, diversions, always something new, always something to make me laugh or cry. The thing I can't stand is boredom.'" Chapter 4, pg. 23.

"I was sleeping soundly, and suddenly I sat up and called out ... perhaps it was a nightmare ... nightmares run in the family, Papa has them too and frightens us with them, though Mamma just says he should get a grip on himself, which is easier said than done ... so, I sat up, roused from my sleep and cried out, and when I looked round as best I could in the dark something rushed past my bed, just there, just where you're standing Johanna, and then it was gone. And if I really ask myself what it was...'

'When, what was it then my lady?'

'And if I really ask myself ... I don't like to say this Johanna ... but I think it was the Chinaman.'

'The one from upstairs?' Johanna tried to laugh, 'our little Chinaman, the one Christel and me stuck on the back of the chair? Oh, your ladyship was dreaming, and even if you were awake it all came out of the dream.'

'I would like to think so. But at exactly the same moment Rollo barked outside, so he must have seen it too, and then the door flew open and the dear, faithful animal bounded towards me as if he had come to save me. Oh it was awful, my dear Johanna. And I'm so alone, and so young. Oh if only I had somebody here with a shoulder to cry on. But so far away from home ... Oh away from home.'" Chapter 9, pgs. 54-55.

"When something particularly beautiful came into bloom in his hothouse he would bring it round himself and spend a happy hour chatting with the young woman he found so congenial and for whom he had all the finer feelings of love rolled into one, a father's love, an uncle's, a teacher's and an admirer's. Effi was moved by all this and mentioned it in her letters to Hohen-Cremmen so often that her mother began to tease her about being 'in love with an alchemist'; but this well-meant teasing was wide of the mark, indeed its effect was almost painful, because it brought home to her, if only dimly, what



was actually lacking in her marriage: marks of devotion or encouragement, little attentions. Innstetten was kind and good, but he was no lover." Chapter 13, pgs. 74-75.

"Roswitha laughed, which made a particularly good impression on her young mistress. Effi was of staunchly Protestant upbringing and would have been very shocked if anyone had found anything Catholic in or about her; but she nevertheless believed that Catholicism protects us better against some things 'like those things upstairs'; indeed, this consideration had been quite a significant factor in her plan to take Roswitha into the house." Chapter 15, pg. 84.

"'What a thing to say,' laughed the major. 'Harbour police! The authorities we have here will surely turn a blind eye, all three of them. Does everything have to be so fiendishly legal? Rules and regulations are always a bore.'

Effi clapped her hands.

'Yes Crampas, that's your style, and Effi, you can see, applauds you. Naturally; women are always the first to call the police, but they won't hear anything of the law.'

'That's a time-honoured woman's privilege, Innstetten, and we won't change it.'

'No,' Innstetten laughed, 'nor do I want to. No point trying to wash off the leopard's spots. But someone like you, Crampas, who've grown up under the banner of discipline and know very well that obedience and order are of the essence, a man like you really shouldn't talk like that, not even in jest. Of course you're sublimely indifferent, and you think there's no immediate danger of the heavens caving in. and they won't not right away. But one day they will.'" Chapter 16, pgs. 93-94.

"Effi was displeased with herself and glad it was settled that these outings together would cease from now on for the rest of the winter. When she considered what had been said, touched upon or hinted at over all these weeks and months, she could find nothing to reproach herself with in any direct way. Crampas was a clever man, sophisticated, humorous, free, free in a good sense too, and it would have been petty and mean-spirited to be strait-laced and insist on the rules of strict propriety at every moment. No, she could not accuse herself of having responded to his manner, yet she had just a slight sense of having escaped danger and congratulated herself that all seemed to be behind her now." Chapter 18, pg. 104.

"Innstetten now had other plans, however, and as soon as his sleigh was over the wooden bridge, instead of taking the outer path, he turned into a narrower one through the thick woods. Effi shuddered. Up to that point she had had air and light about her, but not any longer, now the dark treetops arched over her. She began to shake and clenched her fingers together to get a hold of herself. Thoughts and images flashed through her mind, and one of them was the little mother in the poem 'God's Wall', and just as the mother prayed, so too did she pray now that God might build a wall round her. Twice or three times the prayer passed her lips, but then all of a sudden she realized that these words were lifeless. She was afraid, but at the same time she felt as if she were under a spell from which she had no wish to escape.

'Effi,' she heard softly in her ear, his voice quivering. Then he took her hand and opened



her fingers which she still held clasped together, and covered them with passionate kisses. She felt as if she were about to faint." Chapter 19, pgs. 117-118.

"'You were going to tell me about Effi.'

'Yes, well, she told me that sense of remoteness had left her, which she was very happy about; that Kessin hadn't been the right place for her, the haunted house and the people up there, one lot too religious, the other lot too dull, but since the move to Berlin she has felt she's in the right place. She said he's the best of men, a bit too old for her and too good for her, but she's got over the hump. That was the expression she used, I was quite struck by it.'

'Why? It's not quite up to scratch, the expression I mean. But ...'

'There's something behind it. and she wanted to hint as much to me.'

'Do you think so?'

'Yes Briest; you always think butter wouldn't melt in her mouth. But you're wrong. She likes to be carried along, and if she's riding a good wave, then she's good too.

Struggling and resistance are not for her.'

Roswitha came up with Annie and with that the conversation broke off." Chapter 24, pg. 158.

"It seemed that on his preliminary examination he had already picked out a few and placed them on top. These he now read once more under his breath.

'Be in the dunes again this afternoon, behind the mill. We can talk at old Frau Adermann's, the house is isolated enough. You mustn't be so afraid of everything. We too have rights. And if you say that to yourself firmly enough, I think all your fears will melt away. Life wouldn't be worth living if conventions were always observed just because they happened to be conventions. The best things are all beyond that learn to enjoy them. ... away, you write, escape. Impossible. I can't leave my wife in the lurch, in poverty on top of everything else. It can't be done, and we must take these things lightly, otherwise we are poor lost souls. Frivolity is the best thing we have. It's all fate. It was meant to be like this. And would you wish it otherwise, wish that we had never met?'

Then came the third letter.

... Be at the old place again today. What are my days going to be like here without you? In this desolate backwater. I'm beside myself, but you're right in one thing: it's our salvation, and when all's said and done we should bless the hand that has forced this parting on us." Chapter 27, pgs. 170-171.

"Innstetten and Wüllersdorf walked up the gulley in the sand, Buddenbrook came towards them. they exchanged greetings and the two seconds stepped aside for a brief discussion of the remaining practicalities. The agreement was that they were to advance simultaneously and fire at ten pages. Then Buddenbrook went back to his place; it was all quickly performed; and the shots rang out. Crampas fell.

Innstetten, stepping back a few paces, turned away from the scene. Wüllersdorf had gone over to Buddenbrook and both awaited word from the doctor, who shrugged his shoulders. At that moment Crampas indicated with a gesture that he wanted to say



something. Wüllersdorf bent down to him, nodded at the few words that came scarcely audibly from the dying man's lips and then went up to Innstetten.

'Crampas would like to say something to you Innstetten. You must grant him this wish. He has barely three minutes to live.'

Innstetten walked over to Crampas.

'Would you...?' These were his last words.

One more agonized but almost friendly flicker in his features and it was all over."

Chapter 28, pgs. 177-178.

"Honour, honour, honour... and then he went and shot the poor fellow whom I didn't even love and whom I'd forgotten because I didn't love him. It was just stupidity, and now it's blood and murder. And me to blame. And now he sends me the child because he can't say no to a Minister's wife, and before he sends the child, he trains her like a parrot, and the phrase he teaches her is 'if I'm allowed'. I'm disgusted at the thought of what I did; but I'm even more disgusted when I think of how virtuous you both are. Away with you. I have to live, but it won't be fore ever.'

When Roswitha came back Effi was lying on the floor, her face turned away, as if lifeless." Chapter 33, pg. 202.

"And if it's a matter of questions, there are others demanding answers Briest, and I can tell you that not a day passes now that the poor child is lying there, without these questions coming into my head...'

'What questions?'

'Whether perhaps it was our fault after all?'

'Nonsense Luise. What do you mean by that?'

'Whether we should perhaps have brought her up more strictly. Us that is. For Niemeyer is really useless, because he leaves everything open to doubt. And then Briest, I'm sorry to have to say this ... there were your constant risqué remarks ... and finally, and this is what I reproach myself with, for I don't want to seem blameless in the matter, I wonder if perhaps she wasn't too young.'

Rollo who wakened at these words shook his head slowly from side to side, and Briest said calmly, 'Ah Luise, that's enough ... that's too vast a subject.'" Chapter 36, pgs. 217.

Topics for Discussion

How does Marietta Trippelli contribute to the novel?

How does Rollo contribute to the novel?

What roles does the War of 1870, play in the novel?

What motivates Effi's obsession with Roswitha and Kruse's conversation?

Who do you find is the novel's noblest character, and what makes him or her noble?

Who do you find is the novel's most flawed character, and how do you describe that flaw?

How would you describe the relationship between the von Briests?