

The Contrast Between Appearance And Reality Theme In The Good Soldier

Posted on September 4, 2019

The narrator of *The Good Soldier* depicts the love story between Ashburnham and Florence. John Dowell tells the story of his marriage and how his wife, Florence Dowell, met Edward Ashburnham-an, a wealthy English man who is termed a good soldier from the novel's title. He goes ahead to explain the events which transpired in Ashburnham's secret affair with his wife and how he came to know about it (Ford). Throughout the story, most of the characters hold socially acceptable appearances, which surface their underlying irrational realities.

The discrepancy between reality and appearance is unravelled in the second sentence of the novel. The narrator says, "My wife and I knew Ashburnham and the captain just like it was usual to know any other person, and yet, in a different sense, we did not know anything about them." The tragedy of the story then begins unravelling. In this essence, the narrator seeks to set forth that knowing people does not mean that you know anything about them and what is really hidden behind their appearance.

The narrator, John Dowell, tells his story in the form of a fireside conversation. In the opening of the novel, Dowell tries to agree and bear the bitter truth of his current discoveries about Edward and his wife, who are already dead. He explains how he had been thoroughly deceived by their false appearances when they lived. After discovering their nine-year relationship, Dowell is not surprised, and he begins to recall how his wife had deceived and fooled him throughout their married life.

The theme of contrast between appearance and reality is evident in Florence Dowell's and John's relationship. At the beginning of the story, the reader is meant to believe that Florence suffered from heart disease and had succumbed to death. However, in a real sense, she did not suffer from heart disease. Dowell used that trick and affair to cover up her infidelity. In reality, heart disease would not be the reason for having a separate room from her husband. Additionally, throughout the story, the reader also realizes that Florence did not die from heart disease but instead drank poison after discovering that Edward had another lover beside her. In addition, throughout her sickness, Dowell thinks that the medicine in the little flask was Florence's medicine for her heart, but he later discovers that it was poison. Moreover, in regard to Florence's acts, it is evident that her emotional life is a deception.

Moreover, there is more contrast between appearance and reality in Florence and Dowell's marriage. The couple seems to love each other. They enjoy each other company and even go to the spa together and always stay beside each other. According to the story, Florence never left her husband's sight. However, Florence still cheats on her husband with Edward despite always being in the company of him. Florence pretends to love Dowell genuinely, but in a real sense, she only wants him

for his wealth. This is evident when she tells Dowell that she wants to marry a man with a specific large income, and that's why she married Dowell: because he was wealthy and met her wants. On the other hand, as the story unravels, Dowell confesses how he hates Florence and never loved her, counteracting the initial romantic appearance between her and Florence.

On the other hand, the theme of contrast between appearance and reality is also evident between Edward and Leonora's marriage. Initially, the narrator describes them as a model couple. He depicts Edward as a devoted and responsible husband. However, throughout the story, it is clear that Dowell terming them as model couples is not necessarily true. This is evident when Edward claims that he only admired Leonora but did not love her. According to the narrator, Edward was never a faithful and promiscuous man; he was only corny and an idealist who squandered his money on other lovers while abandoning his wife. At the end of the story, it is clear that Leonora and Edward appear to be the perfect couple, but in reality, their love life is far from perfect.

Primarily, Dowell describes Florence as a simple and superficial woman. This is evident when Dowell says that 'she was bright and a good dancer'. He also says that all he ever did was to keep Florence always bright. Rather pathetically, as the story continues, Dowell confesses that her sole life purpose was to pacify Florence's fraudulent illusions. He also admits that his love life with Florence was a lie and that Florence was a burden to him and terms her as an unattained mistress. Additionally, their love life is not as romantic as it seems.

In conclusion, the theme of contrast between appearance and reality runs throughout the story. This theme serves the purpose of educating the reader that what really matters is what lies beyond the surface. In this assertion, the narrator aims to depict that the overall appearance of a person can be deceiving. In supporting his main idea, the narrator sets forth his marriage life as an example of the deceptions and illusions that lie on people's faces. This is of relevance to how Florence and Dowell pretend and appear to be so emotionally attached, but in reality, they do not love each other. On the other hand, Edward, too, appears to love Leonora but later admits that he only admired her and never felt love for her. According to the novel, people may present socially acceptable appearances but hide their real deceptive inner selves.

Work Cited

Ford, Ford M. *The Good Soldier*. John Lane, 1915.