

Points to Ponder – October 2021

Ruth

Ruth is in many respects typical of many of EG's protagonists: a young girl from a protected, secure background who is suddenly torn from her stable life and placed in a hostile, or at the least much less stable, environment.

Below are a few points to consider from the opening ten chapters.

1. How effective is Gaskell's opening of this novel?
2. How does EG set her work up in a romance framework and in what ways is she actually criticising this very popular form of female reading?
3. In what ways is Ruth portrayed as the stereotypical heroine of romance - and how far can we see this as a Cinderella story in the making?
4. How does Bellingham's rescue of the child (chapter 2) fit into this romance framework and why does EG include the incident?
5. How does EG undercut her presentation of Bellingham?
6. What is the importance of the Welsh setting?
7. Why do you think EG gave Thurstan Benson a physical disability? What does this add to the novel?
8. How does HB judge a gentleman? Does this quotation remind anyone of Jane Austen?
"If it had not been for his deformity, I should not have made him out from your description; you called him a gentleman."
9. What is Gaskell's view of a gentleman and how does she show this?
Any hints of *Great Expectations* (1860-1891) here?
10. Hardy says of his heroine Tess; she was a 'woman more sinned against than sinning'. EG uses the word sin frequently in relation to Ruth. Do we feel that she is a guilty, shameful woman or do we feel as Hardy does about his heroine? What are your views of Gaskell's presentation of Ruth's 'Fall'?
11. How does Gaskell present her views on bringing up and educating children in this novel?
12. According to Alan Shelston's notes, Dickens told EG that she should remove the 'sir' from the quotation below as it would be out of character. Gaskell did remove it and then returned it to her text as she felt it was quite *in* character. What do you think?

Ruth to Bellingham:

"But can she take us in, sir? I thought I heard her saying her house was full."