

### Ruth - Points to Ponder Session 4.

**1. Look at the opening pages of Chapter 27 when Leonard comes from the chapel. This is an example of Gaskell's very dramatic, and some critics believe overly dramatic, presentation of events. What is your view of the way this emotional meeting has been presented. What is there here that might be compared to a Gothic heroine and in what way may Ruth feel she too is trapped.**

**2. Comment on Mr. Bradshaw's presentation and his comparison with Mr Benson in the following passages.**

"You think, perhaps, that I shall feel it acutely. You are mistaken. He is no longer as my son to me. I have always resolved to disown any child of mine who was guilty of sin. I disown Richard. He is as a stranger to me. I shall feel no more at his exposure—his punishment—" He could not go on, for his voice was choking. "Of course, you understand that I must feel shame at our connexion; it is that that is troubling me; that is but consistent with a man who has always prided himself on the integrity of his name; but as for that boy, who has been brought up all his life as I have brought up my children, it must be some innate wickedness! Sir, I can cut him off, though he has been as my right hand—beloved. Let me be no hindrance to the course of justice, I beg. He has forged your name—he has defrauded you of money—of your all, I think you said." P. 404 /405 p. 406

Although Mr Benson had been very calm during this interview, he had been much shocked by what had been let out respecting Richard's forgery; not by the fact itself so much as by what it was a sign of. Still, he had known the young man from childhood, and had seen, and often regretted, that his want of moral courage had rendered him peculiarly liable to all the bad effects arising from his father's severe and arbitrary mode of treatment. Dick would never have had "pluck" enough to be a hardened villain, under any circumstances; but, unless some good influence, some strength, was brought to bear upon him, he might easily sink into the sneaking scoundrel.

"It was all my money; it was not my all," replied Mr Benson; and then he went on as if the interruption had never been: "Against an habitual offender I shall not prosecute Richard. Not because he is your son—do not imagine that! I should decline taking such a step against any young man without first ascertaining the particulars about him, which I know already about Richard, and which determine me against doing what would blast his character for life—would destroy every good quality he has". p. 406

**3 Below is Mr Donne's response to Benson –how does this passage affect the reader's view of Donne and his ability to reform?**

"An ill-bred, puritanical old fellow! He may have the boy, I am sure, for aught I care. I have done my duty, and will get out of this abominable place as soon as I can. I wish my last remembrance of my beautiful Ruth was not mixed up with all these people."

**4. Below is Mrs Bradshaw's response to her husband's treatment of Richard. What is Gaskell saying about motherhood here and elsewhere in the novel and how far do you agree with her sentiments?**

"Has he been here? Oh! is not he cruel? I don't care. I've been a good wife till now. I know I have. I have done all he bid me, ever since we were married. But now I will speak my mind, and say to everybody how cruel he is—how hard to his own flesh and blood! If he puts poor Dick in prison, I will go too. If I'm to choose between my husband and my son, I choose my son; for he will have no friends, unless I am with him." pp. 407-8

**And- in what ways do the following passages reflect Gaskell's views on education for men and women?**

Oh, nothing could exceed his penitence. If one had never heard of the proverb, 'When the devil was sick, the devil a monk would be,' I should have had greater faith in him; or if he had had more strength of character to begin with, or more reality and less outward appearance of good principle instilled into him. However, this Glasgow situation is the very thing; clear, defined duties, no great trust reposed in him, a kind and watchful head, and introductions to a better class of associates than I fancy he has ever been thrown amongst before. For, you know, Mr Bradshaw dreaded all intimacies for his son, and wanted him to eschew all society beyond his own family—would never allow him to ask a friend home. Really, when I think of the unnatural life Mr Bradshaw expected him to lead, I get into charity with him, and have hopes. By the way, have you ever succeeded in persuading his mother to send Leonard to school? He may run the same risk from isolation as Dick: not be able to choose his companions wisely when he grows up, but be too much overcome by the excitement of society to be very discreet as to who are his associates. Have you spoken to her about my plan? p. 418

**Benson to Ruth** -But Leonard," he echoed. "Ah! there it is hard, Ruth. I own the world is hard and persecuting to such as he." He paused to think of the true comfort for this sting. He went on. "The world is not everything, Ruth; nor is the want of men's good opinion and esteem the highest need which man has. Teach Leonard this. You would not wish his life to be one summer's day. You dared not make it so, if you had the power. Teach him to bid a noble, Christian welcome to the trials which God sends—and this is one of them. Teach him not to look on a life of struggle, and perhaps of disappointment and incompleteness, as a sad and mournful end, but as the means permitted to the heroes and warriors in the army of Christ, by which to show their faithful following.

**5. Think about how Gaskell presents surface and depths, inner and outer , evidence and social prescription in this novel. Below is an extract which deals with Bradshaw's perception of Ruth. What can we take from this discussion?**

"Oh, Mr Bradshaw! Ruth was not depraved, and you know it. You cannot have seen her—have known her daily, all these years, without acknowledging that!" Mr Benson was almost breathless, awaiting Mr Bradshaw's answer. The quiet self-control which he had maintained so long, was gone now.

"I saw her daily—I did *not* know her. If I had known her, I should have known she was fallen and depraved, and consequently not fit to come into my house, nor to associate with my pure children."

"Now I wish God would give me power to speak out convincingly what I believe to be His truth, that not every woman who has fallen is depraved; that many—how many the Great Judgment Day will reveal to those who have shaken off the poor, sore, penitent hearts on earth—many, many crave and hunger after a chance for virtue—the help which no man gives to them—help—that gentle, tender help which Jesus gave once to Mary Magdalen." Mr Benson was almost choked by his own feelings.

"Come, come, Mr Benson, let us have no more of this morbid way of talking. The world has decided how such women are to be treated; and, you may depend upon it, there is so much practical wisdom in the world that its way of acting is right in the long run, and that no one can fly in its face with impunity, unless, indeed, they stoop to deceit and imposition.

**6. How does ECG present Leonard and what is our response to him?**

**7. The final chapters of Ruth may be considered to contain too many convenient plot devices. What is your view?**

**Some critical responses to *Ruth***

**8. Charlotte Bronte – Why should she die? Why are we to shut up the book weeping? What would be your reply?**

**Pollard's view:** the incident of the fever epidemic gives her more than sufficient opportunity to redeem herself. Yet still she **has to die**. The description of **Ruth's** last days **is** powerfully conveyed. Mrs **Gaskell** makes excellent use of such emotive detail as the reference to her continual singing, something that Ruth had never been heard to do since her mother's death.