

April Points to Ponder

Consider this conversation between Cynthia and Molly then Cynthia and Mr Gibson paying particular attention to the highlighted section. Chapter 51-2 pages in

Why would Cynthia feel shame? What do the highlighted sections show of Cynthia's character and Roger's?

I do not love him well enough to go through the shame of having to excuse myself,—to plead that he will reinstate me in his good opinion. Confession may be—well! I can never believe it pleasant—but it may be an ease of mind if one makes it to some people,—to some person,—and it may not be a mortification to sue for forgiveness. I cannot tell...."I cannot bear to exculpate myself to Roger Hamley. I will not submit to his thinking less well of me than he has done,—however foolish his judgment may have been. I would rather never see him again, for these two reasons. And the truth is, I do not love him. I like him, I respect him; but I will not marry him. I have written to tell him so. That was merely as a relief to myself,... The relief is the one good thing come out of it all. It is such a comfort to feel free again. It wearied me so to think of straining up to his goodness. 'Extenuate my conduct!'" she concluded, quoting Mr. Gibson's words. Yet when Mr. Gibson came home, after a silent dinner, she asked to speak with him, alone, in his consulting-room; and there laid bare the exculpation of herself which she had given to Molly many weeks before.

Is this an unusual way to describe a stepfather? What does it say about Dr Gibson's character and his relationship with Cynthia?

"And now, Mr. Gibson,—I still treat you like a friend,—help me to find some home far away, where all the evil talking and gossip mamma tells me of cannot find me and follow me. It may be wrong to care for people's good opinion,—but it is me, and I cannot alter myself. You, Molly,—all the people in the town,—I haven't the patience to live through the nine days' wonder.—I want to go away and be a governess."

"But, my dear Cynthia,—how soon Roger will be back,—a tower of strength!"

"Has not mamma told you I have broken it all off with Roger? ...

What is your response to this highlighted section below? What does it illustrate about Cynthia's and Dr. Gibson's character?

What are Roger's standards and how are they different from Cynthia's?

"Nonsense. An engagement like yours cannot be broken off, except by mutual consent. You've only given others a great deal of pain without freeing yourself. Nor will you wish it in a month's time. When you come to think calmly, you'll be glad to think of the stay and support of such a husband as Roger. You have been in fault, and have acted foolishly at first,—perhaps wrongly afterwards; but you don't want your husband to think you faultless?"

"Yes, I do," said Cynthia. "At any rate, my lover must think me so. And it is just because I do not love him even as so light a thing as I could love, that I feel that I couldn't bear to have to tell him I'm sorry, and stand before him like a chidden child to be admonished and forgiven.... I love you better than Roger; I have a fine instinct for reading the thoughts of others when they refer to me. I almost hate the idea of Roger judging me by his own standard, which wasn't made for me, and graciously forgiving me at last."

"Then I do believe it's right for you to break it off,"...That poor poor lad! But it will be best for him too. And he'll get over it. He has a good strong heart. Poor old Roger!"

How far do you feel illness is used as a plot device to bring about the desired conclusion?

From the final pages Written by Frederick Greenwood.

What indications in the work so far would give the reader this idea?

We know that Roger Hamley will marry Molly, and that is what we are most concerned about. Indeed, there was little else to tell. Had the writer lived, she would have sent her hero back to Africa forthwith; and those scientific parts of Africa are a long way from Hamley; and there is not much to choose between a long distance and a long time. So Roger found. The days were weeks that separated him from the time when Molly gave him a certain little flower, and months from the time which divorced him from Cynthia, whom he had begun to doubt before he knew for certain that she was never much worth hoping for...

What is there about ECG's descriptions that might set her above other writers?

When he returned; [he] was oppressed with the old dread that she would think him fickle. Therefore this young gentleman, so self-reliant and so lucid in scientific matters, found it difficult after all to tell Molly how much he hoped she loved him; and might have blundered if he had not thought of beginning by showing her the flower that was plucked from the nosegay. How charmingly that scene would have been drawn, had Mrs. Gaskell lived to depict it, we can only imagine: that it would have been charming—especially in what Molly did, and looked, and said—

Is there evidence for this?

Roger and Molly are married; and if one of them is happier than the other, it is Molly.

If anyone suffers for Molly's marriage it, it is Mr. Gibson. But he takes a partner, so as to get a chance of running up to London to stay with Molly for a few days now and then, and "to get a little rest from Mrs. Gibson." Of what was to happen to Cynthia after her marriage the author was not heard to say much; and, indeed, it does not seem that anything needs to be added. One little anecdote, however, was told of her by Mrs. Gaskell, which is very characteristic. One day, when Cynthia and her husband were on a visit to Hollingford, Mr. Henderson learned for the first time, through an innocent casual remark of Mr. Gibson's, that the famous traveller, Roger Hamley, was known to the family. Cynthia had never happened to mention it. How well that little incident, too, would have been described!

How far would you agree that these texts are a divergence from previous works?

It is clear in this novel of Wives and Daughters, in the exquisite little story that preceded it, Cousin Phillis, and in Sylvia's Lovers, that Mrs. Gaskell had within these five years started upon a new career with all the freshness of youth, and with a mind which seemed to have put off its clay and to have been born again. ...few minds ever showed less of base earth than Mrs. Gaskell's....

This is a hymn to Gaskell's descriptions. What in her descriptions do you most enjoy?

...There is a scene in Cousin Phyllis—where Holman, making hay with his men, ends the day with a psalm—which is not excelled as a picture in all modern fiction; and the same may be said of that chapter of this last story in which Roger smokes a pipe with the Squire after the quarrel with Osborne. There is little in either of these scenes, or in a score of others which succeed each other like gems in a cabinet, which the ordinary novel-maker could "seize." There is no "material" for him in half-a-dozen farming men singing hymns in a field, or a discontented old gentleman smoking tobacco with his son...

Do you believe Cynthia is more important than Molly?

Viewed in this light, Cynthia is a more important piece of work even than Molly, delicately as she is drawn, and true and harmonious as that picture is also. And what we have said of Cynthia may be said with equal truth of Osborne Hamley.

How far would you agree with this view of the subtlety of ECG's depictions?

...since we are writing of Osborne Hamley, we cannot resist pointing out a peculiar instance of the subtler conceptions which underlie all really considerable works. Here are Osborne and Roger, two men who, in every particular that can be seized for description, are totally different creatures. Body and mind they are quite unlike. They have different tastes; they take different ways: they are men of two sorts which, in the society sense, never "know" each other; and yet, never did brotherly blood run more manifest than in the veins of those two. ...it is a "touch beyond the reach of art" to make their likeness in unlikeness so natural a ...Inferior writers, even some writers who are highly accounted, would have revelled in the "contrast," persuaded that they were doing a fine anatomical dramatic thing by bringing it out at every opportunity. ...These differences are precisely what might have been expected from the union of Squire Hamley with the town-bred, refined, delicate-minded woman whom he married; and the affection of the young men, their kindness (to use the word in its old and new meanings at once) is nothing but a reproduction of those impalpable threads of love which bound the equally diverse father and mother in bonds faster than the ties of blood.