

Sylvia's Lovers Session 2 Points to Ponder

1 Why is the idea of learning, or lack of it made such a big issue in this story?

Here are a few examples from Chapter 8

if she [Sylvia] sate at the dresser at her lesson, and Kinraid at the table with her father, he might hear all, and find out what a dunce she was.

Sylvia and Philip: Sylvia caught her mother's look of displeasure, and it made her docile for the evening, although she owed her cousin a grudge for her enforced good behaviour.

Sylvia took her book and glanced down the column Philip pointed out to her; but, as she justly considered, one man might point out the task, but twenty could not make her learn it, if she did not choose; and she sat herself down...and idly gazed into the fire.

Perhaps it was not very flattering to notice Sylvia's great joy when her lessons were over, sadly shortened as they were by Philip's desire not to be too hard upon her.

though Daniel could read pretty well, yet the double effort of reading and understanding what he read was almost too much for him. He could read, or he could understand what was read aloud to him; reading was no pleasure, but listening was.

2 This is ECG's only real historical novel. There is a great deal about customs in it and details of life style. Why is the historical setting so important to the story?

The consequences of darkness in the country even now are to gather the members of a family together into one room, and to make them settle to some sedentary employment; and it was much more the case at the period of my story

3 What are your views on the long section on Whaling included in Chapter 9? What does it add to the story?

4 How far do you feel that Sylvia is taken in by Kinraid's adventures? There may be parallels here with *Othello*. How far is it significant that Sylvia is depicted as close to Daniel in viewpoint and very different from her mother and Philip?

'I'm none fond on him; I think he tells us traveller's tales, by way o' seeing how much we can swallow. But the master and Sylvia think that there never was such a one.'

5 Sylvia's cloak is made a big issue in this section as are things such as ribbons and other aspect of dress. Both male and female. What is the importance of the cloak and dress in general to the story? Are there parallels with any other Gaskell story?

It just shows what different views different men and women take of their fellow-creatures, when I say that Hester looked upon Philip as the best and most agreeable man she had ever known. He was not one to speak of himself without being questioned on the subject, so his Haytersbank relations, only come into the neighborhood in the last year or two, knew

nothing of the trials he had surmounted, or the difficult duties he had performed. His aunt, indeed, had strong faith in him, both from partial knowledge of his character, and because he was of her own tribe and kin; but she had never learnt the small details of his past life. Sylvia respected him as her mother's friend, and treated him tolerably well as long as he preserved his usual self-restraint of demeanour, but hardly ever thought of him when he was absent. Ch 11

How well does ECG manage this idea of viewpoint and how does it affect our understanding of the characters and their stories?

- 6 Why does ECG call the character's actors? ECG is suggesting that time affects the way we perceive a situation. How far do you agree? ECG is clearly showing the different perceptions of actor and onlooker. Do you think this strategy works?

*At this hour, all the **actors** in this story having played out their parts and gone to their rest, there is something touching in recording the futile efforts made by Philip to win from Sylvia the love he yearned for. But, at the time, any one who had watched him might have been amused to see the grave, awkward, plain young man studying patterns and colours for a new waistcoat, with his head a little on one side, after the meditative manner common to those who are choosing a new article of dress. They might have smiled could they have read in his imagination the frequent rehearsals of the coming evening, when he and she should each be dressed in their gala attire, to spend a few hours under a bright, festive aspect, among people whose company would oblige them to assume a new demeanour towards each other, not so familiar as their every-day manner, but allowing more scope for the expression of rustic gallantry. Philip had so seldom been to anything of the kind, that, even had Sylvia not been going, he would have felt a kind of shy excitement at the prospect of anything so unusual. But, indeed, if Sylvia had not been going, it is very probable that Philip's rigid conscience might have been aroused to the question whether such parties did not savour too much of the world for him to form one in them. P 133 ch12*

- 7 Why does ECG spend so long discussing Philip's business partnership? Does this help the narrative?

8 Is Alice Rose right to suggest Philip has 'Fallen away' ? In what ways does she think of him as changed for the worse? Might others see him as changed for the better, if so, who and how?

'Neither do godly ways savour delicately after the pleasures of the world,' continued she, unheeding his speech. 'Thou wert wont to seek the house of the Lord, and I thought well on thee; but of late thou'st changed, and fallen away, and I mun speak what is in my heart towards thee.' p.162 Ch 13

- 9 What does this passage show about the relationship between Kinraid and Sylvia?

For the frosty air came sharp in through the open lattice window, and the ice was already forming on the milk. Kinraid would have found a ready way of keeping his cousins, or indeed most young women, warm; but he paused before he dared put his arm round Sylvia; she had something so shy and wild in her look and manner; and her very innocence of what her

words, spoken by another girl, might lead to, inspired him with respect, and kept him in check. So he contented himself with saying,—

'I'll let yo' go into t' warm kitchen if yo'll tell me if yo' think I can ever forget yo' again.'

She looked up at him defiantly, and set her red lips firm. He enjoyed her determination not to reply to this question; it showed she felt its significance. Her pure eyes looked steadily into his; nor was the expression in his such as to daunt her or make her afraid. They were like two children defying each other; each determined to conquer. At last she unclosed her lips, and nodding her head as if in triumph, said, as she folded her arms once more in her check apron,— p184 ch 15