

Sylvia's Lovers: Points to Ponder Session 3

1 What does this passage show us about Kinraid and his relationship with Sylvia?

I didn't know yo' cared for me; yo' niver said so.' In an instant he was back at her side, his arm round her in spite of her short struggle, and his eager passionate voice saying, 'Yo' never knowed I loved you, Sylvia? say it again, and look i' my face while yo' say it, if yo' can. Why, last winter I thought yo'd be such a woman when yo'd come to be one as my een had never looked upon, and this year, ever sin' I saw yo' i' the kitchen corner sitting crouching behind my uncle, I as good as swore I'd have yo' for wife, or never wed at all. And it was not long ere yo' knowed it, for all yo' were so coy, and now yo' have the face—no, yo' have not the face—come, my darling, what is it?' for she was crying; and on his turning her wet blushing face towards him the better to look at it, she suddenly hid it in his breast. He lulled and soothed her in his arms, as if she had been a weeping child and he her mother; and then they sat down on the settle together, and when she was more composed they began to talk. He asked her about her mother; not sorry in his heart at Bell Robson's absence. He had intended if necessary to acknowledge his wishes and desires with regard to Sylvia to her parents; but for various reasons he was not sorry that circumstances had given him the chance of seeing her alone, and obtaining her promise to marry him without being obliged to tell either her father or her mother at present. 'I ha' spent my money pretty free,' he said, 'and I've ne'er a penny to the fore, and yo'r parents may look for something better for yo', my pretty: but when I come back fro' this voyage I shall stand a chance of having a share i' th' Urania, and maybe I shall be mate as well as specksioneer; and I can get a matter of from seventy to ninety pound a voyage, let alone th' half-guineas for every whale I strike, and six shilling a gallon on th' oil; and if I keep steady wi' Forbes and Company, they'll make me master i' time, for I've had good schooling, and can work a ship as well as any man; an' I leave yo' wi' yo'r parents, or take a cottage for yo' nigh at hand; but I would like to have something to the fore, and that I shall have, please God, when we come back i' th' autumn. I shall go to sea happy, now, thinking I've yo'r word. Yo're not one to go back from it, I'm sure, else it's a long time to leave such a pretty girl as yo', and ne'er a chance of a letter reaching yo' just to tell yo' once again how I love yo', and to bid yo' not forget yo'r true love.'

2 Philip and Kinraid are diametrically opposite in character yet they are both successful in their chosen career as sailor/specksioneer and businessman:

Secure and exultant, his broad, handsome, weather-bronzed face was as great a contrast to Philip's long, thoughtful, sallow countenance, as his frank manner was to the other's cold reserve. p. 206

Which do you feel would make a 'good' husband for Sylvia? Which, if any, does ECG approve of?

3 Is Philip right in his assessment of Kinraid-see below?

'She's but a young lassie,' said he to himself; 'an' Kinraid has been playing wi' her, as such as he can't help doing, once they get among the women. An' I came down sudden on her about

Annie Coulson, and touched her pride. Maybe, too, it were ill advised to tell her how her mother was feared for her. I couldn't ha' left the place to-morrow if he'd been biding here; but he's off for half a year or so, and I'll be home again as soon as iver I can. In half a year such as he forgets, if iver he's thought serious about her; but in a' my lifetime, if I live to fourscore, I can niver forget. God bless her for saying, "Good-by, Philip." He repeated the words aloud in fond mimicry of her tones: 'Good-by, Philip.' p.212

4 How far do you think fate, chance, or maybe just social circumstances play a role in this story?

And yet he came back with a letter from the Fosters in his pocket, curt, yet expressive of deep gratitude for his discreet services in London; and at another time—in fact, if Philip's life had been ordered differently to what it was—it might have given this man a not unworthy pleasure to remember that, without a penny of his own, simply by diligence, honesty, and faithful quick-sightedness as to the interests of his masters, he had risen to hold the promise of being their successor, and to be ranked by them as a trusted friend. p.228

5 What is the importance of the sea in this novel? Remember it is set in the 1790s so before the emergence of the railways.

Sylvia, found the bleak sea-winds came up and blighted all endeavours at cultivating more than the most useful things—pot-herbs, marigolds, potatoes, onions, and such-like.

6 ECG spends quite a long time discussing the criteria for marriage but presents very few successful relationships in this novel. Why do you feel the idea of courtship and marriage is so negatively presented in this text?

I'll see what I can do; but, lad, I dunnot think she'll have thee. She doesn't fancy thee, and fancy is three parts o' love, if reason is t' other fourth.'

'Lad! it's not schooling, nor knowledge, nor book-learning as carries a man through t' world. It's mother-wit. And it's noane schooling, nor knowledge, nor book-learning as takes a young woman. It's summat as cannot be put into words.'

Mrs Robson: 'I'll do no such thing. Marriages are best made wi'out melling. How do I know but what she likes some one better?'

Coulson: He did not love his new sweetheart as he had done Hester: there was more of reason and less of fancy in his attachment. But it ended successfully; and before the first snow fell, Philip was best man at his partner's wedding. pp. 242-44

7 At the end of this section we have the riot against the press gangs and the destruction of the Mariner's Arms. What are your views on Daniel's actions? Is it right to view him as a hero?

But he could not help being both touched and flattered at the way in which those who formed his 'world' looked upon him as a hero; and was not insensible to the words of blessing which a wife, whose husband had been impressed and rescued this night, poured down upon him as he passed. p. 264