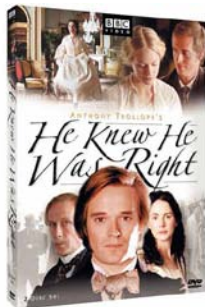


Discussion Questions

- 1** In Chapter One, Louis Trevelyan's unwarranted jealousy drives him to tell his wife to bar Captain Osborne from the house. It could be argued that the novel serves as a study of one man's misperceptions. Do you agree or disagree? How does Trevelyan's relationship with his wife change as he fails to tell her the truth of his complex feelings? For instance, what might have happened to their marriage if he had done as he wanted in Chapter One and "explained to her, with his arm round her waist, that it would be better for both of them that this . . . friendship be limited."? What later actions and consequences might have been changed? If he had acknowledged his error, what might he have learned from confiding in his wife?
- 2** Screenwriter Andrew Davies remarks, "*He Knew He Was Right* is about a strong woman who is seeking to make her own decisions and lead her own life, and a rather fragile man who can't stand up to her." Do you agree or disagree? What are Emily's strengths? What are her weaknesses? What effect does her status as an "outsider" have on her behavior? What are Louis's weaknesses? How do you interpret his inability to "stand up" to his wife?
- 3** In what ways does Emily Trevelyan refuse to obey the rules of submission in Victorian marriage? What does she stand to lose—or gain—by being outspoken and independent? How much is she the cause of her own marital suffering? Recall a time when you actively challenged a norm. What did you learn from the experience? Knowing what you know now, would you do it again?
- 4** Why do you think Anthony Trollope shows the perspectives of both Louis and Emily as their marriage dissolves? Is he equally sympathetic to both characters? Are you? Why or why not? How might the perspective of a minor character add to your understanding of the conflict? For example, Nora Rowley counsels Emily to obey her husband. Why does she do this? Are you sympathetic to Nora's point of view? Why or why not? How might the addition of Louis and Emily's child's point of view change the novel? Why?
- 5** By succumbing to irrational sexual jealousy, Louis's judgment and actions become deeply flawed. To what extent does he resemble Shakespeare's Othello? To what extent is Louis able to distance himself from his obsession and try to affect change in himself and his marriage? Does his final act toward Emily redeem him? How?

- 6 The issue of women's rights is key in the novel. "The lot of a woman," observed Nora Rowley, "was wretched, unfortunate, almost degrading. For a woman such as herself there was no path open to her energy, other than that of getting a husband." Written when the Divorce Act of 1857 was still new, and at the time of J.S. Mill's publication of *The Subjection of Women*, some female characters in the novel challenge the status of women in English society. What do you make of Emily's efforts to see her son when she had no legal right to him during her separation? Or Nora Rowley's decision to marry for love rather than money? Or Priscilla, who chooses no marriage at all? What issues today—in our families, communities, society—seem equally on the brink of change?
- 7 Consider a list of ways the film portrays Louis and Emily and the two major subplots. What has been changed? What has been added, or left out? Which do you prefer? Why do you think the filmmakers chose to make changes?

He Knew He Was Right, by Anthony Trollope, was published in 1868–69. For more about the MASTERPIECE film *He Knew He Was Right* and related features, visit <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/heknew/>.



You can purchase the *He Knew He Was Right* DVD from shoppbs.org. Enter the code BOOKANDFILM for a 15% discount.

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