

SIMON'S CHARACTER AND EVOLUTION

Simon's basic character is prototypical Victorian optimism in the ability of the individual to control his universe through hard work, creative ingenuity, and perseverance. This quality was molded by his father Zadok who taught him that if he worked harder than an Englishman, and was smarter and more patriotic than an Englishman, eventually he could be accepted as an Englishman and as a Jew. Events by and large have proven his father right. Simon emerged as a minor war hero from the Crimea, and then managed to enter a profession (the Metropolitan Police Force) that few, if any, Jews had penetrated. He has simultaneously managed to have a happy marriage and raise a large family. Thus, fundamentally, he perceives the world as controllable through effort and commitment. God is just, the righteous are rewarded and evil is punished.

Into this orderly, predictable, and controllable universe comes Rachel's death, swiftly followed by his daughter Leah's death. These events shake Simon to the core, and thrust him into despair. Suddenly the universe as he knows it has veered out of control and has become unbearably unfair and capricious. Despite his efforts, despite his faith, he has lost both wife and child. Although he continues to try to "do his duty" toward family and work, he has been reduced to an automaton, a state of affairs that has not escaped the attention of Henrietta and his children at home, and Sergeant Murdoch and Superintendent Walker at work. Simon's internal conflict throughout the book will be whether to give way to his despair and hopelessness or whether to rekindle hope and forge ahead with the business of life.

In the opening scene of the book, Simon has mobilized in a mechanical manner to "do his duty" by appearing at the crime scene. However, everything he sees disgusts and embitters him - the elegance of Lady Fairhaven's death contrasted to his recollection of Rachel's bloody and chaotic death; the exquisite accoutrements of the Fairhaven mansion contrasted with his own humble home; the attention paid to this death vs. the unnoticed passing of his beloved Rachel; the upper class emptiness of Lady Fairhaven compared to the rare but unsung qualities of his wife. Thus he is not "engaged" in the case, may even be having thoughts of quitting the force, etc.

Quickly, however, he will become engaged with the Fairhaven crime and pursue it vigorously. The hook here is that Lady Fairhaven's daughter in an early scene will present him with a doll to give to her mother. The little girl is too young to fully understand the meaning of her mother's death, but thinks the police may be able to do something to "help." This simple action will make Simon realize that Lady Fairhaven was not just an upper crust snob, but a wife and mother. It "hooks in" to his character trait of courageous fighting spirit, and moves him from withdrawn and passive to active and engaged. He can't solve the mystery of Rachel's death for his own children, but at least he can solve this crime to bring peace to another little girl. An additional hook may be the development of some personal animosity toward Sir Gregory - (Simon discovers he

beat his wife; or Sir G voted against legislation to regulate the milk refinery responsible for the 1873 typhoid epidemic in which Leah died?).

After this, for a large part of the book, Simon actively pursues both cases, although he is more involved with the Fairhaven case because of the intensity of the above hooks and because he thinks the baby deaths result from the desperate actions of poor single mothers and he is not anxious to have them prosecuted. Then, maybe half, 2/3 of the way through the book, there is a further reversal, swiftly followed by a second turning point.

Murdoch's murder is responsible for this temporary resurgence of despairing feelings, and Simon even briefly contemplates suicide as a way of escaping from his crushing sense of responsibility for his sergeant's death. Basically he feels his preoccupation with the Fairhaven case caused him to treat the baby deaths as a quotidian crime rather than recognize Murdoch's intuition of a more malevolent force at work. But the ultimate resolution of this setback is a renewed vigor in pursuing the mystery of the baby deaths. Finally, Talbot's abduction of his children propels him even more strongly to action, so that by the end of the book, despair is in abeyance and Simon is once again recommitted and engaged.

SUMMARY: CHARACTER CONFLICT AND EVOLUTION

First scene - Simon withdrawn automaton; despair predominates

Early scene - Simon makes a personal commitment to find justice for Lady Fairhaven's little daughter by bringing to ground the murderer of her mother; courageous optimism and fighting spirit are glimpsed

Later - future scenes pursuing leads showcase Simon's courage, tenacity, ingenious creativity and perseverance in solving case

Still later - Murdoch's death causes a temporary setback in Simon's "recovery" (analogous to a hero with an alcohol problem who stays away from liquor only to regress under stress); Simon agonizes, blames himself; but quickly realizes the only way to make amends for any negligence on his part is to strive still harder to solve the case; so there is a resurgence of effort and perseverance

Climax - Talbot abducts Rebecca and Emily, intending to kill them. This triggers even greater action and involvement on Simon's part, while simultaneously forcing him to acknowledge his blind spot where Talbot's demonic qualities were concerned; this action epitomizes his courage, fighting spirit, and hope against hope; he is so mobilized that there is no room for despair

Denouement - Simon evaluates all that has happened and concludes that despair, though understandable, leads nowhere; he recommits himself to tikkun olam (doing his small part to repair the world), even while realizing that there exists much in the world that is uncontrollable and unfair. Perhaps his final embrace of Emily symbolizes his ability to simultaneously embrace these two insights.

Please send feedback. I'd also like to fax you a pictorial diagram of the above, modeled after the illustration in Ken's book, so expect this as soon as you send your fax number.

I thought our conversation on Sunday night was very useful. I feel somewhat more "back on track," ie., "forward movement" (!). I may not be able to talk by phone till the 26th or 27th, as Deane and I are visiting our daughters in Arizona through Monday next, then I come back to a very heavy week. But I'll call that weekend for sure. Thanks for your help, Kendra. I look forward to your reaction. Best, Johanna