

Simon the Coldheart

by Georgette Heyer

About the Author

The late Georgette Heyer was a very private woman. Her historical novels have charmed and delighted millions of readers for decades, though she rarely reached out to the public to discuss her works or private life. It is known that she was born in Wimbledon in August 1902, and her first novel, *The Black Moth*, was published in 1921.

Heyer published 56 books over the next 53 years, until her death from lung cancer in 1974. Heyer's large volume of works included Regency romances, mysteries and historical fiction. Known also as the Queen of Regency romance, Heyer was legendary for her research, historical accuracy and her extraordinary plots and characterizations. Her last book, *My Lord John*, was published posthumously in 1975. She was married to George Ronald Rougier, a mining engineer, and they had one son together, Richard.

Reading Group Guide

In the early 15th century, during the middle of the Hundred Years' War, England and France were fighting for sovereignty over France. It was a time of hand-to-hand combat, the invention of the longbow, and real knights in armor.

Simon Beauvallet was born in 1386, the illegitimate son of Geoffrey of Malvallet. After his mother's death in 1400, he and his half-brother, the legitimate son and heir of his father, became great friends of the Prince, fighting against France.

Known for his silence and nicknamed "the Coldheart," Simon nonetheless loved children and had a complex and deep personality. After the Battle of Agincourt in 1415, he was sent to besiege Belremy, where he met the lady, Margaret, who eventually surrendered to the English and became his bride.

1. Why do you think Heyer chose to introduce Simon at age 14 as he comes to Montlice, instead of as a young boy, or as an adult man? What do we learn about the character because of this?
2. How would you describe the relationship between Simon and Alan of Montlice? Which is the stronger character, and why? How do both characters benefit from their relationship?
3. When Simon's father, Geoffrey Malvallet, first comes to see Simon and offers to acknowledge him and give him a home, why does Simon say no? What feelings do you think Simon has for his father? What about his feelings for Fulk? Do you think Simon hides his feelings, or does he really not feel that deeply?
4. In a time of knights and constant warfare, Simon made his way in the world through hard work, unswerving adherence to his principles, and sheer force of will. In today's world, how might he achieve his goals? What line of work would he be in? Would he be as successful?

5. When Simon first comes to rule Fair Pastures, what do you learn from the kitchen scene with Hubert the steward, Bernard the secretary, and James Short-leg? Why do you think Heyer chose to provide the information in this way?
6. There are many instances in the book of people demonstrating fierce loyalty to Simon. How does Simon earn men's loyalty? Why do you think this is so effective?
7. Simon is nicknamed "The Coldheart" but Heyer seems to go to some lengths to show that he wasn't altogether coldhearted. Give some examples of scenes in which he shows that he has a softer side.
8. In the time period in this historical novel, birth was of great importance. How does Simon's low birth impede him in getting what he wants? How does he overcome this obstacle? Is he ever able to use his birth to his advantage?
9. King Henry refers to the three friends (Simon, Geoffrey, and Alan) as his Soldier, his Knight, and his Poet. How are these nicknames apt? Why do you think their friendship works so well?
10. Before we meet the character of Margaret, she is described as strong, cold, and proud. Are these positive characteristics, or negative? Does she live up to her reputation?
11. How well does Heyer integrate the romance element into this novel? Does the heroine seem fully realized as a character? Why or why not? How do you, as a modern woman, feel about the way Lady Margaret behaves in her relationship with Simon?
12. When Simon enters her castle alone and threatens the Lady Margaret with his sword, her court is shocked and horrified. Why are they so surprised? Why does his strategy work? If things had gone differently, do you think he would have been willing to kill Margaret? Why or why not?
13. Give some examples of scenes in which Heyer lightens the mood with humor. What character or characters does she use for this? Do you think Simon has a sense of humor?
14. Who would you rather be married to—Simon, Geoffrey, or Alan? Which of these three is the most romantic character?
15. In the time of this historical novel, war was a way of life. What was the attitude of the nobility toward war? What was the attitude of the King? What was the attitude of the common people? How have our attitudes toward war changed, or stayed the same? What about our attitudes toward our leaders?
16. What details does Heyer use to bring alive early fifteenth century England and France? How successfully do you think she does this?
17. How much do we learn about the politics of England, Wales and France from this book? How is each character affected by these politics? Do you think the various events and battles are central to the story, or are they used merely as a backdrop for Simon's personal story?

18. How is Margaret's treatment of her servants different from Simon's treatment of his? How is it similar? Compare her relationship with Jeanne to Simon's relationship with Geoffrey.
19. What was so shocking about Margaret's dressing as a boy to escape the castle? What does her doing so tell us about her character? Do you think this was a good move on her part?
20. Why do you think that Ranaud, who serves no master, goes out of his way to protect Margaret and Jeanne in the face of dangerous circumstances? Why does he then swear allegiance to Simon?
21. In what way was Jeanne and Margaret's being taken by Raoul a fate worse than death? If Simon had not come to the rescue, what do you think Margaret would have done? Would she have allowed herself to be married to Raoul? Why or why not? What were her options?
22. Simon can be said to have lived by the sword; he kills many men in battle. How is his slaying of Raoul the Terrible different? In what way is this a turning point for him? Do you feel that Simon is justified in killing the people that he does?
23. Why does Margaret's cousin, the Chevalier de Fleurival, try to have Simon assassinated? Do his actions stem from love, hate, or ambition? How does this threat to Simon advance the plot?
24. What do you think of Jeanne's relationship with Geoffrey? When she and Margaret are rescued by Geoffrey and Simon, Jeanne seems disappointed that Geoffrey is not angry with her for running away with Margaret. Why does she react this way?
25. Heyer paints a portrait of a man who was quite literally a knight in shining armor. Why do you think this fantasy is still so powerful? Does the knight in shining armor appeal to you? Why or why not?