



The Secret Agent (Illustrated): A Simple Tale

Joseph Conrad

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The Secret Agent: A Simple Tale is a novel by Joseph Conrad, published in 1907. The story is set in London in 1886 and deals with Mr. Adolf Verloc and his work as a spy for an unnamed country (presumably Russia). The Secret Agent is notable for being one of Conrad's later political novels in which he moved away from his former tales of seafaring. The novel deals broadly with anarchism, espionage and terrorism. It also deals with exploitation of the vulnerable, particularly in Verloc's relationship with his brother-in-law Stevie, who has an intellectual disability. The Secret Agent was ranked the 46th best novel of the 20th century by Modern Library. Because of its terrorism theme, it was noted as "one of the three works of literature most cited in the American media" two weeks after the September 11 attacks.

The novel is set in London in 1886 and follows the life of Mr. Verloc, a secret agent. Verloc is also a businessman who owns a shop which sells pornographic material, contraceptives, and bric-a-brac. He lives with his wife Winnie, his mother-in-law, and his brother-in-law, Stevie. Stevie has a mental disability, possibly autism, which causes him to be very excitable; his sister, Verloc's wife, attends to him, treating him more as a son than as a brother. Verloc's friends are a group of anarchists of which Comrade Ossipon, Michaelis, and "The Professor" are the most prominent. Although largely ineffectual as terrorists, their actions are known to the police. The group produce anarchist literature in the form of pamphlets entitled F.P., an acronym for The Future of the Proletariat.

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