

A12                      The Secret Agent                      1907

*A. First English edition.*

*(1) First printing, domestic issue*

THE | SECRET AGENT | A SIMPLE TALE | BY | JOSEPH CONRAD | METHUEN & CO. | 36  
ESSEX STREET W.C. | LONDON

*Note:* A few copies have been seen in which the second line of the imprint reads '36 ESSEX STREET W C.' For a note on this see (3) *First printing, colonial issue, second state*, below.

*Collation:*  $\pi^4$  A-2D<sup>8</sup> 2E<sup>6</sup> (\$1, +2E<sub>2</sub>, signed); pp. [2] [I-VI] 1-442 [443-444]; 187 x 127 mm.; [printed on wove paper.

*Contents:* first two pages, blank; p. i, half-title 'THE SECRET AGENT'; p. ii, list of nine works by Conrad plus the two collaborations with Ford; p. iii, title; p. iv, '*First Published in 1907*'; p. v, dedication to H. G. Wells; p. vi, blank; pp. 1-442, text; p. 443, 'THE RIVERSIDE PRESS LIMITED, EDINBURGH.'; p. 444, blank.

*Binding:* Dark red vertically ribbed cloth. Spine stamped in gold '[*shell and coral design*] | THE | SECRET | AGENT | JOSEPH\*CONRAD | [*flower*] | [*shell and coral design*] | METHUEN'. Top and fore-edge trimmed, bottom edge untrimmed. White wove end-papers. Bound in at the end is a 40 page publisher's catalogue dated September 1907.

*Copies examined:*

*(2) First printing, colonial issue, first state*

No copy located. All colonial issue copies were ordered transferred to the domestic stock (see (3) *First printing, colonial issue, second state*, below).

*(3) First printing, colonial issue, second state*

The colonial issue copies were transferred to the domestic stock and supplied with cancel half-title and title pages before binding. As both cancellandum and cancellans are a pair of conjugate leaves, there is no visible evidence of cancellation and for all practical purposes we must regard these copies as indistinguishable from the regular domestic issue. As has been noted, however, a few copies have been seen in which the second line of the imprint reads '36 ESSEX STREET W C.', dropping the full stop after 'W'. The error remains uncorrected in the second printing. Thus, it is possible the type was pulled during the course of the first printing, making two states of the title page, or that it was dropped between the first printing and the later machining of the cancel titles, perhaps when the type was removed to insert the Briggs imprint for the Canadian issue. If the latter is the case, only the cancel titles would be missing the full stop and copies with this title page would be the second state of the colonial issue. The collational formula for the second state of the colonial issue reads:  $\pi^4(+2.3)$  A-2D<sup>8</sup> 2E<sup>6</sup>.

*(4) First printing, Canadian issue*

THE | SECRET AGENT | A SIMPLE TALE | BY | JOSEPH CONRAD | WILLIAM  
BRIGGS | TORONTO

*Collation:*  $\pi^4$  A-2D<sup>8</sup> 2E<sup>6</sup> (\$1, +2E<sub>2</sub>, signed); pp. [2] [I-VI] 1-442 [443-444]; 184 x 121 mm.; printed on wove paper.

*Contents:* As in the domestic issue.

*Binding:* Light green smooth cloth. Front cover printed in black and white ‘[*illustration in black of a man standing by a tree; lettering, to the left, in white*] The | Secret | Agent | Joseph Conrad’; spine printed in white ‘The | Secret | Agent | [*ornament*] | Conrad | BRIGGS’. All edges trimmed. White wove end-papers.

*Copies examined:*

*Notes*

*First printing:* Originally conceived as a short story titled “Verloc”, Conrad began writing *The Secret Agent* in Montpellier in February 1906. Once the details of finishing *The Mirror of the Sea* had been completed, and Conrad returned to the story, it grew rapidly. In March he mentions it as a longish story of about 18,000 words; in September, when the manuscript of the serial version was nearly completed, he mentions 45,000 words; in November he wrote to Methuen that “book form” would be 68,000 words, or perhaps even more.

The book was pushed forward rapidly because American serial rights had been sold to *Ridgway’s Weekly* and the manuscript was needed. The serial publication ran from October 6 through December 15, 1906. But Conrad never considered the serial text to be the form in which the book was to be published. Nevertheless, once the obligations for the serial had been met Conrad set *The Secret Agent* aside to get on with writing *Chance*, promising to return to the former in June when he would do the necessary rewriting in the proofs. These he promised to return by the end of June so Methuen could include the book in his fall 1907 list. In November he had written to Methuen asking “whether it would be possible to have the book set up and *galley slips* pulled off for me to work on? I would like it done very much unless the cost of such self-indulgence were ruinous. I would send the type-script at once to you.” In the spring (the letter is undated) Conrad wrote to Pinker sending him “the SA up to p. 160 – half the vol. Let them get on with that. The second half will take more time. But I promise not to linger over it more than a decent regard for my work requires.” Apparently he was sending 160 pages of a new typescript, already substantially revised, from which Methuen was to begin setting the proofs. Pinker wrote back at the end of April asking if the corrected proofs which would follow shortly could be returned promptly and whether he might not send a second set of the proofs to Harper for the American edition. Conrad replied, May 3, from Montpellier, “The proofs of *Sec<sup>t</sup> Agt* will be given back end June not before. I must *see* that story. The mere notion of you sending the proofs to Harpers puts me in a fever of apprehension. Don’t do it for goodness sake. You know it was always understood the book had to be worked upon thoroughly.”

The proofs reached Conrad at Geneva in mid-May, but they were not what he had expected, as he wrote to Pinker in an hysterical letter dated May 18: “the proofs of SA have reached me and I have almost cried at the sight. I thought it was arranged beyond doubt that I was to have *galley slips* for my corrections. Instead of that I get proofs of set pages! Apart from the cost of correction which will be greatly augmented through that there is the material difficulty of correcting clearly and easily on small margins....

“In the circumstances after reflecting on the best way of dealing with the SA I think I *must* curtail my corrections as much as possible. I have begun to correct and shall be sending you the first signatures as I finish them off.”

By “correction,” of course, Conrad meant “revision.” Possibly Methuen believed Conrad had completed his revisions in the new typescript, or perhaps in the six months between Conrad’s request that he be sent galley slips and the setting of the proofs the request was forgotten. In either event, Conrad, beset by pressing financial troubles and worried by Borys’ series of illnesses, was in a state of nervous distraction and in no very reasonable frame of mind. The day following the above letter he wrote again to Pinker: “When I look at the proofs of the SA I feel exasperated with Methuen. The utter contempt shown for my wishes and my instructions is galling. If it had been the merest fancy I think that Conrad was worth attending to. But you know it was no mere author’s caprice. I had hurried the thing on in the hope of having every facility to give it a properly finished shape later on.”

But he set to work and by May 25 was able to write to Pinker, “I send you by this post 64 pp. of corrected proof. On Monday I will post some more; by Thursday you will get half the book and I believe that the whole will be in your hands by the end of this month. Let Methuen set up the corrections and forward you the revises in two sets. One set you will be able to send to U.S. as it comes in. The other please forward to me as I wish to look over the revise for the English edition which will be the standard one. This last remark applies to all my work. The English edition is the authoratative one in case of future reprints. Please my dear Pinker bear that in mind; for you will have the care of my literary reputation when I am no longer there to fuss about things myself.”

He continued reading and revising proofs as they were sent to him until, in July, the last lot was ready. These he returned to Pinker with a request that he “try to have a corrected set sent to the States. If the money *of the public* ever comes to us it will be from there. We must treat them well.” In August Conrad was back in London and dropped by Methuen and “worried out a set of pages . . . just in time to discover a beastly typographical blunder affecting the two last chapters. This incredible carelessness! However, I think I was in time, but one can trust no one.” On 2 August 1907 Methuen ordered 2500 copies of *The Secret Agent* printed by the Riverside Press, Edinburgh. Three issues of the book were intended and for each separate preliminaries were printed: 1500 for the domestic issue, 500 for the colonial issue with the ‘Methuen Colonial Library’ half-title and title pages, and 500 for the Canadian issue with the imprint of William Briggs, Toronto.<sup>28</sup> The 2000 copies (with eleven overs) intended for the domestic and colonial issues were delivered August 20th and sent directly to the binder with instructions to bind the 1500 domestic issue copies. The bound copies from this order were received by the publisher between September 6th and 24th. The sheets for the Canadian issue reached Methuen August 27th and were shipped unbound to the Toronto publisher.

As advance orders from the English booksellers exceeded expectations, it was decided to transfer the colonial issue sheets to the domestic stock. An entry in the publisher’s stock ledger notes the receipt of 550 ‘English titles’ September 13th and on the same date the 511 colonial copies were ordered bound in the domestic binding. (For the two states of the colonial issue preliminaries see A2a(2) and (3) above.) These copies were received from the binder between September 25th and October 2nd.

*Publication:* 12 September 1907 in England at 6s. Ryerson Press records do not give the date of publication for the William Briggs issue though, allowing for shipment and binding in Canada, it could not have been before late September. Reviews appeared in the *Evening Standard* (London), the *Daily News* (London), and the *Manchester Guardian* on September 12th and in other papers later the same week. Conrad inscribed a copy to his wife September 12th. The British Museum depository copy was received September 24th.

*Subsequent printings:* A second printing of 2500 copies (2531 receive) was ordered September 16th. Of these, 1431 were issued in the Methuen Colonial Library (781 in paper wrappers and 650 in cloth), replacing the 500 originally scheduled for colonial issue and adding 931 to the total. A third printing of 1000 copies followed October 14th and a fourth of the same number on October 25th, after which moulds were made for stereotype plates and the type distributed. The error in the last line on page 117, 'be be' for 'to be', continued through the first four printings before it was corrected.

By the end of 1907 Methuen had had printed 511 domestic, 1431 colonial, and 500 Canadian copies of *The Secret Agent* and had sold 3400 domestic, 1200 colonial and all the Canadian copies, but Conrad still was not happy with the publicity Methuen was giving to his books. In February 1908 he wrote to Pinker:

"As to the matter of publicity I can tell you something which you will see at once. We can't compare B'wood with M. B'wood Mag. is unique in its way. Nearly 300000 words passed through that Magazine and took my name wherever the English language is read. And the Conrad who wrote *Lord Jim* is not the Conrad of today, who has done *Youth*, *Typhoon*, *Nostromo*, *Mirror of the Sea* since. B'wood paid me for the *book* £240 (including 40 from Gage Toronto which they arranged for me). But only say 200. Mr. John B'wood told me 3 years ago that my sale did cover up the advance – and no more. The roy. was 20 { % } I think, certainly not higher. Well, on that basis if M. sold 5 times as many copies (I only wish he had) of S.A. already, then  $200 \times 5 = 1000$ . Simple facts and figures. But as a matter of fact M has done nothing of the kind – or at least I can't believe it till proof positive as above. And that will be a long time in coming.

"The last I heard of SA in Dec I think was a report of 4,600 cop. of which 1,200 Col Ed. the three-penny thing. And that's about the size of it. Therefore my remarks on publicity stand. Whatever M tries to do he will never do for me what the B'wood connection has done.

"The only recent publicity I had was from Heinemann 3 reviews on day of publication and enough stir made around the book (*Typhoon*) to impress Harvery [of Harper & Brothers, New York] when he came over here. Pawling took some trouble over it. So he did over the *Nigger*. But M is a mere shop anyhow. That's how it strikes me. He has 200 authors and doesn't care for one more than another. But I've only one life to live. A man eminent in his way and who is concerned with the publication of books (not a publisher) told me that the SA was quite worth a special effort of publishing. An effort which was *not* made. The fact is the good man is not in touch with the literary world. People will do things for my work if they are properly approached. A mere hint on my part was sufficient for the Ev. Standard to give me a pub<sup>on</sup> review of the SA. But it isn't my business, tho' even I could do something from my hole if I tried.

"I repeat that M won't get 4 novels out of me on some damned pretense or other – unless by Jove he does something for it except asking *me* to write instructions and a synopsis and a description for his travellers – for his famous travellers. And if I write a 65000 novel he will have to take it. I amnot a draper to measure my stuff to the exact yard. If he won't then I'll have no difficulty to get another publisher for it. The next *vol.* he gets will have to be taken as the 2nd under the contract and in no other way. That will make him a pretty set of five vols if he cares to have it."

Conrad's effort to write a popular novel, one which would be a selling success and provide him with the money needed to get out from under pressing debts, had fallen far short of his hopes. In his frustration it was all too easy to blame the failure on an inadequate advertising campaign. Sales tapered off rapidly after the end of 1907 and the book was not reprinted until February 1914 when, in a 2s format, it was offered once more to a public whose interest in Conrad had been awakened by his best-selling *Chance*. In all, there were thirteen printings in England of *The Secret Agent* from the first editing setting, totaling something over 41,500 copies (6,500 before 1914 and 35,000 after that date) during Conrad's lifetime.

*First printing*

[*within a single rule border*] [*in red*] THE SECRET AGENT | {bl}A Simple  
Tale{/bl} | BY | JOSEPH CONRAD | [*in red: publisher's device*] | NEW YORK AND  
LONDON | [*in red*] HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS | MCMVII

*Collation:*  $\pi^4$  [1]<sup>8</sup> 2–23<sup>8</sup> 24<sup>4</sup>; pp. [4] [I–IV] 1–372 [373–374] [2]; 186 x 124 mm.; printed on wove paper.

*Contents:* first four pages, blank; p. i, title; p. ii, list of nine works by Conrad plus the two collaboratoins with Ford; below, '[*within a single rule frame*] copyright, 1907, by HARPER & BROTHERS. | [*short rule*] | *All rights reserved.* | Published September, 1907.'; p. iii, half-title 'THE SECRET AGENT'; p. iv, blank; pp. 1–373, text; p. 374 and the last two pages, blank.

*Binding:* a. Light blue smooth cloth. Front cover printed in dark blue, orange, and white with an illustration representing Atropos about to cut the thread of life from which is suspended a shuttle and a triangle within which is printed in orange outlined in black 'THE | SECRET | AGENT | JOSEPH CONRAD'; spine printed in orange 'THE | SECRET | AGENT | [*in dark blue: illustration of a shuttle and shears*] | CONRAD | HARPERS'. All edges trimmed. White wove end-papers.

b. Dark blue linen finish cloth. Front cover stamped in gold '[*within a frame of two rules terminating at the base in a circular ship device, a gold panel with lettering in cover cloth*] THE | SECRET AGENT | [*rule*] | JOSEPH CONRAD'; spine stamped in gold 'THE SECRET | AGENT | [*rule*] | JOSEPH | CONRAD | HARPERS'. All edges trimmed. White wove end-papers.

*Copies examined:**Notes*

*First printing:* From the number and nature of the textual variants between the English and American editions of *The Secret Agent*, it would appear that Methuen supplied early proofs without Conrad's corrections to Harper to serve as copy-text. Of the something over one hundred changes noted, most consist of an added, deleted, or altered word or short phrase, the type of correction easily made in proof. On 15 August 1907 Harper ordered 4000 copies of the book printed. It was entered for copyright in the United States August 29th and the required two depository copies were received at the Library of Congress September 11th. Though the Chase Act of 1891 required American manufacture of books as a qualification for securing copyright in the United States, Harper did not begin indicating American printing in their books until 1909, perhaps prompted to do so then by the reiteration of this requirement in the Copyright Act of 1909. Some copies of *The Secret Agent* are rubber stamped beneath the copyright notice on the verso of the title page 'Printed in U. S. of America.' It is probable these are copies placed on sale by the publisher after 1909.

*Publication:* On or about 14 September 1907 at \$1.50. It is noted in *Publishers Weekly*, 14 September 1907, as being brought out that week and is included among the new books in the following issue, September 21st. By the end of the year the book had sold 2676 copies, but sales dropped off sharply after that and averaged only sixty copies a year until the success of *Chance* doubled that figure for the years 1914–1920.

*Subsequent Printings:* *The Secret Agent* was reprinted only once by Harper: 500 copies ordered in November 1919. The book was removed from Harper's list 11 December 1920, though copies continued to be sold until September 1921 after which, with 240 copies still in stock, no further entries appear in the ledger.

*C. Second American edition.*

*(1) First American printing*

Published in volume VIII of the Doubleday, Page 'Sun-Dial Edition' of Conrad's works (see B1a, below).

*(2) First English Printing*

Published in the Dent 'Uniform Edition' of Conrad's works (see B1b, Vol. VIIIa, below).

*D. Second English edition.*

Published in volume VIII of the Heinemann edition of Conrad's works (see B2, below).

*E. Third English edition.*

Copy in Lilly styled "Twelfth edition" is from a new setting of type.