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### A Chaotic Hierarchy

Toodles, the private secretary of Sir Ethelred, a high-ranking political figure, was depicted by Joseph Conrad in an unsophisticated and unsympathetic fashion to criticize the corruption in bureaucratic government and to mock the irrationality of social hierarchy.

Conrad depicts Toodles' physical appearance as plain and his life experience as lacking. Toodle was introduced as a "fair, smooth-faced young man, whose symmetrically arranged hair [gives] him the air of a large and neat schoolboy" (99). How could such a "large and neat schoolboy" with his gibberish name also be a private secretary working for a high-ranking official? Toodles seems to be completely out of place, unless he is incredibly gifted, which was certainly not Conrad's design. Instead, Conrad implies that Toodles' qualification is because of his "numerous family and the wide connections (in the government)" (105). While Toodles' work mainly comprises of leading people to the office of Sir Ethelred and patiently waiting outside of the door, Conrad also depicts characters like the cabman, who makes a hard living by dragging people around with his poor horse every night. Moreover, while the cabman works hard to barely provide for "(his) missus and four kids at 'ome" (122), Toodle is "unpaid" since making money is not his concern at all given the wealth his family has. As soon as he was born, his families' social privilege immediately guarantees him a life of "an austere and exalted destiny" (105). Through those contrasts, Conrad reveals the cruel and irrational social order that differentiates people by their background at birth but not their hard work and efforts and criticizes the corruption prevalent in bureaucratic governments.

*Analysis on Toodles, who appeared in Chapter 7 & 10 as a private secretary*

Toodles, as someone in politics, is also described as unsympathetic politically, which makes the audience further question the structure of social hierarchy. Toodle is only worried that Sir Ethelred may lose political power because of his “revolutionary” policies on the nationalization of fisheries (106). However, regarding the recent terrorist attack that threatens social security and may cause the loss of human lives, Toodles always refers to it as something small and insignificant. Using Toodles’ indifference towards the interests and lives of common people, Conrad questions the purpose of bureaucratic governments in general since they are not serving the people but themselves. Furthermore, Toodles’s indifference was portrayed more vividly during his conversation with the Assistant Commissioner, when he learned that there is an anarchist in the esteemed and exclusive club “Explorers” that he has always trusted. He shockingly responded to the Admission Commissioner, “that’s the beastliest thing I’ve ever heard in my life” (159). Besides, Conrad describes that he was “offended with the Assistant Commissioner for exposing such an unsavoury and disturbing fact” (159). The unsophisticated way of using the word “beasties” and indifferent reaction remind readers of the reaction that Stevie has when he finds out that the lives of the cabman and his horse are miserable. Both are exposed to the evidence that the perfect world in their mind is actually filled with cruel realities; however, while Stevie rages for justice and change, Toodles is annoyed when he is confronted with the truth. Originally, politics should be fundamentally about sympathizing with the public so that a healthier social structure can be formed for the common good. However, Conrad makes Toodles’ ability to sympathize with the public far more inferior than Stevie’s, who is mentally disabled. Sarcastically, Stevie thinks that the police, or more generally the government, always maintain justice forcefully. In reality, for people in politics like Toodles, they are indifferent and only care about practicing justice for their own sake (like how Ms. Verloc answers to Stevie).

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Profoundly, through contrasting characters in different fates like Toodles, cabman and Steve, Conrad mocks the purpose of having governments, and moreover, the purpose of having social hierarchies.

### **Bibliography**

Joseph Conrad. *The Secret Agent*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008.