

“The Good Terrorist” by Doris Lessing [B2]

Nel pieno del fermento politico della Londra degli anni ‘80, una giovane impegnata si unisce a un gruppo radicale. In questo romanzo della Premio Nobel 2007, violenza e disillusione mettono in luce le fratture tra idealismo e morale personale.

Winner of the 2007 Nobel Prize in Literature, British novelist Doris Lessing explores themes such as feminism, politics, psychology and societal structures in her work. In her satirical novel *The Good Terrorist*, political idealism **propels** a protagonist into committing a violent act. The novel was published in 1985 at a time when the IRA was bombing **targets** across the UK, including Northern Ireland.

SQUATTERS

The novel centres on a group of radicals in London. Alice, the book's protagonist, is in her mid-thirties, well-educated, practical, **caring** and naïve. Determined to oppose what they believe to be a “fascist” establishment in the government of Margaret Thatcher, Alice and her partner, Jasper, join a communist group **squatting** a London **council** house. The **council** has deliberately made the house uninhabitable, but Alice is still shocked by what she sees: “Light fell on desolation. Worse, danger: she was looking at electric cables ripped out of the wall and dangling, raw-ended. The cooker was pulled out and lying on the floor. The broken windows had admitted rain water which lay in puddles everywhere. There was a dead bird on the floor. It stank. Alice began to cry. It was from pure rage.” “Davanti a lei c’era uno spettacolo di totale squallore. Anzi, di pericolo: i fili elettrici erano stati strappati dalla parete e lasciati penzolare, scoperti. La cucina giaceva a terra, rovesciata; la pioggia era entrata dai vetri rotti, formando pozze dappertutto. Sul pavimento c’era un uccello morto che mandava un terribile fetore. Alice si mise a piangere. Era un pianto di rabbia.”

BACKGROUND

Despite her revolutionary zeal, Alice has had a comfortable middle-class upbringing and likes a clean and tidy home. She clears the buckets of excrement, manages the household budget, and exerts her authority with the police and local council. Her comrades are harder to convince, especially Faye, unstable and vulnerable, who comes from a very different background: “I’ve met people like you before, Alice. [...] You cannot let things be. You’re always keeping things up and making things work. If there’s a bit of dust in a corner you panic. [...] I care about one thing, Alice. [...] I want to put an end to this shitty fucking filthy lying cruel hypocritical system. Do you understand?” “Ho conosciuto altre persone come te, Alice [...] Tu non sei capace di prendere le cose come vengono. Tutto deve essere perfetto, tutto deve funzionare. Se c’è un po’ di polvere in un angolo, tu ti disperi! [...] A me interessa una sola cosa, Alice. [...] Io voglio metter fine a questo fottuto schifoso ipocrita falso spietato sistema di merda. Mi capite?”

PARENTS

Alice’s parents are divorced and she is contemptuous of the lives they lead. She steals money from her father and lets Jasper scrounge food, money and accommodation from her mother, failing to see the sacrifices that her mother has made, until her mother points it out: “I used to look at you when you were little, and I thought, well, at least I’ll make sure that Alice gets educated, she’ll be equipped. I won’t have Alice stuck in my position, no qualifications for anything. But it turned out that you spend your life exactly as I did. Cooking and nannying for other people. An all-purpose female drudge.” “Quando eri piccola ti guardavo e pensavo, be’, almeno farò in modo che riceva una buona educazione, così avrà gli strumenti per cavarsela. Non voglio che diventi come me, incapace di fare qualsiasi cosa. Ma il risultato è che tu vivi esattamente come ho vissuto io. Non fai che cucinare e occuparti degli altri. Una schiava pronta a tutto.”

EXPLOSIVE ENDING

The novel reveals Alice's wilful ignorance, and how groupthink subsumes individual integrity — how an apparently good person can be complicit in violence. When the radicals forge links with the IRA, Alice's comrades begin plotting their own bombing campaign. She battles with her conscience as, inevitably, the plans head for disaster. Alice ends up alone in the house, her mind fluttering like a trapped insect: "I was all the time waiting for something to start — she thought; and on her face came a small scared incredulous smile at the inappropriateness of it. Had she not believed that the bombing was serious, then? No, not really; she had gone along with it, while feeling it was not right — and behind that was the thought that serious work (whatever that might turn out to be) would come later." "Aspettavo sempre che qualcosa 'accadesse' — pensò; e sul viso le spuntò un risolino spaventato e quasi incredulo. Possibile che non avesse mai considerato l'attentato una cosa seria? No, no; era stata al gioco, pur continuando a pensare che ci fosse qualcosa di sbagliato, che il lavoro 'serio', qualunque fosse, sarebbe venuto in seguito."

IGNORANCE

The Good Terrorist is angry, witty and ever-relevant. It is prepared to broach the complex relationship between idealism and fanaticism more effectively perhaps than any work of non-fiction. As Lessing herself said, "Fiction makes a better job of the truth."

Glossary

- **subsumes** = assorbire
- **broach** = affrontare
- **caring** = premurosa
- **council** = comune
- **failing** = non riuscire a
- **ends up** = finire
- **fluttering** = agitarsi
- **propels** = spingere
- **squatting** = occupare (illegalmente)
- **upbringing** = educazione
- **buckets** = secchi
- **household budget** = bilancio domestico
- **scrounge** = scroccare
- **plotting** = complottare
- **head for** = dirigersi verso
- **targets** = obiettivi
- **tidy** = ordinata
- **contemptuous** = sprezzante
- **wilful** = ostinata
- **forge** = instaurare
- **witty** = arguta
- **ever-relevant** = sempre attuale
- **council house** = casa popolare
- **the lives they lead** = le vite che conducono
- **groupthink** = pensiero di gruppo