

Method and Myth in L. P. Hartley's *The Go-Between*

Betty Jay^{[a],*}

^[a] Ph.D., MA in English Literature, Director of Graduate Studies (Taught),
Royal Holloway, University of London, UK.

* Corresponding author.

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Abstract

Critical readings of *The Go-Between* often relate its depiction of sexuality, class and gender to the symbolism with which the author is frequently identified. Such connections can be further illuminated by considering T.S. Eliot's notion of the "mythical method". Hartley's narrator seems to make extensive use of a personalised version of the "method" advocated by the poet. Mapping his world onto the Zodiac, Leo's use of the "mythical method" enables him – at least for a short while – to order and control his experience. Initially offering him the mastery he craves, this method eventually renders Leo more vulnerable to the dramas that unfold around him. Once the integrity of his mythic structure is threatened, Leo's own disintegration is assured. Given his absolute faith in the Zodiac, Leo comes only belatedly to recognise a different mythic parallel at work in his life. This other doubling sees Leo's fate twinned with that of Icarus. Eventually acknowledged by Leo himself, this figure demonstrates Hartley's on going concern with both method and myth and therefore suggests that his narrative – like its central protagonist, can offer the reader a critical perspective on the workings of each.

Key words: Mythical method; Mythic doubles; Icarus; Zodiac; Mercury; Mastery; Structure; Order; Hierarchy; The fall

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We are all tellers of tales. We each seek to provide our scattered and often confusing experiences with a sense of coherence by arranging the episodes of our lives into stories. This is not the stuff of delusion or self-deception. We are not telling ourselves lies. Rather, through our personal myths, each of us discovers what is true and what is meaningful in life. In order to live well, with unity and purpose, we compose a heroic narrative of the self. (McAdams, 1993, p. 11)

In using the myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him. They will not be imitators, any more than the scientist who uses the discoveries of an Einstein in pursuing his own, independent further investigations. It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history. It is a method already adumbrated by Mr. Yeats, and of the need for which I believe Mr. Yeats to have been the first contemporary to be conscious. It is a method for which the horoscope is auspicious. Instead of narrative method, we may now use the mythical method. It is, I seriously believe, a step towards making the modern world possible for art. (Eliot, 1975, pp. 177-178)

As a child of the late Victorian era, Leo Colston, whose story is told in *The Go-Between* (1953) views the turn of the century as no less than "the dawn of a Golden Age" (Hartley, 1997, p. 8). For him, it heralds a welcome movement away from an era marred by sickness and death, which has left him fatherless. Leo's excitement is further intensified because the year ahead will also bring about his serendipitous coming-of-age. As he asserts: "I was between twelve and thirteen, and I wanted to think of myself as a man" (ibid.). Despite his utopian fantasies concerning the "glorious destiny of the twentieth century" (ibid., p. 9), the subsequent course of Leo's life is determined by his brief sojourn with the Maudsley family at Brandham Hall. This period, covering just nineteen days in the Summer of 1900, obliterates Leo's early passion, promise and creativity. It leads him into a solitary and regulated existence, supplanting the "rapture" (ibid.,

p. 7) of his anticipation with “disappointment and defeat” (ibid., p. 6).

Critics approaching L. P. Hartley's most well-known novel have been drawn by its concern with “the recovery of lost memories where those memories are not only personal (and, it turns out, deeply painful) but collective and cultural” (Brooks-Davies, 1997, p. XI). Clearly, Leo's repressed childhood experiences invite psychoanalytic readings of the novel's complex patterns of desire and identification and of how these might relate to a wider construction and understanding of past. Indeed, Virginia L. Blum goes so far to argue that all of the elements to be found in the narrative can be traced back to an Oedipal origin:

Children in literature frequently are installed in go-between positions, be it between classes, races, generations, good and evil, nature and civilization. Whatever the operative metaphor, however, the child is always, radically, the sexual go-between, with the other triangles merely displacing and reformulating the Oedipal. (Blum, 1989, p. 100)

Yet equally pertinent to an understanding of the text is the question of precisely how the young Leo navigates his world. For, in addition to its exploration of memory, longing and the adult dramas into which the boy is drawn, *The Go-Between* also concerns itself with those structures – primarily mythical, but also linguistic – which enable Leo to order his experience. As a consequence of the events of the Summer, these structures fail and the exuberant child, once lauded as “a master of language” (Hartley, 1997, p. 14) is lost. From this perspective, what makes Leo's experience so damaging is not simply the drama of witnessing what might be viewed as a primal scene, or even that this is swiftly followed by a disaster (the suicide of Ted Burgess) that henceforth connects desire to death. Clearly, these events can readily be understood in terms of the trauma they induce since they overwhelm the boy and cannot be assimilated into his existing epistemological structures. However, Leo's prolonged atrophy, which lasts for more than fifty years, can better illuminated if one also takes into account his relationship to the mythic and in particular those systems that hitherto enable him, to not only know but also to master the world. Following the events of the Summer Leo's own personal rendition of ‘the mythical method’ and the mastery it *seems* to bestow, is exposed as little more than an elaborate and finally inadequate fiction.¹ Its disintegration ensures Leo's emergence as an individual in whom all desire is extinguished. He will never experience sexual intimacy with another human being. With his life spent “cataloguing other people's books instead of writing [his] own” (ibid., p. 17), Leo excels only in the “undertaker's art” (ibid., p. 16), burying his memories and his desires alongside the boy he once was.

In the Prologue an older Leo, now in his sixties, is compelled by the unexpected discovery of his old diary, to excavate the secrets it contains. Before these are fully unearthed, a portrait of the younger Leo is delineated by his disdainful adult counterpart. It is evident from this brief sketch that as a child Leo has a very particular relationship to language and an acute awareness of the power it can wield. It is this aspect of Leo's early existence, first underlined in the Prologue that will prove vital to an understanding the absolute negation of identity that results from his experiences at the Hall.

Entranced by the beauty of the diary, Leo longs to become a writer worthy of “its general sumptuousness” (ibid., p. 9). His aspiration leads Leo, in turn, to discover the terrible power of language and to understand for himself, the consequences of a simple verbal transgression. When his use of a “pretentious word” (ibid., p. 10) in the diary is discovered by the other boys at his boarding school, Leo is singled out for bullying. His carefully chosen signifier, “Vanquished!” (ibid., p. 9) is deployed by his tormentors to further their persecution of him. Eventually, Leo's stoical response to such treatment gives way to a more active stance. He first reclaims his “defaced diary”, by erasing from its “violated” pages the word repeatedly scribbled there. Then, accomplished as he is, in the twinned arts of code-making and code-breaking, Leo alights upon what turns out to be a strangely effective means of preventing further attacks. In order to facilitate his revenge, (or “poetic justice”), he invents a sequence of curses, “concocted ... out of figures and algebraical symbols and ... some Sanskrit characters ... in a translation of the *Peau de Chagrin*” (ibid., p. 11). Mixing these different languages together, Leo, who knows very well his diary will be read by the other boys, is able to create a pleasing sense of “malevolence” (ibid., p. 12) with his inscriptions. In a fortunate coincidence, Leo's magic appears to work upon his chief tormentors, Jenkins and Strode, who are involved in an accident (a rooftop tumble) and almost lose their lives. In the light of their misfortunes, Leo's status amongst the boys is enhanced and his ill-treatment ends.

Although Leo fondly recalls his elevation as “a recognized authority on two subjects dear to the hearts of most boys at that time: black magic and code-making” (ibid., p. 14), his triumph can only be understood within a limited context, that of the school. In his communications with his mother he is ever mindful of her moral and religious beliefs and must “edit and bowdlerize” his experiences:

to such a degree that very little of the original was left; and least of all the intoxicating transition from a trough of persecution to a pedestal of power. A few of the boys had been a little unkind, now they were all very kind.

¹ For a detailed discussion of Eliot's “mythical method,” see Jewel Spears Brooker, *Mastery and Escape: T. S. Eliot and the Dialectic of Modernism*.

As well as downplaying his own suffering, Leo also masks the virulence of his own response to the boys who inflict it. The vengeful curses over which he has laboured and which are inked in his own blood, become little more than “something [he] had written in [his] diary which was rather like a prayer” (ibid., p. 22). Whilst such self-censorship curtails Leo’s sense of achievement, it nonetheless proves his aptitude for fashioning a narrative designed to suit the particular sensibilities of his listener and therefore serves as yet another demonstration of linguistic accomplishment. During his later crisis at the Hall, Leo will try in vain to deploy the skills that here serve him so well. First, he sends a carefully coded missive in which he pleads for his mother to call him home. Then, in a simple act of sabotage designed to prevent a forbidden assignation between lovers, Leo alters a message he is entrusted to deliver. Finally, when his letter fails to bring about rescue, Leo resorts once again to Black Magic. He casts an elaborate spell designed to sever the lovers’ bond. None of these strategies, all of which depend upon Leo already proven ability to exploit the power of the signifier, extricate him from his predicament. Indeed, the simple act of altering the time at which the meeting takes place proves catastrophic for all concerned.

Despite his inventiveness, demonstrated by the curses and again through his competence as editor and translator, Leo’s time with the Maudsley family will see him consistently fail to exert himself in precisely these areas. The reason for this is that it is not just the past (to paraphrase the novel’s famous opening), that can be viewed in terms of its foreignness. At Brandham Hall, Leo will have to negotiate an upper-class culture and will encounter for the first time the unfathomable adult world of desire. Doubly estranged, Leo will struggle to decipher the complex exchanges to which he is party. Here, his spells will fail, his editorial skills will be exposed as inept and above all, his faith in the symbolic structures that he increasingly relies upon to map this new world, prove to be his undoing.

MAPPING THE ZODIAC

If the young Leo’s assimilation into the exclusive world of the Hall is called into question by his inability to understand complex class relations and sexual exchanges, he will later suspect that his very presence there is the result of a nominal misunderstanding. As he notes, the apparent grandeur of his home address, ‘Court Place’, is probably what leads Mrs. Maudsley to identify him as a suitable companion for her son, Marcus. Indeed, both mother and son believe Leo shares their more elevated social position, oblivious to his middle-class origins and, in the wake of his father’s recent death, uncertain economic and social status. One consequence of this

mistaken identity is that, Leo – despite his own snobbery and desire to belong – is very much out of place at the Hall. For this reason, he depends on Marcus to guide him in questions of propriety:

And, Leo, there’s another thing you mustn’t do. When you undress you wrap your clothes up and put them on a chair. Well, you mustn’t. You must leave them lying wherever they happen to fall – the servants will pick them up – that’s what they’re for. (ibid., p. 37)

Once initiated into the peculiar habits of the elite (‘only cads ate their porridge sitting down’ [ibid., p. 57]), Leo’s otherwise tenuous bond with Marcus begins to flourish. What further consolidates their relationship is a shared adherence to a schoolboy language. As Leo later recollects:

At home we had one way of talking and at school another: they were as distinct as two different languages. But when we were alone together, and especially when any excitement – like Marcus’s suspected measles – was afoot, we often lapsed into schoolboy talk, even away from school. Only when Marcus was instructing me in *les convenances*, as he called them, for he liked to air his French, did he stick closely to an unadorned vocabulary. They were a serious matter. (ibid., p. 59)

Alongside this language is a code, or system of ethics, which governs Leo’s actions when he is at school and to which he must adhere if he is to be integrated there. In this institutional context, he must also find ways to adapt his mother’s injunctions to suit the mores of his classmates. Caught between home, with its religious edicts and the school, with its limited but studied acts of defiance, Leo invariably manages to meet the demands of both. Thus, he is able to say his daily prayers “for our code permitted it as long as it was done in a perfunctory manner” (ibid., p. 22). Eventually, when he finds himself unable to decide upon a course of action (whether to peek at Marion’s unsealed letter), it is to this schoolboy code that Leo returns. In so doing, he uses a resource belonging to childhood in order to negotiate the problems that arise as a consequence of his forays into the adult world. For now, however, Leo depends upon Marcus to guide him in matters relating to the Hall, so that he might better translate *himself* into this foreign realm, crossing from his middle-class origins into the world of the social elite.

Despite Leo’s desire to take instruction and Marcus’s willingness to share his expertise, there are limits to how far such an alliance can go. For unlike Marcus, who is at home with the privilege afforded by life at the Hall, an awe-struck Leo remains confounded by the people he encounters there:

I did not understand the world of Brandham Hall; the people there were much larger than life; their meaning was as obscure to me as the meaning of the curses I had called down on Jenkins and Strode; they had zodiacal properties and proportions. They were, in fact, the substance of my dreams, the realization of my hopes, they were the incarnated glory of the twentieth century; I could no more have been indifferent to them than after fifty

years the steel could be indifferent to the magnets in my collar-box. (ibid., p. 16)

Unable to comprehend these elevated figures, Leo instead chooses to associate them with one of the principle structures through which he gives “shape and significance” to the world. Derived from the design on the frontispiece to his beloved diary, the Zodiac provides Leo with a distinct pattern through which he can orientate himself. With each sign, “somehow contriving to suggest a plenitude of life and power, each glorious, though differing from the others in glory” (ibid., p. 7), the Zodiac epitomises Leo’s aspirations but equally, his belief that there is an over-riding order and structure to the world. Before his arrival at the Hall, the Zodiac is an object of contemplation for Leo, who privately debates which figure he most identifies with and might one day become: “there were only two candidates, the Archer and the Water-carrier” (ibid., p. 8). Possessed of an “imagination” that is “passionately hierarchical” and which “envisaged things in an ascending scale, circle on circle, tier on tier”, Leo adds his own embellishment to the astrological system. The “mechanical revolution of the months” that characterises the more conventional form of the Zodiac is eclipsed by a different movement. This emanates from the symbolic figures that go to make up the Zodiac and which, to Leo’s mind at least, “soar[...] in an ascending spiral towards infinity”, thus confirming his sense of the universe as boundless and elevated. Such a hierarchical re-conceptualization of the Zodiac means that when Leo eventually encounters the Brandham set, the only way he is able to comprehend the superior wealth and power they epitomise, is by mapping them onto this celestial realm. At the same time, the structure and design of the Zodiac also mirrors the nascent desires which Leo experiences at the Hall.

At its apex is the Virgin, or Maiden. From the outset, she represents for Leo “the key to the whole pattern, the climax, the coping-stone, the goddess”. Crucially, once Leo arrives at the Hall, this figure will be connected to Marion, the woman he will come to desire and who will inadvertently bring about the collapse of both the boy and his elaborate epistemology. It will take him more than half a century to perceive both the idealism of the original design in terms of a knowledge that only comes later:

The Fishes sported deliciously, as though there were no such things as nets and hooks; the Crab had a twinkle in its eye, as though it was well aware of its odd appearance and thoroughly enjoyed the joke; and even the Scorpion carried its terrible pincers with a gay, heraldic air, as though its deadly intentions existed only in legend. The Ram, the Bull, and the Lion epitomized imperious manhood; they were what we all thought we had it in us to be; careless, noble, self-sufficient, they ruled their months with sovereign sway. (ibid., p. 7)

Although the Zodiac is crucial to the way in which Leo chooses to structure and read the world, it is curious

that once he arrives at the Hall, he no longer exploits the ontological potential of this sign system. Instead of seeking for his own double amongst the twelve figures, Leo uses the Zodiac as a mythical template in which he locates the most important people he encounters. Leo’s reticence or indecisiveness concerning which figure he most identifies with and therefore where precisely he might belong in this system is directly contrasted with the willingness of others to impose particular identities upon him. The first to do so is Marion.

While Leo is inspired by a Zodiacal ordering of the universe, his own movement through the celestial realm of the Hall is thwarted by genteel poverty. His mother’s decision to save money by skimping on his wardrobe means that Leo, attired in a thick Norfolk suit, can do little but suffer and wilt in the unexpected heat-wave. Embarrassed by the “mild persecution” (ibid., p. 38) his overheated condition seems to invite, yet fearful lest his family’s shortcomings be publicly exposed, Leo is eventually rescued by Marion. Seemingly attuned to his predicament, she nonetheless – as Leo later understands – also exploits the proposed shopping trip for her own ends. The expedition which takes them in search of a new suit enables her to meet with her lover. Unaware of Marion’s opportunism, Leo is delighted by her intervention on his behalf. From his perspective, the Lincoln green suit she chooses has heroic and romantic associations, of Robin Hood and Maid Marion. Unaware that the suit also proclaims his naiveté to the world, Leo feels himself to have undergone a significant metamorphosis – nothing less than a spiritual transformation – in Marion’s hands.

The shopping trip produces euphoria in Leo, who readily succumbs to Marion’s charm. It is during this epiphany in Norwich that the effects of his desire are first figured in terms of flight:

What did we talk about that has left me with an impression of wings and flashes, as of air displaced by the flight of a bird? Of swooping and soaring, of a faint iridescence subdued to the enfolding brightness of the day? (ibid., p. 44)

Along with the sustained solar metaphor which runs throughout the narrative and connects – through the intensifying heat--desire with danger, this particular articulation of Leo’s sexual awakening also hints at the perilous paths that Leo, like his mythic counterpart will take. As yet unacknowledged by Leo, it is Icarus, a figure who exists outside of the Zodiac, who will prove to be his truest and most convincing double.

First introduced in the Prologue, the connections between Leo and Icarus are underlined throughout the narrative. Regardless of the numerous other guises in which Leo appears – magician, postman, Robin Hood, Mercury, even Shylock – the novel insists that the best parallel for his life is to be found in the story of the flying and falling boy. Eventually, this mythic doubling is eventually acknowledged by Leo himself. Thus, in

the prologue, when he conducts an imaginary dialogue with his boyish self, both Leos recognise in the story of Icarus, the arc of their shared narrative. Even though Leo imagines the “reproach” with which his younger self would greet him, not least for his failure to emulate “the Ram, the Bull, and the Lion”, he is able to counter this accusation with a charge of his own. As Leo says to the boy he once was: “Well, it was you who let me down, and I will tell you how. You flew too near to the sun, and you were scorched. This cindery creature is what you made me” (ibid., p. 17). Significantly, given the recriminations that otherwise characterises this exchange between past and present selves, the twelve year old does not deny the truth of this claim. Both of them must eventually, it seems, acknowledge the hubris associated with youthful exuberance and a story in which a fleeting triumph is quickly followed by a deadly fall from the sky.

Once he encounters Marion and begins to associate with the other elevated beings at the Hall, Leo’s metaphorical ascent seems assured. Unlike Icarus, whose flight is orchestrated by Daedalus, but whose advice to his son goes unheeded, Leo has no father to guide him. For both Leo and his mythic double, however, the ecstasies induced by escape from the earth, render each one oblivious to the dangers ahead. In Leo’s case, the transformation he undergoes when in Marion’s company leaves him newly conscious of his “wings”, and is simply suggestive of “an emerging butterfly” (ibid., p. 44), or, more ominously, “a moth in the beam [of Mrs. Maudsley’s] eye” (ibid., p. 45). Now liberated from his unsuitable garb, Leo sets about exploring the “new element” that unfolds before him – the heat. He longs to achieve “corporeal union with the summer” (ibid., p. 46) and dazzled by his newfound freedom, seeks only to discover “[h]ow best to explore the heat ... how best to feel its power and be at one with it” (ibid., p. 70)?

“THE CONVERSATION OF THE GODS!”

Although Leo undergoes a sexual awakening at Norwich, his experience there also entails a more materialistic element which in turn, leads him to interpret the wealth and privilege of the Hall in a particular way. Astonished by Marion’s largess during the shopping trip, Leo tries to understand what appears to him to be a “godlike” plenitude. Unable to grasp it with his “mind” he instead turns to his imagination and a “ready-made” structure through which to organise these thoughts. With this recourse to the Zodiac Leo is able to “contemplate the incomprehensible” (ibid., p. 46). He begins to understand Marion’s elevated status because he sees how it might be encompassed by the more familiar design. At the same time, the Zodiac also helps Leo to place the elite group he encounters at the Hall and who prove to be equally vexing to him. For Leo “those resplendent beings, golden with sovereigns ... arriving,

staying, leaving, apparently unaffected by any restrictions of work or family ties, citizens of the world who made the world their playground” need take only a “a short step to the hardly more august and legendary figures of the Zodiac” (ibid., pp. 46-7).

In order to make sense of the world, Leo depends heavily upon what might be described as a structuralist principle; value and meaning are easier to grasp whenever the external world can be mapped onto a clearly demarcated taxonomy and hierarchy. Indeed, when the elder Leo engages with his younger self in the Prologue there is a suggestion that the young boy’s desire to defend the Zodiac effectively disempowers him:

What good was a spell when curses were needed? You didn’t want to injure them, Mrs. Maudsley or her daughter or Ted Burgess or Trimmingham. You wouldn’t admit that they had injured you, you wouldn’t think of them as enemies. You insisted on thinking of them as angels, even if they were fallen angels. They belonged to your Zodiac. (ibid., p. 17)

Such a desire for order and the comfort it bestows provides a partial explanation for Leo’s somewhat conservative attitudes, particularly as they relate to class. Thus, this initial connection between very different manifestations of hierarchy, earthly and heavenly, is further underscored by Leo’s relationship to the aristocratic Trimminghams. Even though his family has suffered a decline, Trimmingham is, from Leo’s perspective, the living embodiment of an ancient lineage. The Trimmingham genealogy is carved into the “mural tablets” (ibid., p. 61) in the Church and initially, is a source of wonder and speculation to Leo.

The Trimmingham line comes to represent a comforting historical continuity to Leo, even though his first perusal of their genealogy sees his attention drawn to the places where such order fails to cohere:

All the Viscounts seemed to be called Hugh. Seven Viscounts were accounted for, but there should have been eight – no, nine. The fifth was missing; there was no record of him. And the ninth was missing, too ... It offended my sense of completeness. What was still more annoying, two of the Viscounts had perversely been called Edward. (ibid., p. 62)

Although the missing Viscounts and anomalous names almost spoil the entire arrangement for Leo, eventually he will choose to overlook these flaws in order to avoid devaluing such a powerful system of signification:

The thought of their unbroken line, stretching down the ages, moved me deeply. And yet, I told myself, it *has* been broken; there is no memorial to the fifth Viscount. My mind disliked the lacuna and tried to by-pass it. At last, by dint of persuading myself that the missing memorial must be in another part of the building, I managed to regain my altitude. The solemn atmosphere of church reinforced the sufficiency of earthly glory; in a mystical union of genealogy and mathematics, the time flashed by. (ibid., p. 145)

While he compensates for the supposed lack in the system in this way, Leo’s investment in it proves to

be expedient. His subsequent realisation that the ninth Viscount is not missing because he still lives fills him with joy. Such incompleteness means that the stones cannot fully contain what turns out to be the still unfolding family history. In the chain of association that follows, the Trimingham line eventually touches Leo himself:

But if there really was a ninth Viscount, not buried in a wall but walking about, then the whole family came to life; it did not belong to history but to today; and the church was the citadel of its glory; the church, and Brandham Hall ... and it seemed to me that the Maudsleys were the inheritors of the Trimingham renown. It was, I felt, local, and they enjoyed it by right of rent. And if they, so did their guests, including myself.
A glory brighter than the sunshine filled the transept. It filled my mind too, and reaching upwards and outwards began to identify itself with the Zodiac, my favourite religion. (ibid., p. 62)

As he claims kinship with this ancient order, by virtue of his stay at the Hall, Leo associates the genealogy, based as it is, on a careful delineation of a superior world, with his Zodiac. Leo's delight is compounded still further by the realisation that the battle-scarred man who, it seems, must otherwise endure "the handicap of [an] ambiguous social position" (ibid., p. 56) because he is seemingly untitled, is actually a living embodiment of this old order. Thus: "The equivocal unmistered Trimingham [he] had pictured ... vanished utterly, to be replaced by the ninth Viscount, whom [he] somehow felt to be nine times as glorious as the first" (ibid., p. 65). While Leo is able to discover the identity of the ninth Viscount, the other gap in the order – which Leo chooses to ignore – proves more ominous. The fifth Viscount, as Trimingham will later reveal, is erased from the written record because of his wife's indiscretion and the duel which claimed his life. Later, the unruly Marion will further challenge the authenticity of this historical record, her own indiscretion casting doubt over the continuity the Trimingham bloodline supposedly represents.

Given his love of order and structure, Leo cannot fail to worship the ninth Viscount. His arrival at the Hall means that the Zodiac, or what Leo later calls his "realistic-idealistic system", is infused with even greater meaning and significance. The presence of Trimingham inspires Leo to "act on a grander scale" (ibid., p. 69) and it is this that leads him to cross "the rainbow bridge from reality to dream" (ibid., p. 70). Believing himself to "belong [...] to the Zodiac", Leo leaves behind his "old life" as if it were a "discarded husk" (ibid., p. 70). Even though Leo seems to undergo a symbolic rebirth at this juncture and gains admittance to the Zodiac as a result, it is evident that the question of where precisely he is located within this celestial universe goes unanswered. Drawn initially to the Archer and Water-Carrier, his tentative identification with these potential doubles gives way to a growing affection for their real-life counterparts, Trimingham and Ted Burgess. However, while Leo's place in the Zodiac is not fixed, his admission into this alternative world is

guaranteed by Trimingham himself. Assigned the role of Mercury, or "the messenger of the Gods" by him, a delighted Leo imagines himself "threading [his] way through the Zodiac, calling on one star after another" in "a delicious waking dream" (ibid., p. 83).

Even as he revels in his newfound role of messenger, Leo's curiosity about what he calls "spooning" is further piqued by his exposure to the mysteries of courtship. He is as baffled by the euphemistic approach of Trimingham as he is by the illicit and therefore coded messages that pass between Marion and Ted. Unable to decipher the social and sexual undercurrents that determine such exchanges, Leo is nonetheless content to facilitate the passage of words:

The conversation of the gods! – I didn't resent or feel aggrieved because I couldn't understand it. I was the smallest of the planets, and if I carried messages between them and I couldn't always understand, that was in order, too: they were something in a foreign-language – star-talk. (ibid., p. 84)

Leo's apparent willingness to act the part of go-between in relation to Trimingham and Marion owes a great deal to his sense of the propriety of their match, since each of them occupies an elevated place in his schema, Trimingham, by virtue of his aristocratic background and military exploits, Marion, because of her beauty, class and the desire she elicits.

Occupying the pinnacle of Leo's Zodiac is "the Virgin, the one distinctively female figure in the galaxy". However, even though Leo is able to recall the significance of each of the figures in the chart, he cannot communicate the supreme importance assigned to this figure: "I can scarcely say what she meant to me". As the sole female in this universe, the Virgin provides both a spiritual and a sexual dimension to the Zodiac. Unable to assign precise meaning to "the goddess" (ibid., p. 7) – even before he encounters a living version in Marion – Leo understands only that she occupies the most crucial and elevated place in his structure. Indeed, he does not seek to better articulate the significance of this figure beyond such an acknowledgement that her place is there.

The spiritual importance of the Zodiac, which Leo describes as his "favourite religion" (ibid., p. 62) depends upon the female figure, the Virgin (or Maiden), and is therefore built an illusion. Marion, of course, cannot be said to embody the corporeal purity that the Virgin symbolises. Her failure to adhere to the strict codes governing sexual morality and class loyalty mean that her actions will eventually turn the genealogical order etched in the murals, into a lie. The tenth Viscount will be the result of an illicit coupling between Marion and Ted.

COUPLING AND DECOUPLING

If the narrative of *The Go-Between* demonstrates how Leo's systems of belief and allegiance break down, it is clear that Marion, a woman who refuses to be contained

by conventional notions of purity and propriety, is central to these processes. As the inspiration for Leo's first and only experience of desire, she is the focal point for his psycho-sexual development. However, Marion's function extends beyond this dimension because as "the Goddess", she provides both the "key" and "climax" to the Zodiac. Equally, Marion's presence disrupts all of Leo's epistemological structures, confounding him until the last. The action she takes that will later cast doubt on the Trimmingham line, will, at the same time threaten Leo's "mythical method" and the whole order that for him, this imaginative structure is meant to safeguard.

Utterly spellbound by Marion, Leo becomes her messenger, relaying details of planned assignations between her and her lover, a man for whom Leo also develops an abiding affection. The lovers' increased dependency upon Leo and his errands ensure that all three are bound by the secrecy that surrounds their undertakings. A source endless speculation on Leo's part is the precise nature of the exchanges between Ted, the lowly tenant farmer and Marion. Since Ted is aligned with the Water-Carrier, Leo is uncertain how his path can legitimately be made to cross that of the more elevated Virgin. In a terrible twist, its solution to this particular conundrum – sexual concourse – also provides a key to the very question that Leo otherwise seeks to answer when he interrogates Ted about "spooning" (ibid., p. 103). Ted's reluctance to compromise the boy's innocence by taking on a paternalistic role in this matter is, of course, ironic, given the scene that Leo eventually comes to witness.

Given Marion's exalted position in Leo's imaginative structuring of the universe, the knowledge that she has been engaging in what is understood to be a base exchange with Ted threatens – at least initially – the order of his belief system:

Trying to regain my self-respect, I allowed myself a hollow chuckle. To think how I had been taken in! My world of high intense emotions collapsing around me, released not only the mental strain but the very high physical pressure under which I had been living; I felt I might explode. My only defence was, I could not have expected it of Marian. Marian who had done so much for me, Marian who knew how a boy felt, Marian the Virgin of the Zodiac – how could she have sunk so low? To be what we all despised more than anything – soft, soppy – hardly, when the joke grew staler, a subject for furtive giggling? My mind flew this way and that: servants, silly servants who were in love and came down red-eyed to prayer – post-cards, picture post-cards, comic post-cards, vulgar post-cards, found in shops on the 'front': I had sent some of them before I knew better... I laughed and laughed, half wishing Marcus had been with me to share the joke, and at the same time miserable about it, and obscurely aware that ridicule, however enjoyable, is no substitute for worship. That Marian of all people should have done this! No wonder she wanted it kept secret. Instinctively, to cover her shame, I thrust the letter deep into the envelope and sealed it. (ibid., pp. 102-3)

At first glance it seems that the letter cannot but represent a multiple challenge to Leo. It convinces him

that he has been used by the lovers and ends all attempts to resolve the enigma of their exchange by resorting to fantasies which see Marion cast as advisor and rescuer to Ted. Instead of these grandiose visions of Virginal omnipotence Leo discovers what he considers to be Marion's "shame" and her understandable attempts at concealment. It is significant then, that it is not simply knowledge of the relationship between Marion and Ted that forces Leo to act. Rather, it is news of Marion's planned betrothal to the Viscount, a match that seems entirely natural given the superior position of each of them that leads to his attempts at intervention. Once Marion and Trimmingham are paired, her continued relationship with Ted not only disturbs Leo's sense of propriety by calling to mind those furtive post-card exchanges. It represents a transgression that threatens his beloved Zodiac and the aristocratic order alike.

One important aspect to the revelation is the way in which it shows how Leo struggles to place this new knowledge – that Marion and Ted are lovers – into some sort of context. He thinks first of a devalued sentimentality, then of the activities of servants, before alighting on the innuendo of the seaside postcard. Even though he connects the lovers' tryst to the notion of "spooning" (ibid., p. 103), his understanding of what precisely this signifies is vague. The words in the letter and the associations conjured are insufficient to reveal the secret in full. This is important because although Leo is initially defined in terms of his mastery of language, codes and sign systems, his chief means of ordering the world is also visual since it is derived from the symbolic and pictorial form of the Zodiac. That Leo cannot translate the words into a precise form aside from the murky recollection about postcards is telling. His visual imagination will, of course, later be assailed by a scene in which he is *shown* rather than told what "spooning" means to his Goddess and her chosen lover. As Leo later comes to understand it: "Ted hadn't told me what it was, but he had shown me, he had paid with his life for showing me, and after that I never felt like it" (ibid., p. 247).

Although the revelation of an illicit courtship between Ted and Marion represents, in some sense, a fall into knowledge for Leo, "No Adam and Eve, after eating the apple, could have been more upset than I was" (Hartley 102), the narrative otherwise resists this Biblical trope. One reason for this is that Hartley substitutes the Christian myth of the Fall with a different version, drawn from Greek mythology, in which it is not Adam but Icarus who is brought low. In this novelistic rendition of the classical story, the sun's heat equates to passion and the boy is launched skyward simply because of his encounters with the living counterparts of those deities which feature in his Zodiac. In particular, Leo's own ascent depends upon the favour Marion bestows upon him. As he himself points out, "had the balance of my feelings for her been disturbed by a harsh look, I should have fallen, like Icarus" (ibid., p. 141).

From this perspective, *The Go-Between* demonstrates how, when Leo attempts to intervene in the lives of the lovers, his actions might, with hindsight at least, be said to counteract the possibility of a fall. This idea of the fall applies not only to Hartley's use of the Icarus myth but can be extended to take in Leo's Zodiac – his chief method for bestowing order on the world. However, this system is, as the Summer unfolds, increasingly dependent upon the placement of Marion, “the key to the whole pattern” (ibid., p. 7) and Trimingham, whose aristocratic aura seems to animate the entire design. Should they fall, Leo's entire system will be at risk.

Astounded to discover that Marion wishes to continue relationship with Ted despite her engagement to Trimingham, Leo tries first to extricate himself from his role as “postman” (ibid., p. 104) before devising more elaborate plans to end their contact. When his refusal to carry her message exposes Leo to Marion's fury, his anguish is compounded by the nature of her invective: “Of all the insults she had heaped upon me the one that hurt me most was ‘Shylock’, because I didn't know what it meant and therefore couldn't deny it” (ibid., p. 154). Equally perplexing are Ted's reluctant attempts to explain the mysteries of sex and therefore uphold his side of the bargain he has struck with Leo. Significantly, his relationships with both Marion and Ted unravel because of his failure to understand the idiom adopted by these representatives of the “foreign” (ibid., p. 5) adult world. He can translate neither Marion's insult nor the euphemisms and analogies preferred by Ted. Disarmed by Marion's insults and confounded by Ted's opacity, Leo feels himself to be rejected by them both.

If Leo, the onetime “master of language” (ibid., p. 14) begins to find himself undone by the incomprehensible nature of adult discourse his next step – a letter home to his mother with a coded appeal for rescue – represents an attempt to put his own, already trusted, language skills to good use. Sworn to secrecy by the lovers and still confused about the precise nature of their relationship, Leo must couch his appeal for release from the Hall in terms that his mother will best understand but which will not implicate anyone else in wrongdoing. However, far from communicating a sense of his increasingly compromised position, Leo's letter reads as if it were simply an attempt to avoid an onerous chore – carrying messages in the heat. With this failure to extricate himself from his predicament, Leo must resort to more subtle means of achieving salvation.

Just as he shapes his narrative in order to appease his mother's sense of righteousness, Leo intervenes to edit the verbal message given to Marion by Ted. By altering the time of their meeting he envisages that Marion's impatience will be exhausted before Ted's late arrival. This slight amendment sets in motion the catastrophic events which lead to the discovery of the lovers, in flagrante delicto, by Mrs. Maudsley and Leo. However,

in addition to this ruse Leo also adopts another strategy, designed to counteract the spell that Marion appears to have cast over Ted. Resorting once more to the Black magic that redeemed him at school, Leo searches for a spell that has “a symbolical appropriateness”, to the present moment of crisis. In the event, Leo's spell involves a midnight battle with a deadly nightshade, a potion and a spell. What is important here seems to be that Leo resorts to those strategies which have served him in the past, redeploying old techniques to overcome present difficulties and restore “social order, universal order” (ibid., p. 219) to his world. Although this spell seems to break the connection between Ted and Marion, it does so in an unexpected way, bringing about the destruction of Ted and perhaps even Leo himself.

While it is evident that “revelation in the outhouse” (ibid., p. 245), Mrs. Maudsley's hysteria and the subsequent suicide of Ted, all undoubtedly contribute to Leo's traumatized condition, this psycho-drama includes an additional element. Given Leo's investment in the Zodiac and particularly, in Marion, his experience on his thirteenth birthday not only precipitates a “breakdown” (ibid., p. 245) and amnesia but also brings about the apparent collapse of his “mythical method”. Providing him with a way of mapping individuals onto a structure which contains and glorifies them, the Zodiac seems nonetheless inadequate for dealing with the reality of the events that ensue. Its magic and the reverence it inspires, as it enables Leo to comprehend the strange adult world of the Hall, are equally laid waste when the “key” to the pattern – Marion as Virgin – no longer fits. Bringing about the collapse of Leo's “favourite religion” (ibid., p. 62), the primal scene destroys Leo's sense of the world and his place within it. Identity, desire and meaning all unravel. Later, Leo will ponder the destruction, reasoning that he has been punished for trying “to set the Zodiac against itself” (ibid., p. 246).

Despite the fact that *The Go-Between* seems to mirror Leo's diary in terms of its “message of disappointment and defeat” (ibid., p. 6), the novel also undercuts itself on this point. It offers, with its Epilogue, the chance for Leo to return to the scene of his trauma and therefore master, albeit belatedly, its effects. Notwithstanding the ambiguity of the ending and the question of whether Leo will shape the narrative to be relayed to Marion's troubled grandson, according to Marion's expectations and distortions, there is a strange accord between Leo and Marion. Despite the radical differences in their recollection of events (not to mention Marion's callous disregard of Ted), they share an understanding of what the twentieth century brought:

But you can tell him, Leo, tell him everything, just as it was. Tell him that it was nothing to be ashamed of, and that I'm nothing to be ashamed of, his old grandmother whom people come miles to see! There was nothing sordid in it, was there? And nothing that could possibly hurt anyone. We did have sorrows, bitter sorrows, Hugh dying, Marcus and Denys killed, my son Hugh killed, and his wife – though she was no great loss. But they weren't our

fault – they were the fault of this hideous century we live in, which has denatured humanity and planted death and hate where love and living were. Tell him this, Leo, make him see it and feel it, it will be the best day's work you ever did. Remember how you loved taking our messages, bringing us together and making us happy – well, this is another errand of love, and the last time I shall ever ask you to be our postman. (ibid., p. 260)

Echoing Leo's sense of the era as "vanquished" (ibid., p. 17), Marion's lament for the sorrows brought about by "the hideous century" also recalls once more Eliot's "the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history" (Eliot, 1975, p. 177) and the method that might bring meaning and order to world in disarray. This time, however, instead of the Zodiac, Marion suggests that narrative itself – albeit shaped and inflected by her – might provide Leo with a means of mastering his own history and thereby ameliorating its continued effects. With Leo's return to Marion and his resumption of the role of "postman" (Hartley, 1997, p. 104), the text brings past and present together with a telling but deceptive circularity. Since the reader never knows exactly how Leo will shape the story he relays to the estranged Edward, it remains open to question whether his return to Brandham enables catharsis or whether he is bound to repeat his youthful history by doing Marion's

bidding once again. With this ambiguity, Hartley refuses to bestow upon his text the kind of closure that would safeguard its meaning, leaving the final instalment of Leo's story to the imagination of the reader – to order, or structure as they so desire.

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