

# “Slightly Severely Injured”: childhood trauma, the family and sociology in L. P. Hartley’s *The Go-Between*

*Michael Erben*

University of Southampton, UK

**Abstract:** *The Go-Between* (1953) L. P. Hartley’s best known novel opens with the famous sentence, *The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there*. In the novel a man (Leo Colston) now in his sixties looks back upon a momentous domestic drama that took place at a grand country house, the home of the Maudsley family, in Norfolk in 1900 and in which he was crucially involved. The title *The Go-Between* describes the young Leo’s carrying back and forth messages between the daughter of the house and a local tenant farmer with whom she is having a secret and intensely passionate affair. The discovery of the illicit affair under alarming and shocking circumstances wrecks Leo’s future emotional life. This event contrasts with the superbly rendered atmosphere of formal Edwardian life with its protocols of status and rank and its ordered leisure pursuits. The novel will be discussed in relation to the congruences between literature and sociology, the family as a social institution, the possible penalties of desire, and the lasting effects of childhood trauma.

*Literary works offer their readers a range of experiences that philosophical prose cannot provide, reshaping their perceptions in a variety of ways. Some of these experiences are varieties of emotional response; some are experiences of dislocation and a loss of meaning; some are experiences of losing a sense of meaning and then finding it again; some are experiences of not being able to figure out who or what a certain person is, or even what a person or self might be. And sometimes the experience is that of following the shifting trajectory of a human relationship* (Nussbaum, 2008: 38).

*Only the smallest fraction of the human race has ever acquired the habit of taking an objective view of the past. For most people, even most educated people, the past is merely a prologue to the present, not merely without interest in so far as it is independent of the present, but simply inconceivable except in terms of the present* (Raglan, 1949:1).

*There is no prima facie reason why the literature written in a given society should be less interesting or informative to the sociologist than, say, that society's stratification system (Pincott, 1970: 177).*

In writing about the sociology of lives, as with all sociological investigation, we are required to ascertain which data will be required to make the study both worthwhile and methodologically convincing. In the analysis of individual lives works of literature have often proved a valuable resource, whether as documentary source or as expressive example. In this article a novel is used as primary datum to think about how love affairs can ruin innocent lives.

### Literature and Sociology<sup>1</sup>

Before an explicit treatment of *The Go-Between* it is worth considering what the beneficial connections of literature and sociology may be – the degree to which they may be epistemologically connected, may reinforce each other, may contain congruent data and may have expressive connection (explicit or implicit). In short it is being suggested that there can be a continuity between the objects of study within sociology and literature - that is, between the literary work and the social world (Templeton and Groce, 1990). Lowenthal stresses that the importance of literary study is that it can assist us, “to understand the success or failure of the socialisation of individuals in concrete historical moments and situations” (Lowenthal, 1987: 6).

It is not being proposed that the primary data of literature are in themselves sociology - that literature and sociology are the same:<sup>2</sup>

*The Polish Peasant* which discusses suicide amongst an immigrant population is a work of sociology, *Anna Karenina* which culminates in the suicide of its heroine is not. Sociology is concerned with the actual and its systematic elucidation, literature is concerned with the imaginary possible and its aesthetic presentation (Erben, 2002: 56).

While the distinction here is reasonably clear so also is the reasoning that affinities between literature and sociology can be sufficiently striking to become linked in the mind. It is all but impossible had a reader been affected by both Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* and Durkheim's *Suicide* not to have thought of the one when reading the other. In such a case as Lowenthal indicates the degree to which the drama described or discoursed upon continues to resonate is an indication of the strength of either work (Lowenthal, 1984).

If we take a work of fiction (most particularly here the novel) as a text for sociological consideration this is no more than to say than that there is a

recognition that significant moments in fictional data can relate extra-textually to lives beyond the fictional ones and can thereby be of interest to sociologists (Gibson, 2007). At such a level of shared intellectual congruence there are numerous examples of an affinity between realist novels and plays and social science. One could cite (as representative examples from among many) the subject matter, social drama and values (affirmed or contested) present in say Young and Willmott’s *Family and Kinship in East London* (1957) and Stan Barstow’s *A Kind of Loving*; in Elliott Mishler’s *Storylines* (1999) and Arnold Wesker’s *I’m Talking About Jerusalem* (1960); in Goldthorpe et al’s *The Affluent Worker* (1969) and Alan Sillitoe’s *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1958); in Carey McWilliams’ *Factories in The Field* (1939) and John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939).

Further, from the side of sociology Robert Nisbet poses a rhetorical question to indicate the imaginative thought processes that may link artist and sociologist even while their realised products differ:

Can anyone believe that Weber’s vision of rationalisation in history, Simmel’s vision of the metropolis, or Durkheim’s vision of anomie, came from logico-empirical analysis as it is understood today? Merely to ask the question is to know the answer. Plainly, these men were not working with finite and ordered problems in front of them. They were not “problem-solving” at all. Each was with deep intuition, with profound imaginative grasp, reacting to the world around him, even as does the artist, and, also like the artist, objectifying internal and only partly conscious, states of mind (Nisbet, 1962: 71).

He continues, specifically in relation to Durkheim:

The idea, the plot, and the conclusion of *Suicide* were well in his mind before he examined the records. Where then did he get the idea? We can only speculate. He might have got it from Lamennais . . . [or] it could have come from personal experience – from a remembered fragment of the Talmud, from an intuition born of personal loneliness, . . . a scrap of experience in Paris. . . . The creative blend of ideas behind *Suicide* – a blend from which we still draw . . . was reached in ways more akin to those of the artist than those of the data processor . . . (Ibid: 72).

It has been worth quoting Nisbet at some length as he is a sociologist now somewhat neglected.<sup>3</sup> What may be added in support of Nisbet’s descriptions of the formation of sociological ideas through deep imaginative conjecture is Charles Sanders Peirce’s notion of “abductive inference” (or the higher speculation) without which much of the best

original sociology could not have begun.<sup>4</sup> This closely relates to the notion of there being quite plausibly a development of sociological theory from literary texts. Extending Robert Merton's view of how empirical data exert pressure for initiating theory Lewis Coser remarks, "that literary perceptions may upon occasion perform a similar role for sociological theory" (Coser, 1963: 5). In turn this suggests, as Anthony Giddens argues, that the conceptualisations of both literary theory and sociological theory have a degree of alignment:

I would like to argue for promoting a convergence of social and literary theory. In the days in which the social sciences were dominated by objectivism, particularly those versions which associated themselves closely with the ideals of natural science, literary theory seemed quite irrelevant to the concerns of social science. . . . With an appreciation of the partial character of objectivism - coupled to an understanding of the limitations of naturalistic models of social science - it becomes increasingly clear that there are interpretive issues which bind problems of literary theory closely to issues of social analysis (Giddens, 1986: 529).

The link between literary text and sociology further coheres in terms of the social realist novel and the ethnography of the Chicago School. Relevant here is the legitimately often repeated 'Thomas theorem' of 1928, namely, "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (Thomas and Thomas, 1928: 572). That is,

. . . the subject's view of the situation, how he regards it, may be the most important element for interpretation. For his immediate behaviour is closely related to his definition of the situation, which may be in terms of objective reality, or in terms of subjective appreciation - 'as if' it were so (Ibid).

As Hans Bakker notes, "Thomas's contribution is valuable as a reminder that there are indeed times when the objective consequences of holding a false belief can be very real . . . for better or for worse" (Bakker, 2007: 991-992). This is significant here because an understanding of some social situations by participants (whether they be real persons or characters in a realist novel) involves their capacity to hold the view that what they wish or desire is rational and clear while for the researcher or reader such views are problematic and confused. What is stressed is the importance of subjective outlook as a determinant of seemingly legitimate action and behaviour, which has been an understood appreciation in both social research and the realist novel.

In general terms we can say that literature can supply representations of the social world for sociological discussion and that sociology itself can be seen to operate imaginatively and expressively (*pace* Nisbet) in a manner not dissimilar to that of creative writers.<sup>5</sup> There can be, then, a degree of correspondence and congruence between the two areas. To reinforce the point, this does not involve equating sociological knowledge with any literary sources. The sociological “process of knowledge construction has its own rules and its own forms of discourse, differing from the rules and forms of discourse typical of literature” (Longo, 2017: 104). It is rather a matter of literary sources providing a body of non-systematic knowledge available for sociological exploration (Coser, 1963). In short what is being claimed is that the relationship of sociology to literature may be both as a source of data (an object of knowledge) that has qualitative sociological resonance *and* that sociology per se can be observed to employ imaginative operations not automatically dissimilar to those of literature. As Harrington clearly puts the matter:

The central methodological premise of this thesis is that literature and sociology are not mutually exclusive but interdependent forms of discourse. Literature need not only form an object for sociology . . . it may also form a medium of sociological thinking in its own right; while sociology, for its part, may also be shown to depend in interesting and significant ways on forms of cognition that are figurative in character, such as narrative, metaphor and analogy (Harrington, 2002: 2).

If this is a legitimate encapsulation of the methodological matter we can go on to note that the subject matter of the two enterprises (the novel and sociology) is frequently concerned with cleavages within social life. This not infrequently involves unresolvable practical and emotional pressures where a seeming contestation between freewill and fate pushes the human representatives of these two concepts over a cliff together. In the best of sociology and literature persons and characters caught up in such dynamics will be seen to combine typicality with individuality – be incarnate of social forces and having individual subjectivities. As Marx says in the *Eighteenth Brumaire*:

Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past (Marx, 1969: 398).

## The Family and *The Go-Between* and Leo

If what has been argued above has some validity then we can venture more directly to *The Go-Between* and emphasise that at its centre is a social institution, namely a family plus an innocent child enmeshed within that family's rules and expectations.<sup>6</sup> The family is the most resolute of social institutions - it is everywhere: in the conscious mind and the unconscious mind; it can be abhorred, adored, avoided, dismissed, thought irrelevant or crucial. The family, (whether one's own or that of others or merely the concept itself) has a sure influence on the great majority of individual lives. Unlike other institutions family socialisation is "early, intense, lasting and, for a relatively long time, without competition" (Lahire, 2019: 382). It is there in welcome open light or as an unbanishable ghost or as something in-between.<sup>7</sup> As an entity it has been affected by major socio-historical factors (most frequently beyond its influence): economic fluctuation, political change, occupational restructuring, war, international relations and more. These matters have been the subject not only of social scientific analysis but also cardinal to an important group of realist novels with specific, historically identifiable time frames. Such novels have been variously demarcated and labelled - e.g. the period novel, the family novel, the novel of manners, Zeitroman, the generational novel, the domestic novel, the family saga and so on. In most cases this welter of definitions overlap. The best examples of the family novel genre pivot upon dramatic social change and the concomitant alteration of interpersonal relations. Prominent examples of the genre would be - *Buddenbrooks* (1901, 1924), *The Forsyte Saga* (1906-1921), *Radetzky March* (1932, 1934), and (pre-eminently) *The Leopard* (1958, 1960). Employing the tensions between fixed family values, family prestige, family aspiration and the facts of the personal passions of love, want and need *The Go-Between* in its treatment the Maudsleys is not out of tune with these works.<sup>8</sup>

The Maudsley family, portrayed in 1900 in *The Go-Between*, belonged to a class at the summit of its influence. While still not entirely unarriviste the Maudsleys are becoming increasingly assured in their status. The rise of this class during the reign of Victoria is put succinctly in another English family novel, *The Forsyte Saga*, by its central protagonist:

The Queen was dead [1901], . . . In '37, when she came to the throne . . . Coaches still ran; men wore stocks, shaved their upper lips, ate oysters out of barrels; . . . there were manners in the land, and pigsties for the poor; unhappy devils were hanged for little crimes, and Dickens had but just begun to write. Well-nigh two generations had slipped by – of steamboats, railways, telegraphs, bicycles, electric light, telephones, and now these motor-cars – of such accumulated wealth that . . . Forsytes were numbered by the

thousand! Morals had changed, manners had changed, men had become monkeys twice-removed. God had become Mammon – Mammon so respectable, as to deceive himself. Sixty-four years that favoured property, and had made the upper middle class; buttressed, chiselled, polished it, till it was almost indistinguishable in manners, morals, speech, appearance, habit and soul from the nobility. . . . An era which had canonised hypocrisy, so that to seem to be respectable was to be so (Galsworthy 1962: 267-268).

While *The Go-Between* is not a family chronicle novel on the model of a *Forsyte Saga* or a *Buddenbrooks* it is so descriptive of generational difference, social accommodation and conflict that its similarity with that genre is a close one.

For what follows it will be useful to briefly outline the main story of *The Go-Between*:

The date is 1900 and Leo Colston a boy from an ordinary middle-class family is invited by the mother of his school friend, Marcus Maudsley, to spend the summer holidays at Brandham Hall, their grand mansion in Norfolk. There in his naivety and willingness to please Leo becomes a courier for messages between, Marian, the daughter of the house (whose engagement to Viscount Trimmingham is shortly to be announced) and her lover Ted Burgess, a tenant farmer on the Brandham estate. The Marian/Burgess relationship is both clandestine and serious. Leo, at first pleased with his important role as Mercury to the couple gradually, by their increasingly insistent and sometimes threatening demands, becomes fearful. Mrs Maudsley, the epitome of chatelaine, has developed a sense of uneasiness about the time Marian spends with Leo. She arranges an elaborate tea for Leo’s thirteenth birthday. It is a celebration at which Marian is absent, supposedly visiting her old nanny. Mrs Maudsley is informed by a servant during the tea that no such visit has taken place. Without protocol Mrs Maudsley sweeps a reluctant Leo outside and makes him, through a storm, take her to where Marian is likely to be found. On entering a derelict outhouse, Mrs Maudsley sees Marian and Burgess in flagrante. Mrs Maudsley screams and screams. Leo recalls, “. . . it was Mrs Maudsley’s repeated screaming that frightened me, plus a shadow on the wall that opened and closed like an umbrella.” Ted Burgess commits suicide and Marian, pregnant with Ted’s child, marries Trimmingham. The unwitting Leo’s confusions and anxieties culminate in a trauma from which he does not recover. He is destroyed by what he has seen and heard, destroyed by the passion of others. He closes down

emotionally, his only protection. The seemingly fixed upper-class world of grand house, long established conventions and routines, of manners and practices have at the end of the book all but gone. Leo in his sixties makes a visit to Brandham: the new Viscount Trimmingham (Marian and Ted's grandson) lives in a corner of Brandham Hall (the rest is a school); Marian (the Dowager Lady Trimmingham) lives in a cottage in the village; Mrs Maudsley was sent to a mental asylum, several of the family have been killed during two wars and the baroque conventions of a family of the leisured class just about annihilated. The current Viscount Trimmingham has resolved never to marry, he feels that the destructive legacy of which he has heard stories must lose its inter-generational charge. Leo finds Marian's outlook on life little altered.

The span of historical change covered by *The Go-Between* occurs during a mere fifty years and takes two forms. There are general, easily recordable incidents of public record and there are the continuing consequences of the emotional drama of trauma and death borne of the fateful triadic relationship of Leo, Marian and Ted. In *The Go-Between* we are bound to both the characters and their epoch. While the characters are unaware of the history that will unfold before them (two World Wars, the Great Depression, the dismantling of the landed gentry, universal suffrage, the rise of the welfare state, etc) it is an ignorance unshared by Hartley's readers. What happened from 1914 onwards while known to the reader would have seemed inconceivable to the characters in *The Go-Between* in the summer of 1900.

My title to this essay, *Slightly Severely Injured* is a line of high irony taken from Harold Pinter's screen play for the 1971 film of *The Go-Between* and I shall use stills from this critically admired film in this article for illustrative purposes.<sup>9</sup> In the film young Leo, the go-between messenger, uses the expression in recounting how he caused two school bullies to fall off a roof by casting a spell. Jenkins and Strode (the bullies in question) suffered minor injury and Leo was a school hero. When Leo recounts the story at Brandham Hall (where he is a guest courtesy of his schoolfriend Marcus Maudsley) the assembled company ask in mock alarm "Were they killed?" and his reply, to much adult amusement was "Oh No! – only slightly severely injured." Leo is just a boy – with the preoccupations and outlooks and conversational traits of a perfectly standard, amiable schoolboy.

It is not difficult to say that *The Go-Between* is a story of the loss of childhood innocence – that is obvious. And true as that may be my angle on the matter is about cause not the secondary result. It is saying essentially, in possibly Durkheimian terms, that *The Go-Between* is a



treatise on the essentially destructive power of unregulated passion, but in a manner that is unsensational and completely serious. While Durkheimian in its concern for social deregulation it is Weberian in providing us with an almost Ideal Type of the phenomenon. It examines how dysfunction works – or rather how everyday dysfunction can escalate from a quotidian event into something like tragedy. From the precis of the story given above we see an alarming social clash - patterns of accepted behaviour and norms of conduct are violated in extreme ways.

A mistaken observation sometimes made of the *The Go-Between* is that its social and psychological concerns, being mainly placed in a high-class setting, are too remote to have wider applicability. The patterns of activity at the heart of the novel - deception, romance, lust, stifling family life, escape into a fantasy love relation- are ones that can happen anywhere: on a working-class terraced street, on an avenue of middle-class mock-Tudor semis, in a village, or on a mobile-home park - anywhere. As Walter Allen observed, although Hartley’s world may seem a small one his work, “can uncannily reflect the violence and the conflicts from which it is seemingly isolated” (Allen, 1965: 254). Further as Anne Mulkeen observes *The Go-Between* is marked by a rich re-creation of time and place in which, “people and their sometimes petty problems are involved, often unwittingly, in a much more vast, ancient and serious drama of quest and redemption” (Mulkeen, 1972: 568).

One of the reasons for this universality is the resemblance of behavioural codes across social groups. *The Go-Between* is built round the ordinary, even trite, situation of a love-triangle, with passionate love and convention competing in a life and death struggle. None of the characters – Leo, Marian, Ted, Trimmingham ever thought of themselves as extraordinary. We have an everyday, unexceptional act (sexual intercourse), driven by a longing and love that proves calamitous - not only for the participants but for the unwitting observers. It results in male sacrifice - the wrecking of Leo’s emotional life, his life-long shunning of any form of sensual engagement; it results in Ted Burgess’s suicide for ruining a woman’s reputation and it results in Viscount Trimmingham, as an act of chivalry, accepting another man’s child as his own.

Before the calamity unfolds young Leo arrives at Brandham Hall in the early July of 1900. He is full of anxiety and expectation and having the nature he does, “hopes for more than can possibly occur” (Webster 1970: 164).



Mrs Maudsley (left) and Leo (front right) at tea at Brandham Hall

His agreeable outlook, good manners and the fact of him having the status of a guest allow him (mainly) to adjust to the house and do what he can to please the Maudsley family.

It is this willingness to please that makes him the go-between, the innocent transporter of messages, between Marian and Ted, the two figures he idolises. That he is required by Marian and Ted to keep the messages secret greatly appeals to his schoolboy sense of adventure. Marian is kind to him, cultivates him, buys him an expensive summer suit of Lincoln green, tends his injured knee – she becomes his maid Marian and the Virgo in his Zodiac. Ted of whom he is slightly fearful when he first strays on to his farm he comes to greatly admire for his strength, his competence, his physical abilities (whether swimming, playing cricket, or conducting his farm), for his earthiness.



Leo with Marian at Brandham Hall and with Ted at his farm

However, Leo becomes alarmed at the growing intensity and frequency of Marian's and Ted's demands. He reads part of a not properly sealed letter. All he can read is a fragment, "*Darling, darling, darling, same place, same time, this evening. But take care not to*" (p 101). Leo's alarm is realised but Marian and Ted angered at his growing reluctance to act as go-between begin to practice emotional blackmail – each telling him that the other will suffer should he not continue. Their accusations are so potent that he cannot but carry on. Leo likes his relationships with adults to be as uncomplicated and as predictable as possible. He is a subject in a world not devised by himself and which can be capricious. He has to steer a watchful course that is often not without its fears but on the whole is manageable enough – with its bad bits but also its much appreciated real treats. It is in play and imagination that Leo is truly absorbed and sole arbiter of his practices. As folklorists have long observed children's play and imaginations are marked by inventiveness and conservatism, flights of fancy and unbending rules.

To try and restore the world to how it should be Leo, with the irrational logic of the imaginative and desperate child, attempts by the destruction of a deadly nightshade plant to save Marian and Ted from themselves. He came upon the plant in an unused part of the garden, located close to the place he later witnesses the coupling. He writes in his diary:

Wednesday 11th July. Saw Deadly Nightshade – *Atropa Belladonna*. In one of the outhouses which was roofless as well as derelict, I suddenly came upon the plant. . . It looked the picture of evil and also the picture of health, it was so glossy and strong and juicy-looking. It seemed to have found the place in the world that suited it best. I knew that every part of it was poisonous, I knew too that it was beautiful. . . I felt that the plant could poison me, even if I didn't touch it, . . . it looked so hungry, in spite of all the nourishment it was getting (pp 33-34).

The plant unnerves him. He returns at night and destroys it, chanting “*delenda est belladonna*” [the belladonna must be destroyed] (p 224) hoping that his schoolboy mumbo-jumbo will succeed. He feels he has acted as he should, that he has effected protection for both Ted and Marian and broken the insidious tie that holds them.

This of course does not happen. Following close upon his destruction of the deadly nightshade is the tea to honour his thirteenth birthday and it is there during the tea that Mrs Maudsley, the presiding, imperturbable, grande dame of Brandham Hall, realises the real reason for Marian's absence from the celebration. She is transformed and sweeps Leo out of the house, forcing him through a storm to where both suspect Marian and Ted may be. Fears she hoped would never be realised are and she screams in horror and fright as the world she hoped for is destroyed before her eyes.



Mrs Maudsley at Leo's tea and some minutes later upon witnessing, alongside Leo, the sex act between Marian and Ted from which neither recover

While witnessing the same scene Leo's emotional life is ruined beyond repair. He is a witness to the animalistic self-absorption of the act - the primal scene without benefit of childhood amnesia.

Although devoid of personal interaction Leo manages his reduced future life. He dedicates it to facts as a library cataloguer. When the older Leo contemplates the past (as a result of coming across, in his mother's things, his old diary) he decides reading it won't upset him unduly because he no longer has, "much life left to spoil" (p 18). As well as his diary he finds too that his mother has kept all his old letters. Among them is an unopened one – it is his last undelivered message from Marian to Ted. It reminds him that one day he had asked Ted what spooning meant. Ted says he will tell him but doesn't. Leo, who was given a reserved occupation during the First World War reflects:

So I missed the experience of the War, along with many others, spooning among them. 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 (p 247).

It is in the Prologue and Epilogue to *The Go-Between*, set in 1950, that links the barrenness of the 63 year-old Leo's current life with the high sensations of his childhood summer at Brandham Hall. He imagines his 12 year-old self, saying to his current self:

. . . why have you grown up such a dull dog, when I gave you such a good start? Why have you spent your time in dusty libraries, cataloguing other people's books? What has become of the Ram, the Bull and the Lion? where above all is the Virgin? (p 17).

Leo's 63 year-old self has an answer ready,

Well, it was you who let me down, and I will tell you how. You flew too close to the sun, and you were scorched. This cindery creature is what you made me (Ibid).

Nonetheless even with these deliberations the adult Leo still does not blame Marian (his virgin love-object) or Ted (his surrogate father) for hurling him at the sun, melting his wings and bringing his collapse. When he decides to visit Brandham fifty years after the summer of 1900 Marian, the principal agent of his undoing, says to him, "you're all dried up inside, I can tell that" (p 261).

As Marian talks to Leo it becomes clear that she has become increasingly sure of her own rightness. She says to Leo of herself and Ted

"[that] we were made for each other. . . We didn't have a thought except for each other" (p 260). "Do you remember what that summer was like, Leo? Our feeling for each other [she is speaking of herself and Ted] was the most beautiful thing in that summer. Didn't you feel, Leo, when you took our letters that all the rest – the house, the people – just didn't count . . . you were our instrument, we couldn't have carried on without you. You were only a little boy and we trusted you with our great treasure" ( p260). Marian is unable to see the real ruination of Leo's life and the fact that had it not been for Trimmingham's chivalry she would have ended up discarded. In her wilfulness she betrays some irritation with Ted, saying to Leo, "Ted had a weak streak in him . . . He should have waited till it all blew over , as I did. I knew it would blow over, once I was Lady Trimmingham" (p 257).



Leo: "It was for [Ted] I grieved. He haunted me." (p 245)

Still steely Marian asks Leo, ever the go-between, to take a message to her grandson telling him of the nobility of her love for Ted.

. . . hardly had I turned in at the lodge gates, wondering how I should say what I had come to say, when the south-west prospect of the Hall, long hidden from my memory, sprang into view (p 261).

Whether he delivers the message or not we don't know. Here the novel ends. What we do know is that the adult Leo (who knows better than anyone of Marian's wilful delusions) knows that she loved Ted and that he cannot blame her.

## Conclusion

When it is said that people are madly in love it is recognised that we are dealing with something where detachment and reason are absent.



Leo at sixty-three

Very often because of the devotion on display being madly in love and its unreason can be regarded as charming, as something that enriches even those whom merely bear it witness. We feel cheered when we see a couple we know, in love. What happens when this set of devotional feelings collide with the social group's taboos? In some situations there is expulsion from the tribe, of banishment, in other situations those who are not the subjects of the passion may exhibit an uneasy tolerance along with feelings of resentment and disapproval.<sup>10</sup> There will be differing shades of social and interpersonal reaction. But in some instances as in *The Go-Between* there will be disaster – what may have begun as a dalliance is transformed into an all-consuming infringement of code and taboo. It leaves behind broken lives - for Leo permanent damage by exposure to actions and emotions to which he should never have been a party, for Mrs Maudsley insanity and for Ted suicide.

There were no close webs of affiliation for either Ted or Marian, nowhere for them to rehearse their position. They are in a sense friendless - isolated by the strength of their mutual adoration. Their relationship cannot be - it is an outrage. There are no sisters or brothers or close cousins sufficiently in tune with either figure to act as confidantes. It is like a teenage crush disfigured by hostile fate: to apply to *The Go-Between* a quotation from Dorothy Van Ghent's essay on *Wuthering Heights*, Marian and Ted, "act in the spirit of passionate immoderacy, of excess" (Van Ghent 1953: 191). Hartley is concerned with the re-creation of time and place and family life where individual problems are unavoidably self-absorbing while historically they are unexceptional. As Arthur Koestler, adapting Hauptman, puts it, ". . . the action of the novel is always the distant echo of some primitive action behind the veil of the period's costumes and conventions" (Koestler 1946; 82).

Are there many families where lesser gradations of such events have not occurred: where family and expectation are discordant and conflictual and where children are involved? Leo's childhood troubles were caused by grown up family troubles. Hartley's outlook is a conservative one. The foremost reasons for this is a fear of moral disruption, of the wrecking of hopes and the spoiling of affection. Such is the nature of the family and of mutual attraction that the events of *The Go-Between* will continue be repeated, if mostly in less severe (but still traumatic) versions. If Hartley is a decidedly unradical writer with a conventional message he is also one concerned with caring for others. What Peter Brookes says of Walter Benjamin has application to L. P. Hartley - he has "a sophisticated nostalgia that holds in balance loss and the insight it provides" (Brookes 2020: 49).<sup>11</sup>

## Notes

- 1 The form of literary fiction considered in this article is almost exclusively the novel.
- 2 This may not always have been exactly the case – for which see Lepenies (1988).
- 3 Although the neglect is not uniform - he is mentioned at length by Longo (2016) and in other perceptive studies of the sociology of literature – e.g. Barnwell (2015), Harrington (2002), Templeton & Groce (1990).
- 4 For Peirce’s ideas in relation to Durkheim and Weber see respectively the work of Toby Huff and Basit Koshul (Huff 1975, 1985; Koshul 2014).
- 5 Wolf Lepenies has rehearsed the historical connections between the beginning of the novel form and the advent of sociology (Lepenies 1988).
- 6 All quotations from the novel are from the Penguin edition of 1997.
- 7 The characterisation of the family discussed here (as it relates closely to the examples given) is the Western nuclear family, as broadly understood (Burguière 1996, vol 2.)
- 8 *The Go-Between* most precisely falls in the category of Zeitroman – an historically retrospective novel overlapping with the author’s own time. On these matters see for a superb rehearsal of the changing conceptualisations of the Historical Novel and the related family novel Perry Anderson (2011). As regards *The Leopard*, Hartley regarded it as perhaps the greatest novel of the twentieth century.
- 9 The film of *The Go-Between*, directed by Joseph Losey and with screenplay by Harold Pinter is unusual in that most aficionados of the novel agree that the film is first rate – being itself a disquisition on time and subjective damage, it is in effect a meta-version of the novel, slighter than the novel but an effective essay upon it - “it adds curiously to the poignancy of the novel” (Brooks-Davies, 1997: xi). It is unusual for a film of a novel to be as regarded as *The Go-Between*. It was awarded the Palm d’Or at Cannes in 1972. There is an informative discussion of its success at Cannes by Dirk Bogarde (Bogarde 1983).
- 10 The classic example where disaster is averted through banishment from the tribe is Edith Wharton’s *The Age of Innocence* (1920).
- 11 For work that discusses the importance of nostalgia see for example Boym (2001) and Dickinson and Erben (2016).

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*Biographical note*

Michael Erben was for many years Director of the Centre for Biography and Education at the University of Southampton (UK) where he now holds an Honorary Fellowship. He is also lucky enough to be that most prized of things, an Independent Scholar. (mde@soton.ac.uk)