

# The go between and spies



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

“ THE MAIN CHARACTERS IN THE GO-BETWEEN AND SPIES ARE SOCIALLY OPPRESSED ARE SOCIALLY OPPRESSED” How far do you agree with this statement? Social Oppression is a main theme explored throughout the two tragic novels, *The Go-Between* and *Spies*. Throughout the novels, L. P. Hartley and Michael Frayn successfully convey the idea, through the use of their main characters, the effects of social oppression and class divide. Using many techniques they show how class and oppression had power over the people of the Victorian era.

And even after the turn of the century, People were still trapped in the shadows of the past era. Both novels are told as flashbacks taking us through the lives of two main protagonists. The climax of both novels lead to the death of two male characters due to oppression. This gives us the idea that men were under greater pressure from social oppression. Considering, Marian and Ted are caught together 'two bodies moving like one' in the squalid outhouse but yet only Ted takes his life. Leo, being ' acutely aware of social inferiority' swings to the extreme opposite as he aspires to be a member of the hall.

Leo, ' a foreigner in the world of emotions', a character so imaginative and sensitive gets invited into the world of Brandham hall in the summer of 1900. With Marcus thinking he was like them from the sophisticated sound of his home ' Court Place'. He sees himself as lower class and a mere mortal among gods and goddesses. He characterises the members of the hall as figures of the zodiac. Marian is the ' virgin of the zodiac' ' pure and innocent'. To him she is 'the key to the whole pattern, the climax, the coping-stone, the

goddess'. He insisted on thinking of them as angels' no matter what because they ' belonged to the zodiac'.

Leo, aware of the social difference, feels like a ' misfit' among ' these smart rich people'. He is determined to keep his class a secret even though Mrs Maudsley had ' the ability to fix you like a pinned butterfly with her gaze'. He overlooks the authentic care of his own mother and comments that she would be ' socially unacceptable ; she would make a bloomer' and prepares ' to bear the humiliation' by himself. Leo being so young, had no knowledge of the events and situation around them. This lack of knowledge and naivety makes him lost in a sophisticated world of adults and he finds his way to destruction.

Leo, with ' the weather defying him', after he learns from Marcus that ' only cads wear their school clothes in the holidays'. He starts to think of clothes as badges of social status and takes an offer from Marian to ' take him to Norwich tomorrow and get him a new outfit'. This makes more highly aware of his social inferiority as he has ' only fifteen shillings and eight pence half penny' as she adds ' that doesn't matter,' ' we've got some'. This opens way for Marian to take advantage of Leo's malleability and he becomes ' Mercury' for Ted and Marian as he gets involved with the illicit love affair.

Leo admits he's a ' super snob' and this snobbish, naive and bigoted character failed to allow him realise the danger of his work until it's rather too late and the harm is already done. He fails to realise what ' spooning' is due to his lack of knowledge he could only have the thought of 'Ted Burgees as her spooning partner'. He gets a ' green suit' and a ' green bike' as Marian felt ' green is his true colour 'and is called a ' shylock'. After all these he still

fails to realise he's been mocked but rather still seeks for adventure thinking of himself as a 'figure of fun'. The disastrous ending is caused by Leo's naivety and lack of knowledge.

He fails to realise the trauma happening around him until it leads to the death of Ted after 'the virgin and the water carrier' are caught together 'two bodies moving like one'. Unlike Leo, who Marcus his friend is nice too, Stephen suffers a worse oppression as he's manipulated and pressured by his own friend his age Keith. Like Leo he feels like 'a misfit everywhere' as he comments that 'he doesn't quite fit with the pigtailed Geest girls and the oil-stained Avery boys', but he however still aspires to be part of the clan like Leo but still acknowledges and accepts the fact that 'he never will'.

Unlike Leo, Stephen's low class was known to everyone and he couldn't even dare to keep it a secret. He was 'the other ranks' and unlike Leo, although he felt the class difference he was still 'grateful to be so'. He went to a different school completely from Keith with uniforms 'socially coded for ease of reference'. He lived in a 'semi-detached' house attached to 'the pinchers' making the whole situation 'even more shameful'. While his friend Keith lived in a house with 'white wicket gates' with a 'neat red brick path that curves through rose beds'.

He felt like he wasn't even worthy of the Hayward's as he says 'The Hayward's were impeccable and yet they tolerated him' and Mrs Hayward's 'incomprehensible niceness'. Stephen like Leo, has the colour 'green' associated with them as Stephen admits 'everything about me was plainly green'. Stephen didn't dare to go against Keith's orders as Keith 'was the leader' and he 'was the led'. Stephen's feeling of social inferiority to Keith

allows Keith to dominate and intimidate Keith's life as Stephen sees Keith as 'the first in a whole series of dominant figures whose disciple I became'.

Stephen sees himself as the 'undersized boy with the teapot ears following his powerful friend open mouthed and credulous'. Stephen is much more different from Leo as he doesn't hide who he is and isn't ashamed of who he is. Both boys however are associated with symbols. Stephen is associated with the 'Privet' as Leo is associated with 'Mercury'. Both boys are completely unaware of sex and it's this lack knowledge that makes Leo not realize what 'spooning' is and Stephen misinterprets the 'X's' and '!' in Mrs Hayward's diary. Both boys become messengers for illicit love affairs and don't realise what they're been used for.

Being naive and snobbish like Leo, Keith fails to realize the relationship between Uncle Peter and Mrs Hayward. He doesn't realize why a man will be in the barns. This naivety prevents him from realising Mrs Hayward may have gone into the barns even as he says 'there's only one way to go and that's left, if you go right it leads to the tracks'. He doesn't think Mrs Hayward for one minute will go into the tracks. When they realize Mrs Hayward might have go into a house in the lanes, he says they couldn't pursue their project 'Germans we might be able to deal with, these people we certainly can't'.

He didn't realise he was German and even detested the thought a German as it was during the war time and being German in Britain at that point would be a sign of betrayal and a huge deal. Both boys heavily affected by class, and sexual awakening lead them to events that affect them throughout their lives and see the need to reconcile their past with their future as Leo says '

the facts of life were a mystery to me'. Their lack of knowledge can't be totally blamed on them but rather the times and conditions they lived in.

They lived in a society where even girls could grow into women and not know where children were given birth to from or know what awaited them on their wedding night. Children were forbidden to know nor talk about Sex. They were not allowed to know a lot of things. It was like a society with an 'adult world' and a children's one because knowledge in the society then, was a package combined with loss of innocence. Just like Stephen begins to know more and starts seeing the path ahead as 'darker tunnels' and no longer 'remote blue horizons'.

However, this lack of knowledge leaves both boys lives in a complete shatter especially that of Leo. The Climax of the novel, leaves Leo 'like a train going through a series of tunnels; sometimes in the dark not knowing'. He lives with himself thinking he was responsible for the death of Ted Burgees as he comments that 'the tidings of Ted'ssuicidecame to me voicelessly as 'he haunted' him. He lives thinking 'in destroying the belladonna' he 'had also destroyed Ted' and 'perhaps destroyed himself'. He was left a lonely man 'sitting alone' in a 'drab flowerless room'.

While Stefan was left with a marriage 'that was never quite a real marriage'. With 'worse troubles than anyone's ever had before'. He thinks he was responsible for the death of Uncle peter as he struggles to figure out where he belonged. Hartley used the social structure of his main protagonist Leo, who admits that he had 'destroyed Ted' as a vehicle for expressing the power of the class structure over the society's actions with Ted serving as the scape goat shooting himself after the findings of Mrs Maudsley in the

outhouses to avoid the societal disgrace and spare Marian the embarrassment.

Ted was oppressed by his lack of social status as Denys doesn't fail to say 'we don't know him socially of course' and his lack of money as he rents his land from Lord Trimingham. Hartley makes reference to the class range in the society using the complex sub-textual elements of the interaction between the main characters especially with the relationship between Marian Maudsley and Ted Burges. Marian states that 'Ted and I were lovers' their 'love was a beautiful thing' but yet they couldn't be together due to the distinction in their social class and her expectations to marry an aristocrat.

The villagers admire them and feel 'if it wasn't for the difference what a handsome pair they'll make'. Ted Burges isn't ashamed to tell anyone about his low class as he admits to Leo 'I'm a kind friend of hers' but doesn't hesitate to say 'but not the sort she goes about with'. However, he feels insecure about it and looks at 'himself critically all over' and even Leo notices that 'the more clothes he put on, the less he looked himself'. Ted seemed to have been a comfortable man before any illicit love affair with Marian as the villagers see his change as a sudden one and ask 'what's come over Ted? To be shy with ladies'? This implies he was a lady's man and was content with his farm life as he admits 'I'm not what you call a gentleman farmer'. Trimingham, on the other hand, was 'a Lord' whose clothes, unlike Ted's, 'seem to be a part of him'. He's an aristocrat and a gentleman who teaches Leo 'nothing is ever a lady's fault'. Unlike Ted, he had 'an ambiguous social position' as he was penniless yet his aristocracy

strengthened his social status and was seen as an 'emblem of the golden age'.

Trimingham however, despite all these odds, was oppressed by his lack of money and the defects of his face from the 'Boer war'. He was 'dreadfully ugly' and we learn from Marcus that 'he doesn't like you to feel sorry for him'. Hartley contrasts his hideous 'sick shaped scar that ran from his eye to the corner of his mouth' with the image of war making him 'a hero with a background of the hospital and battlefield'. Trimingham is the gentle, chivalrous representative of a dying tradition, bearing the scars of an 'impersonal' war.

A complex symbol, he is 'two-sided, like Janus', like the war, conflict and suffering for which in some ways he stands—entities which can be evil, the result of passion and pride and 'the fear of losing face', but which can also be good, the nurturer of strength, humility, self-discipline, compassion, the gaiety having the 'background of hospital and battle-field'. Hugh is two-sided like the traditions of the British nobility, like the blind-in-one-eye chivalry which insists that nothing can ever be a lady's fault, like the patriotism which sends soldiers off to kill the Boer, who's 'not a bad feller' but who happens to be the present target.

When Leo first sees Trimingham he immediately concludes it'll be 'impossible to like him' and so doesn't expect Marian to marry him after he learns from Marcus that 'Mama wants Marian to marry him'. His lack of money makes him still go forward to marry Marian even after 'the virgin and the water-carrier are caught together, 'two bodies moving like one'. Marian



still becomes 'Lady Trimingham'. He was so deeply oppressed that even Leo comments that 'His life could never have been a good life'.

He was a respectable man from a family of aristocracy, yet had no money pushing him to still marry a woman who had become a figure of shame to get himself some money. Also because of his strong belief that 'nothing was ever a lady's fault' Uncle Peter on the other hand, 'who's very absence, was a kind of presence' was a man with no status in the society living beyond the edges of civilisation but his presence lied in 'the glory of Uncle Peter' a RAF pilot meant to be flying bombing missions over Germany.

War plays a role in both novels as Frayn and Hartley use Uncle Peter and Trimingham to further show the effects of war on societal men. In Uncle Peter's case however, it led to his destruction and the end of his life. It was his major source of oppression as he now had to live in the lowest of the lowest, the Barns. Unlike Trimingham who's still fully idolised and idealised even much more after the war, we can't say the same about Uncle Peter.

Indeed he was idolised and his iconic status still remains with Auntie Dee, as Stephen tells us the untidiness of their house 'glowed with a kind of sacred light, like a saint and his attributes in a religious painting'. This image is a different man from the man in the barns who is now 'that low in the table of human precedence'. This painting is nothing close to that of war hero. As the narrator unveils the mystery we find out he has betrayed his country, deserted his duties under the claim 'you're up there in the darkness five hundred miles away from home and suddenly the darkness is in you as well'.

The man at the Barns and Uncle Peter are two different beings. One is a desperate, sick broken, deserted individual and the other whose eagle on his

hat 'spreading its gilt wings protectively' over the children of the Close. Should Uncle Peter have tried to rejoin the society, he would have brought shame and disgrace upon his family as Uncle Peter's iconic status was what reflected on Auntie Dee as even their untidy house 'glowed with a kind of scared light, like a saint and his attributes in a religious painting'. He is oppressed by the war effects and love as Trimmingham and Ted.

In his own case, he has married the wrong sister and at the same time gone from being a hero, to a man 'that low in the table of human precedence'. He has nothing to offer the woman he loves like Ted who has nothing to offer Marian other than love. He has but a map with the one word 'Forever'. He lives with images of the war fully fresh in his head saying 'you can't think, you can't move, Everything's drowned by this great scream of terror in the darkness' as he struggles to close his mind to the memory by using second person, refusing to acknowledge them as his own experience.

Like Leo is traumatised by the death of Ted, as he claims 'the tidings of Ted's suicide came to me voicelessly', and 'haunted me', Uncle Peter lives with the trauma of the war and describes it as 'blood-red velvet in the crown above the eagle'. He describes his plight and says it 'gets a bit leak, lying here and likens himself to a 'dicky engine'. Uncle Peter deeply oppressed by the war, explains his plight to Stephen saying 'you start playing some game, and you're the brave one, you're the great hero,' But the games goes on and on, and it gets more and frightening' and unfortunately for Uncle Peter the end result is death.

His death remains ambiguous as we can't ascertain if he killed himself like Ted, or if he was killed or perhaps had an accident. Marian Maudsley a

beautiful 'goddess' from Brandham hall an upper middle classed family in late-Victorian England with her 'hair bright with sunshine' and 'pale rose-pink' face. She has so many social expectations from both her family and the society. Best of all she's expected to make a 'good marriage'. It was like she was 'the climax, the key to the whole pattern'. She was in the middle of a cross battle with her emotions.

Torn between the man she 'must marry' to give her and her family the aristocracy they desire and the man who she shared a ' beautiful thing' and believed 'were made for each other'. Marian was tough like her mother as they were 'like two steel threads crossing each other', but 'her face reflected all the misery she had been going through'. She was oppressed by her social class and expectations, her Love for Ted and like her mother, she's expected to be a good hostess, moral, and keep her emotions and family under control by marrying Trimingham.

However, Marian is a very deceptive character as she lies to her mother on her seeing someone in Norwich as she hurriedly said 'Not a cat; we were hard at it all the time'. She also thinks she can marry Trimingham and carry on with her affair with Ted. Being the 'virgin of the zodiac', associated with the 'Atropa Belladonna'. She was a beautiful creature yet poisonous. So was the Atropa Belladonna as Leo says ' I knew that every part of it was poisonous, but I knew that it was beautiful'. Marian was a cruel and heartless character to an extent.

She was a 'snob' as Leo towards Trimingham on several occasions. She knew fully well there was no future for her and Ted and is fully aware she must marry Trimingham. She says to Leo 'I cant' when Leo asks her why she cant

marry Ted and admits to him that She 'must marry' Trimingham. She's a selfish character, as Ted has scarified all he has for her, he rents his farm from Trimingham and knows he can loose it and is willing to take that risk. She however, takes no serios risk as she has her eyes set on aristocracy.

She lures him into deceit which leaves the young man dead and she ends up as 'Lady Trimingham'. She uses Leo as 'the Go-Between' between her and Ted and still calls the young boy names like 'shylock', she tells her brother Marcus that green is a suitable color for Leo. She takes advantage of the love Trimingham has for her as she threatens that she 'wont marry him if Ted goes' and is willing to go as far as saying that 'Blackmail's a game two can play at'. Marian sees Ted's suicide as weakness and tells Leo 'Ted is as weak as water'.

Marian is sometimes nice to Leo, ut however, all her niceness towards him always had a motive behind it. She takes him to Norwich so she can get the chance to see Ted, she buys him a bicycle to make the message delivery faster between her and Ted. However, it could be argued that it was all out of frustration. Her eyes showed that 'she couldn't trust herself to speak', and had 'a hard bed' to lay on. Marian Maudsley was 'the climax' of the whole story. She was responsible for Ted's death and the calamity that befell Leo. She was still selfish even at old age not to admit to her faults.

She continued to live in her self-deception and somehow made herself believe she was still a popular important figure in the hall telling Leo 'People come in shoals; I almost have to turn them from the door; Everyone knows about me'. Her grandson is left to suffer the consequences of her actions. Michael Frayn uses imagery, metaphor, and irony to present Mrs. Hayward in

different ways. Through these techniques, Frayn dramatically and beautifully contrasts Mrs. Hayward's calm, composed manner at the start of the novel with her serious, emotionally distraught side. Mrs.

Hayward who is introduced with the six letters 'My mother is a German Spy', a character of 'grace and serenity' always cheerful. She's presented as an elegant and respectable character like Mrs. Maudsley and Marian who are under pressure but can't show it. She was almost a perfect being to the extent that even her chickens 'lived irreproachably elegant lives, parading haughtily about a spacious kingdom'. However, Mrs. Hayward was oppressed by her social expectations to always keep a high chin and her house in order and it becomes part of her 'to conceal her true nature'. Also by her husband Mr.

Hayward whose character is a bully inflicting pain on his wife that even 'in the heat of summer' she still wears a 'cravat pinned high around her neck'. It can be argued she did this to hide the bruises inflicted on her by her violent husband' Mrs. Hayward can't leave her marriage because once she got married to Mr. Hayward, being in that period, all her rights, properties and even her identity ceased to exist. By law she was under the complete and total supervision of her husband. Mr. Hayward carefully watches his wife and this is why she has to send Stephen to carry a message to Uncle Peter.

A woman was 'Barred by law and custom from entering trades and professions by which they could support themselves, and restricted in the possession of property, woman had only one means of livelihood, that of marriage'. She keeps a diary with 'X's and '!' 's' representing her period and sex life. We know she has a distant relationship with her husband, and

seems vaguely scared of him, so who she's having sex with is untold. Later on, we see she has 'Uncle Peter in her bosom' perhaps the 'X's' indicated his reciprocated love. Like Marian, she cant be with the man she loves.