

The go between essay sample



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The Go Between, by L. P Hartley is a period novel set in the summer of 1900 in Brandham Hall, Norfolk. In this story we follow the protagonist, a young naive boy called 'Leo Colston', through the three weeks he spends at Brandham hall. Leo gets himself caught up in a love triangle, which results in the loss of his innocence. Hartley uses a definitive turning point to mark the change from Leo's original naivety in the first half of the novel to his loss of childhood innocence in the second half.

The Go Between tells us the story of Leo Colston and his brief time spent at Brandham hall while staying with the Maudsley's in the hot summer of the 1900. Leo is corrupted by Marian (the lady of the house) and by Ted Burgess (a farmer on the estate). They both send love letters to each other via Leo, this results in Leo losing his childhood innocence, which creates sympathy towards him as he suffers a great deal from the result of being a go-between. The climax of the novel is when Ted and Marian's affair is uncovered; this is the cause for the unfortunate event of Ted's suicide. As a result of which Leo is undone, and from this our protagonist never fully recovers.

At the beginning of the novel, we are presented with a broken old man who has been destroyed by a catastrophe that has happened during his time spent at Brandham hall, the first part of the novel is spent exploring an innocent, naïve young boy. Leo's naivety is portrayed throughout the novel in many different ways. He thinks in terms of fairy stories, he finds it difficult to understand the people around him, and he begins to have strong feelings towards Marian but does not realise this. When Leo first arrives he realises he will find it hard to adjust to the new life style he finds there:

“ I did not understand the world of Brandham Hall; the people there were much larger than life; they had zodiacal properties and proportions”

Leo’s naivety is highlighted here as he does not understand how the people at Brandham Hall function. Another way in, which Leo is shown to be very innocent, are in his thoughts towards Marian, as he believes:

“ She was like the girl in the fairy story whose words turned to pearls as they fell from her lips”

Here he is still thinking of Marian in a childish way and is only vaguely aware of his true feelings.

The turning point of the novel is important as it shows Leo’s loss of innocence and the beginning of his corruption. It happens when he first reads the content of the letter and finds out that Ted and Marian are having an affair. At this point he is forced to realise that he has feelings towards Marian and is jealous of Ted’s influence over Marian:

“ I was jealous of him, of his power over Marian, little as I understood its nature”

Now Leo knows the true content of the letter he understands the adult world more and so, becomes more of a part in it. When Leo does first read the content of the letter he feels devastated:

“ Not Adam and Eve, after eating the apple, could have been more upset than I was.”

The biblical reference used here, shows the extent of Leo's unhappiness. At this turning point Leo begins to lose his childhood innocence and become less naive:

“ I had been taken in so often, I had been so green.”

Here Leo realises that the adults around him have been taking advantage of his naivety. The lexis used on ' I had been so green', refers closely to Leo's naivety. This again is highlighted in the book as Marcus commented:

“ Its your true colour, Marian said so...Green, green, green”

Again the colour green is used to represent Leo's naivety, which he loses once he reads the content of the letters he has been carrying.

Hartley also uses symbols, including changes in the weather, to explain what is happening in the lead up to the turning point and what happens afterwards. Tension is created, up until the turning point of the novel by use of the metaphor of the increasing heat to show Leo's increasing feelings towards Marian. In the second half of the novel the metaphor used by Hartley is the building storm representing the destruction of Leo's innocence.

In the first part of the novel the weather is getting hotter each day and the heat is used for a metaphor to show Leo's growing obsession towards Marian. He wants to experience:

“ Complete, corporeal union with the summer”

Up until the turning point the author emphasises Leo's fascination with heat, and the implication is that this is strongly connected with his love for Marian.

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But then after the turning point the metaphor changes and it is the approach of bad weather and storminess that the author uses to represent the destruction of Leo's innocence:

".... the skies were grey...It told me summer was over and a sterner season lay ahead." The weather is being used as a metaphor to foreshadow the tragic event about to occur, and we share Leo's sense of approaching misfortune. As the tragic climax approaches the weather continually worsens:

" This time they had an ominous look, and the still air presaged thunder."

Now the prediction of thunder suggests that the event will be a sudden and violent one: such as a gunshot, again we share Leo's increasing unease.

With the epilogue we understand the damage done to Leo as a result of his discovery of the affair between Marian and Ted. The turning point is shown to be the pivot of the story line: the point at which his naivety is lost and he is led on a destructive path and loss of innocence that overshadows the rest of his life. The contrast between Leo's naivety and his loss of innocence is reinforced by the author's use of symbols including the weather, which also changes at the turning point.