

How significant is symbolism in a novel



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Hartley makes extensive use of symbolism in order to convey his ideas about the strict values of 1900, England in *The Go-Between*. Many symbols are used to portray different messages. Hartley sets most of the story at Brandham Hall, a 'garden of Eden' setting which contains a microcosm of 1900 society, aristocracy, upper class, middle and lower class. The narrator Leo learns about the strict values of this society in this symbolic setting. He observes the forbidden love of Marian and Ted as he, himself, loses innocence. Heat is a recurring symbol in the novel, *The Go-Between*.

Weather is a tool that Hartley uses to track through the passion of Marian and Ted's relationship. As the heat increases the passion does too. Leo, whose obsession with the weather is obvious, reveals this idea to the reader. Everyday he checks the thermometer in the games room and is excited or disappointed depending on results. Leo feels as if he can control the weather, he believes he has the power to influence it. This is also the case with the relationship of Marian and Ted. At the end of the novel Leo suffers a nervous breakdown because he thinks that it is his fault for the events that occur. He feels that he caused the major climaxes of the novel.

Without the symbol of heat, the reader would not be clear about how serious Marian and Ted's relationship is. This symbolism also allows us to understand the character of Leo better." This is the hottest day we have had so far." (Pg 101)" The thermometer stood at eighty-four: that was satisfactory but I was confident it could do better." (Pg 82)The deadly nightshade is another recurring symbol in *The Go-Between*. This plant is significant in this novel because it represents sexual knowledge. At the beginning of the novel, Leo is innocent and pure. He comes across it while exploring.

Leo is fascinated with this plant and makes a few trips to see it in the novel. This symbolises his eagerness and curiosity to see and learn about taboo subjects. The symbol is vital to the novel as the reader learns that Leo is naïve and innocent.” But it wasn’t a plant in my sense of the word, it was a shrub, almost a tree, and as tall as I was. It was so glossy and strong and juicy looking... I knew that every part of it was poisonous; I knew too that it was beautiful.

..” (Pg 42) In this novel the colour green is a prominent symbol. Green represents youth and unripeness. It symbolises the lacking of worldly experience, which is why Leo is associated with this colour. At the beginning of the novel, Marian buys Leo a green suit.” “What a cool customer he looks!” said someone wittily. ‘Yes’ said another, ‘just like a cucumber and the same shade of green!’ They discussed what type of green it was.

‘He might be Robin Hood’. I was delighted by that, and saw myself roaming the greenwood with Maid Marian.” Gradually, as Leo gains experience and knowledge, he realises that his green suit ridicules his ‘unripeness’. Green is a very significant symbol, because he learns that this is how Marian views him.” All my thoughts of her were steeped in green and poisoned; I could hardly bear to look at my green suit...she had always thought of me as green; Marcus told me so.

” (Pg 209) Ted’s gun is an obvious symbol in the novel *The Go-Between*. We first come across this symbol when Ted is in the field shooting rabbits. Ted with his gun signifies he is a hunter in power.” He was standing with his gun watching for the rabbits and other creatures which clung to their shelter till

the last moment before bolting out” Further in the novel, Leo visits Ted while he is cleaning his gun. Ted lets Leo pick the gun up, and he points it at Ted. The gun gives Leo an ‘intensified sense of power’. The gun is an important symbol in this novel as it represents violence and death. The character holding it gains instant power.

After holding the gun, Leo becomes obsessed with the idea that Ted is going to shoot Lord Trimmingham. It is here in the novel that he decides he will not deliver any more messages” I could hardly hold it with two, resting the other hand under the barrel. But I got a strange thrill from the contact... I pointed it straight at Ted”””” Have you got a message for her?’ I asked. ‘Yes’ he replied, ‘but do you want to take it?’ I felt the tears coming back..

. I won’t take anymore messages for you.” (Page 186, 187). In conclusion, Hartley successfully used a number of different symbols which all conveyed different ideas about characters and the strict values of 1900 society. The heat helped the reader understand better the complexity of Marian and Ted’s relationship while also letting the reader discover more about Leo. The deadly nightshade represents sexual knowledge. This significant symbol helps us learn more about Leo and his lack of intimate understanding. The colour green, which represents ‘unripeness’ and youth, helped the reader understand one of the main ideas in this novel, which was loss of innocence.

And finally the gun, a symbol representing power and violence. This is significant because Ted describes himself as ‘a pretty good shot’, ironic because at the end of the novel, Ted shoots himself with the gun.