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“This Cindery Creature Is What You Made Me”:

Bildung after Trauma in L. P. Hartley’s *The Go-Between*

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Abstract

During his lifetime, L. P. Hartley (1895-1972) was considered an outstanding author, but after his death, he was increasingly regarded as an outmoded writer due to his frequent use of nineteenth-century styles and genres, particularly that of the *Bildungsroman*. Several scholars have opposed this perception of the novelist by pointing out his use of modern themes, but none have explored the ways in which Hartley may have deviated from the traditional *Bildungsroman*-format in response to his contemporary socio-historical context. This thesis examines this possibility by analyzing Hartley's masterpiece *The Go-Between* (1953) and demonstrates that Hartley indeed worked with the literary tradition of the *Bildungsroman* and the Enlightenment ideals that permeate it, but has simultaneously included thoroughly modern, post-World War II ideas about the world in his story. Consequently, in *The Go-Between*, Hartley has brought together past and present by, on the one hand, portraying the *Bildung* of his protagonist according to the archetypal plot of the genre but, on the other hand, deviating from this format in the ending by portraying the protagonist's traumatization as a mirror-image of the devastation of Europe after the horrors of World War I and II. Thus, Hartley challenges the Enlightenment presuppositions that stand at the core of the *Bildungsroman*, but simultaneously reinvents the genre and the *Bildungs*-ideal in light of the changed worldview of the late 1940s and 1950s. In this respect, for his time, Hartley has shown himself to be a significantly more innovative author than his long-standing reputation suggests.

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Introduction

Even though during his lifetime L. P. Hartley (1895 - 1972) was considered “one of England’s most distinguished novelists”, from the 1980s onwards his popularity decreased steadily and little scholarly attention has been paid to his works in recent years (Parker 119; Webster 152). This decline in interest is generally explained by Hartley’s seemingly ‘old-fashioned’ writing, which shows many resemblances to the styles and genres of “nineteenth-century English novelists” and lacks the technical or stylistic innovations that characterize modernist literature (Bien 9; Webster 154, 166). In this regard, many of Hartley’s works, including his most well-known novel *The Go-Between* (1953), have been connected specifically to the genre of the *Bildungsroman*, which had been a popular genre throughout the nineteenth century but had become nearly obsolete in Hartley’s time (Mulkeen 9; Jones 31; Bien 39; Moretti 229-231).

Nevertheless, over the years, a few scholars, amongst whom Harvey Curtis Webster and Anne Mulkeen, have argued against this dismissal of Hartley as an outmoded novelist. Mulkeen in particular has demonstrated that even though at first glance, many of Hartley’s works do seem out-of-place among those of his contemporaries with their depictions of long-lost worlds in which “sensitive post-Victorian youths [struggle] for self-discovery”, a closer inspection reveals that his stories are very much concerned with the issues of his own time as they often thematize “the universe in which twentieth-century man finds himself” as well as “its prehistory, its wars, its problems, its concerns, its philosophies” (x-xi; 9-10). Thus, Mulkeen seems to imply that Hartley’s novels can be considered modern *despite* the author’s obvious indebtedness to the literary tradition of the *Bildungsroman*.

However, by focusing on Hartley’s use of modern themes on the story-level of his novels, Mulkeen, like other scholars and critics, overlooks the possibility of an innovation at the level of the *Bildungsroman*-genre. This thesis will examine this possibility and explore the ways in

which Hartley in *The Go-Between* has not only used, but may also have transformed the format of the traditional *Bildungsroman* in response to the changed worldview and socio-historical context of Europe after World War II.

This thesis will be constructed as follows: firstly, the evolution of Hartley's reception up to the present-day will be discussed briefly to illustrate the instability of his position in the British literary canon. Subsequently, the origins and characteristics of the genre of the *Bildungsroman* will be examined, with an emphasis on its connection to late-eighteenth-century Enlightenment thought, in order to roughly reconstruct the literary tradition that Hartley made use of. Following this, the focus will shift to the intellectual and artistic climate in which Hartley wrote *The Go-Between*, concentrating on the challenges posed to Enlightenment thinking by the collective traumas of World War I and II. Finally, this thesis will analyze the novel itself, examining how Hartley has both adhered to and may be said to have innovated the traditional *Bildungsroman*-format to suit the socio-historical context of his own time.

L. P. Hartley's Rise and Fall

L. P. Hartley was considered an outstanding author in his own time. His career, however, had taken off slowly; his first published works, a short story collection called *Night Fears* (1924) and the novella *Simonetta Perkins* (1925), met with moderate acclaim and low sales (Wright 80, 84-85). It was not until 1947, more than two decades later, that Hartley gained a reputation as a respected novelist with his trilogy *Eustace and Hilda*, which was referred to by Walter Allen in the *New Statesman* as "one of the few masterpieces in contemporary fiction" and yielded him the annual James Tait Black Memorial Prize (qtd. in Wright 145-146; Jones 21; Mulkeen ix). However, Hartley's stature as a major British novelist was not assured until the publication of *The Go-Between* in 1953, which received almost exclusively ecstatic praise and became the one of his works most loved by readers and critics (Parker 119; Wright 171-173). After being awarded the Heinemann Foundation Prize for his novel, Hartley became a

member of the Royal Society of Literature and was even granted the honorary distinction of Commander of the British Empire in 1956 (Jones 21; Wright 173, 249; Mulkeen ix). Even in his old age, Hartley remained an important figure in the European literary scene, which led to his becoming a Companion of Literature in the final year of his life, an honor that is bestowed on only ten living British authors at any given time (Jones 21). After his death in 1972, Hartley was mourned in the *Daily Telegraph* by David Holloways as “one of the most singular and most English voices amongst those writing today ... he wrote ... with a skill that at moments touched on genius” (qtd. in Wright 269).

Nevertheless, despite this success, critical voices raised from the start of his literary career the ‘issue’ of his supposed lack of literary innovation.¹ This was picked up by later generations of literary scholars to contest his place in the British literary canon (Athos 172; Allsop 34). Because his style was much less experimental than that of modernist writers such as James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, and showed many resemblances to the symbolist literature of Henry James and Nathaniel Hawthorne, his works were strongly associated with an outmoded “Edwardian aesthetic” because of which Hartley himself was regarded patronizingly as “a marooned Edwardian” (Jones 24, 204-205; Athos 172; Webster 154, 166; Allsop 34; Dobrée 639-640; Karl 277). This reputation was further strengthened by his frequent use of nineteenth-century genres (Jones 31, 204-205; Bien 39).

Even though this portrayal of Hartley was challenged by some scholars, it proved persistent and serves as an explanation for the general decline in interest in Hartley’s works from the 1980s onwards.² Despite the fact that his reputation remained high amongst scholars in the few years after his death, his books sold less well than those of other contemporaries and

¹ In this regard, Hartley can be counted among those 1950s authors who rejected the stylistic experiments of the modernist writers in favor of more traditional styles. For a discussion of this literary movement, see Rabinovitz (1967) and Allsop (1964).

² From the 1980s onwards, the only work published concerning Hartley is Adrian Wright’s *Foreign Country: The Life of L. P. Hartley* (1996), but the publication was apparently unable to rekindle curiosity in the author.

became increasingly difficult to obtain (Webster 152). Hartley gradually faded into obscurity and nearly all books on contemporary British fiction published in the last two decades either fail to mention Hartley at all or dedicate a mere paragraph or two to his works, focusing more on authors that engaged in stylistic experimentation and consequently could be considered forerunners of postmodern literature (Webster 152). To this day, Hartley has not been able to shed his reputation as an old-fashioned writer, which appears from the cover of Penguin's recent republication of *The Go-Between*, that praises the novel as "an unforgettable evocation of the boundaries of Edwardian society."

The *Bildungsroman* and its Portrayal of the Enlightenment Ideal

The literary genre to which Hartley's major works, including *The Go-Between*, have been connected most persistently, is that of the *Bildungsroman*. The term *Bildungsroman* was coined in 1819 by the German professor of rhetoric Karl von Morgenstern (1770-1852) and refers to a particular type of novel that emerged at the end of the eighteenth century and portrays the *Bildung* - roughly translatable as self-cultivation - of the protagonist in line with the work of the German Classicist Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835) (Martini 2-8; Hardin ix; Castle 40-46; Swales 121; Jeffers 49).³ According to Humboldt, who built on the humanist Renaissance ideal of the homo universalis, which can be traced back even further to Antiquity, *Bildung* entails a process in which an individual improves himself in order to become an independent, free and 'whole' person, both psychologically and spiritually, through a "harmony of aesthetic, moral, rational, and scientific education" (Martini 5, 7; Castle 6-7, 40-43; Minden 5; Swales 14).

Bildung occupied a central place in Enlightenment thought and was intrinsically connected to its notions regarding the development of the individual and society throughout

³ However, the term was not much used in literary scholarship until its popularization by Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) in his work *Poetry and Experience* (1906) (Boes 647; Jeffers 49; Swales 13). Just like Von Morgenstern, Dilthey based his theory of the genre on Johan Wolfgang von Goethe's novel *Wilhelm Meister's Lehrjahre* (1795), which became the genre's literary archetype (Boes 648; Swales 28; Castle 9).

history (Hardin xi, Castle 34-35, 40-43). In line with the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, it was believed that man should freely cultivate himself, especially his *ratio*, in order to fulfill his potential and assume his true identity (Swales 16-17; Castle 7; Minden 5). In doing so, the individual was able to become an optimally functioning part of society and consequently contribute to the gradual perfecting of human civilization at large as it was assumed that “the growth and evolution of man are interlocked” (Swales 16-17). In this process, the universe, which was believed to be inherently “meaningful, even beneficent,” served “as a surrogate guide” for the individual on his path toward harmonious perfection in a linear progression of history (Hardin xxi; Jeffers 16; Shaffner 10).

The emergence of these beliefs is closely related to the developments in late-eighteenth-century German society; a time that was characterized by a simultaneous liberation and disorientation as “the rise of democracy and liberalism” and the repudiation of traditional authorities, both sacred and secular, shook people’s sense of identity, particularly that of young people (Jeffers 50-51; Castle 8; Minden 6; Swales 16, 149). In this regard, *Bildung* provided adolescents - who were in a sense the “material sign” of modernity “because of [their] ability to *accentuate* modernity’s dynamism and instability” - with a new way of constructing their own identities based on the Enlightenment principles of freedom and rationality (Moretti 5; Castle 7-8, 10). Consequently, the *Bildungsroman* became a popular way of portraying that process from the 1800s onwards, which resulted in a variety of national variants and an abundance of authors that worked with, rejected or altered the genre’s conventions and its Enlightenment presuppositions (Castle 6-8, 13-15, 19-23).⁴

Because of its multivarious character, the *Bildungsroman* has proven hard to define, which has resulted in a lively scholarly debate, that can be divided roughly into two sides: some

⁴ As Hartley’s works are generally connected to the classic *Bildungsroman* of the late-eighteenth century, this thesis focuses primarily on this first type of the genre. For a discussion of the various developments in the *Bildungsroman*-genre during the nineteenth and early-twentieth century, see Castle (2006).

scholars argue that the *Bildungsroman* should be seen as an exclusively historical phenomenon due to its close connection to the academic and artistic climate of late-eighteenth-century Germany whereas others have pointed out that the genre transcends the specific time and place of “German Classicism” and has continued to play an important role in several European, particularly the French and Anglophone, literary traditions (Jeffers 2; Martini 24-25; Hardin xxiii; Jeffers 5; Castle 12-13). Consequently, the latter group of scholars, which predominate modern-day scholarship, have proposed definitions of the genre based on certain characteristics that many of these novels have in common, regardless of their time or place. In this regard, the definition suggested by Jerome H. Buckley in his work *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding* (1974) is most-often adopted (Hardin xxiii; Jeffers 52). Buckley argues that even though the *Bildungsroman* “ultimately escapes precise definition or neat translation, its meaning should nonetheless emerge clearly enough from an account of the novels themselves and the steady recurrence of certain common motifs in them” and consequently defines the *Bildungsroman* through its archetypal plot:

A child of some sensibility grows up in the country or in a provincial town, where he finds constraints, [both] social and intellectual ... He, therefore, sometimes at a quite early age, leaves the repressive atmosphere of home (and also the relative innocence), to make his way independently in the city ... There his real “education” begins, not only his preparation for a career but also – and often more importantly – his direct experience of urban life. The latter involves at least two love affairs or sexual encounters, one debasing, one exalting, and demands that in this respect and others the hero reappraise his values. By the time he has decided, after painful soul-searching, the sort of accommodation to the world he can honestly make, he has left his adolescence behind and entered upon his maturity. His initiation complete, he may then visit his old

home, to demonstrate by his presence the degree of his success or the wisdom of his choice. (17-18)⁵

The protagonist (*Bildungsheld*) of the late-eighteenth-century *Bildungsroman* is generally a sensitive young boy with a rich inner life and artistic aspirations, who embodies “Every Young Person” (Minden 4-5; Jeffers 50; Buckley 13). In addition, he is often “orphaned or at least fatherless” which accounts for his need to construct his identity independently without a role model (Buckley 19-20). Nevertheless, he consciously aspires to elevate his character and consequently “matures in full awareness of his formation”, urged on by the continual tension between his actuality and potentiality (Swales 29; Shaffner 10-11). This process is portrayed by an autobiographical narrator who is the protagonist in an older, more experienced and ‘complete’ age (Minden 4-5, 11; Hardin ix; Swales 4).

Throughout his life, according to the *Bildungs*-ideal, the *Bildungsheld* is prompted by his experiences to reflect on his own identity, behavior and the more abstract concepts of good and evil in order to become a moral character with his own norms and values (Hardin xiii, xv-xvi; Swales 29). As Thomas Jeffers explains: “it is a hero’s lived experience of keeping or not keeping promises, of telling or not telling the truth, of being faithful or unfaithful to parents, friends, and spouse ... that gives rise to his conceptual beliefs about ... the Good and the True” (53). Consequently, throughout the novel both passive reflection and action play a vital role in the protagonist’s dealing with the world, which can be illustrated with the metaphor of swimming; the protagonist is completely at the mercy of the tumultuous sea that resembles life and is only capable of exerting his agency in how he challenges the waves (Shaffner 19-20; Hardin xiii, xv). However, in line with Enlightenment optimism, nature will never destroy him, but rather guides him to “a better understanding of [the] self and to a generally affirmative view

⁵ Buckley addresses that “No single novel, of course, precisely follows this pattern. But none ignores more than two or three of its principal elements” (18). Even though Buckley’s definition relies in part on circular reasoning - the novels he analyzes in order to formulate a definition of the *Bildungsroman*-genre have been pre-selected as *Bildungsromane* - his definition is useful when it comes to identifying the genre’s conventions.

of the world” in which all conflict has been resolved and the protagonist has internalized “the community’s norms” (Hardin xiii, xv-xvi; Jeffers 16, 51; Castle 10). Thus, the *Bildungsroman* is inextricably connected to the Enlightenment ideal regarding the progressive development of the individual and society towards harmonious perfection.

Post-World War II Trauma and Disillusionment

It is not surprising that the *Bildungsroman* was believed to be an obsolete genre in Hartley’s time as the horrors of World War I and II had radically undermined the Enlightenment belief in progress and harmony that underpin it (Heffernan 8-11). The “era of cataclysm and statistical death, involving tens of thousands, even millions” had proven “the liberal humanist faith in the intrinsic value of the individual” untenable (Jones 191; Heffernan 9, 13-14). Additionally, as “the rational being in Kantian philosophy” had shown its undeniably vile nature, the cosmos as a whole was regarded suspiciously as a hostile entity, leading the individual to believe “that a total immersion in life would destroy him” (Karl 6). As Franco Moretti argues “Reality is no longer the infinitely perfectible material it was thought to be during the Enlightenment ... history moves not only forward, in harmony with reason, but it can also resist change and bring back the past. Reality then – such is the plain but disturbing discovery of this age – is characterized by mere existence, independent of any symbolic legitimacy” (94-95). Consequently, Europeans were traumatized and alienated from themselves and their surroundings as they “look out on ultimate chaos, on a world that is no longer seeking instruction, but destruction, a world possibly heading nowhere”, having lost all “faith in a higher order or ultimate pattern” that would lend “a sense of purpose to [their] existence in the world” (Karl 3, 11-12, 16-17; Connor 7-8; Heffernan 3-10; Webster 3).⁶ In addition, this feeling of

⁶ Even though, in Britain in the late 1940s and early 1950s a certain atmosphere of triumph and optimism about the future can be observed, the literature of the time paints an entirely different picture, which indicates that the underlying feelings within society were not as positive as may have seemed (Head 14).

estrangement increased due to the emerging belief in language's inability to represent reality, resulting in a suspicion of language (Heffernan 3-4, 10-11, 14-19; Connor 8).

These developments in European thought after World War II formed the starting point for what Jean-François Lyotard would later call the postmodern condition. In his influential work *La Condition postmoderne* (1979), Lyotard defines postmodernism as a general "incredulity toward metanarratives", especially those belonging to the Enlightenment tradition "in which the hero of knowledge works toward a good ethico-political end – universal peace" (Lyotard xxiii-xxiv; McHale 67-68; Hutcheon 6, 53; Butler 13). Amongst several others, this narrative structure of "the progressive emancipation of humanity", had sustained and legitimized modern society in the West for nearly two centuries, but had lost all credibility after the Second World War (Lyotard xxiii-xxiv; Hutcheon 6; Butler 13; McHale 67-68). Consequently, these universal and totalizing narratives were replaced by a plurality of little narratives, or language games in the Wittgensteinian sense, whereby "each of the various categories of utterance can be defined in terms of rules specifying their properties and the uses to which they can be put" (Lyotard 10; McHale 68). These beliefs go hand in hand with the notion that objective truth and reality are merely fictitious constructs (Hutcheon 40; Butler 17, 19). Thus, even though postmodernism as a demarcated tradition did not emerge until the 1970s, the birth of its principal ideas can be traced back to the radical change in worldview in Western Europe after the communal trauma of World War II (McHale 66-68).

Hartley himself, having fought in the First World War before being invalided out of the army on account of a weak heart, was very much aware of "the social, psychological and moral dislocations of the twentieth century which have disrupted civilization and cast doubt on its existence and continuance" (Jones 33; Wright 68-70). He wrote of the devastation in 1918, that had only increased in 1945, as follows: "The First World War shook one's belief in the essential goodness of humanity – the belief that all's for the best in the best of all possible worlds that

... had dominated Victorian thought” (Hartley TW 251). Consequently, the feelings of alienation and trauma that resulted from the rupture in Europe’s traditional belief system likely found their way into several of Hartley’s works, including *The Go-Between*, just like the literary tradition of the *Bildungsroman*.

An Analysis of Hartley’s *The Go-Between*

The story of *The Go-Between* is told by the autobiographical narrator, Leo Colston, who, spurred on by the rediscovery of his old belongings and treasured diary on a rainy day in 1952, looks back on his childhood and particularly the summer of 1900, which he spent in the company of the Maudsley family at Brandham Hall; a period in which he developed from an innocent child into a more experienced adolescent.⁷ The young Leo is portrayed as a sensitive boy with literary ambitions and a lively imagination, who becomes increasingly occupied with his own identity and place in society (Hartley GB 8, 14-15). At the dawn of a new age, Leo believes his radiant future to be intrinsically connected to “the glorious destiny of the twentieth century”; a belief that resembles the Enlightenment notion of the connection between individual and communal fate in an advance toward harmonious perfection (Hartley GB 7-9, 24, 246). In addition, he considers the figures of the zodiac, that adorn his diary, as “the incarnated glory” of the coming century, which makes him want to adopt their identity –both the Archer and the Water-carrier are considered as options - in his development towards adulthood (Hartley GB 8, 16; Jones 102; Mulkeen 101, 107).

This search for his own identity continues when Leo – who, like many *Bildungshelden*, grew up in the country in the restricted company of his parents until his father’s death - first encounters the society of Southdown Hill school and later is introduced to the even larger microcosmos of Brandham Hall. Both worlds are accompanied by their own language,

⁷ Focusing on one summer and the events leading up to it rather than multiple years in Leo’s life, *The Go-Between* is much more limited in scope than a traditional *Bildungsroman*. Nevertheless, the archetypal plot of the genre has remained largely intact.

conventions and rules, which Leo needs to adopt in order to turn from an outcast into a functioning and more mature member of that society (Hartley GB 59, 84, 172).⁸ At Southdown Hill, Leo gradually learns the language and internalizes the schoolboy's code, which prescribes certain types of behaviors in particular situations (Hartley GB 97, 99-101). As an ultimate rite of passage, Leo manages to get rid of his two bullies through a spell, whilst fully adhering to their code, which turns him into "the hero of the hour" (Hartley GB 15, 21). Leo eagerly adopts this new identity as a "revered magician": "For the first time I felt that I was someone" (Hartley GB 14, 21-22). Additionally, due to the admiration of his fellow-schoolboys, he becomes overconfident and sees the world – again in line with Enlightenment thought - as a benign force that exists for his benefit only: "I felt myself to be invulnerable.... I felt that the laws of reality had been suspended on my behalf" (Hartley GB 24; Mulkeen 102).

At Brandham Hall, where he encounters a much more diverse society of people of a variety of ages and social standings, whom he regards as the incarnated members of the zodiac, Leo develops again from naïve outcast to knowledgeable adolescent by learning its language and conventions and constructing a new identity (Hartley GB 46-47, 246). Initially, Leo, who dreads being treated again as an outcast, resorts to the only code of conduct he knows, namely his school's code ("The schoolboy's standards were my standards" (Hartley GB 69)), to improve his position: he hatches a spell to alter the situation, but ultimately fails as this new world is governed by different laws (Hartley GB 38-39, 246).⁹ He realizes that, by having left Southdown Hill behind, he must find a way to become a part of the illustrious society of Brandham Hall: "I must increase my stature, I must act on a grander scale ... my emotions and my behaviour must illustrate this change" (Hartley GB 69-70). Consequently, he adopts a new

⁸ In the novel, the process of growing up is strongly connected to one's initiation into a new (adult) language game. For a discussion of language in *The Go-Between*, see MacArthur (1990).

⁹ Leo's status as an outsider is emphasized by his wearing a woolen Norfolk suit in the midst of summer (Hartley GB 38-39). To remedy his situation, Leo creates a spell to bring the temperature down, but to no avail, which challenges his fantastical belief that he can master the cosmos (Hartley GB 35, 37-39).

identity by shedding his school clothes and donning his new green summer suit, gifted by Marian Maudsley: “I felt different, too. I tiptoed about, as though exploring a new personality. I felt I was cast for a new role ... [as] a Robin Hood in Lincoln green ... I started off” (Hartley GB 68). Additionally, conforming to his new identity as Robin Hood, Leo takes on the seemingly heroic task of delivering messages for ‘Maid Marian’, which provides him with a meaningful occupation in the society (Hartley GB 94-95).¹⁰

On his way towards maturity, Leo starts out with “little sense of right and wrong in the abstract”, but is challenged to think about good and evil, like classic *Bildungshelden*, through the situations he encounters in his life (Hartley GB 99). Especially when he is confronted with situations that can no longer be ‘solved’ by means of his school code (“for any system of ethics, as distinct from the school code, I barely recognized” (Hartley GB 97)), Leo is prompted to reflect critically on his values and the ethical implications of his actions in order to construct his own moral code independently (Jones 28). This is the case, for instance, when Marian slips Leo an unsealed letter: according to his school code, Leo is entitled to read the letter whether or not the writer intended to seal it, but because Leo does want to take into account her intentions, he decides on a compromise and reads only the words that are exposed (Hartley GB 99-101). Thus, Leo demonstrates that he has crossed the bridge from a mere schoolboy to a more autonomous adolescent.

In serving Marian as a go-between, Leo seems to have found his function in the society of Brandham Hall; a position that enables him to observe and learn the meaning of the adults’ conversations and behaviors. Initially, he understands barely anything (“What they thought, what they did, how they occupied themselves, were a mystery to me” (Hartley GB 31)), but after a while he becomes more familiar with their ways to the point that he can adopt them himself (Hartley GB 84, 115, 237). Furthermore, after having successfully participated in two

¹⁰ In this regard, Leo likewise identifies himself with Mercury, the messenger of the gods (Hartley 94-95).

of the adults' main events, namely the cricket match and the concert, he considers himself to have become part of their world: "I was called upon to exchange the immunities of childhood for the responsibilities of the grownup world. It was like a death, but with a resurrection in prospect ... At last I was free from all my imperfections and limitations; I belonged to another world, the celestial world. I was one with my dream life" (Hartley GB 134-135, 141). His vision for himself, like his vision for the future, seem to have come true as everything has "become part of the general harmony" just like in the endings of classic *Bildungsromane* (Hartley GB 142).

However, after a while, Leo realizes that his constructed identity as a Robin Hood was in reality manipulated by Marian, who needed him to be able to communicate with Ted, her lover (Hartley GB 102, 155-156). The experience makes him question himself again, as it dawns on him that he has constructed this identity depending on her perception of him: "The transfigured Leo ... was her creation ... And now, again like an enchantress, she had taken it all away and I was back where I started from" (Hartley GB 156). In this regard, Leo's relationship with Marian corresponds well to the classic *Bildungsroman*-format in which the protagonist encounters an exalting as well as a debasing love affair as Leo initially feels elevated by Marian's interest in him, but later on feels humiliated by her betrayal and consequently rejects his identity as a Robin Hood (Hartley GB 53, 94-95, 156).

Additionally, Leo is presented with a new moral dilemma, namely whether to continue delivering Marian's messages whilst she is engaged to Hugh Trimingham (Hartley GB 169).¹¹ Again, he is prompted to reject his school code and adopt an independent morale: "It was I who had changed, not they. For the first time in my life I had a strong sense of obligation in a matter that didn't really concern me —a sense of ought and ought not. Hitherto my maxim had been

¹¹ This inner conflict is symbolized by Leo's dual vision of himself when he decides to deliver one more letter: "And I had a curious experience ... as though a part of me was stationed far away, behind me ... Perhaps it was the part of me that would not take the letter" (Hartley GB 157)

to mind my own business, as it was the maxim of most of my schoolfellows ... But now for some such scruple I felt constrained to take preventive action” (Hartley GB 169). Finally, Leo abides by his inner imperative to intervene and decides to leave Brandham, even if that means sacrificing his own wish to stay (Hartley GB 169, 219).¹² Additionally, in line with his new moral code, he assumes a new identity that rejects all of his former fantasies and instead looks on reality as it really is, with “nobody’s standards to live up to except [his] own” (Hartley GB 183, 233).¹³

At this point, Leo seems to have become an adult according to the precepts of the archetypal *Bildungsroman* as defined by Buckley: realistic, critical and independent. He seems ready to become a well-functioning part of society, were it not for the last bridge that separates him from completely understanding nature and reaching maturity: the mystery of sex. However, this last initiation, provided by the discovery of Ted and Marian *in flagrante delicto*, does not complete his development towards adulthood, but completely destroys it; the seemingly benign sea of life has revealed its treacherous nature and swallowed him whole. In witnessing the explicit scene and hearing Mrs. Maudsley’s agonized shriek, Leo realizes that the glorious members of the zodiac are far from the harmonious and whole beings he presumed them to be, but instead are thoroughly flawed people who are constantly contending with their inescapable, dark and evil natures (Hartley GB 244; Mulkeen 99).¹⁴ Because he is unable to reconcile this harsh reality with his fantastical belief in the majesty of the zodiac (“You insisted on thinking of them as angels, even if they were fallen angels” (Hartley GB 18)), Leo is utterly traumatized, which makes him incapable of fully constructing his own identity and assimilating into society;

¹² Leo’s initial urge to tear up the letter to his mother asking for his return home and his subsequent decision not to, further illustrates the increasing strength of his moral character (Hartley GB 180).

¹³ To mark this transition, Leo takes off his green suit, which he regards as “the vesture of [his] make-believe” and goes back to wearing his Norfolk suit (Hartley GB 229).

¹⁴ Throughout the novel, Leo does instinctively sense the destructive power of nature in the Belladonna bush, but is convinced that he has mastered this unknown evil force by uprooting the plant (Hartley 33-34, 223-224). Likewise, nature’s ruthlessness is symbolized by the rising heat, whose threat Leo disregards because he believes himself to be “in league with it” after having put on his summer suit (Hartley 37, 45, 69; Bien 181).

an ending that is diametrically opposed to that of the traditional *Bildungsroman* (Hartley GB 6, 16-18, 244-247; Mulkeen 107; Jay 2). Where the Enlightenment ideal of *Bildung* had confidently promised him the *gain* of experience, purpose and a harmonious identity, it has instead brought about a tremendous *loss*; a loss of innocence, of self-formation, of Leo's expectations for the coming century, and of the belief in the world as a meaningful and benevolent entity.

Hartley has created this ending purposefully to draw a parallel between Leo's development from naïve youth to traumatized and disillusioned adult and the 'maturing' of Europe during the first half of the twentieth century (Mulkeen 97-98). Leo remembers his younger self in the year 1900 - a year most deliberately chosen by Hartley - filled with expectations for himself and the coming century, just like the Europeans, who at the turn of the century naively saw "the twentieth century, culmination of so many years of cultivation and humanism and scientific achievement, as, logically, a Golden Age of human fulfilment" (Mulkeen 106, 109-110). Both believed themselves to be invincible as Leo looked at the world through a filter of fantasy and European society was led by the optimistic Enlightenment beliefs (Hartley GB 24, 227). However, both were also punished for their naivete in believing these narratives and disregarding the brutal realities of (human) nature; Leo's fate mirrors the Europeans' state of disillusion after World War II as they were forced to come to terms with a potentially meaningless world heading nowhere (Hartley GB 6, 16-18, 244-247).

As an old man in 1952, Leo realizes the dangers of believing in fantastical narratives and has rejected all belief in language as a truthful representation of reality and especially history, which is indicated by the novel's famous first sentence: "The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there" (Hartley GB 5).¹⁵ Consequently, he has refused to become a writer in favor of a life dedicated to facts and blames the bleakness of his current life on his

¹⁵ In this regard, a parallel can be drawn between the inevitably unstable representation of history and Leo's unstable portrayal of his own history because of his unreliable memory (Hartley GB 28-29, 33, 82, 110, 140-141).

younger self: “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” (Hartley GB 17-18, 247).^{16 17} At last, he is able to connect his own mistake to the mistake of the whole Western world at the beginning of the century: ““Has the twentieth century,” I should ask, “done so much better than I have? ... You were vanquished, Colston, you were vanquished, and so was your century, your precious century that you hoped so much of” (Hartley GB 17-18). Leo has seen the terrible effects of this mistake play out on the small scale of his own life, but has simultaneously witnessed the devastation of an entire continent. Thus, through his deviation from the traditional *Bildungsroman*-format and his interweaving of Leo’s life story with the historical context of World War I and II, Hartley seems to critique those who believe in a world and a type of *Bildung* where conflict will always be resolved harmoniously, and humankind is untainted with sin (Mulkeen 106, 109-110).¹⁸

However, this does not mean that Hartley himself rejected the concept of *Bildung* entirely. On the contrary, he saw self-education as a vital tool in an individual’s independent self-realization, particularly in his contemporary society that due to the “social and political structure of the modern welfare state” made people into predictable automatons and stripped them of their “personal responsibility and individual accountability” (Hartley NR 190, 200 ; Jones 22, 33, 203). Still, he did object to the Enlightenment concept of *Bildung* that ignored the existence of evil in humans and the cosmos and in which one was thrown “into life unprepared for its seriousness”, under the assumption that “heat, violence, sex, are unmentionables which, if ignored, may disappear” (Mulkeen 106). Instead, Hartley argued that evil, “even though it

¹⁶ Of course, in a way, Leo did become a writer after all by writing his life story, which implies that he has not written off language entirely. Likewise, he does not fully reject the notion of an objective reality, that can be known through facts.

¹⁷ Here, the sun, a symbol for Enlightenment, emphasizes once more the similarity in fates between Leo, who soared to great heights, like Icarus, as Mercury in his fantasy-world, and that of the European community who ‘got burnt’ for counting too much on the Enlightenment promises (Hartley GB 17-18).

¹⁸ Hartley’s emphasis on the story’s historical dimension is also what sets his innovation of the *Bildungsroman*-genre apart from those of, for example, the modernists. Their stories, often, likewise feature protagonists that turn their back on society, but their protagonists always remain individuals without a universal, historical significance.

cannot, perhaps, be fully understood ... must be reckoned with” and consequently “must be accepted as part of the training of the soul on its way to a higher development” (Hartley NR 122; Hartley TW 19; Mulkeen 12; Jones 19). In his opinion, it is the novelist’s responsibility to portray this complex process faithfully, by which he seems to say that a new type of Bildungsroman ought to be written that does not shy away from the dark side of the world and accepts “polarities and conflicts as the stuff of existence” without the necessity to resolve them (Hartley NR 122; Mulkeen 15; Jones 189). Thus, Hartley does not go as far as to reject all metanarratives like the postmodernists, but instead wishes to create a new metanarrative of Bildung that better suits the complexities of reality.

Hartley’s *The Go-Between* corresponds well to his vision of what a contemporary Bildungsroman ought to be like as it portrays a Bildungs-process that does not end with a victorious *Bildungsheld* returning home as an experienced adult, having overcome all conflicts, to demonstrate his success and wisdom, but with an old yet inexperienced man, whose life took an unexpected turn due to a trauma he was unable to overcome, but who is ready to dip his toe in the sea of life again to test the waters, this time without deluding narratives that cloud his judgement. When Leo visits Marian again, he is struck by her self-deception, her inability or unwillingness “to connect these wars, [their] hatreds and terrors ... with [her] own passions, the unfronted blackness and destructiveness of their own natures” (Hartley GB 259-261; Mulkeen 106, 109-110).¹⁹ She has banished all facts that do not coincide with her delusionary narrative of the glorious love between Ted and herself (Hartley GB 259-261). Consequently, her personal development has stopped short; she is the same Marian she was in 1900. Leo, however, is able to see her mistake – the mistake he used to make – and, not having “much life left to spoil,” accepts the world as it is by serving one more time as Marian’s go-between

¹⁹ Marian’s refusal to acknowledge the reality of war is symbolized by her continual misunderstanding of Leo’s pronunciation of Hugh’s name, who - being facially deformed by the Boer War - serves as a symbol of the god Janus, pointing to the wars past and those to come (Hartley GB 48, 56-57, 66-67, 89, 153, 209, 259).

(Hartley GB 18, 261). His *Bildungs*-process is resumed as he tries again to find his place in a world that has become unknown to him, starting out once more as “a foreigner”, who is “ignorant of [its] language”, but this time unhindered by illusions (Hartley GB 18, 261). In this regard, Hartley’s ending might even be said to picture a path towards healing for his traumatized contemporaries (Mulkeen 199).

Conclusion

In his *magnum opus* *The Go-Between*, Hartley has clearly built on the literary tradition of the classic *Bildungsroman*, as he portrays the majority of Leo Colston’s development from naïve youth to experienced adult in line with the German classicist ideal of *Bildung* and the optimistic Enlightenment narratives that frame history as a progression towards harmonious perfection both for the individual and for the community. However, by providing his story with a different ending – Leo’s traumatization at coming face-to-face with the harshness of reality - Hartley echoes the widespread rejection of these narratives in post-World War II Europe and emphasizes the dangers of believing in a type of *Bildung* that denies the dark side of (human) nature. Consequently, he has transformed the *Bildungsroman*-format by portraying a more true-to-life, nonlinear *Bildungs*-process in which trauma and conflict are accepted as necessary parts of life. Because of this re-invention of the traditional genre - even though he refrains from fully adopting the radical postmodernist belief system with its rejection of objective reality and language, and keeps adhering to an improved, but nevertheless rather traditional *Bildungs*-ideal (mirrored by a semi-conventional happy-ending in his novel) – Hartley has proven himself to be, for his time, a considerably more innovative author than he has been given credit for in the past decades.

Hartley’s status as an old-fashioned author may, perhaps, be explained by his obvious indebtedness to the literary tradition of the *Bildungsroman*, which has logically steered scholars in the direction of examining the similarities between the two as opposed to the differences,

even though – as is argued here – these differences may be more meaningful in evaluating an author’s literary innovation. Another reason for his reputation could be provided by the fact that stylistic and thematic innovations are more obvious to the reader’s eye than modernization on the level of the genre and its archetypal plot, which are generally more subtle and less noticeable without a thorough understanding of the novel’s socio-historical context and author. Furthermore, it may also be that the linguistic experiments of the modernists and postmodernists in particular have influenced our modern-day perceptions of literary innovation to such an extent that other aspects of a novel could easily be overlooked or deemed less important. Once more, this illustrates how our way of thinking is as much a product of our contemporary climate as it is of our history. And this timeless fact is exactly what Hartley, being a go-between himself, has shown to be true through his novel *The Go-Between* by bringing together the foreign country of 1900 and the disillusioned present of 1952 in a new take on *Bildung* after trauma.

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