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## THE ACHE OF VICTORIANISM: L.P. HARTLEY AND KENNETH GRAHAME

Roger Craik

Less than half a century ago, everything suggested that L.P. Hartley (1895-1972) would be remembered as a distinguished, but not great, English novelist, as well as a short story writer and literary reviewer. In 1925 he had established himself as a Jamesian novelist with *Simonetta Perkins*, and after many other novels (he wrote sixteen in all and was at work on the seventeenth when he died) came *The Go-Between* (1953), generally considered to be his masterpiece, in which the middle-aged narrator Leo Colston looks back to a holiday he took at the age of twelve, in 1900, at the country house of a school friend's family, where he is persuaded to pass love letters between the school friend's beautiful elder sister Marian and her farmer lover Ted Burgess. Hartley lived long enough to see his novel made into a gratifyingly successful film directed by Joseph Losey, scripted by Harold Pinter, and starring Julie Christie and Alan Bates. Posthumously he was still to the fore in the late 1970s when the BBC serialized his trilogy *Eustace and Hilda* (1941-47). But since then he is spoken of little, and *The Go-Between* is remembered, if at all, as the book-of-the-film, rather than the book in its own right. Now, of all the books that Hartley wrote, only *The Go-Between* and a later, feeble novel, *The Hireling*, remain in print. If he were to have had any revival, it would have followed the publication of the only full-length biography of him, Andrew Wright's, with its claims that Hartley was a homosexual and possessed a lifelong but unrequited love of Lord David Cecil. The smatter of reviews of Wright's book, though, mainly written by friends of Hartley, were not only discouraging to the biography but were resigned: all of them, some more than others, felt it necessary to explain Hartley to a world that they knew does not know him. Reading these notices, one senses that Hartley's day is done: in the closing years of the twentieth century there was no place for his novels, warmed as they are by Georgian, Edwardian and Victorian suns. The world of Hartley's fiction, of public schools, of privileges

and servants and class distinctions, is distant from the technological and increasingly business-minded England of today, and lingers as recognized anachronisms rather than part of that country's cultural fabric. Sadly, not even the great virtues of Hartley's novels—his universal themes such as the transition from childhood to adulthood, the destructiveness of emotional and sexual relationships, and the self-withering trait of keeping one's love hidden—have been able to preserve his novels in a century he came to loathe and which Philip Larkin bemoaned in one of his later poems, "Going, Going":

And that will be England gone,  
The shadows, the meadows, the lanes,  
The guildhalls, the carved choirs.  
There'll be books; it will linger on  
In galleries. . . (Larkin 189)

These are Hartley's fears too, and they have come true. Consequently, of all the injustices meted out to Hartley the cruellest is that his most famous sentence, "the past is a foreign country: they do things differently there," has become true of his own past and of himself.

The handful of critics who have written on Hartley concur with Peter Bien's general assessment that "Hawthorne and Brontë [Emily] are ever-renewed sources of inspiration, while Henry James remains more in the background as a teacher whose lessons have been fully absorbed" (14-15). Giorgio Melchiori has established beyond doubt that Hartley drew on Hawthorne's story "Rappaccini's Daughter" for his description of the Deadly Nightshade, the poisonous plant that so fascinates Leo Colston in *The Go-Between*. Later, in 1966, Richard Allan Davidson makes an unconvincing claim for the influence of Graham Greene's short story "The Basement Room" (1936).

The greatest and by far the most far-reaching influence on Hartley's *The Go-Between*, however, has gone unnoticed. He is Kenneth Grahame. The book in question, lauded by Swinburne as "well-nigh too praiseworthy for praise," and which was prescribed as compulsory reading for English parents who "will understand their children the better for doing so" (qtd. in Green 104), is not *The Wind in the Willows*, but *The Golden Age*, published by a curious but perhaps significant coincidence in 1895, the year that L.P. Hartley was born. A collection of stories written about children but intended for adults, *The Golden Age* reverts to the Wordsworthian and Blakean ideas of children as "illuminati" whose perception is far superior to that of the unimaginative pleasure-stifling adults ("Olympians") who control them. The particular children are five orphans living with an aunt and visited by various grown-up friends of the aunt. The book made Grahame famous.

My original aims in this essay were first to establish *The Golden Age* as the major influence on L.P. Hartley's *The Go-Between* and then to explore how Hartley's reading of Grahame's book infuses and illuminates his own, but during the course of my reading and thinking about Hartley's and Grahame's now unfashionable books, another aim began quietly to assert itself, namely that as our own troubled century advances in its first decade, readers of this journal might be encouraged to take up Grahame and Hartley with admiration and pleasure.

It is with pleasure indeed that those familiar with Grahame's *The Golden Age* read the chapter "The Secret Drawer" in which the boy narrator finds himself in "a little used, rarely entered chamber." The boy is sensitive to the room's atmosphere:

There was something very feminine in the faint hues of its faded brocades, in the rose and blue of such bits of china as yet remained, and in the delicate old-world fragrance of pot-pourri from the great bowl, blue and white. . . . But one other thing the room possessed, peculiar to itself; a certain sense of privacy—a power of making the intruder feel he *was* intruding. . . . There was no doubt it was reserved and stand-offish, keeping itself to itself. (171-72).

Displaying an adult habit which Kenneth Grahame perceives so well as being particularly irritating to children, Uncle Thomas enters the room and approaches an old bureau, exclaiming "There's a secret drawer in there somewhere" but then dashes off to smoke, leaving the boy enraptured at the thought of a secret drawer but with no means of finding it. In vain he "explore[s] the empty pigeon-holes and sound[s] the depths of the softly sliding drawers. [He] becomes disillusioned":

I . . . felt over every inch of the smooth surfaces, from front to back. Never a knob, spring or projection met the thrilling fingertips; unyielding the old bureau stood, stoutly guarding its secret; if secret it really had. I began to grow weary and disheartened . . . . Was anything any good whatever? In my mind I began to review past disappointments, and life seemed one long record of failure and non-arrival. (177)

Some minutes later, after the boy has mused upon the early evening sky, his fortunes change: "Hardly had I put my hand once more to the obdurate wood, when with a sort of small sigh, almost a sob—as it were—of relief, the secret drawer sprang open" (178-79). Grahame lets us experience the boy's disappointment at the contents of the secret drawer before he divulges those contents, and when he does so it is with a sensitive child's sense of increasing wonder:

And yet, as I looked again at the small collection that lay within that drawer of disillusion, some warmth crept back to my heart as I

recognized that a kindred spirit to my own had been at the making of it. Two tarnished gilt buttons—naval, apparently—a portrait of a monarch unknown to me, cut from some antique print and deftly coloured by hand in just my own bold style of brush-work—some foreign copper coins, thicker and clumsier of make than those I hoarded myself—and a list of birds'-eggs, with names of the places where they had been found. Also, a ferret's muzzle, and a twist of tarry string, still faintly aromatic! It was a real boy's hoard, then, that I had happened upon. He too had found out the secret drawer, this happy-starred young person; and here he had stowed away his treasures, one by one, and had cherished them secretly awhile; and then—what? Well, one would never know now the reason why these priceless possessions still lay here unreclaimed; but across the void stretch of years I seemed to touch hands a moment with my little comrade of seasons—how many seasons?—long since dead.

I restored the drawer, with its contents, to the trusty bureau, and heard the spring click with a certain satisfaction. Some other boy, perhaps, would some day release that spring again. (179-80)

The *Go-Between* opens as follows:

The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there.

When I came upon the diary it was lying at the bottom of a rather battered red cardboard collar-box, in which as a small boy I kept my Eton collars. Someone, probably my mother, had filled it with treasures dating from those days. There were two dry, empty sea-urchins; two rusty magnets, a large one and a small one, which had almost lost their magnetism; some negatives rolled up in a tight coil; some stumps of sealing-wax; a small combination lock with three rows of letters; a twist of very fine whipcord, and one or two ambiguous objects, pieces of things, of which the use was not at once apparent: I could not even tell what they had belonged to. The relics were not exactly dirty nor were they quite clean, they had the patina of age; and as I handled them, for the first time for over fifty years, a recollection of what each had meant to me came back, faint as the magnet's power to draw, but as perceptible. Something came and went between us: the intimate pleasure of recognition, the almost mystical thrill of early ownership—feelings of which, at sixty-odd, I felt ashamed. (5)

Hartley's debt to Grahame is clear: Grahame's miscellany of objects, the child's treasure-trove, gives rise to Hartley's, and in particular the "twist of tarry string" occasions Hartley's "twist of very fine whipcord." Also, Grahame's secret drawer and Hartley's "small combination lock with three rows of letters" are both sprung open, as if in relief at revealing their secrets, by narrators who are musing and entranced, rather than trying. But it is not enough to speak merely of Hartley's debt to Grahame as if the former merely appropriates details from *The Golden Age*. What is fascinating—and, at its best, inspired—is Hartley's modifying for the needs of his twelve-year-old narrator, Leo Colston, the discoveries and reactions of Grahame's ten-year-old. This one instance is particularly complex. Grahame's narrator, who

is never given a name, thrillingly finds a secret drawer containing the treasures belonging to a child from the past. Hartley's Leo Colston, on the other hand, is in his middle-sixties, and the secret trove he uncovers belongs not to some unknown child but to himself as a child: the small lock that he cajoles open releases not, as in Grahame, initially unrewarding objects, but his diary which chronicles the traumatic events he underwent when he was nearing thirteen, and which account for the course of his life since then.

This opening scene, energetic in response to *The Golden Age*, is crucial to the novel. Grahame had written of a small boy who goes into a little-used room and is sensitive to its atmosphere and color, noting the "faint hues of its faded brocades, in the rose and blue of such bits of china as yet remained, and in the delicate old-world fragrance of pot-pourri from the great bowl" (171). He then finds a boy's treasure-trove and muses on it awhile before resuming a life of spirited games, of "warmth and light and laughter" (181). By contrast, such a future and such a room are precisely what Hartley's Leo Colston feels should have been his, rather than the dreary room which reflects the dissatisfaction-filled bachelorhood, with little life remaining, that he has chosen for himself: Leo's ruminations show him aware of the consequences and deprivations of the path he has chosen:

I should not be sitting in this drab, flowerless room, where the curtains were not even drawn to hide the cold rain beating on the windows, or contemplating the accumulation of the past and the duty it imposed on me to sort it out. I should be sitting in another room, rainbow-hued, looking not into the past but into the future: and I should not be sitting alone. (6)

The contrasts continue. One of Kenneth Grahame's many talents is that he writes exactly as a child thinks:

Was it any good persisting longer? Was anything any good whatever? In my mind I began to review past disappointments, and life seemed one long record of failure and of non-arrival. Disillusioned and depressed, I left my work and went to the window. (177)

As adults we might smile indulgently or even a shade ironically at the ten-year-old speaker as he snaps out of most of his mood and resumes his games, with all of his life ahead of him. But ten-year-olds do feel such sweeping fits of despair, and they can indeed feel old and hopeless: I remember doing so myself at the same age. Despair, though, is justified for Hartley's Leo Colston, who nearing the end of his life has no such future and who feels that "every object in the room spoke of the diary's enervating power, and spoke of its message of disappointment and defeat" and who experiences "a bitter blend of self-pity and self-reproach" (6).

To read Hartley alongside Kenneth Grahame is to sense the energy of Hartley's response to the earlier writer. Here, that energy is bitter. The boy narrator of *The Golden Age* is comforted to think that "a kindred spirit to my own had been at the making of it [the collection of treasures]" (179), and describes him as "this happy-starred young person." There we readers leave him, unknowing what becomes of him. But whereas the boy in Grahame is *imagined* as "happy-starred," Leo Colston *knows* that he himself was indeed so, full of grandiose ambitions for himself in the new century, and with a private hierarchical system of the zodiac to support him. Hartley has the aged Colston reproached by his twelve-year-old self for failing to take advantage of "such a good start": "What has become of the Ram, the Bull, and the Lion, the example I gave you to emulate? Where above all is the Virgin. . .?" (17). Here the aged Leo encounters in his younger self a figure who is at the same time Grahame's "kindred spirit" and yet not one: "kindred" literally by kin, but not kindred because Leo grew so witheringly away from his earlier promise.

I cannot emphasize enough that this chapter in Grahame is not just *an* influence on Hartley but *the* influence, and so I cite it again:

He too had found a secret drawer, this happy-starred young person; and here he had stowed away his treasures, one by one, and had cherished them secretly awhile; and then—what? Well, one would never know now the reason why those priceless possessions still lay here unreclaimed; but across the void stretch of years I seemed to touch hands a moment with my little comrade of seasons—how many seasons?—long since dead. (180)

"Then—what?" expects no answer; its wonder and lack of answer are its point. But for his part, Hartley does answer the question, and it is with the whole novel that he does so. The events chronicled in Leo's diary truncate his childhood and stunt his life—they and the withered life they create, causing the diary and the childish things to be abandoned, are the "what" that Grahame asks. What is more, Hartley has his novel confront and then refute Grahame's assumption that "one would never know now the reason why these priceless possessions still lay here unreclaimed": it is by reclaiming the diary and by coming to terms with its contents that Leo, even though he admits he "has not much life left to spoil" (21) can salvage and fructify the remainder of his life with kindness, with the fellow-feeling he so denied himself until then. Hartley thus takes Grahame at his word in a way the latter could never have imagined or intended anyone to do. And it is with bitter wordplay that Hartley on Leo's behalf exercises his imagination on Grahame's remark that "across the void stretch of years [I] seemed to touch hands a moment with my little comrade

of seasons. . . long dead.” That “void stretch of years” in Grahame is void simply because it is empty through being unknowable, but for Leo Colston “void” means spiritually empty and *known* indeed by him. And although Hartley surely realized that in “my little comrade of seasons long dead” the “dead” refers to the seasons, he saw the phrases, by transference, as relating to Leo’s spiritual death, related in the diary, after his holiday at Brandham Hall. In this light, Hartley has Leo “touch hands” with his former self not for “a moment” (as in Grahame) but for the years remaining to him.

From Grahame, too, Hartley took the leitmotif of the go-between. In “The Burglars,” a late chapter in *The Golden Age*, the narrator’s elder brother Edward idly repeats an anecdote told him by a friend:

“Bobby Ferris told me,” began Edward in due course, “that there was a fellow spooning his sister once—”

“What’s spooning?” I asked meekly.

“O I dunno,” said Edward indifferently. “It’s—it’s—it’s just a thing they do, you know. And he used to carry notes and messages and things between ’em, and he got a shilling almost every time.” (90)

Edward goes on to recount how the lovers quarrel, leaving Ferris to continue to receiving the money, giving fictitious messages. The account then trails off inconsequentially. In Hartley, go-betweening is anything but slight as Leo carries messages first from Trimmingham to Marian, and then, with serious consequences, between Marian and Ted, and lastly, over fifty years later, from Marian to her grandson, even though it is against Leo’s wishes: “‘Once a go-between never a go-between’ had become my maxim” (249). And, like Bobby Ferris in *The Golden Age*, Leo comes to gloss the messages that he bears: he tells Trimmingham out of kindness that a curt remark of Marian’s, meant curtly, was a joke, and claims that he has come to fancy himself “as an editor as well as a messenger” (115).

Both books have go-betweens serving the cause of “spooning,” a wonderfully dated and equivocally used expression, but the meanings of the word differs. When Edward declares that “there was a fellow spooning his [Bobby Ferris’s] sister,” the activity is innocent, however dubiously transitive it may sound to our ears. When asked what spooning is, Edward answers “indifferently,” and his hesitation (“It’s—it’s—it’s”) is the older child’s slight annoyance at not knowing and being seen to not know. Earlier on, the narrator had come across “spooning” but did not know it by name when he encountered

a pair of lovers, silent, face to face o’er a discreet unwinking stile. As a rule this sort of thing struck me as the most pitiful tomfoolery. Two calves rubbing noses through a gate were natural and right and within



the order of things; but that human beings, with salient interests and active pursuits beckoning them on from every side could thus—! Well, it was a thing to hurry past, shamed of face, and think on no more. (19)

Exhilarated by the glories of a windy morning in spring, the narrator finds that everything he meets “seemed to be accounted for and set in tone by that same magical touch in the air; and it was with a certain surprise that I found myself regarding these fatuous ones with kindness instead of contempt” (19). This reaction is out of character, however. Generally in Grahame children despise adults for spooning when they have so much freedom to do better things. But it is important to stress that spooning, even though it is “a thing to hurry past,” has for Grahame nothing to do with sex.

With Hartley, spooning has everything to do with sex, or, rather, it *comes* to the naive but curious Leo to have everything to do with sex. Early in the novel, when he reads part of a love letter from Marian to Ted, Leo is greatly disappointed that the two are in love, and, like any schoolboy of his age, despises demonstrations of love as “soft, soppy—hardly, when the joke grew staler, a subject for furtive giggling” (102). It is inspired of Hartley to have Leo’s view of spooning move, in the course of the novel, from one side of Grahame’s view to the other. In Grahame’s sexless world, spooning means merely billing and cooing, “natural” in animals but “shameful” (that is to say, embarrassing and unworthy) in people. That matter decided, the narrator continues to enjoy the childhood pleasures available to him. Leo, though, is seen to change. Initially, courtship means the unbearable silliness of

post-cards, picture post-cards, comic post-cards, vulgar post-cards, found in shops on the ‘front’: I had sent some of them myself before I knew better.

‘We are having an interesting time in Southdown’—a fat couple, amorously intertwined. ‘Come to Southdown for a good spoon’—two spoons with human faces, one very thick, one very thin, leering at each other. (102)

“Amorously intertwined” and “leering” escape him. But as the novel proceeds, Leo is forced to face “spooning” in a series of shocks. On being told by Ted Burgess that the latter’s mare “did a bit of spooning,” Leo’s reaction is as follows: “Spoonng! The word struck me like a blow. Then horses could spoon and a foal was the result. It didn’t make sense” (107). Of course the matter does not make sense to Leo because until now he has relegated spooning to “a kind of game that grown-ups played” (108), a silliness. The fact that animals spoon, and that they should subsequently (not necessarily

consequently) conceive, brings Leo to the brink of the realization that spooning has something to do with sex, a subject of which he is completely ignorant. Matters are made worse by Ted Burgess—who is explaining things to Leo by answering his questions—telling Leo that spooning is a consequence of “Nature” (106). The topic having most unobtrusively moved from horses to people, Leo asks “Could you be in love with someone without spooning with them?” (108) and receives the reply that “It wouldn’t be natural” (108). That spooning is natural and can lead to children advances Leo’s knowledge considerably but has him wondering about the mechanics, which of course are so traumatically revealed to him when at the end of the novel he is forced to see Ted and Marian making love. Grahame’s “spooning” has shifted in meaning between the two books, and in doing so epitomizes the difference between the ten-year-old nauseated by courtship yet sturdily uninterested in it (while recognizing that it is natural in animals), and the twelve-year-old who is coming across the facts of life as disturbingly “natural.”

Another term of Grahame’s that Hartley adopts is “Olympians” (applied to adults for their loftiness and incomprehensibly willful behavior). Initially, adults are godlike to Leo, and because he is used as a go-between his vanity soon has him nominating himself as Mercury. Dwelling on the idea, he preens: “The messenger of the gods! I thought of that, and even when the attention of the gods had been withdrawn from me, it seemed to enhance my status” (83). Thereafter, he is captivated by such images: “I was a planet, albeit a small one, and carried messages for the other planets” (86). As he becomes more and more aware of social class, those who live at Brandham Hall become “resplendent beings” (46), Marian “a goddess” (138), and even Henry the footman is seen to exercise “Olympian tolerance” (226).

Much of what animates *The Go-Between* is Hartley’s energetic responding to *The Golden Age*: the latter stands behind the former, at Hartley’s elbow, continually furnishing not just the atmosphere of a Victorian childhood but the opportunity to transform a ten-year-old’s views into a twelve-year-old’s. This two years’ difference is significant. Grahame’s narrator will despair of adults:

it was one of the most hopeless features in their character . . . that, having absolute licence to indulge in the pleasures of life, they could get no good of it. They might dabble in the pond all day, hunt the chickens, climb trees in the most uncompromising Sunday clothes; they were free to issue forth and buy gunpowder in the full eye of the sun—free to fire cannons and explode mines on the lawn: yet they never did any one of these things. (4)

Even when he realizes that he is no longer a child but has hardened into one of the very Olympians whom he despises and finds incomprehensible, his tone is sad, regretful: “Can it be that I also have become an Olympian?” (7). The irony in Hartley is that although Leo Colston *wants* to be an Olympian, he does so for the very reason that Grahame’s narrator has grown out of: he envies Olympians for being “unaffected by any restrictions of work or family ties, citizens of the world who made the world their playground” (51).

However much Leo’s vanity makes him feel adult, grown-up humour remains beyond his grasp. He would have agreed with Grahame that “the reason of a child’s existence was to serve as a butt for senseless adult jokes—or what, from the accompanying guffaws of laughter, appeared to be intended for jokes” (27), and he would have sympathized, too, with his twelve-year-old counterpart who complains that a certain curate is “always saying things that have no sense in them at all, and then laughing at them as if they were jokes” (132). Unfamiliar expressions flummox Leo: told that “Mr. Burgess is a bit of a lad,” Leo “noticed the Mister but the rest of the remark was disappointingly meaningless. Ted Burgess did not seem in the least like a lad to me” (85). Of course this is Hartley’s means of presenting Burgess’s reputation to Leo, but it is also pure Kenneth Grahame, as is Leo’s reaction to Mrs. Maudsley’s attitude to Marian, early in the novel: “Her glance most often rested on her daughter who usually sat between two young men. What did they find to talk *about*? I remember thinking” (35). Here Hartley is drawing on the chapter “What They Talked About” where Edward is bewildered by Selina and the Vicar-age girls: “I can’t make out what they find to talk about” (130).

In Grahame’s chapter “A Harvesting,” the Rector bumps into the narrator, and, apologizing, says that the narrator “see[s] visions” (106), and adds: “you are hot, it is easily seen;—the day is advanced. *Virgo* is the Zodiacal sign” (106). These chance musings—hardly, one would think, in any way remarkable—must have resonated extraordinarily with Hartley, for from them he has Leo Colston’s diary contain a picture of the Zodiac and its emblems. From this picture, in turn, Leo fashions for himself an ecstatic personal philosophy in which the adults around him become not only gods but zodiacal figures. Most notably, Marian Maudsley becomes “the Virgin of the Zodiac” (155). Moreover, as Leo becomes more and more taken with his system and more and more eager to wring self-delighting significances from it, Grahame’s Rector’s remarks on a hot day in *Virgo* become Leo’s wondering to himself: “Perhaps Marian was the heat?” (228).

It is one thing for an excitable twelve-year-old in the heat of an

exceptionally hot summer to superimpose a zodiacal system on the adults around him, but it is quite another thing for him to put that vision to the service of a belief in the new century and then to invest his whole being in it. Early in the novel Leo confesses himself fearful that his illness will cause him to miss “the dawn of a Golden Age.” He adds, in explanation: “For that was what I believed the coming century would be: a realization, on the part of the whole world, of the hopes that I was entertaining for myself” (8). The more acute the strains of being a go-between, the more stridently egotistical Leo becomes: in his demands for “the realization of my Golden Age,” he insists merely on things “existing only for themselves and me” (218). But at this age, the age at which Leo is so zealously obsessive, the time of a Golden Age in Kenneth Grahame is past and that narrator is well on his way to becoming an Olympian. In this light, what is most disillusioning for Leo is that for all his hopes, he is simply too late to have a Golden Age. The one he mistakenly fabricates, and which destroys itself and him, contrasts painfully with the shared wonder-filled games that the children in Grahame’s *The Golden Age* enjoy. Nothing in *The Go-Between* suggests that Leo ever experienced such wonder, nor can he say, albeit with Grahame’s speaker’s wistfulness: “*Et in Arcadia ego*—I certainly did once inhabit Arcady” (8). Instead of living a fulfilling life in the twentieth century, Leo has lived a withered atrophied one in what Marian later calls “this hideous century we live in” (260). In 1953, the year of *The Go-Between*, this view was Hartley’s own.

It remains only to point out two further echoes from *The Golden Age*. One concerns Leo’s intuitive reaction to the Deadly Nightshade, *atropa belladonna* —

This plant seemed to be up to something, to be carrying on a questionable traffic with itself. There was no harmony, no proportion in its parts. It exhibited all the stages of its development at once. It was young, middle-aged, and old at the same time. . . It invited yet repelled inspection, as if it was harbouring some shady secret which it yet wanted you to know. (177)

This splendid passage, one of the most memorable vignettes of *The Go-Between*, is Hartley at his best, and no one would consider it unoriginal. The belladonna, while being distinctively itself, also emblemizes all the Leos since it is “young, middle-aged, and old at the same time,” and thus the young Leo is looking at (and finally destroying) his current selves and future selves too. Yet the disturbing aura of the belladonna is not entirely Hartley’s own; it recalls Grahame’s “little used, rarely entered chamber” of “The Secret Drawer”:

But one other thing the room possessed, peculiar to itself; a certain sense of privacy—a power of making the intruder feel he was intrud-

ing. . . There was no doubt that it was reserved and standoffish, keeping itself to itself. (172)

Hartley is particularly good at suggesting the eerie, and he does so again in his description of the sight that Leo suddenly encounters on a bathing party visit with the family from Brandham Hall:

There was a black thing ahead of us, all bars and spars and uprights, like a gallows. It gave out a sense of fear—also of intense solitude. It was like something that must not be approached, that might catch you and hurt you. . . . We had nearly reached it, and I saw how the pitch was peeling off its surfaces, and realized that no one could have attended to it for years. (49)

Whatever this piece of river machinery is, it anticipates the Deadly Nightshade that Leo will see soon afterwards, but it is also remembered from “A Holiday,” the very first story in *The Golden Age*:

I raised my eyes, and before me, grim and lichened, stood the ancient whipping post of the village; its sides fretted with the initials of a generation that scorned its mute lesson, but still clipped by the stout rusted shackles that had tethered the wrists of such of that generation's ancestors as had dared to mock at order and law. (22)

The narrator is left to “hurry, homewards. . . with an uneasy feeling . . . that there was more in this chance than met the eye” (22).

Influence can be a beguiling subject for the critic, tempting him or her to educe correspondences where there are none. As Kenneth Grahame admonishes elsewhere, “Grown-ups really ought to be more careful” (*Dream Days*, 51). I am confident of all the influences I have discussed so far, but slightly less so of the Litany which in *The Golden Age* “dragged its slow length along” (64) and which has Leo in *The Go-Between* “having a bet with myself as to how long it would last” (63). Given the number of other borrowings from Grahame it is tempting to add this one too, but Leo's reaction to the Litany is that of any child of that age, and Hartley did not need Grahame to tell him so. There are also similarities in the two writers' description of being in the countryside: both speak of how it feels to enter a wood that is surprisingly thick and oppressive, and of how hot it then feels to emerge into sudden sunlight. Both speak—Hartley of a river, Grahame of a stream—of flowing water widening into calm pools (Hartley 47, 49; Grahame 54-56). Readers can judge for themselves the weight, if weight there is at all, of Grahame's hand here. Likewise, given the extent of Hartley's thorough knowledge of *The Golden Age*, one might expect him to have borrowed from its successor, *Dream Days* (1898) or even from *The Wind in the Willows* (1908), but the details in common are not close enough to constitute influence.

What is certain, however, is that Hartley knew Kenneth Grahame's life, and the lives of his family, through his reading of the one biography of Grahame available to him, Patrick R. Chalmers' *Kenneth Grahame: Life, Letters and Unpublished Work* (1933). Hartley's borrowings from Chalmers are not complex, nor does he exert himself on them: therefore they can be cited side-by-side with passages from *The Go-Between*. Here is a hitherto unpublished musing of Grahame's, discovered in an old ledger dating from Grahame's years at the Bank of England:

Worn and depressed by harrying troubles I dreamt that I sped south over the sea, to a sunny isle far south in the Atlantic. . . My thoughts flew back to the faraway northern island, arena of strife and all the crowd of petty vexations. Now, how small they all seemed! How simple the unravelling of the baffling knots! How orderly and easy the way to meet them and brush them by! So that I, sitting there in the South, seemed to be saying to my struggling self in the North, "If I were you, how easily would I make my way through these petty obstacles! and how helpless and incapable you are in a little strait!" And myself in the North, put on defence, seemed to reply: "And if I were you, so would I—with your fuller knowledge, fuller strength. As it is, perhaps on the whole I do my best." And myself in the South, in justice forced to assent, returned, "Well, yes, perhaps after all you do your best—a sorry best, but as much as can fairly be expected of you." Then I woke, startled at the point to which my dream had led me.

Will it be like this again? Sitting one day on the dim eternal shore, shall I look back, see and pity my past poor human strivings? And say then, as now, "Well, perhaps, little cripple, you did your best, a sorry one though, you poor little, handicapped, human soul?" (37)

And here is the middle-aged Leo Colston arguing with his former self, the twelve-year-old self of the diary, with the same blend of condescension, pity, loftiness, defensiveness, and, above all, sadness:

If my twelve-year-old self, of whom I had grown rather fond, thinking about him, were to reproach me: '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 instead of writing your own? What has become of the Ram, the Bull, and the Lion, the example I gave you to emulate? Where above all is the Virgin, with her shining face and long curling tresses, whom I entrusted to you'—what should I say?

I should have 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,'

To which he might reply: 'But you have had half a century to get over it! Half a century, half the twentieth century, that glorious epoch, that golden age that I bequeathed to you!'

'Has the twentieth century,' I should ask, 'done so much better than I have? When you leave this room, which I admit is dull and cheerless, and take the last bus to your home in the past, if you haven't missed

it—ask yourself whether you found everything so radiant as you imagined it. Ask yourself whether it has fulfilled your hopes.’ (16-17)

Chalmers describes Kenneth Grahame carrying out social work in London’s East End:

At Toynbee Hall he was known and loved by all who met him there. A shy man, he fought off his shyness and sung, extremely badly (or so he said), but for large audiences, the extremely sentimental songs of the period. Moreover, as the occasional chairman at sing-songs, he would announce the names of numbers, at which he must have shuddered, without a visible tremor. (40)

—and in *The Go-Between* Ted Burgess sings to Marian Maudsley’s accompaniment, at the village hall after the Hall-versus-Village cricket match which is a great set-piece of the novel:

“Take a Pair of Sparkling Eyes,” announced Ted, as if they were the last thing one would want to take...

The new song was a sentimental one by Balfe. I don’t suppose it’s ever sung now, but I liked it, and liked Ted’s rendering of it and the quaver which threaded his voice. (133)

Chalmers also relates how Grahame’s son Alastair (known as Mouse) as young schoolboy sang at “a party for the village in the big barn at Boham’s (152):

He stood in the light, round him in the shadows sat the party, Newgate fringes and gaiters, shepherds, gamekeepers and carters, men and women of the down country. Mouse piped as sweetly as a thrush:

“Like silver lamps in a distant shrine  
The stars are sparkling well  
Now a new Power has come to the Earth  
A match for the armies of Hell,  
A Child is born who shall conquer the foe  
And the armies of wickedness quell.” (152)

Hartley echoes this scene by having Leo sing the religious song “Angels ever bright and fair” in the village hall, to the teams from the village and the Hall, to similar acclaim:

*Angels! Ever bright and fair,  
Take, oh take me to your care.  
Speed to your own courts my flight  
Clad in robes of virgin white  
Clad in robes of virgin white.* (148)

Finally, Chalmers chronicles Kenneth Grahame’s years at the Bank of England (where he rose to the position of Secretary), and quotes Grahame’s friend, the artist Graham Robertson, observing of him:

“He had a marvellous gift of silence. . . He would slowly become part of the landscape and a word from him would come as unexpectedly as a sudden remark from an oak or a beech” (97). For his part, perhaps in discreet homage, Hartley gives Grahame a cameo appearance in *The Go-Between* by having Mr. Maudsley work at the Bank of England—he is “W. H. Maudsley, of Princes Gate and Threadneedle Street” (29)—and also has him sharing Grahame’s characteristic of contented silence rarely broken by abrupt utterance: “‘Hugh coming?’ Mr. Maudsley asked, making one of his rare contributions to a conversation” (40).

What, in the end, do all these borrowings and influences amount to? How, in terms of illuminating the novel and adding to our knowledge of Hartley himself, do they measure up to what (leaving aside the thematic comments made by literary critics) might be termed the “autobiographical approach” to *The Go-Between*? For there is indeed such an approach, despite Hartley’s reticence about himself or his novel’s circumstances. From Adrian Wright’s biography we know that Hartley never forgot the long summer days of 1900 which seemed to him to usher in a Golden Age “almost literally, for I think of it as being the colour of gold. I didn’t want to go back to it but I wanted it to come back to me, and I still do” (Wright 7). We also know that in 1909, when he was thirteen, Hartley spent some of the summer at Bradenham Hall with his schoolfriend Moxey and Moxey’s family (“Brandham” and “Maudsley” respectively in *The Go-Between*), and that, in 1971, he tearfully revealed that he had been made to follow the real-life Mrs. Moxey to the outhouses where in *The Go-Between* Leo Colston sees Ted and Marian making love (Wright 32-33). This detail, inconclusive as it is and divulged the year before his death, is as much as Hartley allowed himself, and it is doubtful that any further details will come to light. The only other claim is that Hartley had been somewhat of a go-between himself as an army postman in the Great War, a job which Adrian Wright characterizes as “An easy happiness. . . [which] brought him approval, the sure knowledge that people would be pleased to see him” (169). One wonders, though, how Wright can be so sure about that “sure” knowledge, especially during the Great War. In short, these scant autobiographical traces cast very little light either on *The Go-Between* or on Hartley himself.

The literary influences, though, are a different matter. The liftings from Chalmers are delicate (and possibly slightly sly) homage to Kenneth Grahame’s *The Golden Age*, the great unacknowledged source which not only which played so great a role in bringing *The Go-Between* into being, but also galvanized the writing of it. But to talk of “influence” and “borrowings” is to fall far short of the importance



that *The Golden Age* held for Hartley. We do not know when Hartley first read it: it could have been in early childhood (many Victorian parents mistakenly construed it as book for children and gave it to them to read, and Hartley's well-to-do father had a large library). It could—although this is less likely—have been in adolescence; if so, one doubts how interesting Grahame would have been to Hartley then. How often Hartley reread it is also a matter of conjecture, but it seems to me improbable that he picked it up in adulthood and doggedly read it again and again by way of preparation for writing *The Go-Between*. To do so would be mannered, willful, not to say unnatural. Besides, Hartley wrote *The Go-Between* far more swiftly than any of his other novels, in a five-month burst, and he did so from “only the briefest of notes” (Wright 170).

Hartley was steeped in *The Golden Age*: the book, and all that it meant, became a part of himself. Only in this way can small details from Kenneth Grahame—the heat, the Zodiac, Bobby Ferris the go-between, the secret drawer—so unobtrusively spread into themes and motifs in *The Go-Between*. Hartley, this late Victorian who lived into the early 1970s, deploring the century for which he held such hopes, must, I suggest, have known Grahame almost by heart, from a very early age, from a lifetime of reading. Furthermore, Hartley's frequent re-readings of Grahame would not only bring back the childhood idyllicism that Grahame captures, but would recall to Hartley his *own* earlier readings of him, including the first time, when the boy Hartley lived so close to the time of *The Golden Age*. In this way he would relive in memory his own childhood, time after time, responding on the one hand with pleasure to the nostalgia that *The Golden Age* evoked in him, but on the other hand resenting the way that life, in particular the entire twentieth century, had not measured up to his earlier expectations. Towards the end of Graham Greene's life, one critic brilliantly wrote of him: “Only the books in the nursery never changed, never lost their original truth. In them was something that ought to be in life” (Pryce-Jones 121). Was Hartley thus? Did he, as a child or youth at most, take that “ought” in its simplest sense, but then, as he grew older, become jaundiced that life had not been as it “ought” to have been, that it had let him down? And did he react in both of these ways—sometimes one, sometimes the other, and sometimes both at once—to *The Golden Age*, a book that he regarded as a coeval, created in the year of his own birth, 1895, and ageing, to the very day, with him? This, of all the possibilities, is the most psychologically fascinating: *The Golden Age*, read at different stages of Hartley's life, would thus suffice the ageing man while making him once again the growing boy.

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