

Discuss the representation of the New Woman in *The Go-Between* by L.P. Huntley

In this essay I am going to explore how the new woman is represented in *The Go-Between* by L.P. Huntley. *The Go-Between* is about Leo Colston who finds his diary from 1900, written in when he was a 13 year old boy. He has suppressed the events and memories of that summer in 1900. Leo visits his boarding school friend Marcus at his country home in Norfolk for the summer in 1900. Leo is from a middle-class family and Marcus is from an upper-class family, so Leo experiences something he is not accustomed to. He meets Marcus' older sister Marian and is taken aback by her. During Leo's stay Marcus falls ill. At this point Leo is left to entertain himself and this is when he begins to interact with Marian.

Marian represents the new woman. She is independent of thought and makes it clear she has no interest in Viscount Trimmingham. The family has come into money and are living well but they have no title whilst for the Viscount has a title. This motivates Marian and Marcus' mother to engineer a marriage between Marian and the Viscount. Marian is not conforming to what is expected of her and decides to have a secret relationship with the tenant farmer Ted Burgess. Leo likes Marian and therefore is happy to deliver messages between Marian and Ted. His innocence is manipulated by Marian to carry messages secretly. She was using sexuality to both exert her freedom and manipulate Leo. Marian was autonomous with how she conducted herself amongst others and was physically independent. Leo needed summer clothes and Marian was willing to travel to town by train with him. Her mother tries to encourage her to take the viscount with her but she refuses. She leads the conversation by asking others if they would like to accompany them and then declares she will go alone with Leo. In town she takes the lead when shopping with Leo to buy him the appropriate clothes needed for summer. This shows the resistance of the new woman against the traditional norms of the time. Her mother represents the values and norms of the time as she tries to encourage her to interact with the Viscount therefore endorsing Marian's dependence on him and letting him take the lead. Later on in the novel Leo returns to visit Marian in the village and discovers Ted fathered her son. She once again exerts her authority over Leo to tell her son about everything that happened in the summer of 1900. She describes how her and Ted were lovers. She does not imply there was anything wrong with the relationship. This indicates she still represents the new woman.

Marian could be seen as a social reformer to some extent as she is forming a new way to conduct herself as a woman in society. She is showing that women can have an equal status to men in terms of wealth and autonomy over decisions a woman makes regarding her social interactions and connections. She is crossing the boundaries of the social class system of the time as she starts a relationship with Ted Burgess. Although this is conducted in secret, she is exposing the fact that the social class system is not as powerful as it is perceived and that it is possible to live outside of the bounds of the social classes. Marian also demonstrates the possibility of women having power over men as she dominates and instructs Leo as he becomes her 'go between' exchanging notes between her and Ted. Marian's open spurning of Viscount Trimmingham can also be seen as her independence of thought. She is aware that she will eventually have to marry the Viscount due to her family's expectations. However she is expressing her disapproval through her rebellious relationship and her sexuality, as we discover her relationship with Ted is sexual. Marian's exploitation of Leo can also be seen as her using her independence and sexuality to dominate and exert her power and authority over Leo.

Marian presents the ideals of the new woman, as presented at the time. The way she relates with people is in opposition to the ideals of her mother. Her mother represents the old traditional values; one example of this is when her mother broaches the subject of Trimingham. She makes it clear that he is who she expects Marian to marry. Her mother is also complying with the social class system and aware of what she needs to achieve in order to improve the family's social standing. This would involve Marian marrying a man who has a title and this in turn would ensure her family's social standing and sense of accomplishment would elevate. Marian throughout the book appears to enjoy the social trappings of her wealthy position. However she uses her position to assert her female authority. Due to her wealth and position she can afford to secretly have affairs with men who she would otherwise be forbidden to meet or marry.

Her wealth and position is also something which Marian utilises to exert her authority over the men around her. Leo is of a lower social rank than her and this is one of his aspects which is exploited by Marian her own gain. Her family's wealth has afforded her the ability to become the new woman.

In conclusion, the representation of the new Woman in *The Go Between* shown through the female character, in this case Marian's, behaviour and conduct and her use of her body to express her femininity and power over the male characters in the novel. As discussed above, her family's wealth has been a factor in her enablement to become a woman with some level of authority. The new woman is represented as being independent however to some extent she is shown as being bound to the social norms such as adhering to the social protocol of having relations with man of either the same or higher social status and this is something very solid. In Marian's case this is shown as something inevitable.