

Hermann Hesse, Pilgrim of Crisis: A Biography Study Guide

Hermann Hesse, Pilgrim of Crisis: A Biography by Ralph Freedman

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Plot Summary

Hermann Hesse, by Ralph Freedman, is the story of Nobel Prize winning writer Hermann Hesse. Hesse was born in 1877 in the German area of Swabia. He was the son of strict Pietists who had a missionary background in India and were prominent in the Basel Institute, a Pietist organization. His background and upbringing result in a great deal of conflict and he was plagued with mental illness for his entire life. His problems began when he was a child. His parents considered him to difficult to handle and put him in boarding school at the mission in Basel when he was six.

Hesse could not deal with formal education and its authoritative structure. He was constantly in and out of schools and was also institutionalized as a child. His parents had hoped he would attend he seminary but he didn't make it past his first term. After that, their goal was to have him achieve the necessary level of education so he would only have to serve one year in military service. He barely succeeded in attaining this level.

He began composing poems at the age of six. He had an older half brother who rebelled against his parents plans to apprentice him to a pharmacist. He auditioned at a music conservatory and secured a place. Even though he failed in his singing career, the young Hermann associated the arts with rebellion against parents. In spite of his emotional problems, he finally decided to set out on his own and took a position as a bookseller apprentice in Basel, where he lived on his own. He wrote in his spare time and had some of his poems published. Hesse stayed on as a regular employer for another year and then left to work less hours at a used bookstore so he could devote more time to writing.

Hesse traveled a great deal, constantly going to spas and clinics for treatments and cures. He alternated living between Calw, Basel and Zurich before he made a permanent home in Montagnalo, Italy, in the Italian Lakes District. Hesse had three sons by his first wife. His first two marriages ended in divorce , but his third marriage to Ninon lasted for three decades until his death in 1962.

This book examines the life of Hesse and how events and crises in his personal life were reflected in his writing. His writings exemplified his internal conflict and search for resolutions. When he began to experience eye problems, and feared blindness, his writing included many things that were visually pleasing, like colors and landscapes. When he began to lose his sight, his writing emphasized music and math as in *The Glass Bead Game* for which he won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1946.

This book is a fascinating history of Hesse. The reader will enjoy this book even if he/she is unfamiliar with the works of Hesse.

Prologue

Prologue Summary and Analysis

The Prologue begins with Freedman saying that most artists create masks behind which they hide. Because of this, people look for truths in their works and in the dynamics of the artists. They think that finding out what goes on in the lives of the artists reveals more truth than their works do, although some critics strictly avoid this approach and keep the life of the author separate from his works.

Freedman feels that knowing something about the author helps to clarify his works and feels that this is particularly true of Hermann Hesse. He wrote about mundane happenings because he was looking for a sense of self. Hesse used everything that happened in his daily life in his writings. His persona is revealed through his novels, stories, poems and letters. He recorded his dreams in special notebooks. The tensions in his works are the result of conflicting impulses in his life.

Hesse was artistic in his childhood. His parents were missionaries and sent him to a mission school in Basel when he was six because he was too difficult to deal with. He grew up under Bismarck in the 1870s. It was also an era of industrialism. World Wars I and II happened later in his life. His writings reflected the psychological, economic, social and cultural crises of the time. His characters were usually part of a counter-culture against technology and the development of an impersonal state.

Hesse reached his height of popularity in the 1940s when he received the Nobel Prize for Literature. After this period, he was in many ways mistrusted by the younger generation who felt he was from their parents' generation. There was a revival of interest in his works in 1960s America because he conveyed the idea of being outside the system. His works were popular with the counter-culture of the period. Some of his works were made into movies after his death but were basically commercial failures.



Chapter 1, pgs. 15-36

Chapter 1, pgs. 15-36 Summary and Analysis

Hesse was born in Swabia on July 2, 1877. He was part of a large family whose parents belonged to the Piet mission in Basel. Pietism was a form of evangelical Lutheranism. His maternal grandfather had been a missionary in India in the 1830s where he married Julie Dubois. When Dr. Gundert was made head of the publishing division of the Basel Institute, and Johannes Hesse eventually became his assistant, where he met Gundert's daughter Julie. They married on November 22, 1874 and had six children, four of whom survived.

Hermann's earliest childhood memory is of being lifted by his uncle at a mountain lookout to see the tiny village down below. The terrified three year old began screaming and was taken home. This was a part of his contradictory life. His parents viewed him as an unmanageable child due to his temper tantrums. In January 1884 they sent him to the Mission School Boy's House.

When his older brother Theodor ran away to Munich to audition for a position at the music conservatory, the young Hermann drew a connection between art and rebellion. He began to write poetry in 1884. Both of his parents were writing and publishing at this time. In 1886, the family moved back to Calw. This gave Hermann his blend of the Swiss and German background that are evident in his writing. The region became divided until the consolidation of a united Germany occurred, but Hermann didn't change his citizenship to German until he was fifteen. He was most influenced by the Swabian-Swiss culture and not the Indian culture that influenced his parents. There is no Indian influence in Hesse's writing until he reaches middle ages.



Chapter 1, pgs. 37-56

Chapter 1, pgs. 37-56 Summary and Analysis

Hermann felt the divided world in which he grew up. On his mother's and grandfather's side, there was India while on his father's side, there was Germany. Hermann seems to have inherited the disposition for mental illness from his father who was hospitalized in 1889. Hermann gradually rejects his family's values as he grows up. He was determined to succeed as an artist because of his brother Theodor's failure as one. Hermann decides that he wants to be a writer at the age of thirteen.

The Hesse's had groomed Hermann for the seminary. He passed his examinations and began his studies in Maulbronn in 1891. He began running away from the school after the first few months which he later portrays in his novel, *Beneath the Wheel*. This novel presents his views on official education and the desire to be free from authority. As a result of running away, Hermann was allowed to complete the term but advised not to return. He was removed in May and taken to the Bad Boll spa for treatment. When he was rejected by a young woman, he tried to kill himself and is institutionalized at Stetten. Eventually he is sent to the Basel Mission School since the doctors are not yet ready to declare him insane. After a month there, he was sent to school in Cannstatt again. They wanted him to pass his examinations so he would only have to serve one year of military service instead of three.

Hesse was experiencing problems within a month and kept running off to Stuttgart. In April 1893 he returns home for the funeral of his grandfather. He passes his examinations in June. At sixteen he was placed as a bookseller's apprentice but ran away after three days. His father brought him home and the family decided to keep him there. Hermann worked in the garden and read many books. He could read what he wanted, but the family would not allow him to go out on his own. In June 1894 he began working in a tower clock factory and at night, he wrote. He worked at the tower clock factory until fall of 1895. Hesse knows he wants to be a writer and finds a job in a Tübingen bookshop as an apprentice. He is eighteen and on his own.



Chapter 2, pgs. 57-87

Chapter 2, pgs. 57-87 Summary and Analysis

Hermann arrives in Tübingen on October 17, 1895. He visits his sister Marulla. He wrote many letters telling of his life in Tübingen and his days at Heckenhauer's Bookstore. He worked twelve hours days, six days a week at the bookstore and describes all the employees in his letters. Little by little he developed a social life by visiting one of his aunts and becoming involved in music. He also visited some student friends he knew from the various schools he had attended. In spite of this, he still felt lonely and isolated.

Hesse became an avid reader. He suffered from anxiety, headaches and insomnia. He viewed his work at the bookstore as preparation for his future role as a writer. Hermann spends a pleasant Christmas with his family in Calw and New Year's Day with the Haerings. As winter turns to spring, he becomes more isolated and reads more.

Hermann began his writing soon after he arrived in Tübingen. His writings were based on his life in Tübingen and his childhood. He wrote poems and was working on a novel. Many of these early pieces were incorporated into his latter works. At this time he begins to associate with the people with whom he works.

In January 1897, he was confronted with military service but rejected because of his poor eyesight. A few of his poems were published during this time. He still needed the emotional approval of his parents at this time, which was the result of his strict Pietist upbringing.

He became part of a group of students from various studies. All were aspiring writers so he could relate to them. They established a literary circle. Among the members were Ludwig Finckh, Carlo Hamelehle, and Oskar Rupp. Hesse became good friends with Finckh and spent time with his family home in Reutlingen. Eventually, Hesse spent most of his free time with members of the group.



Chapter 2, pgs. 87-102

Chapter 2, pgs. 87-102 Summary and Analysis

Hesse's new job in Basel was much like the one he had left in Tubigen. He had a room in Frau Deacon's house and double the income. Hesse also became involved with a literary circle of artists and professors. At this point in 1899, he became interested in art and began to visit art museums. By October he became friends with Hans Drach and Heinrich Jennen and the three of them rented a flat together. Many of the people he met at this time were to become the basis for characters in his later works. Hesse continued his writing during this period.

He did not travel home for the holidays or to see sick relatives. His friend Finckh came to visit several times. Hesse eventually took a room of his own and began to travel around the area. Many of the scenes he wrote during his travels became parts of his novels. He enjoyed nature. Even though his work continued to be published, he became depressed in 1901. He finally changed jobs for less money so he could devote more time to his writing. Hesse traveled to Italy, the first of many trips he would make over the years.

Hesse began to work on his novel Peter Camenzind at this time and returned to Basel after his visit to Calw. He continued to work at the used bookstore since he now had royalties from his published works. Hermann protected his emotional health by remaining isolated from his family problems. He traveled during the holidays rather than visit his family, even though his mother was ill. When she died on April 24, 1902, he did not attend the funeral. He could not face it psychologically.

Hesse became more widely published in 1902.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary and Analysis

Hermann's success came the year of his mother's death. He was going through a difficult period and returned to Calw for an extended visit in August. He didn't return to Basel until the end of October. Hermann spent Christmas in the Black Forest mountains and began to write again when he returned to Basel. His novel, *Hermann Lauscher*, was being favorably received. He also had a second book of poetry published and began a correspondence with writer Stefan Zweig which continued until Zweig's death in 1942.

Hesse continued working at Wattenwyl and after a trip to Italy, finished writing *Peter Camenzind*. It was immediately accepted and published. Hesse developed a new style when he turned to nature. He had adapted to the cultural change of the time and his works appealed to the Youth Movement. His novel was published in installments in the summer of 1903, and Hermann thought he would soon be able to leave the bookstore.

Hermann met Herr Bernoulli when he first came to Basel through his music circle. He began dating Maria Bernoulli, who was the basis for one of the characters in his book which was based on events in his life. She persuaded him to go to Italy with a group of his friends in April 1903. Their relationship developed and when Hesse wanted to marry her, her father was opposed because he felt Hermann couldn't support her. The success of *Peter Camenzind* changed that. He left his job at Wattenwyl and went to Calw, where Maria visited in September. Hermann worked on his new novel while waiting to marry. He also wrote short stories and novellas in addition to the novel *Beneath the Wheel*, which appeared in installments in spring.

Hesse and Maria were married on August 2, 1904 and moved to a farmhouse in Gaienhofen in the Lake Constance area, where they lived for three years. They lived in a second house in the hamlet for another five years. Finckh also came to live in the area. Hermann tended his gardens and wrote. He was very successful in the early 1900s.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary and Analysis

The birth of son Bruno on December 9, 1905 changed Hermann's life. He traveled a great deal and became a part of a biweekly periodical called *South Germany*. He contributed to the periodical until the beginning of the Great War but quit doing so because of its support of the war.

Hesse spent a great deal of time traveling with friends, many times going for cures. He built a new house in 1907. It was rebuilt where it burned, and his friend Finckh lived next door to Hesse. Hermann continued to experience emotional crises, but he was writing his novel *Gertrud* in 1907 while his new house was being built. It would not be published until 1910. He also worked on *Knulp* and a variety of poems during this time. Most of the poems had the theme of solitary.

His second son, Heiner, was born in March 1909. By summer, Hermann went to Badenweiler, a German health spa to recover from the stress and strain of life. He made many visits to these spas over the course of his life. Hesse began his many years of psychoanalysis and also went on lecture tours at this time. In November 1909, his appendix was removed and he stayed at the home of friends, the Rosengarts, until he was well enough to travel home.

Hesse does not feel he is as strong in *Gertrud* as he is in his earlier novels. He was planning a long trip to India at the end of 1911, and made his usual hiking trip to Italy in April. His third son, Martin, was born on July 27, 1911. Hesse did not change his plans for travel to India and departed on September 6 from Genoa. He published *From India and Siddhartha* from his experiences. He also visited Indonesia and Ceylon. The trip lasted for two months.

Hermann's marriage was not the happiest. His wife also suffered from melancholia and frequent illnesses. In spite of their unhappy marriage, they did not consider separation. They decided to move from Gaienhofen and rented a house near Bern in Ostermundigen.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary and Analysis

The home the Hesse's rented in Ostermondigen was located on an estate. Hesse began working on a new novel, *Rosshalde*. This book is a reflection of the lives the Hesse's had in 1912-13. Both Hesse's continued to experience their bouts of depression in Bern. Hermann continued his frequent journeys to Italy and his summer was spent with lectures, writing, children and visitors. When he was home, he stayed by himself in his study.

World War I began in summer of 1914. Since Hesse was a German citizen, he applied as a volunteer and was told to wait to be called. He favored a German victory over the English; even though he was anti-war, he distanced himself from the pacifist movement. Hesse assisted the German war effort by helping collect books for German prisoners. He was called for duty in September but failed the physical. Hesse published *Back in Germany* in 1915, in which he gave his impressions of war time Germany.

As Hesse was leaving for Zurich, his father died on March 8, 1916. He returns to Bern, obtains travel papers for Germany, and goes to his sister's house for the funeral. By the following April he was suffering from depression and eventually entered a private Lucerne clinic, the *Kurhavs Sonnmatt*. He underwent psychoanalysis. During this time, he became interested in Asia and the Eastern influence. It was his link with his dead parents. He also began painting in 1919 and tried to paint his dreams. His therapist was Dr. Josef Lang. Hesse's marriage began to crumble at this time.

Hesse remained active in the war effort, and he and Maria separated in October. Maria was hospitalized during this period. Hermann went to Lucerne to care for Martin while Maria recovered from her breakdown. Hermann continued his usual travels.

Hesse published *Demian* and it was a success. He left Bern in April 1919 when he separated from his family.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary and Analysis

Hesse leaves Bern and goes to Italy. This period is referred to as Hesse's exile. Eventually he settled in Montagnola which was his home for the rest of his life. He was revived by the atmosphere in which he lived. Hesse lived a poor and monastic life and was no longer affluent but was productive. The environment prompted him to paint and write. This period is referred to as his third new life.

Hesse had many friends surrounding him. It was during this time that he met the woman who would become his second wife, Ruth Wenger, who spent her summers in Carona, a village across the hall from where Hesse lived. She forms the basis for a character in his *Klingsor's Lost Summer*. He paints landscapes and writes about nature during this time and begins working on *Siddhartha*, which was an artistic book. Hesse also lectured on Dostoevsky and wrote works like *Vivos Voco*, *Zarathustra's Return* and *The Diary of 1920*. He traveled widely in 1920 but faced depression again in 1921 and went into analysis with C.G. Jung.

Ruth's father wasn't happy about Ruth's relationship with Hesse. Ruth's mother Lisa was in favor of the relationship. In 1922, after spending the New Year with the Wengers, Hesse went on another lecture tour. In between visitors he worked on *Siddhartha*, which was basically a spiritual experience. It showed the rewards of an austere existence in a selfless life. The novel was popular and gained an international audience over the years. His anxiety and depression continued but he was becoming the spiritual leader of the youth. In spite of his problem, he was always on the move.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary and Analysis

After the publication of *Siddhartha*, Hesse continued to write. He wrote Piktors *Metamorphoses* in which he clarified *Siddhartha* in the form of a German fairy tale. He had attained international stature by this time. For a while, his creative work was replaced by reviews and feuilletons. He spent time walking and hiking with Ruth and with her family that summer. He was happy when they invited his friend Hugo Ball to visit.

Hesse worked on many editorial projects that fall but didn't like these projects because of the problems with his eyesight, but they were a source of income. Financial problems created stress which was a cause of his illnesses. The severe German inflation resulted in almost no income. At this time Hesse realized that most of his problems were psychological, although he did not admit this to anyone.

The events of 1923 were to become the basis for his books *A Guest at the Spa*, *Journey to Nuremberg* and *Steppenwolf*. He visited the spa at Baden, the first of many visits. He was happy there and the experience helped him. He planned to marry Ruth at this time but had to become a Swiss citizen first.

Ruth's father was dying as Hesse traveled to Basel in December. They attended many concerts in Basel as Hesse sought escape. They married on January 11, 1924, and Hesse then began to write *Steppenwolf*. He found Ruth very difficult to live with and was happy that she spent so much time at her parents. Within two months of their marriage, Hesse was in a clinic. He went to Montagnola after his release where Ruth, Bruno and others visited him. In October he spent a month at Baden and spent the winter in Basel in an attempt to save his marriage but did not live with Ruth.

In January 1925, Ruth became ill and went to a clinic. When she recovered in March, he returned to Montagnola. Both stayed at her parents' house. Ruth became ill again with tuberculosis and spent the summer in an apartment in Carona which made Hesse feel threatened. His first wife Maria had a breakdown and Hesse had to find places for his sons, which also contributed to the strain on him. Hesse viewed all of this as interfering with his work.

Needing an escape, Hesse began to travel in autumn and visited friends in Zurich. When he returned to Montagnola, he began to make plans for a trip to Nuremberg and Swabia. This would be the basis for his book *Journey to Nuremberg*. His travels did not cure his problems.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary and Analysis

Steppenwolf, published in 1927, is the only work of his which is set entirely in a modern city. The city represents a symbol of what was happening internally with Hesse. It showed the collective neurosis which individuals experienced, and he used a symbolic city to represent this. Hesse spent New Year's Eve with Ruth in Zurich, even though he considered the marriage ended. He was very productive in early 1926 while he was in Zurich.

Steppenwolf, like other works of Hesse, mirrors the relationship between his craft and his life. Hesse's writing was his way of managing his psychological crises. It was his way of trying to seek stability. At this time Hesse began attending masked balls and found they helped him to overcome his depressions. He portrays these scenes in Steppenwolf and also in the poems he wrote at the time. These poems illustrated the conflict within him. His ambivalence was portrayed in his novel, with reversals in the actions of the characters, like joining the Magic Theater and leaving the masked ball. Hesse uses the mask for the various allusions and reversals and tries many experimental techniques in the book.

Hesse tries to become a part of the Zurich social scene during the winter of 1926. He associated with artists but remained on the fringes of their society. He befriended a woman named Ninon Dolbin, a divorcee. Hesse was still married to Ruth and many of their friends tried to foster a reconciliation, which often angered him. Hesse returned to Montagnola with Ninon, his sons and others visiting him. In the summer of 1926, Hesse worked and in October made his usual visit to Baden. He went on a lecture tour in November and returned to Montagnola in December at which time he finished writing his novel Steppenwolf.

At this time Ruth asked for a divorce and had already retained a lawyer. Many of Hesse's followers felt that some of his latter works represented a surrender to mass culture. He was relatively happy in the winter and spring of 1927, when he promoted Steppenwolf. He began work on another novel, Narcissus and Goldmund. Hesse received many invitation because of Steppenwolfe.

Hesse celebrated his fiftieth birthday while his friend Hugo Ball was dying of cancer, and Ninon was with Hesse at this time. Hugo died on September 14, though Hesse did not attend the funeral.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary and Analysis

Narcissus and Goldmund, published in 1928, was well received. The two main characters are friends with each representing half of a divided self. This novel appeals to the visual senses with soothing colors and landscapes. It was written while Hesse's friend, Hugo Ball, was dying of cancer and in many ways, this book portrays his friendship with Ball. At this time Hesse's relationship with Ninon was deepening, and she spent time with him at Montagnola and two months in Arosa. Hesse spent spring in Germany, fall in Baden and returned to Montagnola for Christmas. He worked on a collection of poems published as *Consolation of Night*.

Hesse maintained a busy travel schedule going to Zurich, Baden and a Swabian tour. He continued to have problems with his eyes and other physical ailments. He lectured in Stuttgart and Tübingen and other places but suffered another depression before completing his travels.

The year 1930 began a good period for Hesse. He and Ninon began the first of many visits to a luxury hotel in Chanterella where both were happy. When he returned to Montagnola, he waited for Ninon to arrive in May. There were a stream of visitors that summer as he worked on another book, *Journey to the East*.

Ninon traveled frequently and Hesse was irritable in her absence. Hesse begins to think of building a new house at this time as he needed better lighting and wanted to resume gardening. His wealthy friends, Hans and Elsie Bodmer, offered to build the house for him. It would remain his and Ninon's for as long as either was alive, and then revert to the Bodmer's. Ninon gave Hesse's life a new direction by relieving him of the burden of many of his administrative affairs. In 1931, Hesse married Ninon in November and began to work on *The Glass Bead Game*. At this time he experienced more eye problems and has fears of going blind. This fear is reflected in his books which becomes less visual and more mathematical and musical.

Ninon and Hermann moved into their new house in July 1931 and were married in November. Their lives went on as usual after their marriage. She provided three decades of stability for him. At this time, Nazism was becoming strong in Germany. He worked on *The Glass Bead Game* from 1931 to 1942.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary and Analysis

In January 1933, Hesse's work on *The Glass Bead Game* stopped because of writer's block. When the National Socialists came to power in Germany on January 30, 1933, many people left Germany. Henrich Wiegand and his wife became guests of the Hesse's at their villa. There were many visitors and refugees, and Hesse had many friends in Germany, many of whom were Jewish. Some of his friends were National Socialists, including Finckh, which led to a break with them.

Hesse, wanting to hold true to his values and maintain his German audience, decides against making public statements. His *The Glass Bead Game* became representative of the situation in Germany, and his writings began to reflect the stability he thought he had in his own life. *The Glass Bead Game* represented a system that replaced the crumbling system in Germany where music and math were central. A series of mathematically-related symbols represent the psyche.

Hesse was the recipient of the Gottfried Keller Prize in August and in October learned that his mentor and publisher, Samuel Fischer had died. Early in 1935, his German royalties were cut off. He began to accept other assignments since it became difficult to publish in Germany. While he was in Baden that year, he was attacked by a literary critic in a German magazine. Hesse responded to the attack and stated he was a Swiss national.

Ninon became ill in 1936 and eventually required surgery in 1937. At this time, Hesse's publisher was German Fischer Verlag in Germany which was taken over by the National Socialists. Hesse felt that since most of his following was in Germany, he could not switch publishers. As the Nazis moved across Europe, Hesse continued his work on *The Glass Bead Game*. After the outbreak of war in 1940, Hesse rarely left Montagnola except to go to Baden. Ninon was worried about relatives living in the war zone.

In Germany, Hesse was considered suspect and his German earnings were confiscated. When he submitted his novel, he waited until 1943, and it was rejected, so Hesse found a Swiss publisher. In 1944, the German government prohibited the reading of his books. Many of his and Ninon's friends and family were killed or lost during the war. When the peace was announced in 1945, Hesse read his poem, *Poem on Peace*, on Radio Basel.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary and Analysis

The Hesse's kept in touch with their family and friends in other countries as best as they could during the war years. They wait for word for those who were missing. In summer they vacationed in the mountain resort of Rigi-Kaltbad and celebrated Ninon's fiftieth birthday at the end of the year.

Hesse had a run in with a Stuttgart paper that printed part of his poem On Toward Peace. The omitted two lines changed the meaning of the poem. Since he had given them permission to print his work, he complained. In his protest to the paper run by the Americans he used the word barbarianism, which was the wrong word to use in light of the atrocities of the war. The Austrian who responded said Hesse's poem would never have been published if he could have prevented it. Hesse learns that the Americans would ban his work in Germany. The issue eventually reached the desk of President Truman and Hesse said he did not care to publish in a publication run by the Americans.

After this in 1946, Hesse received the Nobel Prize for Literature for *The Glass Bead Game*. He didn't travel to Stockholm to receive the prize pleading his poor health. The West German government had awarded him the Goethe Prize in that same year. Hesse wrote occasional stories, essays and poems during this time. He was concerned with his health and rightly so. He was soon diagnosed with leukemia; it remains latent for years until it killed him.

Plans were being made for his seventieth birthday celebration. He also received an honorary degree from the University of Bern. By 1953, all his siblings had died. In 1961, his leukemia ceased to be latent and reached an acute stage. They celebrated Hermann's eighty-fifth birthday on July 2, 1962. He died on August 9, 1962.

Epilogue

Epilogue Summary and Analysis

The Epilogue opens with a poem Hesse wrote when he was sixty. It is more or less autobiographical since he talks about his creativity and his personal acts. Hesse feels that the world of senses is confused and must be countered and directed inward. Hesse viewed his life as an artist as an attempt to portray or reach this inner self. He eventually learned to accept the crises of life. He always believed in the ultimate value of the individual. His messages for his readers was always elitist. He was popular with the youth because they identified with his need to be independent and at the same time to be with family.



Characters

Hermann Hesse

Hermann Hesse was an author who wrote books, poems, stories and letters. He was born on July 2, 1877, in Calw and was part of a large family. His parents were Pietists and part of the Piet Mission in Basel. The Pietist beliefs were a source of conflict for the followers. He moved to Basel at the age of four and suffered from nightmares and violent temper tantrums. He attended the Mission nursery school and was sent to the Boy's House in January 1884, returning home only on Sundays. He begins writing poetry that year at the age of six and also began violin lessons. His family moved back to Calw in 1886, and Hermann considered the Calw-Basel area as his house. At the age of fifteen he became a German citizen when he entered the seminary at Maulbronn. Hermann suffered from mental illness, having his first episode at the age of twelve, and would suffer recurring bouts for the rest of his life.

Hermann decides he wants to be a writer at the age of thirteen. He was sent to school in Goppingen in 1890, which he enjoyed. He passed his exams for the seminary in 1891 and enters the protestant Theological Seminary at Maulbronn. When he couldn't function, he was taken to Bad Boll for treatment in 1892. When he tried to commit suicide, he was institutionalized at Stetten. He continued his education at Cannstatt and then returned home in August. He was sent back and then to the Mission School in Basel and a month later to school in Cannstatt. He finally passes his examinations in June 1893. In October he was placed as a bookseller's apprentice but ran away after three days. He works as a mechanic in a clock factory and in the Fall of 1895, finds his own job in a bookstore in Tubingen where he begins his career as a writer. In 1946, he receive the Nobel Prize for literature at the age of sixty-nine. He had three wives and three children by the first: Martin, Heiner, and Bruno. Hesse died on August 9, 1962.

Ninon

Ninon becomes the third wife of Hesse. He first met her when she is a child of fourteen. They became reacquainted in Zurich in 1927. Before their marriage in November 1931, Ninon traveled widely with Hesse. Before their marriage Ninon lived with Hesse and frequently traveled on her own. Hesse was usually irritated during her absences. She gradually assumed the role of managing their lives, which relieved Hesse of the burden. Their wealthy friends, the Bodmer's, built a house for them in Montagnalo. The house was ready in July 1931. After the marriage, their life went on as usual and represented three decades of stability for Hermann. She became ill in 1936 and had to have surgery in 1937 and recovered. In her husband's later years, she made many appearances on his behalf but did not travel to Stockholm to accept the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1946. She assumed more and more of his public appearances as he aged and his eyesight failed. Ninon was always interested in Greek studies and continued them into her old age. As Hermann's health failed, she would help him by taking dictation and



reading to him. She was at his side during his last days, when he died on August 9, 1962. Ninon attended to Hermann's affairs after his death and responded to the correspondence. She continued to live in the villa until her death in 1966.

Marie Gaundet

Marie Hesse is the mother of Hermann and the wife of Johannes. Her father, Dr. Gundert, is a Pietist leader. She was born in Malabar in October 1842 and was left at a Basel home for missionary children at the age of three and remained there for eight years while her parents were in India. At the age of twelve she was sent to a strict boarding school. She was removed from the school and sent to work for a family in Neichafel. In 1857, at the age of fifteen, she rejoined her parents in India and worked at the mission. She remained in India until 1859. Marie returned to India and married Charles Isenburg who soon died, leaving Marie with two surviving children, Theodor and Karl in 1870. She marries Johannes Hesse on November 22, 1874 and gave birth to Adele in 1875, Hermann in 1877, Paul in 1878, Gertrud in 1879, Marulla in 1880 and Johannes in 1882. Two of the children, Gertrud and Paul died in infancy. After a long illness, she dies on April 24, 1902.

Johannes Hesse

Johannes is the husband of Marie and the father of Hermann and a prominent Piet. He was born in 1847, in Estonia and educated in Reval at a religious high school. Johannes was accepted as a missionary by the Basel group and spent three years studying there. He then spent a year serving as the assistant to the director and was ordained in August 1869. He then went to India for four years. In 1873, he became Dr. Gundert's assistant and marries Marie Isenburg on November 22, 1874. They had six children, four of whom survived. In 1881, he went to Basel to teach doctrine and in 1886 returned to Calw to head the publishing house. He suffers a mental collapse and is hospitalized for several months in 1889. He died on March 8, 1916.

Dr. Hermann Gundert

Hermann Gundert is the maternal grandfather of Hermann Hesse. He was a major influence on the young Hermann Hesse. He was born in Stuttgart in 1814, and was a theologian and a linguist. At the age of twenty-one, he traveled to India as a tutor for the son of a missionary and also worked as a missionary beginning in 1836. In two years he became the leader of a group of German missionaries and married Julie Dubois since he had to be married to accept the post. They remained in India for twenty-one years and were accepted by the Mission Institute in Basel. Gundert remained in India until his health forced him to return to Europe in 1859, at which time he was put in charge of the publishing division of the Basel Institute. He dies in April 1893.



Maria Bernoulli

Maria Bernoulli, Mia, was the sister of Herr Bernoulli. She became the first wife of Hermann and remained married to him for twenty years until they were divorced. She and her sister, Mathilde, ran a photography school. Maria married Hermann on August 21, 1904 in Basel. They lived in a farmhouse in Gaienhofen in the Lake Constance area. Maria was frequently ill during their marriage. Their first son, Bruno, was born in December 1905. Heiner, the second son was born in March 1909, and Martin was born on July 27, 1911. Marie also experiences bouts of melancholia throughout their marriage. They separate in 1919 and their divorce became final in 1923.

Ruth Wenger

Ruth Wenger was the second wife of Hesse. They met when she visited her parents' summer home in Carona. She lived at the hotel Krafft in Basel when she was not in Carona. Ruth married Hermann on January 11, 1924, and they separated several months later when he returned to Montagnola after being released from a Basel clinic. Hermann spent the following winter in Basel as they attempted to save their marriage, but they did not live together. When they traveled, they stayed in separate rooms. Ruth experienced a serious illness in January 1924, and was hospitalized. In March she returned to her parents' house and Hesse went back to Montagnola. She soon became ill again and was diagnosed with tuberculosis. They divorced in 1927.

Ludwig Finckh

Ludwig Finckh first met Hesse during his student days in Basel. Finckh was a part of the literary circle that included Hermann Hesse. Finckh was from Tübingen but eventually moved to Gaienhofen where Hermann lived. Finckh was a medical doctor who married in 1907 and lived next door to Hesse.

Bruno Hesse

Bruno Hesse is the first child of Hermann and Maria. He was born on December 9, 1905.

Heiner Hesse

Heiner Hesse is the second son of Maria and Hermann, born on March 1909.

Martin Hesse

Martin Hesse is the third son born to Maria and Hermann on July 11, 1911.



Objects/Places

Calw

Calw in Swabia on the German-Swiss border near the Black Forest mountains in the birthplace of Hermann Hesse.

Basel

Basel is the city in Switzerland where the Piet mission is located and where Hermann was sent to school at the age of six.

Maulbronn

Maulbronn is the German town where the Protestant Theological Seminary is located.

Bad Boll

Bad Boll is a spa to which Hermann was taken.

Stetten

Stetten was the site of a castle that is an institution for retarded and epileptic children.

Tubingen

Tubingen is a town located near Stuttgart in Germany.

Gaienhofen

Gaienhofen is a small hamlet in the Lake Constance area of Switzerland where Hermann and Maria lived after their marriage.

Badenweiler

Badenweiler is a spa town in German where the Villa Hedwig is located. Hesse often went there for treatment.

India

India is an Asian country where Hesse's family served as missionaries and Hesse visited.

Ostermundigen

Ostermundigen is located near Bern, Switzerland where the Hesse's moved in 1912.

Montagnola

Montagnola is the Italian village where Hesse settled.



Themes

Illness

One of the dominant themes in the book is illness. Not only did Hesse suffer from a variety of physical and mental illnesses, so did members of his family and wives. Hesse's father experienced mental illness and had breakdowns, and Hermann may have inherited the disposition from him. As a child Hermann was difficult and sent to boarding school at the age of six. His emotional problems made it difficult for him to accept the authoritative nature of formal education, so he barely made it to the level that allowed only one year of military service. His parents sent him to spas for treatment and had him institutionalized for a while after he tried to commit suicide. Once Hermann was independent working as a bookseller's apprentice in Basel, he completed the three-year apprenticeship and worked as a regular employee for a year while he wrote.

Hesse's first wife also had several nervous breakdowns, as did Hermann. His second wife contracted tuberculosis and his third wife had to have serious surgery. In addition to his psychological problems, Hermann also suffered from headaches, eye problems, sciatica and intestinal problems. He was always visiting spas for treatment and underwent psychoanalysis with several famous therapists. He frequently went for cures of different types from childhood on and was concerned with his health throughout his life.

Relationships

Relationships are a second underlying theme of the book. Hesse had a difficult time developing relationships. His emotional composition and mental illness made it difficult for him to relate to people. This is one of the reasons why his parents tried to find him lodging in a single room instead of having him share a room so he would avoid problems.

Hesse always had a problem relating to people, especially as a young man. He found that he could only relate to artists and didn't really come out of his shell until he joined a literary circle. Later in life when he was famous, he had many friends but still preferred a more or less solitary existence in Montagnola.

Hesse's difficulty in relationships resulted in his first two marriages ending in divorce. He had three children by his first wife, Maria, but when she had a breakdown, he placed the children with different people rather than have them live with him. He separated from his second wife after two months of marriage saying she was too difficult to live with. His third marriage to Ninon was successful and lasted for three decades. Ninon helped to relieve the strain of everyday life on Hesse by managing their lives. This is why he was irritable whenever she traveled on her own, which she frequently did. Hesse struggled



with relationships through most of his life, especially when he was younger. In his latter life, those around him sheltered him.

Struggles

Hesse's life is one of struggle and conflict which is another theme of the book. The struggle and conflict in Hesse became evident in his childhood. The child of strict Pietist parents, he grew up in an environment of conflict that he could never overcome. He needed to be independent of his family, yet at the same time he needed the acceptance and approval of his family. These conflicts came through in his writings which is probably why he appealed to youth. Although his books were based on the struggles and conflicts that Hesse felt and his search for inner peace, they were not as devastating in his books as they were in his life.

Hesse spent his life struggling to cope, and everyday life was a struggle for him from childhood on. He attempted suicide as a young teen and was institutionalized. He couldn't cope with the formal education experience and was very rebellious. When his mother died, he didn't go to the funeral because he couldn't deal with it. There was too much conflict for him.

When the stress and strain of life became too much for him, it would be manifest in various illnesses or a breakdown. Hesse was constantly going to clinics and spas for treatment and tried to work out his conflicts through stability until he married his third wife, Ninon. She was able to help him deal with his conflicts.



Style

Perspective

The book is written from the perspective of the third person point of view where the narrator is the author, Ralph Freedman. The author is telling the story of the life of Hermann Hesse. Although there is some dialogue in the book, the work is basically in narrative form with the author providing the necessary background and details. Since the book was written after the death of Hermann Hesse, there was no way Freedman could rely on personal interviews. Freedman compiled the book from his extensive research and presents the results in the third person narrative.

The perspective of the book is the author's and while he does a good job of presenting the facts and events in the life of Hesse, the reader does not really get to know Hesse or any of the characters. This is acceptable because the author's purpose was to look at how Hesse's personal life affected and was portrayed in his writing. This approach works for the book because the author shows how Hesse's characters are based on real people in his life and how the struggles and conflicts in his life are portrayed in his writings. The third person point of view is appropriate for this purpose and allows Freedman to accomplish his goal. The reader can easily see the correlations that Freedman is trying to make.

Tone

The tone of the work is objective. Freedman presents the results of his research of the events in the life of Hermann Hesse and relates them to the characters and themes in his writings. Freedman did a great deal of research for the book. He read many articles on Hesse as well as many of his works. He also had access to much of Hesse's letters and other correspondence. From all the information he amasses on Hesse, he presents Hesse's life and the events and people that influenced his writings.

Freedman more or less presents the facts and draws the conclusions from the facts and presents the conclusions to the reader. This allows the reader to understand the point the author is making and to see the relationship between the people and events in Hesse's life and his writing of the time. The author does not force the information on the reader but leaves it to the reader whether or not to accept it. In this respect, the tone of the book is appropriate.

Structure

Freedman presents a well-structured book. The body of the book is divided into eleven chapters, each dealing with a stated period in Hesse's life. Each chapter is divided into subsections, each dealing with a different event or topic. Each chapter begins with a quote from the writings of Hesse. This helps the reader to experience more of Hesse's

work. The book is chronological from Hesse's birth to his death. There is a "Prologue," in which the author presents his reasons for writing the book and what he hopes to accomplish in his book. The "Epilogue" contains the author's concluding comments.

The book contains a "Table of Contents" and preceding it is a "List of Illustrations" and "Acknowledgments." There are two sets of illustrations in the book. The purpose of the pictures is to allow the reader to associate information with faces. This allows the characters to be more real for the reader. There is also a well-structured Index at the back of the book that is useful for readers who want to look up information. The extensive section on Notes indicates the depth of the author's research and makes the information available to the reader who wants more information on a particular topic.

The well-structured book is appreciated by the reader. It is balanced and well written and makes a variety of information available to the reader and is also relatively quick reading. The reader will appreciate the extensive research of the author and that makes the book a complete reading experience for the reader.



Quotes

"Throughout his life, Hesse sought to maintain this remarkably fluid boundary between life and art, daily routine and creativity, sanity and psychological crisis, through his studiously pursued role as an artist." (Prologue, pg. 4)

"And since Hermann Hesse's family was composed on Pietist theologians, the conflicts that occurred in their daily lives were seen as mirroring those embedded in the precepts by which they sought to live." (Chapter 1, pg. 17)

"On all levels, then, Hermann Hesse's world as a child was divided. Even the contrast between the reality of the Swiss-Swabian landscape and the Orient of the family's memory and imagination appeared split into the more personal categories of paternal and maternal landscapes." (Chapter 1, pg. 38)

"Still, the tone in his early letters resounded with a sense of success, with the felling that he had arrived at last, that he was now functioning on his own, and that he had attained a place from which he could moralize and instruct." (Chapter 2, pg. 61)

"Maintaining his distance from dangers to his psychic health, he followed a singleminded course to his goal: to establish himself as an independent writer." (Chapter 2, pg. 99)

"Hesse's turn to nature served him well in developing his new style while allowing him to remain within an established context. As he saw it, he had written about the Junstlernatur he considered essential to his identity, about an artistic sensibility nurtured by the cultural changes of his time, which demanded new forms." (Chapter 3, pg. 109)

"Only by traveling, by being outdoors with friends, by establishing his many personal relationships with painters and musicians, did he find a door that allowed him to 'escape'." (Chapter 4, pg. 134)

"At the age of thirty-seven, an artist who loved peace, yet who was deeply concerned about his role as a citizen and writer, Hesse found that the war subjected his indecisiveness to its severest test. His repugnance at the slaughter was genuine." (Chapter 5, pg. 166)

"The visual wealth around him compensated, in part, for the lack of money and possessions. It soon was to stimulate his desire to paint, but is also kindled an ecstatic rush of writing." (Chapter 6, pg. 205)

"His obligation toward Mia and his sons took up a good part of his earnings, and although he tried to lead the life of an ascetic hermit, he had other needs: for travel, for a social life, and, at least intermittently, for personal comfort." (Chapter 7, pg. 238)

"These poems are striking, because they suggest the dark side of Hesse's 'sensual play' - betrayal. The masked ball was most helpful to his imagination, but it had not done



the same for his actual psyche. It ultimately conveyed a striking image of his mood of betrayal and reversal, as discrepancies between public utterances and private feelings to be caught and reconciled in the imagery of his autobiographical novel." (Chapter 8, pgs. 292-293)

"The most triumphant achievement in this novel, however, was Hesse's success in projecting the two impulses that had directed his life: the impulse to be accepted by authority, to remain in place and rise in prominence, and the desire to move from place to place, to defy authority, to run away and fashion new forms with the artist's golden mouth." (Chapter 9, pg. 315)

"Much of this mail came from people who responded with fervor to the new Reich. Hesse disliked their politics, but he felt called to still their spiritual hunger." (Chapter 10, pg. 346)

"Sliding down into old age and weakness has made great progress during this year. How good that our life has its limits, that one is certain of the end. It is the only security in a human life which in other respects the existentialists don't understand well." (Chapter 11, pg. 389)

"Hesse's message of wholeness that can never be whole, of exile that strives toward but can never reach home, emerges fragmentary from his many novels, stories and poems. But Hermann Hesse delivered this message most powerfully in his life which he committed to paper in the rich correspondence that began in his childhood. It is this life that lends coherence to his struggle, and it is to this life that this book has been dedicated. In this critique of a driven yet deeply understanding man lies the love that every biographer must feel for his subject." (Epilogue, pg. 395)



Topics for Discussion

Why did Hermann Hesse have so many problems in school? What was the cause?

When did Hess begin writing? How did he begin his career after all of the problems he had?

In what way did Hesse's writing reflect his life?

Freedman talks about Hesse's first, second and third new lives. What does he mean bhy this? What is significant about each and why?

What was Hesse's view toward war? What position did he take in World War I and World War II? How was he affected in World War II?

What does Hesse try to accomplish in his writing? Why?

Why was Hesse popular with the youth? What was it in his writing with which they identified?