

Journey to the East Study Guide

Journey to the East by Hermann Hesse

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Plot Summary

'The Journey to the East' is a mystical novel telling of a strange secret league of artists, philosophers, writers, and others that transcends time and space, and is engaged in a meandering "journey" that seems to have no concrete destination. The narrator of the tale is H.H., a member of the league who starts out on this journey with a group of other members, but eventually departs from the group after becoming disillusioned. Many years later, he rediscovers the League and attempts to rejoin it. He is brought before a court of League members and confronted with his transgressions for deserting the League on the Journey. He is taken back into the League and shown the secret of his own place within it.

The novel opens with the narrator, H.H., declaring his intention to describe the fantastic Journey undertaken by the League. He has vowed not to reveal anything about the League itself, he explains, but is allowed to reveal his own personal experiences in connection with it. This restriction will present difficulties, he explains, which may make the whole story incomprehensible to the reader.

After being initiated into the League, H.H., and a group of other members set off on the "Journey to the East". Their path is not a definite one, and they often stop at churches and graves and other sites to pray and linger. Along the way, they meet up with other groups of League members also on the Journey. Their paths coincide sometimes, but they all move independently of one another in different directions. The Journey moves through time as well as space, and the other League members are figures both contemporary and historical, real and fictional.

Traveling with H.H.'s group is a man called Leo, whom he describes as a servant. Leo always seems to have exactly the item the party needs, even though, like the rest of them, he carried only a small pack. He is a genial and helpful servant, but he suddenly disappears from the party. His disappearance puzzles the other members, and they soon begin to imagine that Leo has taken with him many of the useful items they need. Most of these items turn up later, but the confusion at the time leads to arguing among the party members. Among the most important things that seem to be missing is a document outlining the founding of the League. H.H. is convinced that Leo has taken this irreplaceable document. Others argue that other copies and translations exist. Some think that the original document was burned. This dispute eventually leads to the disbanding of the party as each member goes his own way.

Several years later, as H.H. sets out to recount the story of this Journey, he finds he is fixated on the disappearance of Leo and cannot move past it in his story. He resolves to find Leo, which he does with the help of a friend. Leo does not seem to recognize him, but is pleasant to him. H.H. pleads with him to try to remember him and the Journey. Leo responds that he is still on the Journey, but does not fully recognize H.H.



Despondent, H.H. returns to his room. He writes a long letter to Leo, explaining his need to reconnect with the League and the Journey. When he awakes the next day, Leo is in his apartment. He has been sent by the League.

Leo takes H.H. by a circuitous route to the headquarters of the League. There, in the archives, he appears before a court of League members to answer for his self-accusations of infidelity to the League. At the head of the court sits Leo, who is also the president of the League. His abandonment of the group earlier had been a test, one that H.H. and the rest of his group failed. The despair that haunts H.H. for years afterward is also part of the test, H.H. learns. He is acquitted and allowed to continue writing his account of the League. He is given full access to the archives, which have a file on every member and all the exploits of the League over the centuries. He begins to search through the archives, eventually finding the entry about himself. His entry consists of a curtained area containing a surreal statue that appears to be of himself melting into the form of Leo. He suddenly feels very tired.

Part I

Part I Summary

'The Journey to the East' is a mystical novel telling of a strange secret league of artists, philosophers, writers and others that transcends time and space, and is engaged in a meandering "journey" that seems to have no concrete destination. The narrator of the tale is H.H., a member of the league who starts out on this journey with a group of other members but eventually departs from the group after becoming disillusioned. Many years later, he rediscovers the League and attempts to rejoin it. He is brought before a court of League members and confronted with his transgressions for deserting the League on the Journey. He is taken back into the League and shown the secret of his own place within it.

The novel opens with the narrator, H.H., declaring his intention to describe the fantastic Journey undertaken by the League. This will not be easy, he explains, for many reasons. One is his faltering memory. Many years have passed since the Journey and he is not certain he can trust his memory. Another difficulty is the vow he has made to the League not to reveal any of its secrets, although he is allowed to describe his own personal experiences. Although he thinks the League no longer exists, and has not for many years, he intends to keep this vow.

H.H. explains that many books similar to the one he intends to write have already been published, by Keyserling and Ossendowski, for example, but that these men were not members of the League and their journeys had nothing to do with the Journey he took. The travels these men took, if they actually did take them, H.H. says, were not really voyages of discovery in the way of the Journey of the League.

H.H.'s journey began in the confused time following World War I. He refers to a few of the highlights of his journey, but then stops again to explain the difficulty in relating his story. The true importance of the Journey and the amazing accomplishments that were achieved can only truly be understood by those who know the secret of the League. A great deal may still be comprehensible anyway, he states, even though the act of putting the experiences into words distorts their truth.

There is also the difficulty that the Journey and the League are now receiving publicity, which in its usual way is distorting the way in which it can be remembered. H.H. gives the example of the horrific war, which, when ended, was deliberately not spoken about for a time. After a while, however, it was rediscovered, and people began writing heroic novels about it. This is what will happen with the memory of the Journey, as well, H.H. suggests, at which time his account will be better received.

Although League had "quite definite, very lofty goals" in undertaking this Journey, H.H. explains, each member was allowed and even expected to have his own personal goals from which they could draw strength. H.H.'s goal was to meet the Princess Fatima.



Having such a goal is a requirement for admission into the League, H.H. implies. Other members had their own goals, some of which he does not understand.

H.H. relates that he first joined the League immediately after the World War. At that time there were many people claiming to be prophets and saviors, he says, including many espousing the religions of the East. This gave many people the idea that the League was one of these new cults that would soon pass out of fashion.

H.H. then recalls his initiation into the League. After a year of probation, he was called before the High Throne to dedicate himself and to state his own personal goal. The Speaker of the assembly placed his hand on his head and gave him the oath of membership along with the League ring to wear on his finger. Immediately afterward, he and his fellow new members were given their assignments. He was told to join one of the groups of ten members who were traveling the country to join an expedition to the East, which he also calls the "Home of Light." This pilgrimage, he discovers, has been going on for centuries and has been undertaken by thousands before him. This is one of the secrets of the League.

H.H. and his group set off on their Journey, traveling on foot. Along the way they meet other groups also on their journey. Any place they come across a holy shrine, chapel, or church, they stop and pray. They also stop at sites that are sacred to the League, such as graves, ruins, and monuments. They sometimes sing. While priests and children welcome them, others mock their strange behavior.

They see strange things along the way, including a Goblin. While resting in a half ruined chapel in Swabia, the leaders of the group ask the members, as usual, to suggest the direction they should take next. There are three possible roads. Some of the members offer opinions, but one urgently suggests the road to the left. While the leaders are considering the decision, a painting of St. Christopher on the wall of the chapel lifts its arm and points to the left. This is the way the party departs. They receive other signs along the way, such as strange apparitions warning them off certain paths. They are also guided by astrology.

At one point, H.H. witnesses one of his fellow members leave the League, no longer believing in its purpose. He stands before the tents of the leaders and calls them out. The Speaker comes out, and the young man begins to shout at him that he is tired of waiting and wandering and of the interruptions for ceremonies and poetry. He throws his ring on the ground and says he intends to take the railway home. The Speaker picks up the ring and calmly tells the man he is absolved from his vow to the League, including the vow of silence. Since the man has obviously forgotten the secret of the League, he will not be able to tell anyone else. The others look on in shame and pity. The young man is defiant that he has forgotten nothing, but does not seem certain. He runs away.

As they progress on the Journey, they hear news of this young man from others. He is apparently searching everywhere for them, but always seems to miss them. H.H. asks one of the leaders if they should not try to help the young man, suggesting that he might become a faithful member again. The leader replies that they would be happy if the



young man came back, but he doubts that he will be able to find them again because he has lost his faith. Even if he did find them, the leader says, he probably would not recognize them. He cannot see the light he once followed as a youth. Reason has made him disillusioned and faint-hearted.

Along the way the group meets other groups on the Journey, each following its own path. These groups sometimes join up for a time before splitting off again. Members sometimes go off on their own for a while, as H.H. does, when some sign leads them that way. His group meets up with another that includes Paul Klee, the painter, the artist Klingsor, and a poet named Lauscher. The groups spend a pleasant time together, sharing their devotions and songs and individual goals. H.H. relates that he is a violinist who is responsible for providing the group with music. He collects songs and also writes them for the group to sing.

One of the members of the group, someone H.H. hardly noticed at the time but who he has thought about more than any other member since, is a servant named Leo. Leo was always amiable and helpful. He was a "perfect servant", one who is never seen except when needed. He is usually attending the Speaker. Leo has an affinity for animals, and his goal is to obtain Solomon's key, which will allow him to speak with the animals.

Here, H.H. expresses again the difficulty of relating his story because his memories are so varied. They were not only traveling toward the East, he says, but also through time, visiting the Middle Ages and the Golden Age. Sometimes when he was traveling alone, he says, he visited characters from the literature of his youth. Their goal was not only the East, but the "home and youth of the soul" (p. 27).

The group has renounced the use of mechanical transportation such as trains or ships, yet is able to travel all over the world and backward through time. Everywhere they go they find other groups of League members, both real and fictional, contemporary and historic. By way of the Journey, all these figures from the past are brought into a fantastic and wonderful present.

In this world where artists and their fictional creations exist side by side, H.H. notices that the creations are often more alive and vivid than their creators. He asks the servant Leo why this is. Leo, who is playing with two white poodles, ponders the question. He responds that they are like mothers who give their children milk and provide them with strength, but are then forgotten. H.H. replies that this is sad, and Leo responds that it may be sad, but it is also beautiful because it is the law.

H.H. asks Leo what law he is speaking of, and Leo answers that it is "The law of service" (p. 34). Those who spend their lives in service live long, he says, but those who want only to rule do not. H.H. asks why then it is that so many people want to rule. Leo replies that they do not understand that only a few are born to be masters. H.H. begins to think that Leo may be wiser than any of the others in the group, even though he is their servant.

Part I Analysis

Hesse introduces the strange parallel world inhabited by the League, where members are apparently able to travel together to real places within their own minds, and characters from literature are as real, or even more real, than the authors that create them. Not much is revealed about the League itself, except that it apparently has some illustrious members and it is engaged on some kind of journey. This journey is something in the nature of a crusade. Like the ancient crusaders, the travelers have as their ultimate goal the East, and also like the crusaders, they are devout and stop at sacred places along the way to pay devotion. There are mentions of fantastic battles and terrible enemies of the League, although details are vague.

This vagueness is the result of the difficulty the narrator is having finding a handle on his story. He is uncertain where to start, or the approach to take. The reader is given the impression that great things could be related, if only the narrator could find the proper words. This adds some suspense to the story.

The book is populated with dozens of characters, but aside from the narrator, only one, the servant Leo, is described or developed in any way. Leo is introduced in the first part as a loyal servant who is also very friendly with animals, particularly dogs. Leo seems to be a League member. Like the others, he has a personal goal he wishes to fulfill, yet he is also their servant. At the end of Part I, Leo suggests that it is actually through serving others that one finds true happiness and a long life. The image of a mother providing milk to her children to strengthen them is introduced. A similar image appears at the end of the book, when H.H. learns his ultimate role within the League.

Leo appears later in the story in a different role, which is foreshadowed here when H.H. speculates that although he is a servant, he may be the wisest of all of them.



Part II

Part II Summary

On a cool day while the party is in a Swiss mountain gorge called Morbio Inferiore, it is discovered that Leo has disappeared. Each member has his own theory about why Leo has vanished, and many, including H.H., have a sense of impending disaster following his disappearance.

The group camps in the gorge and begins to look for Leo. The more they look for him and cannot find him, the more important his disappearance becomes in the minds of the League members. Some take it as a sign that worse things are to come. H.H. explains that while he had unwavering commitment to the League and the Journey before, Leo's disappearance stirred feelings of doubt and sadness. These feelings grow until he loses faith in finding Leo again, which leads to a feeling that the whole Journey is threatened.

Even stranger than Leo's disappearance is the matter of his luggage, H.H. continues. After his disappearance, members of the group discover important things missing from their luggage, which they assume Leo must have carried in his own. This seems strange, because Leo only carried a single sack like the rest of them. Nevertheless, the group soon verifies that several important things are missing.

Odder yet is the fact that all of these things later turn up. While these things were missing, they seemed to be absolutely indispensable to the members of the group for various reasons. As time went on and things turned up again, it is realized that they were not so important after all. There is one item that does not turn up, however, which is an important document. The members differ on its importance, and even if the document had ever been in the luggage in the first place. Some think it was only a copy of the original. This leads to an argument over the location of the original, independent of the question of whether the group had a copy or whether it was even lost. H.H. hints that the document is some kind of charter written by the Master of the League at some time in the past. These arguments about the document, H.H. says, are the beginning of the break up of the group. Such disputes are new among the members, H.H. explains. At first the discussions are respectful. H.H. himself cannot shake his belief that Leo carried the original document and that it is now lost forever. His belief makes him sad, but he is somewhat comforted by the fact that it is a certain belief.

Here H.H. pauses in his story again to explain how difficult it is for him to tell his story. He has set out to simply relate some of the events of the Journey to the East that are still in his memory, but he finds that he cannot move past the point in his story where Leo disappears. He imagines that historians face a similar problem in trying to find a center point around which various related events revolve. To do so, they must define people, events, times, and places so the story can be narrated. H.H. cannot examine his own memories in such a way, he says, because the closer he tries to look at them, the hazier they become. He can find no center point from which to tell the story.



He still desires to tell it, and he stops trying for a time to see if he can approach it again anew. Always in the back of his mind is the doubt that was first raised when Leo disappeared. He doubts if his story even can be told. He also wonders, like those who had passed through the World War must have, whether it is even possible to have experienced such a thing.

Part II Analysis

This short section describes one of the crucial moments in the story, which is the disappearance of Leo. Its true significance is not yet known by H.H. or the other League members, but they have a vague sense that their mission is somehow related to Leo. In the final part of the book, H.H. will discover that other members present at Leo's disappearance will also write about the event with widely varying interpretations.

Hesse introduces the concept of the League document, which is apparently vitally important to H.H. and some of the other members. They fixate on this subject, even though nobody is certain that it even exists. Hesse's somewhat disjointed style of writing accentuates the dreamlike world inhabited by the League. It also reinforces the narrator's claim that the story is perhaps impossible to relate.

Hesse's narrator talks about memory as it relates to writing, and the difficulty in relaying personal experiences in writing. Putting things on paper requires the writer to strictly define things that are not so definite in the real world. The League seems to exist in recognition of this fact and accept the blurriness between the definite and indefinite. The more H.H. tries to define his memories so he can write about them, the more indefinite they become. This implies something that will be further explored later in the book, which is the suggestion that H.H. has lost the ability to embrace this kind of uncertainty, which is crucial to maintaining the path along the journey.



Part III

Part III Summary

Despite the difficulty in telling the story of the Journey, H.H. vows to keep trying. Making this vow makes him happy just as making his first vow to the League does. Like then, he feels he is promising to complete something that may be impossible, but this makes it seem all the more important that he does complete it. Even if he has to start over a hundred times, he intends to tell his story. If he cannot connect all his memories into one meaningful narrative, then he will describe all the events individually. All the while, he says, he will not be ruled by reason in his task, but by faith.

H.H. turns to his old school friend, Lukas, for help in telling his story. Lukas is a journalist, and has also written a book about his experiences in the World War. H.H. goes to see him in his office. Lukas is pleased to see him. H.H. lays his trouble before Lukas, explaining everything. Lukas has heard about the Journey to the East, but among his companions it is not taken seriously. He is skeptical about the League and its intentions. He has dismissed it along with all the other movements that arose and then disappeared following the World War. H.H. corrects Lukas that the League was not one of these temporarily fashionable groups and that the Journey had been taking place for centuries. Lukas smiles condescendingly.

H.H. dismisses Lukas' ironic smile and says he has come to ask advice. He does not intend to try to write the history of the entire League, but only his own journey. His problem is that his memories, although vivid, seem as though they are hallucinations. Lukas enthusiastically sympathizes with H.H. He himself has had the same feeling about his own memories of the war. He managed to write them down, he says, but he imagines that a writer even ten times better could never portray a real picture of his experiences. What made it even possible for him to write his book, Lukas tells H.H., is that he felt it was necessary for his own survival, to keep his life from descending into nothing. Even so, as he wrote it, Lukas says, he was in a constant state of delirium, as if he was surrounded by fallen war dead. Lukas suddenly cannot discuss the matter any more and abruptly says good-bye to H.H.

They meet again. Lukas is calm once more, and he gives H.H. some advice. He notes that the figure of Leo has become an obstacle to H.H. He should get rid of Leo and move on. Lukas asks more about Leo, if that was actually his name, and if it was his first or last name. H.H. responds that it was his last name, and that he does not remember his first name. Meanwhile, Lukas takes down a directory and looks through it. He finds the name and address of an Andreas Leo and gives it to H.H. He tells him to go find this man and see if he knows anything about the Leo from his memory. Lukas politely dismisses H.H., who leaves in a state of excitement.

That same day, H.H. goes to the address Lukas has given him and asks about Andreas Leo. He learns that he lives in a room on the third floor, but is not in. He learns that Leo



works at odd jobs during the day, including training and caring for dogs. H.H. watches the house daily while out walking, hoping to meet up with Andreas Leo. He is in a state of despair, he says, yet is happy at the same time because he feels he has an important purpose.

H.H. ponders over the loss of meaning in his life that has led him to this state of despair. He had set out to describe the Journey thinking he was serving a noble cause, but as he thinks of it more and more, he says, he realizes it is his own ego that is driving him to write about it. He is like Lukas, he decides, in that he must write about the Journey to save his own life, but he cannot find the way. He cannot move forward until he finds Leo, he feels.

Part III Analysis

H.H. does not explain exactly how he became separated from the group of League travelers he was with, but it becomes clear that he is no longer in contact with the members of the League he once knew. He does not indicate whether the journey was completed or not. This would come at the end of the story, and he cannot get to the end of the story because he is still fixed on the idea of Leo's disappearance.

Up to this point, the story largely has been a loose collection of recollections of the narrator, along with occasional asides explaining how difficult it is to tell the story. In Part III, the story enters the present time some ten years after the disappearance of Leo, and begins to gain some narrative momentum. Moved to write his story at any cost, H.H. visits his friend Lukas for advice. The two of them sympathize over the difficulty of writing about their personal experiences when their memories seem so unreal. Hesse describes this process in H.H. and Lukas as a compulsion driven by the writer's instinct to survive, and one wonders if he is also speaking about his own reasons for writing.

Lukas advises H.H. to forget about Leo, but H.H. knows this is impossible. It is suggested that Lukas has used this technique of blocking out certain memories himself in order to cope with his traumatic experiences in the war. At their first meeting, Lukas seems to be suddenly overcome by his memories and abruptly ends their conversation.

Lukas' simple suggestion that H.H. find Leo is darkly humorous. The thought never seems to have occurred to H.H. before, possibly because of his deep despair and his long-held belief that Leo has vanished. The deep haze of his memory seems to have prevented him from imagining that he could still find Leo by simply looking up his name in the city directory, as Lukas does.

The theme of selfishness and egoism is developed at the end of Part III, when H.H. comes to understand his true motives for wanting to write about the journey. This realization seems to prepare him to once again gain contact with Leo and the League in the next section.



Part IV

Part IV Summary

Something has happened, H.H. explains at the beginning of the fourth part. He has had an experience that has changed things, although he does not know if it has helped with his problem. H.H. begins to explain what has happened.

After finding the address of Andreas Leo, H.H. goes by the place twenty times, hoping to meet the man, and also hoping that it will indeed be the same Leo he remembers. Finally, while walking by the house one afternoon, he hears whistling coming from an open window. The music moves him, although he cannot say why. He is mesmerized by it, and stands stock still on the sidewalk below. An old man passes by and nods to H.H. as if in agreement that the whistling is beautiful. At the same time, H.H. realizes that the whistling must come from Leo.

It begins to grow dark, and H.H. watches the window for a light to come on. No light appears, but he soon hears a door opening and footsteps on the stairs. A slim man comes out of the house, and H.H. confirms that it is the same Leo the servant he remembers from his Journey. He is overjoyed, and nearly speaks to Leo, but does not. He remembers that he heard Leo whistle the same music a decade earlier while on the Journey, before he disappeared.

Leo walks past H.H. and continues down the street with a light step. H.H. follows him, feeling he has no other choice. Leo strolls into a park. H.H. hurries to keep him in sight. He watches Leo walk to an empty bench, sit, and take out a small box from his coat pocket. He opens the box and begins to eat something from it. H.H. paces for a time, and finally approaches the bench where Leo is sitting and sits at the other end of it. Leo looks at him, and goes on eating. H.H. sees that he is eating dried fruits, taking them out of the box one at a time and chewing them slowly. Leo finishes the fruit and closes the empty box. Suddenly he says to nobody in particular that it looks like rain.

H.H. agrees, and is embarrassed because Leo apparently does not recognize him. Leo, he notes, looks the same as he did ten years before. H.H. compliments him on his whistling, adding that he himself used to be a musician. Leo is friendly, and asks if H.H. has given up music. He responds that he has given it up for now, and even sold his violin.

Leo seems to take this to mean that H.H. has sold his violin because he needed money. He offers to give H.H. some food and money. H.H. explains that he did not mean it that way, and actually has all he needs. He thanks Leo for his kindness, adding that such kindness is rare in people. Leo responds that people are strange. He adds that H.H. is also strange.



H.H. is surprised and asks why Leo finds him strange. Leo responds that it is because he has enough money but has sold his violin. He asks if H.H. still likes music. H.H. responds that he does, but that he no longer takes pleasure from it as he once did. This is not uncommon in people, he adds. He asks Leo if he has not heard of painters who suddenly burn all their work, for instance. Leo answers that he has heard of this happening, and that it comes from despair. Leo says he has even known such people who have committed suicide. "Such people are stupid and can be dangerous," he says (p.70.)

Leo asks H.H. what he does now after selling his violin. H.H. gives a vague answer that he does not do much any more, explaining he is often ill. He asks Leo why he continues to ask about the violin. Leo responds that it reminds him of King David. David was also a musician, he explains, who cheered King Saul with his playing. Later David became a king, Leo says, and became a famous leader. He also was filled with worry, and did some "wicked" things, Leo says. When he thinks of David's life, he says, he thinks it is sad that David ever became a king, because it was when he was a young musician that he was happiest and good.

H.H. responds vehemently that of course David was happier as a young man, but that even if he had remained a musician all his life, the worries that come with age would have still plagued him. So he became a king and accomplished large things and wrote his psalms. H.H. adds that there is more to life than pleasure. "Life is not just a game!" he tells Leo (p. 71).

Leo stands and takes a parting bow. He adds that he does not know much about David and his supposedly great deeds, but does not want to say anything against them. Nevertheless, he says, nothing will convince him that life is indeed nothing but a game. Some people make it into a duty or a prison, he says, but it is most beautiful when viewed as a game. He says goodbye to H.H and begins to stroll away.

H.H. tries to restrain himself, but cannot. He runs after Leo, gushing that they are League brothers and asking if Leo does not remember him and the time they spent on the Journey. He asks Leo to have pity on him. Leo does not run, but slows his walk so H.H. can come near. He tells H.H. he is being hasty, and says they will walk slowly in the light rain for a time. H.H. pleads with Leo to please tell him if he knows him. Leo tells him he will calm down soon. He asks if anyone really knows anyone else, including his own self. Dogs and cats and birds he knows, Leo says, but he does not really know H.H.

H.H. asks Leo if he is not the same man who belongs to the League and was on the journey. Leo responds that he does belong to the League, and is still on the journey. So many have come and gone, however, and he has known many people and yet not known them. Leo tells H.H. to stop for a moment as he makes a low whistle. From a wooded area of the park behind a fence appears an Alsatian dog. The dog is happy to see Leo and comes close to the fence to be petted through the wire. When the dog looks at H.H., however, it growls.



Leo introduces the dog to H.H. Its name is Necker. He introduces H.H. to Necker as a former violinist and tells him that he must not bark at him. Leo happily pets the dog through the fence, and H.H. becomes jealous that Leo should be such friends with the dog but act so aloof toward him. They walk on slowly, with Necker following along on the other side of the fence. The dog seems to hold its disapproval of H.H. in check as Leo told him to do.

H.H. excuses himself, saying that he must be keeping Leo from going home to bed. Leo responds in a friendly way that he does not mind at all. Immediately, H.H. feels extremely tired as if he cannot take another step. He explains that he has just realized that he is very tired, and feels he is being a nuisance. Leo politely replies that H.H. can do as he wishes. H.H. once more laments that Leo does not seem to remember him from the journey and says goodnight. Leo walks on into the night and H.H. stands alone feeling dejected. He walks back the way they had come and the dog Necker barks at him from behind the fence.

As he walks home through the rain, H.H. reflects on his state of despair. He has felt this way before, even to the point of feeling suicidal. He no longer feels the impulse to kill himself when bouts of despair overtake him, but endures them. He realizes his life since he returned from his "unsuccessful" journey to the East has been increasingly meaningless and that he has lost faith in himself. Even the task of relating the story of his journey now seems worthless. He can see only one hope, which is to find redemption by becoming part of the League again.

H.H. arrives at his small attic apartment and immediately sits down at his desk in his wet clothes and begins to compose a letter to Leo. The letter extends to twenty pages and is full of H.H.'s remorse at losing contact with the League and asking for Leo's help. He continues to relate his common experiences on the journey with Leo, hoping that Leo will remember him. He swears that he has never given up any secrets of the League and never would, even under threat of death. The letter contains many self-accusations and is cathartic to H.H. He spends the rest of the night writing it, and in the early morning carries it to a letterbox and mails it. Returning home, he falls into bed and sleeps for a long time.

Part IV Analysis

Part IV opens at the turning point of the story. H.H. has found Leo and proceeds to relate how this happened. He goes by Leo's house many times, but does not see him. Given the description of the League deserter in Part I who could no longer recognize his fellow League members, the reader wonders if the paths of Leo and H.H. may have already crossed, but H.H. has not been aware of it.

It is through music that H.H. finds Leo again, by way of hearing Leo's whistling through an open window. He is first captivated by the pure sound of the whistling, but gradually realizes he knows the tune as an old League song. The old man who walks past H.H. at this moment also seems to find enjoyment in the music, and gives H.H. a knowing look,



raising the possibility that the old man himself is a League member, and that H.H. is also becoming "visible" to active League members as well as being able to recognize them himself. This transformation seems related to the experience of his complete despair in the preceding years along with the realization that he has been acting selfishly in wanting to describe his journey as suggested at the end of Part III.

Far from providing him with the relief he seeks, H.H.'s meeting with Leo seems to drive him into even deeper despair. Leo's calmness in the face of H.H.'s distraught entreaties show a glimmer of recognition, or at least suggest that Leo has seen lost League members in similar circumstances.

Leo finds significance in the fact that H.H. has willingly given up playing the violin. Taken in the context of what Leo said about the "law of service" in Part I, this seems to be part of H.H.'s loss of faith and sense of duty to the League. Playing music for others and collecting the League songs, as H.H. did on the journey, was a form of service. Later, when H.H. is brought before the High Throne, giving up the violin is listed as one of his transgressions.

H.H.'s years of despair and guilt over having deserted his faith culminate in an all-night writing session where the words flow rapidly. Now that he has turned his attention away from the egoistic notion of memorializing the journey, he is able to write freely.



Part V

Part V Summary

H.H. wakes the next morning to find Leo sitting in his living room. Overjoyed, he greets Leo, who says simply that he has been sent by the League to get him. He tells H.H. that he gave his letter to the officials of the League and that he is to appear before the High Throne. H.H. can hardly remember what he had written the night before, but nonetheless is glad that Leo has come. He suddenly realizes that Leo has confirmed that there is still a League that was still active without him. In his years of despair, H.H. was never sure if the League had continued or if he was perhaps the last member. Now he is excited to appear before the High Throne and maybe even have judgment passed on him. He is ready to face them, he feels. He is prepared to show them that he has not been unfaithful. He is ready to obey them.

They leave the apartment with Leo in the lead. Leo walks at his regular, easy gait, which tries H.H.'s patience. He feels he has everything at stake and is eager to appear before the High Throne, yet Leo takes many detours on the trip. Twice, Leo enters a church to pray while H.H. waits outside. He stops at the town hall and tells H.H. the story of its founding. They meander through the streets for over two hours until they reach a large building. H.H. notes that had they walked there directly, it would have taken them only fifteen minutes.

They enter the building, which seems deserted. Leo leads H.H. down passages and up stairs, as if he is searching. One door he opens reveals an artist's studio where the artist Klingsor is working. H.H. is pleased to see him, but does not stop to greet him. He feels his mission is too urgent. Klingsor nods to Leo but does not acknowledge H.H. They leave him to his work.

Leo takes H.H. to the top of the building to an archive room full of books and documents. Several people are working silently, and they take no notice of Leo and H.H. They stand and wait until finally Leo begins to sing. H.H. recognizes the song as an old League song. At once, the room begins to expand. The archives move back and a large hall with rising rows of benches appears in the center of the room. At the top of the rows is a throne. From out of several doors and from the background many League officials begin to slowly fill the benches, one by one. The throne sits empty for the time being. Leo leaves H.H. where he stands, giving him a look that means he should wait patiently. He disappears into the crowd. Among the officials, H.H. recognizes some of the faces, including Klingsor.

Finally the assembly grows quiet and the Speaker steps up. H.H. feels alone and anxious at the front of the group, but is eager for the chance to achieve any kind of resolution. The Speaker announces the matter to be decided as "Self-accusation of a deserter League brother" (p. 87). H.H. is terrified, but he knows that this is what must happen.



The Speaker asks H.H. to verify his name and that he was on the part of the Journey that passed through Swabia. He asks if H.H. deserted the journey after the incident at Morbio Inferiore. He asks if it is true that H.H. wanted to write a story about the journey and if he felt restrained by his vow of secrecy to the League. H.H. answers "yes" to all of his questions.

The officials confer quietly with one another, and then the Speaker steps up and announces that H.H. is from that point on allowed to reveal publicly every League secret "that is known to him" (p. 88), and that he will have full access to the League archives. The assembly slowly disbands and the hall is once again silent. H.H. looks around nervously and spies something lying nearby. In a blue envelope, in his own handwriting, is the manuscript he had been working on, "The Story of the Journey to the East". Looking through it, H.H. is energized to begin working on it again. Now that he has the assistance of the League and is not hampered by his vow, he feels his mission is even more important.

As he reads more of the manuscript, however, he likes it less. He realizes he has left out important things and distorted others. He begins crossing out portions of it; as he does, the letters on the page dissolve into fragments and shapes and then disappear. Eventually the pages are left covered in meaningless ornament. H.H. tells himself that naturally his original account was worthless because he was trying to protect the secrets of the League as he wrote it by only relaying his personal experiences. Now that he was free of that vow, he thinks, he can start over from scratch and include the important details.

He decides he will begin his new manuscript with a short summary of the League and how it was founded. He is overwhelmed by the seemingly endless amount of information in the archives, and decides he must first learn how it is organized. He decides to first look for the League document. He finds a reference to its location in the catalog and finds it on a shelf. He finds that he cannot read it. It seems to be in Greek characters, and while H.H. knows some Greek, he cannot fully understand what is written. The characters are clear, but the dialect and symbolism of the document are incomprehensible. He is not discouraged, however. The characters remind him of his time on the Journey.

H.H. returns to the catalog and looks through it. He sees many names he recognizes and even finds a reference to a file on himself. He does not dare look himself up, however, for fear of learning what the League thinks of him. He does look up the file on Paul Klee, however, whom he remembers meeting on the Journey years before. Klee's file contains a small golden dish on which a clover symbol is engraved with the inscription, "As blue as snow is Paul like Klee" (p. 93). H.H. looks up the files of several of his other acquaintances as well. Finally, he decides to learn more about Leo. The label on Leo's file begins and ends with the words "cave!" which is Latin for "Beware!" He cannot bring himself to open the file and reveal this secret. He continues to look at other files, but keeps returning to Leo's.



He looks up the file of Princess Fatima and finds a small locket wrapped in a silk scarf. He remembers his initiation into the League when he named his dream to meet the beautiful princess. A light fragrance that is coming from the scarf sends H.H. into a reverie, and he contemplates the magical atmosphere he had enjoyed while on the journey and the simple yearning he had during his innocent youth. He begins to cry. He suddenly becomes very aware of the vastness of the archives and realizes that he cannot understand even a small fraction of what is there. He realizes he has been placed among this vastness to demonstrate the endlessness of the League and his own place within it.

Once again the officials begin to assemble in the rows of benches topped by the empty throne. The Speaker announces that the League is prepared to announce its judgment on H.H., since he has now realized that his desire to tell about the journey in which he no longer believed was blasphemous. He asks H.H. if he is prepared to submit to the judgment of the Court. H.H. answers that he is.

The Speaker asks if H.H. will accept the Court's judgment without the President seated in the Chair, or if he wants the President to pass the judgment himself. H.H. replies that he will submit to the judgment with or without the President present. Before the Speaker can reply, a soft voice comes from the back that the President is prepared to pass judgment. The President comes forward, dressed in golden robes. It is Leo. Like a Pope, H.H. thinks, Leo ascends to the throne at the top of the Court, each row of officials standing as he passes by.

H.H. is amazed that former servant now stands at the head of the League. He is happy to learn that the League is still strong and that it was not the League that had abandoned him, but the other way around — he had abandoned the League because of his weakness and foolishness. He realizes how ridiculous he was to imagine that he was perhaps the last remaining member of the League at one time, when in fact he was only a deserter. He remembers standing in the same place years before and being initiated into the League and is horrified to realize that he no longer has the League ring which was presented to him. In fact, he has only just now realizes that it is missing.

Leo begins to speak. He announces that H.H. has had a chance to correct some of his mistakes, and that many of his transgressions, such as wanting to become the historian of the League and doubting its continued existence, are the mistakes of a new League member and can be dismissed. This relieves H.H., for he thinks that these were the most serious of his sins. Leo continues to say, however, that H.H. has committed far more serious sins than these, one of which is that he does not recognize these more serious faults. Each one of these sins is worthy of serious punishment, Leo says.

H.H.'s heart races. Leo tells him he will be shown the ways in which he has sinned and how to avoid them in the future. He asks if H.H. remembers the walk that Leo led him on to get to the building where the Court was. He reminds him that when Leo stopped to pray at the churches on the way, H.H. did not go inside to fulfill one of his four League vows to perform devotions, but waited impatiently outside for Leo to finish. This is nearly unforgivable, Leo says, but there are extenuating circumstances in H.H.'s case. He will



not be judged strictly, Leo says, because he only needed a reminder to make him aware of his own transgressions.

Leo says he will tell H.H. some of the other transgressions so he will be aware of them. He reminds him of the time he pleaded with Leo to recognize him as a League brother even though he had made himself unrecognizable by his faithlessness. He also reminds him of how he sold his violin and became suicidal. Even if he had been too harsh and unsympathetic on that evening in the park, Leo adds, the judgment passed by the dog Necker was definitive because the dog was an impartial party and not a League member.

H.H. recalls how the Alsatian had growled and condemned him that night and understands that he has also passed judgment on himself. Leo continues, and asks H.H. if he has reached this self-judgment. He answers that he has. Leo asks if H.H.'s self-judgment is unfavorable, and he replies softly that it is.

Leo rises from his throne and addresses the assembly. He says they have all heard H.H.'s story and mentions that many of them have experienced something similar to it. He says the H.H. does not yet realize that his desertion and despair were a test. He endured the test for many years, but finally his suffering was too much and he reached out to the League again. The despair that H.H. felt in the meantime was necessary for him to become awakened and to move on to the second level of the League. Leo welcomes him back to the League and the Speaker presents him with his own ring, which the League has been keeping safe for him.

As soon as H.H. touches the ring, the full force of how he has neglected his League vows hits him. The ring has four stones spaced around it, each corresponding to the four parts of the League vow. Members are supposed to slowly rotate the ring on the finger once a day to remind them of these four parts. H.H. realizes that he had failed to observe the four precepts of the vow during his years of despair. He finds that he can no longer remember the wording of the four precepts. He understands again the absurdity of thinking for so many years that he was being loyal to his vow when he could not even remember the vow exactly.

Leo speaks again and tells H.H. he is acquitted. It is now his duty, Leo tells him, to take a seat among the other officials of the court after he has passed a test of faith. H.H. has the option of choosing the test. Leo presents the first option, which is taming a wild dog. H.H. replies in fright that he could not do it. Leo asks if he would be prepared to burn the League's archives if commanded; to illustrate, Leo takes two handfuls of papers from a cabinet and burns them over a coal fire. Again, H.H. is horrified and responds that he could not do that either. Leo warns him that he has presented him with the simplest tests first, and that they become more difficult. Leo asks if H.H. would be ready to look up his own file in the archive. Realizing that there is no escape, H.H. stands and says he will do it.

The Speaker leads H.H. to the catalog. H.H. looks through the H section and finds the sheet of paper that has the reference number for his file. Shaking, he takes the sheet



and holds it as one by one the officials leave their seats and come up to him, holding out their hands and looking him in the eye. Finally, the President Leo descends and takes his hand. Smiling, Leo departs, leaving H.H. alone in the archives.

H.H. is not able to go directly to his file. He looks at the vast archives and decides to learn more about the League before looking at his own file. He sees a paper sticking up out of a cabinet and takes it. On it is written "Morbio Inferiore" Excited, he goes to the archive specified on the paper. He finds several papers, including a description of the place and its role in League history. He also finds extensive notes on the group that he was in on his journey. The group was led to the gorge, the notes explain, and submitted to a test which they did not pass. Had the group continued to observe the four precepts of their League vow, they would have succeeded, but after the disappearance of Leo, they forgot their vow and disbanded.

H.H. is no longer surprised to learn this, but he is surprised to find that two others had attempted to write an account of the same journey. H.H. finds a copy of his own manuscript in the file as well as copies of the others. He is astonished to find how different the other accounts are from his own. One account mentions that H.H. was the first to suggest that Leo had taken the League document with him, which prompted the many disputes that broke up the band. The second account blames Leo and H.H. directly for the break up, saying that they had both disappeared with valuable and important things and speculating that they had been bribed by the League's enemies.

H.H. realizes that if these accounts could be so wrong, then his own account could not be trusted, either. There is no point in even trying, he decides, since any account would be useless. He begins to wonder what can actually be said to be true at all, and what he might learn about himself in the archives. Suddenly unable to wait any more, he rushes to the section of the archive that holds his own file. It is a niche in the wall, with a curtain in front of it.

The niche contains no documents, only a strange sculpted figure that H.H. first thinks looks like some kind of idol. As he looks at it more, its form becomes clearer. It appears to be two figures in one, situated back-to-back. He lights a candle attached to the wall on one side to take a better look. Gradually, the true form of the figure is revealed to him. One half of the figure represents H.H. The features are blurry and unreal and the expression on the face is of despair. Attached to the back of this part of the figure is one representing Leo. This portion of the figure is clear and strong. He lights another candle to see it better.

H.H. now realizes that the surface of the figure is transparent and that he can see inside it. There appears to be some kind of molten liquid moving very slowly within. After a while, he understands that the half of the figure representing himself is slowly melting and adding to the half that represents Leo. He realizes that eventually the one half would completely disappear into the other until only Leo remained. This, he finally understands, is his role in the League.



H.H. stands and looks at the figure and recalls the conversation he had once with Leo while they were on the journey about how the creations of poets seem more real than the poets themselves. The candles burn out and H.H. is overcome with weariness. He turns away to find a place to lie and sleep.

Part V Analysis

H.H. once again enters the dream-like world of the League in the final part. Awakening to find Leo in his apartment, H.H. follows him on a meandering walk to appear before the High Throne of the League. This walk mirrors the journey as H.H. describes it earlier in the book, with Leo taking his time and stopping at every holy site along the way to pay devotion. H.H. does not join him in these devotions, as he would have in an earlier time. The significance of this does not occur to H.H. at the time. He is only eager to get to the League, indicating that he has not yet completely given up his selfish ways.

The narrative takes on the logic of a dream when the two enter the building that houses the League archives and court. Leo leads H.H. through long empty corridors with many closed doors. The archive hall at the top of the building expands and contracts outside the laws of physics, and the items in the archives itself are symbolic and strange.

H.H.'s appearance before the court is the high point of the drama of the story, and establishes that the years of despair H.H. has experienced were all part of the same test that began with the disappearance of Leo. Only from this low point can H.H. see everything, including his own selfish motivations for what he has done. This realization is the first step in rejoining the League, but H.H. has not yet given up his selfish thoughts. The court indulges him, however, and turns him loose in the archives so he might return to his initial mission of writing a memorial of his journey and a history of the League. They release him from his vow of secrecy so that he might have none of the hindrances he felt he had before. This, too, is part of the test, which H.H. passes when he realizes the futility of his selfish goal. He is admitted to the second stage of membership. The fact that this test has taken over ten years suggests that membership in the League is a lifelong journey, as is the Journey to the East.

The dual role of Leo as both servant and master of the League demonstrates the recurring theme that trueborn leaders are actually servants. This is to be H.H.'s destiny, as it is to be the destiny of all League members to be eventually forgotten as individuals but to have their individual contributions embodied in the representative figure of Leo. As H.H. turns away from the figure that represents this, it is not clear whether he has fully accepted this destiny.



Characters

H.H.

The narrator of the story, and a member of the mysterious League. He is a musician and collector of songs, but at the time of his relating of the story he has given up music out of despair. H.H. embarks on the Journey to the East along with several others, but eventually deserts it. He then spends ten years in an increasing state of despair until he decides he must write an account of his part in the journey. His goal changes once he has reconnected with Leo, a former servant on the Journey, and he determines to try to rejoin the League. He is brought before a court of League officials by Leo, where he acts as his own accuser and judge. He is then shown the ultimate secret of the League.

H.H. of course shares the same initials with the author of the book, and is probably meant to be partly autobiographical. Like H.H., Hesse is known to have had suicidal impulses. Many of the characters that appear in the book are acquaintances of Hesse and some of them are characters from his own fiction, such as the poet Lauscher and the ferryman Vasudeva.

Leo

Leo is two different characters in the book, Leo the Servant and Leo the President. He is a gentle and friendly man whose simplicity belies deep wisdom. Leo has a mystical ability to communicate with animals, especially dogs, and is usually found with one or two dogs around. Although presumably a very powerful person in his role as President of the League, Leo apparently lives very simply and spends most of his time in the service of others. It is this devotion to service which qualifies him to lead the illustrious League.

The name "Leo" also suggests connections to the historical figures of Jesus and King David.

Lukas

A journalist and a school friend of H.H.'s. Lukas has been through the World War and has written a popular book about it. Lukas is not a member of the League, but has heard about its journey and is skeptical and even condescending toward H.H. about it. H.H. turns to Lukas for help in telling his story. Lukas helps him realize that Leo is the key to the tale.



Necker

The Alsatian dog that Leo introduces to H.H. as they walk through the park. H.H. learns later that the meeting of the Alsatian is part of his judgment.

The Painter Klingsor

Tristan Klingsor is the pseudonym of Léon Leclère, a French painter, poet, and composer who lived between 1874 and 1966. "Klingsor" is also the name of an evil magician in the opera "Parsifal" by Wagner. Since fictitious characters are as real as their creators in Hesse's book, he usually employs the phrase "the painter Klingsor" to indicate he is speaking about the painter.

Princess Fatima

The daughter of the prophet Muhammad. To meet the Princess and win her love is the personal goal of H.H., which he pronounced in order to join the League.

Paul Klee

A Swiss/German painter active in the early 20th century.

Hugo Wolf

An Austrian composer and one of H.H.'s companions on the Journey.

Count Keyserling

A wealthy German philosopher who traveled the world and wrote about his journeys. H.H. suggests that Keyserling is not a member of the League, although many people outside the League consider him to be, and the accounts of his journeys have nothing to do with the Journey to the East.

Ossendowski

A Polish writer and explorer who wrote about his travels. Like Keyserling, H.H. says, Ossendowski was considered by some to be a member of the League, but was not. H.H. indicates that he doubts the two ever even made the journeys they describe in their writing.



Albert the Great

A German Catholic philosopher of the Middle Ages. Mentioned as one of the leaders of the Journey.

Roland

The semi-mythical knight who fought and died under Charlemagne.

St. Christopher

The patron saint of travelers. An image of St. Christopher miraculously points the way for a group of League travelers in Part I.

The Barmekides

A powerful Persian family of the 9th century.

Agramant

The King of Africa who appears in the tales of Charlemagne.

Hans Resom

Probably Hans Moser, a popular Austrian film actor.

Anselm

11th century religious thinker and former Archbishop of Canterbury.



Objects/Places

Swabia

A cultural and linguistic region that encompasses parts of Switzerland and southern Germany. Many of the events described along the journey take place in this region.

The Blue Pot

A spring-fed pool in the Swabian region of Germany that figures in local folklore.

Bremgarten

A castle in the region of Bern, Switzerland. The League holds a festival at Bremgarten which H.H. remembers as a high point of the journey.

Morbio Inferiore

A gorge in the Italian-speaking section of Switzerland.

Famagusta

A city on the coast of Cyprus, mentioned as one of the destinations along the Journey.

Zurich

The largest city in Switzerland, and the home of H.H. and Leo at the end of the story. The League's headquarters also seem to be situated in Zurich.

Seilergraben

The street in Zurich where H.H. finds Leo's house.

Kundalini

Described as a magical snake in the book, kundalini is a Hindu concept of a type of life force characterized by a coiled snake.



The League Archives

The repository of all documents and manuscripts relating to the League and its members throughout the years. Also the location of the High Court.

The League Court of Justice

The court made up of League members and presided over by the President, Leo, which passes judgment on H.H. for his unfaithfulness to the League. Also called the High Court.



Themes

Transformation through despair

In Part V of the book, Leo, as President of the League, addresses the officials of the High Court in reference to H.H and says, "Children live on one side of despair, the awakened on the other side" (p. 106). He is speaking about the depths to which H.H. had sunk during his years away from the League, during which time he had even contemplated suicide. This descent into despair has been part of the test that H.H. has been put through so that he would be ready to awaken to his actual role within the League, which is to serve it and be forgotten.

H.H. describes himself and the other new members of the League as being somewhat childlike when they are first initiated. They are required to take for themselves a personal goal, which for H.H. is a childhood dream to see the Princess Fatima. Along his journey through time and space, H.H. visits the characters from the books he read as a youth, and the events that H.H. describes from the journey read like they come from one of his adventure books. One purpose of the journey itself is to reach the "home and youth of the soul" (p. 27), H.H. states.

By the time H.H. begins to write about the journey, he has left it behind along with his childlike outlook, which has been replaced by adult pride. He is proud to have been a member of the League on its great journey, and feels it is his destiny to record his experiences for posterity. He has difficulty in completing this task, however, which he imagines is because he is not allowed to divulge the secrets of the League. In the latter portion of the book, which takes place many years after the first part was written, H.H. has realized that his difficulty stems from his separation from the League and the deep despair this has driven him to.

His despair has also made him begin to realize that his earlier motivation to write about his own experiences on the journey came from selfishness and pride. He still retains some of this pride, as indicated when he pleads with Leo to recognize him as a League brother. He still craves the status and attention he received as a member of the League. Even as he is brought before the High Court, he is eager to be judged, perhaps only because it means that the League will at least acknowledge him.

Only after he is set loose in the League archives and fully realizes the extent that his own ego has played in his desire to serve in the League does he hit the absolute bottom of his despair. He is immediately brought before the High Court again and informed that he is now ready to pass on to the next level of the League and join those who have "awakened" to a life of selfless service to the League and its goals.



Leading by serving

Early in the book, the narrator H.H. asks the servant, Leo, why it is that the characters created by poets seem more alive than the poets themselves. Leo responds that it is part of the "law of service". By this he means that, like how mothers serve their children with nourishment and support, they are eventually forgotten. This theme is developed throughout the book, and becomes one of the main ideas presented at the end of the story when the servant Leo turns out to also be the highest-ranking member of the League.

This theme is further developed in Part IV when Leo compares H.H. to King David, who before he became king played harp for King Saul to soothe him. This is what made David truly beautiful and happy, Leo says, not his great deeds as king. This reflects the discussion the two had at the end of Part I, about how rulers become unhappy but servants live long, happy lives.

The reference to the legend of David is interesting in another way. In legend, King David wanted to establish a temple in Jerusalem, but received word through a prophet that the temple would be built later and that he should not build it. The temple was eventually built by Solomon in Jerusalem, establishing it as a holy city. This parallels the story of H.H., who was at first a servant, a musician, who later sought to create a monument to the League by writing about it. This is not to be his role, however. Like David, he is only contributing to laying the foundation for what is to come.

The parallel to the story of David is further suggested by the name Leo, which means "lion." The lion was the symbol of kingdom of Judah, over which David reigned, and is still the symbol of the city of Jerusalem where the first Hebrew Temple was established. The messiah predicted in the Jewish tradition, and believed by Christians to be Jesus, is sometimes called "The Lion of Judah".

There are further parallels between the characters of H.H. and Leo with the life of Christ. Christians believe that Jesus sacrificed his life in an ultimate service to humanity. Early in the book, H.H. proclaims his willingness to die for his devotion to the League. This is a matter of pride, however, and although he is sincere, it is out of egoism that he makes the statement. Later on, he learns that he is indeed expected to sacrifice himself for the benefit of the League. He will ultimately disappear and be forgotten for his service, he learns, not be celebrated as a martyr or hero to the cause. It is his acceptance of this ultimate service that allows him to proceed to true enlightenment.

Memory and writing

Hesse explores the process of writing about one's own personal experiences, especially when those experiences have been extraordinary or traumatic. There are several difficulties faced by writers in this task, which Hesse describes through the viewpoint of his characters.



The first two parts of "The Journey to the East" are an attempt by the narrator, H.H., to document his own experiences as a member of the League while on a momentous journey. He acknowledges that this is difficult, partly because of the secrecy involved. Additionally, he is faced with a problem that his memory seems to be faulty, or at least inconsistent. It is not that the images are not vivid in his mind, he says, but that he cannot imagine that they can actually be real.

He finds sympathy from his friend, Lukas, who has written about his traumatic experiences in World War I. Lukas describes the act of writing as necessary to purge himself of these memories by trying to make sense of them. He advises H.H. to do the same by finding Leo, the memory of whom has caused H.H. to become stuck in his writing.

Making sense of memories is itself fraught with difficulty, Hesse suggests. Memories are wispy and ever changing. Trying to describe them requires a writer to make them solid so they can have meaning. This process changes the memory and the meaning, defeating its own purpose. Furthermore, as is revealed to H.H. in the last part of the book when he reads two other accounts of the disappearance of Leo, memories are highly subjective and differ from person to person even about the same experience. The realization that his own memories are insubstantial and perhaps not to be trusted is part of H.H.'s awakening at the end of the book to his own role within the League.

Style

Point of View

"The Journey to the East" is written in the first person. The first part of the book is presented as being written by the narrator himself. The second part of the book is more of a traditional narrative novel, told as if the narrator were addressing the reader directly. The novel deals largely with the introspection of the narrator into his own character and motivations, making the first person point of view a particularly effective way to portray this self-searching and the changes that take place in the character over the course of the story. The "truth" slowly unfolds to the narrator, which is made more dramatic by being revealed as he himself is realizing it.

Also, because the plot involves a secret society whose members have taken a vow not to speak about its goals, the first person point of view lends authenticity to the narrative by making it appear to come from an "insider." The League is not the only society to which H.H. belongs, however. He is also a writer, or aspires to be one. The book deals partly with the difficulty of writing about one's personal experiences and the fluid nature of memory. These are subjective difficulties that each writer must deal with, and writing about them in the first person underlines their personal nature.

Finally, it seems likely that Hesse is using the first person to invite the reader to closely associate the author and the narrator by blurring the line between the two. Hesse has given the narrator the initials H.H., which are his own.

Setting

Many of the places that H.H. mentions as destinations along the journey are in Switzerland and Germany, which is where Hesse himself lived, as did many of the actual people he mentions as characters in the book. While he uses real place names, these places have taken on mystical qualities as the members of the League pass through them. League members can apparently travel great distances on foot, since they have sworn not to use any mechanical means such as trains or ships. Nevertheless, they are somehow able to visit Famagusta, a city on the island of Cypress. This ability to move between places across great distances gives the setting of the journey a mysterious parallel geography where space is warped. The sense of destiny that surrounds the League in its wanderings makes every place they stop seem like it must have a special significance known only to League members. This adds to the mystical nature of the setting.

The League members are also able to travel through time, H.H. tells the reader, and he speaks of stopping for the night in a different era just as one would speak of stopping in a different village. The League exists in a half-real place that overlaps the real world, but where time and space have become the same thing. This world is not visible to those



who are not members of the League, although the League members themselves are visible and widely known about. Curiously, the League members do seem to become invisible in a way to those who have deserted the League, for they do not recognize one another.

The later portion of the book takes place in Zurich, Switzerland, where H.H. has a small apartment and where the League is apparently headquartered in a large building. Leo tells H.H. that the town hall was founded by a League member, suggesting that Zurich has a special significance to the League. H.H. has left the League and apparently lost the ability to move quickly but leisurely through time and space. Indeed, when Leo leads him on a zigzag course through the streets of Zurich toward the League headquarters, H.H. becomes impatient with the amount of time it is taking.

Language and Meaning

"The Journey to the East" was originally written in German and has been translated into English. As with any translation, some of the author's original meaning that would be apparent to native speakers of the original language is lost. As an example, the original title of the book in German is "Die Morgenlandfahrt" which means, literally, "the journey to the morning land". It is a journey toward the rising sun, in other words, which is of course the East. The East also refers to the lands of Asia, the source of the philosophy of enlightenment that underlies the entire story. This double meaning of a journey toward both light and enlightenment is lost in the English translation.

Hesse does not spend much time describing the actual settings of the story, giving only a few details. Instead, he describes the journey in broad terms of the people involved and their reasons for undertaking it. This creates a detached quality to the writing, which accentuates how isolated the League is from the rest of the world, and, later, how isolated H.H. is from the League. The occasional episodes of dialogue that do appear usually have the characters speaking in long passages that are more like monologues. H.H. does not seem to interact with any other characters except out of desperation, and these awkward conversations emphasize this.

Hesse writes in long paragraphs that sometimes condense many events into a short space and sometimes spend many sentences expanding upon a small point. The first part of the book reads like a formal memoir, with the second written like a novel. These shifts in style require close attention from the reader in order to follow the flow of the entire book.

Structure

The book is structured in five parts as a narrative told in the first person. The first two parts stand alone, and represent the narrator's attempt to tell the story of his journey while also outlining some of the reasons that this is difficult to do. The third part of the story shifts to the present time many years after the journey, when the narrator has already made several attempts to overcome these difficulties and has determined the

nature of his trouble, namely the disappearance of Leo. In Part IV, the character of Leo is further developed in preparation for his central role in Part V, while the narrator H.H. makes a significant realization of the transgressions for which he must atone in the final section of the book. Part V, like the first two parts, takes place in the dreamlike world inhabited by the League, where the action does not always proceed linearly.

Hesse uses dialogue sparingly in the first parts of the book, often having the narrator paraphrase conversations. As the story moves forward, more frequent dialogue is introduced as the narrator begins to describe events in the recent past. Events begin to move outside of the narrator's control, including, it seems, the narrative itself. The early parts of the book are written in a more formal style of a memoir meant to be published for an audience of the author's peers. The later portions are written more like a novel, with more frequent dialogue and a chain of events that lead to a climax and ultimate resolution. This is a short work, well suited to Hesse's compact, direct style.

Quotes

"It was my destiny to join in a great experience. Having had the good fortune to belong to the League, I was permitted to be a participant in a unique journey. What a wonder it had at the time! How radiant and comet-like it seemed, and how quickly it has been forgotten and allowed to fall into disrepute." p. 3

"The heights to which our deeds rose, the spiritual plane of experience to which they belong might be made proportionately more comprehensible to the reader if I were permitted to disclose to him the essence of the League's secret. But a great deal, perhaps everything, will remain incredible and incomprehensible." p. 7

"My tale becomes even more difficult because we not only wandered through Space, but also through Time. We moved towards the East, but we also traveled into the Middle Ages and the Golden Age; we roamed through Italy or Switzerland, but at times we also spent the night in the 10th century and dwelt with the patriarchs or the fairies." p. 26

"Each participant in this unforgettable journey had his own ideas as to what made our faithful Leo suddenly decide to leave us in the middle of the dangerous gorge of Morbio Inferiore. It was only very much later that I began in some measure to suspect and review the circumstances and deeper significance of this occurrence." p. 37

"But through what expedient is it possible to tell the story of the Journey to the East? I do not know. Already this first endeavor, this attempt begun with the best intentions, leads me into the boundless and incomprehensible." p. 46

"Whatever happens, I have decided to exercise my will. Even if I have to re-commence my difficult story ten times, a hundred times, and always arrive at the same cul-de-sac, just the same I will begin again a hundred times." p. 52

"While I was still speaking, Lukas had seized a thick book from his writing-desk and was turning over the leaves. With amazing speed he found and put his finger on a place on an open page in the book. It was a directory, and where his finger lay stood the name Leo." p. 59

"Then everything else that I have considered good and fine, and for which I have made sacrifices, has only been my egoistic desires. Indeed, every day I see my egoism more clearly in my plan to write some kind of history of the Journey to the East." p. 61

"But no, he did not recognize me at all, not even by my voice, and although that had been my first wish, it nevertheless gave me a feeling of great disappointment. He did not recognize me." pp. 68-69

"You ask if I know you. Well, what person really knows another or even himself? As for me, I am not one who understands people at all. I am not interested in them. Now, I



understand dogs quite well, and also birds and cats - but I don't really know you, sir." p. 73

"As if in a fever, I covered page after page with hastily written words. The grievances, indictments and self-accusations tumbled from me like water from a breaking jug, without reflection, without faith, without hope of reply, only with the desire to unburden myself." p. 79

"Despair is the result of each earnest attempt to go through life with virtue, justice and understanding and to fulfill their requirements. Children live on one side of despair, the awakened on the other side." p. 106

"I perceived that my image was in the process of adding to and flowing into Leo's, nourishing and strengthening it. It seemed that, in time, all the substance from one image would flow into the other and only one would remain: Leo. He must grow, I must disappear." p. 118



Topics for Discussion

What does Hesse mean when he says "artists sometime appeared to be only half-alive, while their creations seemed so irrefutably alive" (pp. 33-34)? How does this relate to Hesse's own creation of the narrator H.H.?

What role does Christianity play in "The Journey to the East"?

The character of Leo appears both as a servant and as the President of the League. While acting as President, he refers to "the servant Leo" in the third person (pp. 101-106) Are the servant Leo and the President Leo the same person? What is Hesse's reason for referring to Leo in two different ways?

Discuss Hesse's depiction of the artistic process in the book. What do you think Hesse's view is of the role of the artist or author in society?

Does Hesse intend the League to represent any actual group or movement? What about "The Journey"?

The story contains several mystical aspects such as dreamlike sequences and characters from fiction coming to life. Discuss these mystical aspects and how they relate to the structure of the book.

"The Journey to the East" ends abruptly after H.H. is shown a figurative depiction of his destiny. Do you think H.H. accepts his destiny?