

The Loser Study Guide

The Loser by Thomas Bernhard

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Plot Summary

The Loser by Thomas Bernhard is a series of ruminations and recollections about the relationships between three main characters: the narrator, Glenn Gould and Wertheimer. After Glenn Gould's death and Wertheimer's suicide, the narrator travels to Wertheimer's hunting-lodge in Traich where he ponders how meeting Glenn Gould has affected Wertheimer and himself during the last three decades. He comes to the conclusion that even though Glenn Gould's musical genius inspires them, it ruins their own talents since they can never reach the same level of expertise as their friend. This ultimately leads to Wertheimer's suicide and the narrator's depression. The Loser represents the thought processes of a maddened former piano virtuoso, tormented by his failure which results from his inability to surpass his friend's talent. It is also a study into the psyche of a trio of friends with similar aspirations which only one of them manages to achieve.

The narrator enters an inn in Wankham, thinking about Wertheimer's suicide and Glenn Gould's death as well as the relationships between the three men. The narrator, Wertheimer and Glenn Gould meet while taking Horowitz's piano course at the Mozarteum in Salzburg during the summer of 1953. Deciding that Salzburg is not congenial to an artistic lifestyle, the trio rent a house in Leopoldskron together. All three men come from wealthy families who disapprove of their sons studying music with aspirations of becoming piano virtuosos. During the summer, Glenn Gould's genius discourages Wertheimer and the narrator since they can never reach his level of piano playing. Once the course is completed, Glenn Gould returns to his home in Canada, and the narrator and Wertheimer fear that they will never see their friend again.

After some time passes, the narrator and Wertheimer visit Glenn Gould and spend several months in New York City. Glenn Gould is famous by this time as a talented piano virtuoso, though he lives in seclusion. Meanwhile, the narrator and Wertheimer have given up playing the piano; the narrator studies philosophy while Wertheimer takes up the human sciences. The narrator has quit to the point of giving his Steinway to a schoolteacher's untalented nine year old daughter who promptly ruins the expensive instrument. Wertheimer is forced to move to Traich, in the country, for his health; here, he lives with his sister, dictating every aspect of her life. Glenn Gould dies from a stroke, and his death greatly upsets Wertheimer. Wertheimer is further disconcerted when his sister marries a Swiss man, converts to Catholicism and abandons him. Wertheimer hangs himself near his sister's house in Chur. The narrator attends the private funeral which consists of only himself, Wertheimer's sister and her husband. Afterwards, he refuses to have lunch with Wertheimer's sister and her husband.

The narrator feels very guilty about Wertheimer's death because he ignored his friend's last five letters inviting him to Traich for a visit. He travels toward Traich with the intent of visiting Wertheimer's lodge and searching for notes that his friend might have left; he hopes these notes may help him with a book he is writing, "About Glenn Gould." At the inn in Wankham, the narrator talks to the innkeeper and learns that Wertheimer had several guests simultaneously shortly before his suicide. When the narrator goes to



Wertheimer's lodge, he encounters the groundskeeper, Franz Kohlröser who tells him about Wertheimer's last several weeks of life. Shortly before going to Chur to commit suicide, Wertheimer burns all of his notes and orders an out-of-tune piano. He invites many musical guests whom he studied with at the Mozarteum, playing horrendously for them and bribing them to stay. Eventually, Wertheimer insists his guests leave immediately and locks himself in his room for several days before journeying to Chur. The narrator sits alone in Wertheimer's room, listening to a record of Glenn Gould playing "Goldberg Variations."

Section 1: p. 3-16

Section 1: p. 3-16 Summary

The Loser by Thomas Bernhard is a series of ruminations and recollections about the relationships between three main characters: the narrator, Glenn Gould and Wertheimer. After Glenn Gould's death and Wertheimer's suicide, the narrator travels to Wertheimer's hunting-lodge in Traich where he ponders how meeting Glenn Gould has affected Wertheimer and himself during the last three decades. He comes to the conclusion that even though Glenn Gould's musical genius inspires them, it ruins their own talents since they can never reach the same level of expertise as their friend. This ultimately leads to Wertheimer's suicide and the narrator's depression. The Loser represents the thought processes of a maddened former piano virtuoso, tormented by his failure which results from his inability to surpass his friend's talent. It is also a study into the psyche of a trio of friends with similar aspirations which only one of them manages to achieve.

The narrator comments that suicide calculated in advance is not a spontaneous act of desperation. As he enters the inn, the narrator thinks about his friends. Glenn Gould, the most important piano virtuoso of the century, only lived to the age of fifty-one when he died of natural causes. Twenty-eight years previously, the narrator, Wertheimer and Glenn Gould live in Leopoldskron and study under Horowitz at the Mozarteum. Wertheimer and the narrator learn a lot from Horowitz, but at the end of the course, it is obvious that Glenn Gould is the best piano player while the narrator and Wertheimer are equals. The narrator and Wertheimer believe that Glenn Gould is lost when he returns to Canada, possessed by his art. Two years later, Glenn Gould returns to play "Goldberg Variations" at the Salzburg Festival, and the newspaper praises him greatly. The narrator, Glenn Gould and Wertheimer meet at the Ganshof Inn in Maxglan after the concert. The narrator discloses to Glenn Gould his fear of never seeing him again because of his piano radicalism, a term which Glenn Gould frequently uses afterward.

Glenn Gould dies from an impasse that he plays himself into for forty years, though he never gives up playing the piano. The narrator and Wertheimer relinquish attempts to be piano virtuosos. Wertheimer continues playing the piano though he goes into the human sciences. The narrator gives his prized Steinway to the untalented, nine-year-old daughter of a schoolteacher who promptly ruins the instrument; this is part of the narrator's deterioration process, and he never plays again. The narrator cannot be a piano virtuoso because he cannot play as well as Glenn Gould so he devotes himself to philosophical matters, telling himself that he is no artist. The narrator laments: he probably would not have quit the piano if he had never met Glenn Gould. He meets Glenn Gould on Monk's Mountain, also known as Suicide Mountain, and the pair begin a spiritual friendship. The narrator, Wertheimer and Glenn Gould rent a house in Leopoldskron after spending only two weeks in Salzburg; Salzburg is antagonistic to everything valuable in human beings, such as art, and has a tendency to destroy these



attributes. Although Glenn Gould likes Salzburg at first, it takes him only three days to change his mind.

Horowitz alone does not teach the narrator to play the piano; he also learns through his daily contact with Glenn Gould. The narrator laments about the tendency of music instructors to ruin and suffocate the talents of the youthful. Only one in 20,000 music teachers are ideal, but Glenn Gould would have been an ideal musical instructor. Wertheimer also may have become an important piano virtuoso if he had never met Glenn Gould. Wertheimer misuses the human sciences as the narrator misuses philosophy. The narrator reflects that the honestly could never have become a piano virtuoso because he did not really want to become a piano virtuoso. People throw out avenues, abandoning them as part of the deterioration process. Wertheimer never gets over giving up on the idea of becoming a piano virtuoso. Taking Horowitz's course proves deadly for the narrator and Wertheimer since they meet Glenn Gould through the course. The narrator ponders if he and Wertheimer would have become famous piano virtuosos if they had never taken Horowitz's course, but he quickly ignores the suggestion, remembering that he hates virtuosity and all of the features that attend it, such as performing in public and applause.

Section 1: p. 3-16 Analysis

The quote that begins the novel about suicide calculated in advance not being a spontaneous act of desperation foreshadows the inclusion of suicide as a recurring theme throughout the novel. The narrator entering the inn as he thinks about his friends shows that the thoughts about his friends are not actions occurring at the time while the actions in the inn are current actions. Glenn Gould, one of the major characters of the novels, is an actual piano virtuoso, though the author did not have the relationship with him that the novel claims. The narrator stresses that Glenn Gould died of natural causes in this section and repeatedly throughout the novel. The first encounter between the trio is described as a result of their taking Horowitz's course at the Mozarteum. The fact that it was obvious that Glenn Gould was the best piano player is the beginning of the narrator and Wertheimer's failure as piano virtuosos. The narrator's fear that he has lost Glenn Gould when his friend returns to Canada foreshadows the Canadian's death. The term "piano radicalism" is an ironic joke that foreshadows Glenn Gould's death as well.

The fact that Glenn Gould never gives up playing the piano demonstrates his devotion and foreshadows his success, while the fact that Wertheimer goes into the human sciences as the narrator goes into philosophy foreshadows their failure as piano virtuosos. The narrator shows that he is bitter by giving his Steinway to an untalented nine year old daughter of a schoolteacher who ruins the instrument. His acknowledgment that he cannot play as well as Glenn Gould, along with his claim that he is no artist, demonstrates his failure and self-degradation. The narrator blames Glenn Gould for his and Wertheimer's failure through the first of many repeated claims that they may not have failed if they had never met Glenn Gould. The description of Salzburg shows the antagonistic view of the city that the piano virtuosos hold. The fact that daily contact with Glenn Gould helps teach the narrator and Wertheimer to play the

piano sets Glenn Gould up as a mentor to his two friends. Once again, the narrator blames Glenn Gould for his and Wertheimer's failure. The fact that meeting Glenn Gould proves deadly for Wertheimer and the narrator foreshadows Wertheimer's suicide. The narrator contradicts when he rationalizes his failure by claiming that he never wanted to be a piano virtuoso, even as he laments his failure.

Section 2: p. 16-29

Section 2: p. 16-29 Summary

The narrator detests the public. Glenn Gould only plays for the public for two years. The narrator and Wertheimer visit Glenn Gould in America, thinking that their friend will die soon; Wertheimer predicts that Glenn Gould will have a stroke. The narrator and Wertheimer spend two and a half weeks with Glenn Gould who plays all day long. Glenn Gould nicknames Wertheimer "the loser" and the narrator "the philosopher." Although Glenn Gould generally barricades himself against the public, he visits the narrator and Wertheimer in New York City every three weeks during their stay. The narrator considers what a bad school the Mozarteum is. All three men are from wealthy families. The narrator comes from an inartistic family, and he studies music to annoy his parents. Wertheimer's and Glenn Gould's parents are also disappointed in their sons' choice to study piano. Only Glenn Gould disproves his parents' disapprobation. Glenn Gould's existence ends at the only true moment, something that is impossible with suicide. Wertheimer is tormented when he and the narrator receive news of Glenn Gould's death.

Glenn Gould speaks German better than the German students. He abhors people, is very self-disciplined and plays from the top down. The narrator wonders if he makes the right decision in visiting Glenn Gould in America. Wertheimer's sister opposes the idea, but the narrator wants to see Glenn Gould again before he friend dies. In the inn in Wankham, the narrator looks for the innkeeper in vain; this is the inn where he always stays when visiting Wertheimer since Wertheimer does not like having guests. Although all three are big-city people, Wertheimer and Glenn Gould both move to the country. Wertheimer does so for his health. Wertheimer lives with his sister for twenty years until she marries. He laments his sister's abandonment, claiming that he sacrificed his piano career for his sister. Wertheimer's apartment is stuffed with his sister's art which both he and the narrator hate. Wertheimer's dreams of growing old with his sister are ruined. Wertheimer walks in the city but refuses to do so in the country. Neither Wertheimer nor Glenn Gould can tolerate people being around them much. The narrator lives in Madrid because he despises the country so much. Wertheimer is a victim not only of living in the country but of his conviction that his sister lives to serve him.

Section 2: p. 16-29 Analysis

The fact that Glenn Gould only plays for the public for two years foreshadows his affinity for solitude. The narrator and Wertheimer's belief that Glenn Gould will die soon foreshadows Glenn Gould's death. The fact that Glenn Gould plays all day demonstrates his obsession with piano virtuosity. Glenn Gould nicknames Wertheimer and the narrator; this shows their friendship and also foreshadows Wertheimer's life story which the narrator conveys in this novel. New York City is contrasted with Salzburg as being a positive atmosphere for artists. The narrator takes up playing the piano to

annoy his parents; this shows his rebellious attitude. The fact that only Glenn Gould disproves his parents' disapprobation foreshadows his success and the others' failure.

The narrator comments that Glenn Gould's existence ends at the only true moment, something that is impossible with suicide; this demonstrates his disdain for suicide and foreshadows Wertheimer's suicide. The narrator praises Glenn Gould for his overall excellence in everything he attempts. Wertheimer is shown to be solitary through his dislike of guests, something that is reiterated throughout the novel. Wertheimer moves to the country because of his health, showing his illness, and laments his sister's abandonment, showing his depression. The fact that Wertheimer refuses to walk in the country demonstrates his dislike of the country and affinity for the city. Wertheimer and Glenn Gould are compared to one another in their dislike of being surrounded by people and decision to live in the country; the narrator is contrasted with his friends by his decision to live in Madrid because he despises the country so much.

Section 3: p. 29-39

Section 3: p. 29-39 Summary

Wertheimer grows fatally accustomed to living with his sister. When she leaves, he draws the curtains for fourteen days; then he leaves half crazed and starved and collapses on the Graben where a relative finds him and takes him home. Glenn Gould is the strongest of the three while Wertheimer is the weakest. Despite claims that Glenn Gould is crazy, it is untrue; Wertheimer is crazy. Wertheimer chains his sister to him for twenty years and then laments her marriage and conversion to Catholicism. The narrator refers to Wertheimer as "the offended one." Wertheimer withdraws to Traich because he hates Traich; he does not play the piano for fifteen years. Wertheimer claims that Glenn Gould ruins the narrator and himself, but he cannot deal with Glenn Gould's death. Glenn Gould points out that the world is full of cripples. The narrator is alone in the world; Wertheimer and Glenn Gould, the only people who give meaning to his life, are dead. The narrator could call for the innkeeper, but he does not. He thinks about the fact that Wertheimer had a sexual relationship with the innkeeper. Glenn Gould only plays "Goldberg Variations" and "Art of the Fugue."

The narrator, Wertheimer and Glenn Gould do not correspond except for a few cards over the years. Wertheimer invites Glenn Gould to Traich in vain. The narrator chides himself for his absurd desire to see Wertheimer's hunting-lodge. Wertheimer's last card to the narrator reveals his insanity, but the narrator does not respond because he is too busy writing "About Glenn Gould." Wertheimer wants to fly to Glenn Gould's funeral, but the narrator refuses to go and Wertheimer refuses to go alone. Wertheimer commits suicide at the age of fifty-one, the same age that Glenn Gould is when he dies. The narrator envies his dead friends, considering the horror of living past fifty. He wonders if Wertheimer's heirs are at the lodge and whether they will let him in the lodge or if they will just consider him a busy-body. The narrator wants to gather Wertheimer's notes and records. The narrator notices how dirty Austrian inns are compared to Swiss inns. Yet, Wertheimer eats at this inn and sleeps with the innkeeper here. Wertheimer cages himself in the country and claims that Glenn Gould builds his hidden desperation studio after hearing about Wertheimer's lodge. Wertheimer laments his sister leaving him, condemning Switzerland and Catholicism. Glenn Gould's death hit Wertheimer hard. Wertheimer is forced to commit suicide because he does not have a future left. The narrator laughs as he imagines Wertheimer having sex with the innkeeper. The idea then makes him nauseous.

Section 3: p. 29-39 Analysis

Wertheimer shows his depression over his sister's abandonment by drawing his curtains for two weeks. He shows madness and ill health by wondering about the city and collapsing on the Graben. Glenn Gould and Wertheimer are compared with the decision that Gould is the strongest and not crazy while Wertheimer is the weakest and insane.

Wertheimer shows his possession of sister by chaining her to him for twenty years. "The Offended One" is another nickname for Wertheimer. Wertheimer punishes himself by withdrawing to Traich though he dislikes it; it is almost as though he is trying to commit suicide inadvertently which foreshadows his suicide. The fact that Wertheimer blames Glenn Gould for his and the narrator's failure is another repetitious example of blaming Glenn Gould's success for the others' failure. Wertheimer's inability to deal with Glenn Gould's death foreshadows his own suicide.

The narrator's depression is revealed by his admission that he is alone because the only two people who gave his life meaning are now dead. The narrator compares Wertheimer with the innkeeper when he discusses their sexual relationship. "Goldberg Variations" is Glenn Gould's masterpiece, and the narrator and Wertheimer frequently listen to their records of the composition, seemingly as a means of tormenting themselves. The description of the trio exchanging few cards over the years demonstrates their lack of interaction which contrasts sharply with the narrator's strong feelings over his friends' deaths. The narrator admits to abandoning Wertheimer through his lack of response to Wertheimer's last correspondence. The narrator reveals his obsession with writing "About Glenn Gould;" this has become his contribution to the world of piano virtuosos. Wertheimer's solitary nature is contradicted by his refusal to attend Glenn Gould's funeral alone. It is ironic that Wertheimer commits suicide at the age of fifty-one, the same age that Glenn Gould dies at. The narrator's depression is seen through his envy of his dead friends. The narrator reveals that his reason to visit Wertheimer's lodge is to search for his friend's notebooks in order to assist his writing "About Glenn Gould." The narrator finally reveals Wertheimer's suicide as a fact when he states that Wertheimer had to commit suicide because he had no future left.

Section 4: p. 40-53

Section 4: p. 40-53 Summary

Although the inn seems dirtier, it is the only inn in the area. Glenn Gould is convinced that people are not unhappy in general. He refuses Wertheimer's invitations to visit him in Traich. At times, Glenn Gould is embarrassed by his own ignorance. The narrator possesses the skill of perceiving the same thing as something new. He knows the moment that he meets Glenn Gould that Glenn Gould is extraordinary, but it pains him when the newspapers confirm his opinion. Mankind exists because they have no other choice. Wertheimer predicts that the narrator will commit suicide. He never forgives the narrator for moving to Madrid. The narrator considers killing himself. He condemns the dampness of Austrian restaurants and socialism. The narrator condemns himself as base for his desire to see Wertheimer's lodge, but he owes it to Wertheimer. Curiosity is a prominent character trait in the narrator. He thinks that maybe Wertheimer's heirs have already moved everything. Wertheimer hates his family as much as he hates travel, but the narrator likes to travel.

Wertheimer is ashamed that he degrades his sister as a page turner. After Glenn Gould's death, Wertheimer considers suicide; he ponders it even more after his sister escapes from him. At first, Wertheimer thinks that the Swiss married his sister for her wealth, but the Swiss is richer than Wertheimer and his sister combined. The idea of living repulses Wertheimer from his childhood. Wertheimer is arrogant to think of studying music when he is incapable of living. People have no one. Wertheimer claims that he pampers his sister; he thinks that his parents plan for his sister and him to live together for life, but his sister proves that she is stronger by breaking this plan. Wertheimer and his sister travel to Passau, and this dismal, disorganized trip dissuades them from further travel. The narrator is unable to see through the kitchen window in the Wankham inn because of the filth. Glenn Gould dies at the perfect moment, but Wertheimer does not because it is impossible to do so when one commits suicide. Wertheimer hangs himself one hundred steps from his sister's door, and his body goes unidentified for several days. Lifelong guilt plagues Wertheimer's sister as a result of his suicide. The narrator attends Wertheimer's funeral. Although he never says so to Wertheimer, he always knows that he will one day attend his friend's funeral. Glenn Gould's death is the beginning of the end for Wertheimer, but his sister leaving is the crucial factor that determines the event.

Section 4: p. 40-53 Analysis

Glenn Gould's embarrassment over his ignorance shows his insecurities. The narrator's praise of Glenn Gould is tempered by the newspapers' praise of his friend. The narrator demonstrates his depression through his statement that man exists because he has no other choice. It is ironic that Wertheimer predicts that the narrator will commit suicide when Wertheimer is the one who does so. The narrator's consideration of suicide

emphasizes his solitude and depression. The narrator appears mad as he contradicts himself by claiming himself base for his desire to see Wertheimer's lodge in one moment and insisting that he owes it to his friend in the next. Wertheimer and the narrator are compared in their opinions about travel.

Wertheimer's depression and consideration of suicide after Glenn Gould's death foreshadows Wertheimer's suicide. The fact that Wertheimer is repulsed with the concept of living since his childhood reinforces Glenn Gould's nickname for Wertheimer, "the loser." The narrator shows his despair by claiming that he has no one. Wertheimer's claim that he pampered his sister is contradicted by the way he treated her. The narrator compares Glenn Gould and Wertheimer's death, condemning suicide. The narrator provides the details of Wertheimer's suicide and the reasons for Wertheimer committing suicide which are repeated throughout the novel from this point forward. Also, it is ironic that the narrator always knew he would go to Wertheimer's funeral but never said so while Wertheimer claimed that he would go to the narrator's funeral which is not true.

Section 5: p. 53-66

Section 5: p. 53-66 Summary

Wertheimer tries to save himself by reaching out to the simple people in Traich, but simple people do not understand complicated people. Wertheimer wants to publish a book, "The Loser," but he never finishes and throws the manuscript out. The narrator ignores Wertheimer's last five letters, abandoning his friend. Glenn Gould misuses everyone to become "Glenn Gould;" he has a virtuoso head. Wertheimer hurts his sister by committing suicide. Wertheimer's funeral occurs at five o'clock in the morning. Only the narrator, Wertheimer's sister and her husband attend the funeral. Wertheimer's sister sends a telegram to the narrator with the date and time of the funeral. The narrator thinks that Wertheimer died naturally. On the train to Chur, he observes the countryside. He remembers Chur's gloominess from his frequent childhood visits with his parents. The narrator listens to Glenn Gould's "Goldberg Variations" in his apartment in Vienna before leaving for Chur. The apartment is a wreck because the narrator has been gone for three years; he escapes from Vienna and Austria because they are suffocating him. Wertheimer suffocates also, but his escape to Traich makes his situation worse. Wertheimer has a tendency toward suicide. He sees life as nothing as unhappiness, as impossible attempts to create a product of the intellect that inevitably result in failure.

Section 5: p. 53-66 Analysis

Simple people are compared to complicated people; they do not understand one another. The narrator blames this misunderstanding for Wertheimer's suicide, in part. The fact that Wertheimer wants to publish a book called "The Loser" is ironic and demonstrates that he has embraced Glenn Gould's nickname for him. The fact that Wertheimer throws out the manuscript for "The Loser" foreshadows that he has also trashed his notes that the narrator wants so badly. The narrator feels guilty for ignoring Wertheimer's last five letters since he also abandoned his friend. Wertheimer seeks revenge by hurting his sister with his suicide. The narrator incorrectly thinks that Wertheimer died naturally when he first learns of his friend's death. Chur is gloomy and compares to Salzburg, also contrasting with New York City. The narrator repetitiously listens to Glenn Gould's "Golberg Variations." The narrator's need to escape from Vienna and Austria to avoid suffocating is compared to the fact that Wertheimer suffocated more in Traich. Wertheimer's vision of life as nothing but unhappiness shows his depression and tendency toward suicide. Wertheimer sees life as impossible attempts to create a product of the intellect which inevitably fail which shows that he knows that he is a failure.

Section 6: p. 67-75

Section 6: p. 67-75 Summary

Only stupid people are amazed while the great thinkers of history are locked on the bookshelves of libraries. All that is spoken is nonsense. People are born and die in misunderstanding. Wertheimer and his sister have no interest in their inheritance. They are shocked and see it as a burden since the Wertheimer family lives a modest life. The narrator thinks about how odd it is that he stays in the Wankham inn instead of at his own home in Desselbrunn, only five miles away. He promises himself not to return to Desselbrunn for at least ten years since it is unbearable after he disposes of his Steinway. He plans to play his uncle's Steinway in Sintra but never touches the keys. In Sintra, the narrator decides to write about Glenn Gould and destroys eight attempts before writing his current "About Glenn Gould," which he is already thinking of destroying in order to start again. The narrator and Wertheimer destroy each other through their mutual visits and mutual criticisms. Glenn Gould destroys both Wertheimer and the narrator. In Salzburg, Glenn Gould demands a Steinway in his dorm room at the Mozarteum. Although Glenn Gould decides that Salzburg ruins piano players, he wants to study with Horowitz. The narrator, Wertheimer and Glenn Gould rent a beautiful house in Leopoldskron, owned by a recently deceased Nazi sculptor. The sculptures, which are still in the house, greatly improve the acoustics of their piano playing.

Section 6: p. 67-75 Analysis

The narrator shows his disdain for mankind in his claim that all spoken is nonsense and everyone is born and dies in misunderstanding. The narrator shows his depression and discontent over quitting the piano by his refusal to visit Desselbrunn. The narrator shows his affinity for piano virtuosity and refusal to completely let go by his decision to write "About Glenn Gould." His many attempts at the biography show his dissatisfaction and low self-esteem which likely results from his failure at becoming a piano virtuoso. The narrator and Wertheimer ruin each other by their mutual visits and mutual criticisms which they continue, demonstrating their self destructive natures. Once again, the narrator blames Glenn Gould for his and Wertheimer's failures. The fact that Glenn Gould demanded a Steinway in his dorm room at the Mozarteum shows that he had faith in his abilities to play the piano and demanded excellence from the very beginning. The narrator, Glenn Gould and Wertheimer decide to study with Horowitz, demonstrating the teacher's reputation. The sculptures in the house that the trio rent in Leopoldskron are both practical and good for aesthetics since they improve the acoustics of their playing.

Section 7: p. 78-89

Section 7: p. 78-89 Summary

The sculptures in the house in Leopoldskron are so heavy that all three roommates are unable to move them. People assume that Glenn Gould is weak, but that is not true. Glenn Gould cuts down an ash in front of his window because he believes that it obstructs his playing and he must remove all obstacles. Glenn Gould's fans know nothing about Glenn Gould; the Glenn Gould that the narrator knows is much better. Glenn Gould laughs a lot and refuses to take people seriously if they are unable to laugh. Glenn Gould hates nature. The idea piano player wants to be the piano but inevitably fails. Wertheimer possibly hates Glenn Gould and the narrator. The narrator hates Glenn Gould at the same time that he loves him, due to jealousy at his friend's magnificence. Glenn Gould uses the narrator and Wertheimer to become Glenn Gould. Wertheimer and the narrator may have quit Horowitz's course without Glenn Gould who makes Horowitz an ingenious teacher. Glenn Gould ruins Wertheimer more than the narrator because the narrator does not really want to become a piano virtuoso. Wertheimer gives up in part after hearing Glenn Gould play only a few bars. Wertheimer has to take Horowitz's course and be destroyed by Glenn Gould. Wertheimer copies the narrator in everything he does, even his failure. Only his suicide is Wertheimer's own decision. The narrator compares Wertheimer and Glenn Gould. Wertheimer does not talk to anyone, even his sister. He considers it a misfortune to be born into a wealthy family.

Section 7: p. 78-89 Analysis

The fact that Glenn Gould is not weak though he is assumed to be so shows that many things about Glenn Gould are fictionalized. Glenn Gould demonstrates his determination to succeed by his insistence upon removing all obstacles. The narrator admits that the trio's friendships were slightly twisted by the confession that they all possibly hated one another. He also admits that he is jealous of Glenn Gould. Once again, the narrator blames Glenn Gould for his failure. He also contradicts his desire to play piano with the claim that he did not really want to become a piano virtuoso. Wertheimer's failure begins after hearing Glenn Gould play only a few notes. Wertheimer is not an individual; he copies the narrator in everything even his failure. This suggests that the narrator is actually responsible for Wertheimer's failure and suicide. The narrator compares Wertheimer and Glenn Gould.

Section 8: p. 90-104

Section 8: p. 90-104 Summary

The only escape from oneself is through death. The narrator and Wertheimer first talk in the hallways at the Mozarteum. This leads to a lifelong friendship. The narrator, Wertheimer and Glenn Gould answer the call of Horowitz's sterling reputation. Glenn Gould destroys Wertheimer who envies Glenn Gould for turning himself into an art machine. Wertheimer wants to be Glenn Gould. He is unable to see himself as a unique individual. He emulates anyone he thinks is better than him, sending him into early unhappiness. Wertheimer displaces this happiness by taking it out on his sister. One time, the narrator and Wertheimer play a concert together, but Wertheimer ruins it. He is unable to play with others because he wants to shine. Wertheimer tries to assert himself during his whole life; this is the reason he must kill himself eventually. Wertheimer plays better than all of the other students at the Mozarteum, except for Glenn Gould. This is not good enough for Wertheimer.

The narrator attends Wertheimer's funeral, thinking his friend died in an accident and never considering suicide. Although he considers it, the narrator decides against selling his apartments in Vienna and Desselbrunn. Wertheimer's funeral is held at five o'clock in the morning because it is not supposed to be noticed. Wertheimer's sister intends to transport her brother's body to the Wertheimer family plot in Dobling eventually. The funeral is quick, lasting about twenty minutes. There are no flowers; it is a crude and cold funeral. Wertheimer's sister and her husband, Herr Duttweiler, invite the narrator to have lunch with them, but he refuses and leaves Vienna immediately after the funeral. The narrator thinks about Wertheimer's unhappy adolescence, his parents' death and his possession of his sister. Wertheimer may have been successful if he managed his parents' empire; his insistence upon becoming an artist leads to his unhappiness. Wertheimer truly is "the loser."

Section 8: p. 90-104 Analysis

The narrator's depression is revealed in his statement that man escapes himself only in death. The reason that the narrator, Wertheimer and Glenn Gould take Horowitz's class is the man's reputation. Repeatedly, the narrator blames Glenn Gould for ruining Wertheimer and himself. Wertheimer also is jealous of Glenn Gould, wanting to be his Canadian friend. Wertheimer emulates anyone he thinks is better than him, showing again his lack of individuality. Wertheimer demonstrates his pride in his refusal to play a concert with anyone because of his desire to shine, as well as through the fact that he is not content with being second best to Glenn Gould. Wertheimer's failure to assert himself during his life leads to his suicide, a final attempt to assert himself. The fact that Wertheimer's funeral is held at five o'clock in the morning and few attend show that it is a secret. It is questionable whether Wertheimer's sister truly intends to have her brother's body transported to the family plot in Dobling. The narrator is rude in his

rejection of Wertheimer's sister's lunch invitation. The narrator leaves Vienna immediately after Wertheimer's funeral; this shows that he comes to Vienna only for his friend's funeral though he is too late. Wertheimer could have been successful in a different career which shows that he made the wrong decision in life, demonstrating his embodiment of his nickname "the loser."

Section 9: p. 104-119

Section 9: p. 104-119 Summary

Wertheimer is smitten with failure, happy in his unhappiness. He commits suicide to avoid losing his unhappiness. Wertheimer refuses to perform concerts because he is inferior to Glenn Gould. Wertheimer is an extraordinary pianist, second only to Glenn Gould. Lesser pianists are not ruined by Glenn Gould. Wertheimer ruins his talent by isolating himself, unlike Glenn Gould who improves his talent through isolation. Wertheimer is a failure from the beginning because of his pride. After he quits playing the piano, Wertheimer attempts to play for the narrator who advises him never to play again.

Wertheimer broods over the criticism. The narrator keeps his piano virtuosity a secret which helps him. This secret is dead to Wertheimer. Since they are from wealthy families, the narrator, Wertheimer and Glenn Gould do not have to worry about earning money. This shames Wertheimer. The vulgar innkeeper greets the narrator and acknowledges Wertheimer's suicide, shocking the narrator when she refers to Wertheimer as affable. She leads the narrator to his room, telling him that in the few weeks before his death, Wertheimer entertains a lot of peculiar company from the city. The narrator confirms that the innkeeper has heard of Glenn Gould, emphasizing that Glenn Gould died naturally. The innkeeper informs the narrator that no one has been to Wertheimer's hunting-lodge in Traich since Wertheimer's suicide.

Section 9: p. 104-119 Analysis

Wertheimer commits suicide to avoid losing his unhappiness; as "the loser," he revels in his misery. He shows pride in his refusal to give concerts because he is inferior to Glenn Gould. Ironically, lesser pianists are not ruined by Glenn Gould; this too can be attributed to Wertheimer's pride. Wertheimer and Glenn Gould are compared and contrasted in the effect that isolation has on their individual talents. The narrator offends Wertheimer by telling him not to play the piano anymore after a horrible performance. This foreshadows Wertheimer's performances for his guests in the weeks prior to his suicide. The narrator and Wertheimer both keep their former piano virtuosity a secret; the affects that this has on each is compared and contrasted. The narrator's shock over the innkeeper referring to Wertheimer as affable shows that he does not view his friend in this manner. The innkeeper is the first to mention Wertheimer's strange company from the city in the weeks prior to his death. The narrator reiterates that Glenn Gould died of natural causes, showing how important this concept is to him.

Section 10: p. 119-132

Section 10: p. 119-132 Summary

The innkeeper is very busy since her husband of three years died in a paper mill accident. The innkeeper asks about Wertheimer's funeral. The narrator condemns the government and socialists before telling her about the funeral. When the innkeeper mentions that Wertheimer promised to leave her a valuable necklace if he died first, the narrator promises that she will receive it. The innkeeper condemns Wertheimer's guests for taking advantage of him. She says that he wrote his sister, asking her to leave her husband and return to live with him. He drove his sister and himself insane. The narrator asks for hot tea. As he waits, he examines an infection on his temple, considering that he may have a disease. His behavior to Wertheimer's sister disgusts the narrator, but he has nothing to talk to her about. Wertheimer does not have Jewish rites at his funeral like his parents because he considers himself agnostic. The narrator thinks about the Wertheimer family burial plot where Wertheimer will be transported. Wertheimer loves cemeteries. The narrator considers going to Desselbrunn but decides against it. He remembers giving his Steinway to the schoolteacher's daughter. The narrator would die if he stayed in Desselbrunn; he should have renounced his inheritance instead of abandoning it as he has done. One needs tremendous discipline to refrain from committing suicide.

Section 10: p. 119-132 Analysis

The innkeeper's questions about Wertheimer's funeral show her interest and her status as a gossip. Her desire for a valuable necklace from Wertheimer shows her greed. She seems to care about Wertheimer when she condemns his friends for taking advantage of him. The innkeeper also reveals Wertheimer's continued harassment of his sister after her marriage. The narrator's concern with the infection on his temple shows that he is a hypochondriac. The mention that Wertheimer did not have Jewish rites at his funeral is the first indication that Wertheimer was a Jew. He renounced his religion, claiming to be agnostic, which is ironic since he condemned his sister for her conversion to Catholicism. It is ironic that Wertheimer loved his family cemetery but is not buried there. The narrator compares Wertheimer's life and death in Traich to what the narrator's would be if he resided in Desselbrunn. The narrator admits his depression by his lamentation that it takes tremendous discipline not to commit suicide.

Section 11: p. 132-145

Section 11: p. 132-145 Summary

The narrator never seriously considers selling Desselbrunn. He takes his tea to the restaurant in the lower portion of the inn. He is biased against all people. The innkeeper takes over the inn from her uncle who is implicated in a murder case and serves twenty years in jail. Despite the jurors' disbelief of his guilt, they give him the maximum sentence, causing his wife to die of grief. The narrator does not believe that the innkeeper's uncle is guilty of murder. He learns from the innkeeper that her uncle has been released. She travels to see her uncle with her son, hoping that he will give her money, but he refuses to even see them. The innkeeper complains about how exhausting the trip to Hirschbach is. She hates her uncle now. The innkeeper praises Wertheimer as a refined gentleman though such men never understand financial problems. Although Wertheimer spends millions for his friends' entertainment, he refuses to buy the innkeeper a refrigerator. The narrator watches as the innkeeper talks to the beer delivery drivers. He overhears her mention that he is a friend of Wertheimer, the fool who committed suicide. The narrator wishes he could sit and talk with the innkeeper and the drivers instead of going to Traich, but he does not fit in, as Wertheimer always says.

Section 11: p. 132-145 Analysis

The narrator contradicts his earlier ruminations by claiming that he never seriously considers selling Desselbrunn. The narrator provides background information about the innkeeper as he digresses onto a tangent about her uncle's murder conviction and her relationship with said uncle. The innkeeper demonstrates her greed even as she praises Wertheimer as a refined gentleman. The narrator overhears the innkeeper calling Wertheimer "the fool who committed suicide;" this contradicts with her earlier compliments and shows that she is mercenary and simply trying to please the narrator since he is Wertheimer's friend. The narrator is unable to stay and talk to the innkeeper and the beer truck drivers because he does not fit in. This isolation shows his similarities to Glenn Gould and Wertheimer.

Section 12: p. 145-153

Section 12: p. 145-153 Summary

The narrator recognizes the misery of living the beer delivery drivers' lives and escapes quickly to Traich. He realizes that he can never return to Desselbrunn. Like Desselbrunn, Traich is a dead end which caused Wertheimer to reach a dead end and go mad. Wertheimer is the loser from his birth, but only Glenn Gould could coin the term. Wertheimer kills himself as a result of Glenn Gould's death and his sister's abandonment. The narrator wishes he had refused the Duttweilers' lunch invitation more politely. People judge others falsely no matter how they judge them. The narrator condemns himself for the sentimental idea of going to Traich. He wonders if Wertheimer's sister is there now. Her husband's only interest is the money that Wertheimer left behind. Wertheimer's sister will probably be interested in affairs at Traich now. The narrator begins to imagine that Wertheimer did not leave a single note behind. According to the narrator, the reason for Wertheimer's suicide is Glenn Gould's death; Wertheimer hangs himself near his sister's house only in order to deflect the blame from Glenn Gould.

Section 12: p. 145-153 Analysis

The narrator appreciates his life when he considers the misery of the truck drivers' lives and escapes to Traich. The narrator compares and contrasts himself with Wertheimer when he realizes that he cannot return to Desselbrunn because it will mean his death as Traich meant Wertheimer's death. The narrator lists the reasons for Wertheimer's suicide as Glenn Gould's death and his sister's abandonment. The narrator reveals his opinion about mankind by claiming that people judge one another falsely no matter how they judge. Herr Duttweiler shows his greed and mercenary motives in his interest in the money that Wertheimer leaves behind. The narrator's thought that Wertheimer did not leave a single note behind foreshadows the truth of this consideration through the fire in which Wertheimer burns all of his notes. The narrator repeats what he considers the reasons for Wertheimer's suicide.

Section 13: p. 153-160

Section 13: p. 153-160 Summary

People condemn others with words; Glenn Gould calls Wertheimer "the loser." Wertheimer condemns suicide, thinking that his sister will kill herself. She escapes by marriage instead. Glenn Gould destroys Wertheimer. Wertheimer can blame Horowitz for his destruction. Horowitz's reputation leads Wertheimer to Salzburg where he meets Glenn Gould which ultimately leads to his suicide. The narrator plans to return to his apartment and write about Glenn Gould. This will enable him to put his thoughts about Wertheimer in order. He is sure that the walk to Traich will prove futile. Nothing has changed at Wertheimer's lodge, and it is unlocked. Franz Kohlroser, the woodsman, greets the narrator. He has just heard of Wertheimer's suicide and is horrified. Wertheimer's sister is coming to Traich in a few days. Franz Kohlroser invites the narrator inside as he worries that things will change at Traich with Wertheimer's sister in charge; she was never comfortable at Traich because Wertheimer tormented her so.

Section 13: p. 153-160 Analysis

The narrator blames Glenn Gould for Wertheimer's suicide again, this time for nicknaming Wertheimer "the loser." It is ironic that Wertheimer condemns suicide and expects his sister to commit suicide. Wertheimer blames Glenn Gould and Horowitz for his failure; his status as "the loser" can be attributed to his refusal to accept responsibility for his own life. The narrator's contribution to art is mentioned again in his reference to his book, "About Glenn Gould." The narrator shows his despair and hopelessness in his belief that his walk to Traich will prove futile. Franz Kohlroser's reaction to Wertheimer's suicide shows that he likes his boss. Franz condemns the way that Wertheimer treated his sister by his fear of what she will do because of her hatred for Traich.

Section 14: p. 160-170

Section 14: p. 160-170 Summary

Wertheimer treats his sister badly; he dictates what clothes she can wear, what company she can keep and where she can go. He forces her to play music to him in the middle of the night in his unheated room, even when she is sick. He even criticizes her playing under such circumstances. Wertheimer speaks of solitude, but he is unable to actually be alone. He controls where and how long his sister takes walks. As children, the Wertheimers are fun-loving, but they become quiet after a Nazi administration lodges in Traich. Wertheimer refuses to allow his sister to go to church after she converts to Catholicism, but she sneaks to evening mass secretly. Franz wonders if Wertheimer's sister will sell the hunting-lodge at Traich. The narrator reassures him that it is unlikely, though he secretly believes that she will.

Franz mentions that Wertheimer entertained many artistic visitors before his suicide, causing the narrator to feel very guilty when he realizes that he was included but ignored his friend's request. These visitors are people that Wertheimer attended the music conservatory with. Wertheimer is exuberant with his guests, letting them run all over him and ruin many things at his lodge. After his guests leave, Wertheimer lays in bed for two days while Franz cleans the mess they leave. Before his guests' arrival, Wertheimer orders a piano which he plays whenever his guests are in the house. This drives them crazy but he bribes them to stay because he wants them to stay for more than two weeks. Finally, Wertheimer has a grand feast prepared and demands that his guests be gone by the next day. They order cabs and the guests leave the house in disarray. Franz cleans while Wertheimer is in bed since Wertheimer would have a stroke if he saw the condition of his home.

The narrator sees the piano, a worthless Ehrbar, and asks Franz about Wertheimer's notes. Franz informs the narrator that Wertheimer had him light a fire and burn all of his notes before ordering his out-of-tune, worthless piano from Salzburg which he largely tipped the movers for delivering that day. Franz does not want to accept that his master has gone insane. Franz offers to tell the narrator about the weeks in Traich before Wertheimer's suicide, but the narrator asks Franz to leave him alone for a while. The narrator sits alone in Wertheimer's room, playing Glenn Gould's "Goldberg Variations" which is still on the record player.

Section 14: p. 160-170 Analysis

Franz Kohlröser's description of Wertheimer's interactions with his sister shows that Wertheimer treated his sister poorly and justifies Kohlröser's fear of what she will do with the lodge in Traich. Wertheimer's nature is contradicted by his praise for solitude while being unable to actually be alone. The Wertheimers change as children because of the Nazi administration lodging in Traich; this is a reference to their Jewish heritage.

Wertheimer's refusal to allow his sister to practice her Catholicism seems hypocritical considering his decision to be agnostic. The narrator comforts Kohlroser's fears even though he believes he is lying in doing so. Wertheimer's exuberance with his guests, as well as bribing them to stay for more than two weeks, contradicts his desire for solitude. The narrator feels guilty for abandoning Wertheimer when he realizes that Wertheimer intended for the narrator to be one of his artistic guests in the weeks before his suicide.

Wertheimer's depression is revealed when he stays in bed for two days after his guests leave. He returns to his solitude by banishing his guests from his home with short notice. Franz Kohlroser describes how Wertheimer burned all of his notes before accepting guests into his home; this fulfills the earlier foreshadowing that occurred when the narrator began to suspect that he would not find any of Wertheimer's notes. Wertheimer obviously intended to play the piano badly because he ordered an out-of-tune piano rather than a good piano. Wertheimer goes crazy before his suicide; this is apparent through his actions through Kohlroser does not want to believe it because of his loyalty to Wertheimer. The narrator asks Franz Kohlroser to leave him alone, sinking into solitude and mimicking Wertheimer who obviously listened to Glenn Gould's "Golberg Variations" since it is still on his record player.

Characters

Narrator

The narrator enters an inn in Wankham, thinking about the relationships between himself, Glenn Gould and Wertheimer. They meet twenty-eight years earlier in Salzburg where they are all taking Horowitz's course at the Mozarteum. They all desire to be piano virtuosos. They rent a house in Leopoldskron that is owned by a recently deceased Nazi sculptor. The narrator fears that he will never see Glenn Gould again after the course because of his friend's musical obsession. Eventually, the narrator quits playing the piano and gives his Steinway to a schoolteacher's untalented, nine-year-old daughter who ruins the instrument; this is part of the narrator's deterioration process. He studies philosophy instead which he misuses badly. He is unable to be a piano virtuoso because he meets Glenn Gould so he convinces himself that he is not an artist. The narrator has a spiritual friendship with Glenn Gould. The narrator dislikes virtuosity, performing in public and applause.

The narrator and Wertheimer visit Glenn Gould in America, touring the famous sites of New York City. Glenn Gould nicknames the narrator "the philosopher." The narrator wonders if he made the right decision in visiting Glenn Gould in America. The narrator is a big city person; he hates the country and lives in Madrid. He ignores Wertheimer's last five letters because he is busy writing "About Glenn Gould." He refuses Wertheimer's request to attend Glenn Gould's funeral. After Wertheimer's suicide, he decides to go to Wertheimer's hunting-lodge in Traich and retrieve his friend's notes, hoping to find something about Glenn Gould. The idea of Wertheimer having sex with the innkeeper disgusts the narrator. The narrator has a great skill of perceiving the same thing as something new and different. He considers suicide because the only two people who give his life meaning, Glenn Gould and Wertheimer, are dead.

The narrator goes to Wertheimer's funeral where he is rude to Wertheimer's sister and her husband. The narrator abandons his friend. He blames Glenn Gould's death and Wertheimer's sister's abandonment for Wertheimer's suicide. The narrator decides to be a piano virtuoso to annoy his wealthy parents. He keeps his former hopes of becoming a piano virtuoso a secret and advises Wertheimer to quit playing the piano. The narrator talks to the innkeeper at the inn in Wankham about Wertheimer and his funeral. He wants to talk to the beer delivery drivers but does not fit in. The narrator goes to Wertheimer's lodge where Franz invites him inside and tells him about Wertheimer's last weeks of musical company, piano playing and burning his notes. The narrator sits alone in Wertheimer's room, listening to Glenn Gould's "Goldberg Variations."

Wertheimer

Wertheimer is a piano virtuoso who is friends with the narrator and Glenn Gould. They meet twenty-eight years earlier in Salzburg where they are all taking Horowitz's course



at the Mozarteum. They all desire to be piano virtuosos. They rent a house in Leopoldskron that is owned by a recently deceased Nazi sculptor. He commits suicide at the age of fifty-one because of Glenn Gould's death and his sister's marriage. Wertheimer goes into the human sciences, which he misuses, but he never quits playing the piano. Wertheimer and the narrator visit Glenn Gould in America, touring the famous sites of New York City. Glenn Gould nicknames Wertheimer "the loser." Later, the narrator nicknames him "the offended one." Wertheimer does not like guests, dwells in isolation in the country though he is a big city person at heart.

Wertheimer lives with his sister for twenty years and dictates her life. He laments when she marries a Swiss man and abandons him, claiming he sacrificed his career for her. Wertheimer's rich family disapproves of his career as a piano virtuoso. Wertheimer may have been happy if he had gone into the family business instead of tormenting himself in attempts to be an artist. He predicts that the narrator and his sister will commit suicide which is ironic since he is the one who commits suicide. Wertheimer sees life as unhappiness through impossible attempts to create a product of the intellect which always results in failure. Wertheimer throws out his attempts at writing "The Loser." Wertheimer hangs himself one hundred steps from his sister's door, and his body goes unidentified for several days. Wertheimer's funeral occurs at five o'clock in the morning. Only the narrator, Wertheimer's sister and her husband attend the funeral. The narrator and Wertheimer destroy each other through their mutual visits and mutual criticisms. Glenn Gould destroys both Wertheimer and the narrator. Wertheimer does not see himself as an unique individual; he copies the narrator in everything he does, even failure. Only his suicide is Wertheimer's own choice.

Wertheimer entertains many artistic visitors before his suicide, causing the narrator to feel very guilty when he realizes that he was included but ignored his friend's request. These visitors are people that Wertheimer attended the music conservatory with. Wertheimer is exuberant with his guests, letting them run all over him and ruin many things at his lodge. After his guests leave, Wertheimer lays in bed for two days while Franz cleans the mess they leave. Before his guests' arrival, Wertheimer orders a piano which he plays whenever his guests are in the house, driving them crazy but bribing them to stay because he wants them to stay for more than two weeks. Finally, Wertheimer has a grand feast prepared and demands that his guests be gone by the next day. They order cabs and the guests leave the house in disarray. Before his guests arrive, Wertheimer has Franz light a fire and burn all of his notes before ordering his out-of-tune, worthless piano from Salzburg which he largely tipped the movers for delivering that day.

Glenn Gould

Glenn Gould is friends with the narrator and Wertheimer. They meet twenty-eight years earlier in Salzburg where they are all taking Horowitz's course at the Mozarteum. They all desire to be piano virtuosos. They rent a house in Leopoldskron that is owned by a recently deceased Nazi sculptor. Glenn Gould is from Canada and is better than his two friends, a fact that ruins their careers as piano virtuosos. He dies naturally at the age of



fifty-one from a stroke, which the narrator claims resulted from playing himself into an impasse. He plays nonstop in his isolated cabin in Canada. Glenn Gould nicknames the narrator "the philosopher" and Wertheimer "the loser." He shows his friends the sites of New York City when they visit him in America. He is the only one of the trio of friends to disprove his parents' disapprobation of his musical career since he becomes the greatest piano virtuoso of the twentieth century.

Glenn Gould only plays for the public for two years. He dies at the only true moment, a feat that could not be accomplished had he committed suicide. He speaks German better than the German students at the Mozarteum. Glenn Gould is extremely self-disciplined and plays from the top down. He abhors people and lives in the country for isolation, though he is a big city person at heart. Glenn Gould is the strongest of the three and not crazy, despite rumors to the contrary. He sees the world as full of cripples. Glenn Gould refuses Wertheimer's invitations to visit in Traich. At times, he is embarrassed by his own ignorance. He misuses everyone to become Glenn Gould because he has a piano virtuoso's head. His most famous piece is the "Goldberg Variations." Glenn Gould demands a Steinway in his dorm room in Salzburg. He removes all obstacles to enhance his playing and demands excellence. He improves his talent by isolating himself from people. Glenn Gould is the only student at the Mozarteum who plays better than Wertheimer, and his death is the reason for Wertheimer's suicide.

Wertheimer's Guests

Wertheimer's guests are other students that attend the music conservatory with Wertheimer. Wertheimer invites them to stay with him for over two weeks before his suicide. They traipse around town together. Wertheimer drives his guests crazy with his poor piano playing but bribes them to stay. Finally, Wertheimer has a grand feast prepared and tells his guests to leave by the next morning. The guests destroy a lot of Wertheimer's stuff at the lodge in Traich.

Wertheimer's Sister

Wertheimer's sister lives with her brother for twenty years before marrying a rich Swiss man. Her conversion to Catholicism upsets Wertheimer who controls his sister and treats her poorly, blaming her for his failure as a piano virtuoso. Part of the reason that Wertheimer commits suicide is his sister's abandonment.

Schoolteacher's Daughter

The schoolteacher's daughter is nine years old and has no talent. The narrator gives her his Steinway as part of his deterioration process. The schoolteacher's daughter promptly ruins the expensive instrument.



Innkeeper

The innkeeper owns the inn in Wankham where the narrator stays. She has a sexual relationship with Wertheimer and compliments him to the narrator but calls him a fool to the beer delivery drivers for committing suicide.

Wertheimer's Heirs

Wertheimer hates his heirs who inherit his hunting-lodge in Traich. The narrator assumes that they will think him a busy-body for wanting to see the lodge if they are already settled in there.

Horowitz

Horowitz is the teacher that the narrator, Glenn Gould and Wertheimer study under one summer at the Mozarteum in Salzburg.

Franz Kohlroser

Franz Kohlroser is Wertheimer's woodsman and groundskeeper. He informs the narrator about Wertheimer's last weeks before his suicide, along with his artistic guests and burning his notes.

Objects/Places

Mozarteum

The Mozarteum is a musical conservatory in Salzburg where the narrator, Wertheimer and Glenn Gould meet while they are all taking a course taught by Horowitz.

Salzburg

Salzburg is the city where the Mozarteum is located. The narrator, Wertheimer and Glenn Gould rent a house in Leopoldskron instead of staying in Salzburg because Glenn Gould points out that Salzburg ruins everything good there is in human beings, particularly musical talent.

Leopoldskron

Leopoldskron is a town near Salzburg where the narrator, Wertheimer and Glenn Gould rent a house owned by a recently deceased Nazi sculptor.

Piano Virtuosos

Piano virtuosos are ingenious piano players. The narrator, Wertheimer and Glenn Gould all aspire to be piano virtuosos, though only Glenn Gould succeeds in this desire.

Madrid

Madrid is the city where the narrator lives at the time of the book's action.

Steinway

The Steinway is a very good piano that the narrator owns. When he decides to quit playing the piano, he gives his Steinway to a schoolteacher's untalented daughter who subsequently ruins the instrument.

Goldberg Variations

The Goldberg Variations is the composition that Glenn Gould plays continually. He excels greatly at it. Both the narrator and Wertheimer own records of Glenn Gould playing this piece.



Traich

Triach is the country town where Wertheimer owns a hunting lodge. He retires there for his health. After Wertheimer's suicide, the narrator visits Traich to search for Wertheimer's notes, hoping to find something of consequence to include in his book, "About Glenn Gould."

Sculptures

The sculptures are left in the house that the narrator, Wertheimer and Glenn Gould rent in Leopoldskron. These sculptures improve the acoustics for the students' piano playing.

New York City

The narrator and Wertheimer spend some time in New York City when they visit Glenn Gould. Glenn Gould shows them the most famous sites, causing his European friends to claim that New York is the greatest city in the world.

Ehrbar

During the insanity of Wertheimer's last weeks, he orders an out-of-tune Ehrbar piano from Salzburg, paying an exorbitant tip to the deliverers to have it delivered immediately. Wertheimer drives his guests crazy by playing the Ehrbar continually.

Desselbrunn

The narrator owns an estate in Desselbrunn that he inherited from his parents. He avoids the estate for ten years because he decides it would be his death to stay in the country town. Although the narrator debates selling his estate in Desselbrunn, he knows that he would never seriously part with it.

Inn in Wankham

Most of the actual action of the novel occurs in the inn in Wankham. The narrator considers his relationships with Wertheimer and Glenn Gould as he waits for the innkeeper to show him to his room. The inn is dirty, and the narrator is appalled that Wertheimer had a sexual relationship with the innkeeper.

Wertheimer's Suicide

Wertheimer's suicide results from Glenn Gould's death and his sister's marriage, which he considers her abandoning him. Wertheimer hangs himself less than one hundred steps from his sister's house in Chur.

Horowitz's Course

Horowitz teaches a course at the Mozarteum in Salzburg; this is where the narrator, Wertheimer and Glenn Gould meet and become friends.

Chur

Wertheimer's sister marries a Swiss man and moves to Chur in Switzerland; this leads to Wertheimer's suicide which takes place only a few steps away from his sister's home.

The Loser

Glenn Gould nicknames Wertheimer "the loser." The narrator realizes that this name has been accurate for Wertheimer since his birth.

Themes

Piano Virtuoso-ism

The theme that ties the three main characters in the novel together is piano playing and the desire to become famous piano virtuosos. Glenn Gould is the most important piano virtuoso of the century. The narrator, Wertheimer and Glenn Gould study under Horowitz at the Mozarteum. Wertheimer and the narrator learn a lot from Horowitz, but at the end of the course, it is obvious that Glenn Gould is the best piano player while the narrator and Wertheimer are equals. Glenn Gould possessed by his art. Glenn Gould plays "Goldberg Variations" at the Salzburg Festival, and the newspapers praise him greatly. The narrator discloses to Glenn Gould his fear of never seeing him again because of his piano radicalism, a term which Glenn Gould frequently uses afterward. Glenn Gould dies from an impasse that he plays himself into for forty years, though he never gives up playing the piano. The narrator and Wertheimer relinquish attempts to be piano virtuosos. Wertheimer continues playing the piano though he goes into the human sciences. The narrator gives his prized Steinway to the untalented, nine-year-old daughter of a schoolteacher who promptly ruins the instrument; this is part of the narrator's deterioration process, and he never plays again. The narrator cannot be a piano virtuoso because he cannot play as well as Glenn Gould so he devotes himself to philosophical matters, telling himself that he is no artist. The narrator laments: he probably would not have quit the piano if he had never met Glenn Gould. Salzburg is antagonistic to everything valuable in human beings, such as art, and has a tendency to destroy these attributes.

Horowitz alone does not teach the narrator to play the piano; he also learns through his daily contact with Glenn Gould. The narrator laments about the tendency of music instructors to ruin and suffocate the talents of the youthful. Only one in twenty thousand music teachers are ideal, but Glenn Gould would have been an ideal musical instructor. Wertheimer also may have become an important piano virtuoso if he had never met Glenn Gould. Wertheimer misuses the human sciences as the narrator misuses philosophy. The narrator reflects that he honestly could never have become a piano virtuoso because he did not really want to become a piano virtuoso. People throw out avenues, abandoning them, as part of the deterioration process. Wertheimer never gets over giving up on the idea of becoming a piano virtuoso. Taking Horowitz's course proves deadly for the narrator and Wertheimer since they meet Glenn Gould through the course. The narrator ponders if he and Wertheimer would have become famous piano virtuosos if they had never taken Horowitz's course, but he quickly ignores the suggestion, remembering that he hates virtuosity and all of the features that attend it, such as performing in public and applause.



Hopelessness

Hopelessness is a key theme in this novel, especially as relating to Wertheimer and, less explicitly, the narrator. The narrator comments that suicide calculated in advance is not a spontaneous act of desperation. Glenn Gould dies from an impasse that he plays himself into for forty years, though he never gives up playing the piano. The narrator and Wertheimer relinquish attempts to be piano virtuosos. The narrator gives his prized Steinway to the untalented, nine-year-old daughter of a schoolteacher who promptly ruins the instrument; this is part of the narrator's deterioration process, and he never plays again. The narrator cannot be a piano virtuoso because he cannot play as well as Glenn Gould so he devotes himself to philosophical matters, telling himself that he is no artist. The narrator laments: he probably would not have quit the piano if he had never met Glenn Gould. The narrator reflects that the honestly could never have become a piano virtuoso because he did not really want to become a piano virtuoso. People throw out avenues, abandoning them, as part of the deterioration process. Wertheimer never gets over giving up on the idea of becoming a piano virtuoso. Taking Horowitz's course proves deadly for the narrator and Wertheimer since they meet Glenn Gould through the course. Glenn Gould nicknames Wertheimer "the loser" and the narrator "the philosopher."

Wertheimer claims that Glenn Gould ruins the narrator and himself, but he cannot deal with Glenn Gould's death. The narrator is alone in the world; Wertheimer and Glenn Gould, the only people who give meaning to his life, are dead. The narrator realizes that he can never return to Desselbrunn. Like Desselbrunn, Traich is a dead end which caused Wertheimer to reach a dead end and go mad. Wertheimer is the loser from his birth, but only Glenn Gould could coin the term. Wertheimer kills himself as a result of Glenn Gould's death and his sister's abandonment. According to the narrator, the reason for Wertheimer's suicide is Glenn Gould's death; Wertheimer hangs himself near his sister's house only in order to deflect the blame from Glenn Gould. According to the narrator, Wertheimer can blame Horowitz for his destruction since Horowitz's reputation leads Wertheimer to Salzburg where he meets Glenn Gould which ultimately leads to his suicide. The narrator is sure that the walk to Traich will prove futile. Franz informs the narrator that Wertheimer had him light a fire and burn all of his notes before ordering his out-of-tune, worthless piano from Salzburg which he largely tipped the movers for delivering that day.

Blaming Others

A recurring theme in this novel is blaming others for one's shortcomings, especially as regards the narrator and Wertheimer who both blame Glenn Gould's success for making them fail at becoming piano virtuosos. Glenn Gould uses the narrator and Wertheimer to become Glenn Gould. Wertheimer and the narrator may have quit Horowitz's course without Glenn Gould who makes Horowitz an ingenious teacher. Glenn Gould ruins Wertheimer more than the narrator because the narrator does not really want to become a piano virtuoso. Wertheimer gives up in part after hearing Glenn Gould play



only a few bars. Wertheimer has to take Horowitz's course and be destroyed by Glenn Gould. Wertheimer copies the narrator in everything he does, even his failure. Only his suicide is Wertheimer's own decision.

The narrator, Wertheimer and Glenn Gould answer the call of Horowitz's sterling reputation. Glenn Gould destroys Wertheimer who envies Glenn Gould for turning himself into an art machine. Wertheimer wants to be Glenn Gould. He is unable to see himself as an unique individual. He emulates anyone he thinks is better than him, sending him into early unhappiness. Wertheimer tries to assert himself during his whole life; this is the reason he must kill himself eventually. Wertheimer may have been successful if he managed his parents' empire; his insistence upon becoming an artist leads to his unhappiness. Wertheimer truly is "the loser." Wertheimer is smitten with failure, happy in his unhappiness. He commits suicide to avoid losing his unhappiness. Wertheimer is a failure from the beginning because of his pride. The narrator would die if he stayed in Desselbrunn; he should have renounced his inheritance instead of abandoning it as he has done. One needs tremendous discipline to refrain from committing suicide.

The narrator realizes that he can never return to Desselbrunn. Like Desselbrunn, Traich is a dead end which caused Wertheimer to reach a dead end and go mad. Wertheimer is the loser from his birth, but only Glenn Gould could coin the term. Wertheimer kills himself as a result of Glenn Gould's death and his sister's abandonment. The narrator wishes he had refused the Duttweilers' lunch invitation more politely. People judge others falsely no matter how they judge them. The narrator condemns himself for the sentimental idea of going to Traich. According to the narrator, the reason for Wertheimer's suicide is Glenn Gould's death; Wertheimer hangs himself near his sister's house only in order to deflect the blame from Glenn Gould. People condemn others with words; Glenn Gould calls Wertheimer "the loser."

Wertheimer condemns suicide, thinking that his sister will kill herself. She escapes by marriage instead. Glenn Gould destroys Wertheimer. Wertheimer can blame Horowitz for his destruction. Horowitz's reputation leads Wertheimer to Salzburg where he meets Glenn Gould which ultimately leads to his suicide. Wertheimer treats his sister badly; he dictates what clothes she can wear, what company she can keep and where she can go. He forces her to play music to him in the middle of the night in his unheated room, even when she is sick. He even criticizes her playing under such circumstances. Franz mentions that Wertheimer entertained many artistic visitors before his suicide, causing the narrator to feel very guilty when he realizes that he was included but ignored his friend's request.

Style

Point of View

The point of view of the novel is first person. This point of view is limited as it only reflects the narrator's thoughts and feelings. Even the minimal actions that occur throughout the novel are seen through the narrator's point of view. The point of view of the novel is presented in the form of a continual first person interior monologue as the narrator considers his relationships with Wertheimer and Glenn Gould and how these relationships have affected the three men during the past three decades. This point of view is important since the novel is focused around the relationships between this trio of friends and two of the three men are now dead; this leaves the narrator to explain their interactions with one another and the impact they have had on each other's lives.

The point of view is very unreliable since it is told completely from the narrator's point of view at a much later date than the action that he recounts occurs. Only, the narrator's viewpoint is subjective and seems to be obsessive about his friends and his failed career as a piano virtuoso. Through the novel, the narrator's frame of mind reveals him to be bordering, if not completely submerged in, insanity through his circular and repetitive thought patterns. There is very little action and very little dialogue throughout the novel since most of the novel is written as the narrator's thoughts. A very small amount of time passes during the entire novel.

Setting

This novel is set in the actual world around 1983. The majority of the novel takes place in a dirty inn in Wankham where the narrator rests on his way to Wertheimer's lodge in Traich. The narrator pauses at the inn in order to think about the relationships over the past three decades between himself, Wertheimer and Glenn Gould. The narrator later concludes his journey at Wertheimer's hunting-lodge in Traich where he continues his ruminations about his friends and their deaths. The novel ends with the narrator sitting in Wertheimer's room, listening to Glenn Gould's "Goldberg Variations" on the record player.

The aforementioned reflections make up the majority of the novel; although the actual action of the novel occurs only in the inn in Wankham and Wertheimer's lodge in Traich, the narrator's reflections present many other settings where the three main characters have encountered one another. The narrator, Wertheimer and Glenn Gould meet, thirty years before the narrator's ruminations, while they are simultaneously taking a course taught by Horowitz at the Mozarteum in Salzburg. Although the Mozarteum is not physically visited in the novel, it is an important location as its existence results in the origination of the friendships that the novel examines. After condemning Salzburg as unfriendly to the arts, the trio rent a house in Leopoldskron which belongs to a recently deceased Nazi sculptor.



There are many more locations that the narrator describes in his considerations of the time in between their initial encounter and the present in which he thinks of these things. At one point, the narrator and Wertheimer visits Glenn Gould in Canada, and the three visit New York City. The narrator has an estate in Desselbrunn which he avoids for ten years because he is sure it will kill him since this is where he decided to give away his Steinway. He also avoids his apartment in Vienna whenever possible, primarily living in Madrid. Glenn Gould lives in an isolated cabin in Canada which is where he was born. Wertheimer lives in Traich, but he hangs himself in Chur in Switzerland which is where his sister lives with her husband.

Language and Meaning

The language of the novel seems to highlight the narrator's crazed frame of mind. The language is obsessively repetitive and unrestricted. The narrator pays no heed to proper grammar, completely ignoring sentence structure in favor of run-on sentences and incomplete sentences. The novel is not separated at any point by paragraphs; it reads as one long train of thought. The narrator demonstrates an odd and irrational use of italics with explaining his reasons for doing so. He also tends to change verb tense without any rational whatsoever.

Although the language is modern and simple, the novel is very difficult to understand due to the infringement on common grammatical rules and regulations. The circular nature of the story as well as the repetitions that occur throughout, giving more, less or sometimes contradicting details on each subsequent occasion serves to prove the narrator's insanity. This manner of storytelling makes it difficult for a reader to grasp the actual events that are taking place, especially since these events are actually thoughts while very little physical action occurs throughout the novel.

Structure

This novel does not contain any division of chapters or even paragraphs. There is not even a very clear manner of breaking up the ideas of the novel as these tend to be repeated and elaborated upon at later points in the novel. Sometimes, these ideas are directly contradicted. The novel exists as a very long stream-of-consciousness as the narrator reflects on the relationships between himself, Wertheimer and Glenn Gould and the effects that these have had on their lives. The novel occurs during a very short amount of time during which little action occurs. The novel is preoccupied with the narrator's recollections of events that occurred approximately thirty years earlier.

The plot is very difficult to grasp as there is so very little action. The plot actually consists only of the narrator's desire to visit Wertheimer's hunting-lodge in Traich after Wertheimer commits suicide. The majority of the novel consists of the narrator's thoughts which are scattered and repetitive. The narrator tends to refer to one event, go on one tangent after another, and then return to his original thought with greater, lesser or contradicting detail. The repetition makes the pace of the novel slow while the

disorganization makes it difficult for the reader to maintain a clear image of what is happening. The majority of the novel's action occurs as a flashback of sorts as the narrator reflects on the past. The novel is very difficult to read, and the plot is hard to grasp. The novel does not clearly convey what it is talking about.

Quotes

"Suicide calculated well in advance, I thought, no spontaneous act of desperation."
page 3

"Exactly twenty-eight years ago we had lived in Leopoldskron and studied with Horowitz and we (at least Wertheimer and I, but of course not Glenn Gould) learned more from Horowitz during a completely rain-drenched summer than during eight previous years at the Mozarteum and the Vienna Academy. Horowitz rendered all our professors null and void. But these dreadful teachers had been necessary to understand Horowitz." page 3

"Wertheimer went into the human sciences, as he always used to say, I entered my deterioration process, and in bringing my instrument to the teacher's house I had initiated this deterioration process in the best possible manner." page 7

"This climate and these walls kill off all sensitivity." page 12

"And probably this piano virtuoso career that I had suddenly tossed aside was a necessary part of my deterioration process, I thought while entering the inn. We try out all possible avenues and then abandon them, abruptly throw decades of work in the garbage can." page 14

"Wertheimer and I loved New York right from the start. It's the most beautiful city in the world and it also has the best air, we repeated again and again, nowhere in the world have we breathed better air. Glenn confirmed what we sensed: New York is the only city in the world where a thinking person can breathe freely the minute he sets foot in it."
pages 17-18

"So many in his circle had already died, he said, so many relatives, friends, acquaintances, none of these deaths ever shocked him, but Glenn's death dealt him a deadly blow, he pronounced deadly with extraordinary precision. We don't have to be with a person in order to feel bound to him as to no other, he said. Glenn's death had hit him very hard." page 32

"It took me three days after Wertheimer hanged himself to figure out that, like Glenn, he had just turned fifty-one. When we cross the threshold of our fiftieth year we see ourselves as base and spineless, I thought, the question is how long we can stand this condition. Lots of people kill themselves in their fifty-first year, I thought. Lots in their fifty-second, but more in their fifty-first. It doesn't matter whether they kill themselves in their fifty-first year or whether they die, as people say, a natural death, it doesn't matter whether they die like Glenn or whether they die like Wertheimer. The reason is that they're often ashamed of having reached the limit that a fifty-year-old crosses when he puts his fiftieth year behind him. For fifty years are absolutely enough, I thought. We become contemptible when we go past fifty and are still living, continue our existence."
pages 34-35

"I had developed the art of perceiving the same thing over and over as something new, developed it to a high, absurdly high skill, neither Wertheimer nor Glenn had that skill." page 41

"We exist, we don't have any other choice, Glenn once said." page 41

"We run away from one thing into the other and destroy ourselves in the process, he said. We just simply go away until we have given up, so he said." page 44

"To exist means nothing other than we despair." page 47

"Naturally we want to have a practical relationship with the things that fascinate us, he once said, that is above all a relationship with the sick and the terminally ill and the old and the dead, because a theoretical relationship isn't enough, but for long periods we depends on a theoretical relationship, just as we often depend on a theoretical relationship as far as music is concerned, so Wertheimer, I thought." page 63

"Our starting point is always that we don't know anything about anything and don't even have a clue about it." page 66

"We've locked up the great thinkers in our bookcases, from which they keep staring at us, sentenced to eternal ridicule, he said, I thought. Day and night I hear the chatter of the great thinkers we've locked up in our bookcases, these ridiculous intellectual giants as shrunken heads behind glass, he said, I thought. All these people have sinned against nature, he said, they've committed first-degree murders of the intellect, that's why they've been punished and stuck in our bookcases for eternity. For they're choking to death in our bookcases, that's the truth. Our libraries are so to speak prisons where we've locked up our intellectual giants, naturally Kant has been put in solitary confinement, like Nietzsche, like Schopenhauer, like Pascal, like Voltaire, like Montaigne, all the real giants have been put in solitary confinement, all the others in mass confinement, but everyone for ever and ever, my friend, for all time and unto eternity, that's the truth." page 67

"We are, to put it precisely, born into misunderstanding and never escape this condition of misunderstanding as long as we live, we can squirm and twist as much as we like, it doesn't help." pages 68-69

"If something is in our way we have to get rid of it, Glenn said, even if it's only an ash. And we don't even have the right to ask first if we are allowed to chop down the ash, we weaken ourselves that way. If we ask first we're already so weakened that it's bad for us, may even destroy us." page 79

"We are already destroyed and still we don't give up." page 86

"Wertheimer had gone to America only against his will, during the trip he continually let me know that he basically detested artists who, in Wertheimer's own words, had taken



their art as far as Glenn had, who destroyed their personalities to be geniuses, as Wertheimer expressed himself then. In the end people like Glenn had turned themselves into art machines, had nothing in common with human beings anymore, only seldom reminded you of human beings, I thought." page 92

"Every person is a unique and autonomous person and actually, considered independently, the greatest artwork of all time." page 93

"One has to have tremendous discipline not to kill oneself." page 131

"We should observe and treat people not from our point of view but from all angles, I thought, associate with them in such a way that we can say we associate with them so to speak in a completely unbiased way, which however isn't possible, since we actually are always biased against everybody." page 132

"We constantly portray and judge people only in false terms, we judge them unjustly and portray them meanly, I said to myself, in every instance, no matter how we portray, no matter how we judge them." page 149

"Glenn Gould surely doesn't owe Horowitz his genius, I thought, but Wertheimer is perfectly entitled to blame Horowitz for his downfall and destruction, I thought, for Wertheimer, attracted by the name Horowitz, had gone to Salzburg, without the name Horowitz he would never have gone to Salzburg, at least not in that fateful year." page 155

"Wertheimer always spoke of solitude without ever actually being able to be alone, he was no solitude type, I thought, and so on his visits to Traich he always took along his sister, whom he loved by the way, although he hated her like no one else in the world, in order to misuse her in his way." page 161

"Wertheimer had been exuberant with them, which by the way Franz had also noticed, he became a totally different person in their company during those days and weeks." page 166

Topics for Discussion

Why does Glenn Gould call Wertheimer "the loser?"

How does Glenn Gould ruin Wertheimer and the narrator's careers as piano virtuosos?

Why does Wertheimer commit suicide?

Compare and contrast Glenn Gould, Wertheimer and the narrator.

What is the effect of taking Horowitz's course on the narrator, Glenn Gould and Wertheimer?

Explain why the narrator gives his Steinway to the schoolteacher's daughter.

Describe how the innkeeper sees Wertheimer. Describe how Franz Kohlröser sees Wertheimer. Compare and contrast these different points of view.