Narcissus and Goldmund Study Guide

Narcissus and Goldmund by Hermann Hesse

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Plot Summary

Hermann Hesse's Narcissus and Goldmund, first published in 1930, is the classic tale of two best friends, a monk and a wanderer, whose lives come together, diverge, and reunite over the years. The novel takes the form of an extended parable, where the settings are generic rather than named and many of the characters represent specific qualities or modes of living. Narcissus is the first of the two title characters to be introduced. Apparently in the medieval period, Narcissus is a novice at a cloister called Mariabronn. He is a brilliant scholar with a gift for making keen, intuitive analyses of others and of what their futures might be. Goldmund is brought to the cloister by his father, who wants him to become a monk, which the boy also believes will be his future. He immediately develops admiration for both Narcissus as an intellectual and for the cloister's leader, Abbot Daniel, as a person of intense goodness and spirituality. In a hesitating fashion, Narcissus and Goldmund become friends, and the prescient novice helps the boy to recognize that his father is the one who wants him to become a monk, to expiate the sins of his mother, who ran away from the family. With the help of Narcissus, Goldmund realizes that he has blocked out memories of his mother. With this understanding comes a flood of remembrance, followed by a conviction that he must emulate the ways of his mother, who was open to romance and excitement. A sexual encounter with a young village woman cements this decision, and a few years after his arrival at the cloister, Goldmund bids Narcissus goodbye and begins his life in the wider world.

The young woman soon returns to her husband and years of wandering begin for Goldmund. A handsome young man, he is a favorite among women, many of them the wives of villagers that he encounters on his travels. He accepts their love indiscriminately and his original innocence eventually changes into the wiliness of the serial seducer. He meets a con man named Viktor who teaches him tricks of getting along as a vagrant, but when Viktor tries to rob and strangle Goldmund, he kills him in self-defense. Goldmund comes upon a beautiful statue in a chapel that inspires him to track down the artist, who teaches him to carve. He is so good that the artist offers him a permanent position and even the eventual hand of his beautiful daughter, but Goldmund decides instead to continue his wandering. The Black Death strikes the land, and he encounters terrible devastation. When a plague-infested man attacks Goldmund's current lover, he kills the fellow in a rage. Later, he seduces Agnes, the beautiful concubine of a governor, is caught and imprisoned, to be executed in the morning. Narcissus, who happens to be visiting the prison, saves Goldmund and brings him back to the cloister, where Narcissus is now the abbot. Goldmund carves beautiful statuary for the cloister, which proves to both men that Goldmund's soul is still intact despite the wrongs he has done. Later, Goldmund leaves the cloister to attempt a reunion with Agnes, but he is rejected as no longer young and beautiful. He suffers an accident on horseback and returns to the cloister, deathly ill. He dies there, leaving Narcissus to wonder if his own life of rigid discipline, scholarship, and devotion to God has been a complete one.

Chapters 1 and 2

Chapters 1 and 2 Summary

Narcissus and Goldmund is often touted as the greatest novel of the famed German writer, Hermann Hesse, who died in his mid-80s in 1962. It tells the story of the two title characters, one a wandering pursuer of sensual pleasures, and the other, a contemplative monk. The tale begins at the Mariabronn cloister, in an unnamed Germanic country in a medieval time. The cloister has been accepting monks and students for many generations, and two of its current occupants are very unusual. One is the aging head of the house, Abbot Daniel, and the other is a young novice named Brother Narcissus. The former is beloved for the extraordinary extent of his simple kindness, which approaches saintliness. The latter is a brilliant scholar, somewhat aloof and perhaps arrogant, but also deeply spiritual. Narcissus has no friends in the cloister, and one day after his confession, he is asked by the Abbot about his anticipated future. Narcissus says he intends to live a cloistered life and perhaps become an abbot. When the Abbot asks what skills he has, aside from learning, to do such work, Narcissus replies that he can divine the characters and fate of others. Skeptically, the Abbot asks what Narcissus sees in the older man, and Narcissus replies that the Abbot prays for a gentle death, which he will receive. He adds that Abbot Daniel will give him a light penance, which the Abbot also will perform, which turns out to be correct. Later, when Narcissus and an elder monk disagree over a teaching method, Abbot Daniel sides with the older man to maintain order in the cloister. After that, a young student named Goldmund arrives with his elderly father, who is employed by the Emperor. Goldmund meets the Abbot, and is introduced to his new teacher, Narcissus. Goldmund falls asleep during his first lesson, and is teased by the other pupils. He fights with one of the boys and after that is accepted by the group.

In Chapter 2, Goldmund is cordial with everyone but has not acquired a close friend. He is deeply attracted to Abbot Daniel and Brother Narcissus. He intends to become a monk and live in the cloister, as his father wishes for him, and as he believes God wishes. The Abbot knows from hints dropped by Goldmund's father that something scandalous is attached to the boy's life, but Abbot Daniel does not care. Narcissus quickly recognizes something special in Goldmund and becomes interested in him. Goldmund is torn between trying to emulate the saintly Abbot and the intellectual Narcissus, because he feels that the two goals are incompatible. After about a year in the cloister, this pressure causes Goldmund to develop headaches and to feel ill. A classmate named Adolf convinces Goldmund to slip out of the cloister with him and go to the nearby village. Two other boys, Konrad and Eberhard, come along. They walk through the forest and climb a fence into the garden of a house in the village. Adolf knocks on the shutter and two girls let them into the kitchen. They drink alcoholic apple cider and the other boys occasionally caress the older girl. Goldmund thinks the younger one is lovely, but is appalled by what he regards as a sinful situation, and vows to himself never to return to this house. As the boys leave, the younger girl leans out the window and lightly kisses Goldmund, who immediately is conflicted between a desire to

return tomorrow and to stay away forever. Later, when Goldmund sees Narcissus, he breaks down and cries, much to his own shame. Narcissus puts him in the infirmary, although he realizes Goldmund is not ill. He is eager to help the boy, because such help will lead to friendship between them.

Chapters 1 and 2 Analysis

As the novel opens, no specific time or place is provided, which immediately produces a sense of universality, as if the story to be told were a fable. The setting, a monks' cloister, signals that matters of the soul will play an important role in the story. Indeed, the first two characters introduced, Abbot Daniel and Brother Narcissus, are both highly spiritual people. They represent two manifestations of spirituality, in that one man is pure and simple, while the other is cerebral. This foreshadows another dichotomy to be introduced soon as the book's main focus, setting the intellectual approach of Narcissus against the sensual life of Goldmund. When Abbot Daniel asks Narcissus about his view of the future, he does not seem entirely convinced that Narcissus has the gift of looking into people and understanding them in ways that help him predict the general course their lives will take. Even so, it appears that Narcissus is correct about Abbot Daniel hoping for an easy death, and he also is right that the Abbot will do the penance he gives Narcissus after his confession. The arrogance Daniel sees in Narcissus could be mere self-confidence that stems from deep self-knowledge. Narcissus is young, but in self-awareness he seems much older than his years. In contrast, Goldmund's arrival at the cloister is marked by falling asleep in his first class, which indicates his lack of interest in scholarly pursuits. Next, he gets into a fist fight, which symbolizes his unfitness for a spiritual life. Like Narcissus, he develops no close friend, but his wish to be a monk is conflicted. He already has shown little aptitude for attaining the pure goodness of Abbot Daniel or the intellectualism of Narcissus, and after a year in the cloister, the pressure of trying to attain those goals begins to make him sick. The episode in the village intensifies Goldmund's internal conflicts because of his desire to see the girl again and his fear of sinning. His tears when he speaks to Narcissus indicate that Goldmund is still a child, confused and uncertain. The willingness of Narcissus to strengthen their friendship by helping him shows that he intuits how important their relationship will be to both of them.

Chapters 3 and 4

Chapters 3 and 4 Summary

Initially, Narcissus has more trouble than does Goldmund with their new friendship, because he foresaw that it would become extremely important to both their lives. Goldmund, on the other hand, had been thrown into turmoil by the young girl's kiss, and the safer relationship with Narcissus is unsatisfactory, because his teacher is too exacting and does not seem to know how to have a simple, undemanding friendship. He thinks Narcissus is slightly contemptuous of him, but in reality Narcissus admires Goldmund greatly. He sees that Goldmund is mistaken about being headed for the life of a monk, whereas for Narcissus such a fate is certain, which means to him that their friendship must be ascetic, distanced, and cerebral. One day, they talk about the night Goldmund had become ill, and he confesses that he had gone to the village and kissed a girl. Narcissus advises him not to take such actions too seriously, as Goldmund is just a student, not a monk. Goldmund argues that the two of them are alike, but Narcissus stuns him by saying they are exact opposites. Meanwhile, the other students begin to gossip jealously about the special relationship between Narcissus and Goldmund. Abbot Daniel thinks a close friendship is inadvisable, but he trusts the judgment of Narcissus and does not interfere. Narcissus ponders Goldmund's family, and particularly his father, whom he does not like. He resolves to learn more. Goldmund finds pleasure in the beautiful statuary around the cloister and in singing hymns, but is bothered by the new coolness of the other students toward him. Even so, he rejects the occasional offer to return to the village.

In Chapter 4, Narcissus is still without more information concerning Goldmund's family, although he has plied his young friend with many questions. One day, in the library, they talk about science as a quest to determine and categorize differences. Goldmund returns to his assertion that the two of them are not different, and Narcissus argues that their paths will surely diverge. Goldmund says that Narcissus takes him for a child, and his teacher agrees that some of his thinking is childlike, which hurts the boy. Narcissus explains that Goldmund is not yet awake to his own potential or to what drives him. He says to find himself, Goldmund must remember his childhood. This shocks Goldmund. Narcissus continues that Goldmund has the soul of an artist, while Narcissus is a thinker. Goldmund is overcome, and asks the surprised Narcissus to go away. Alone, Goldmund becomes extremely distressed, because Narcissus had touched upon his inmost secret. Abbot Daniel finds Goldmund, who has fainted, lying on the floor of the cloister's inner court. He confronts Narcissus, who tells of their conversation. He says Goldmund, who is now eighteen, is suffering because he has wiped the memory of his mother from his mind. Troubled, Brother Abbot visits Goldmund, who is still unconscious. He wonders if he has let the boy down, or if Narcissus is secretly evil. When Goldmund revives, he feels better. Father Anselm, the physician who is watching over him, says he thought the boy might have had the colic, but is reassured that he now looks well. He leaves, and Goldmund has a mental image of a beautiful blonde

woman, whom he recognizes as his mother. He does not understand how he could have forgotten her.

Chapters 3 and 4 Analysis

While Goldmund broods over the girl who kissed him, Narcissus worries about the possible consequences of having a friendship with the boy. To achieve his goal of becoming a monk, he believes he must live in the world of the mind and spirit, staying aloof from friendship and all other worldly attachments. Goldmund's concern that Narcissus cannot be free and easy in a friendship is a misapprehension, because Narcissus is commanding himself to be cool and distanced. Similarly, Goldmund is wrong to believe he and Narcissus are alike. They are exact opposites, as Hermann Hesse firmly establishes in Chapter 3. The jealousy of others in the cloister concerning the friendship of the two shows that Brother Daniel trusts the judgment of Narcissus, who rightly heeds his own keen intuition in resolving to discover more about Goldmund's family. The talk between the two friends in the library allows the author to strengthen the point that his protagonists are polar opposites, even as he introduces a key plot element, which is that Goldmund has blocked certain memories concerning his childhood. Goldmund's reaction to this revelation, which is so extreme that Abbot Daniel fleetingly wonders if Narcissus could secretly be a bad person, awakens the young man to the memory of his mother. This foreshadows a preoccupation that will remain prominent throughout the rest of his life, as his mother increasingly comes to represent key elements of his own personality.

Chapters 5 and 6

Chapters 5 and 6 Summary

Goldmund begins to remember what little he knew of his mother, whom his father had forbidden him to discuss. She was a beautiful noblewoman of poor birth who had a reputation for wildness. After her marriage, she lived quietly for a while but returned to her old ways of seducing men, and then disappeared. His father raised Goldmund but became embittered and instilled in the boy the belief that he must become a monk to atone for his mother's sins. Goldmund had forgotten another image of his mother as a kind and lovely presence, which was separate from his father's depiction of her, and he recalled this image now. He feels much better for it, and attributes his "cure" to Narcissus, who realizes his young friend is on the cusp of a major change in his life. Goldmund begins dreaming of his mother as kind and beautiful, but also with a wild and dark side, and these dreams summon much else of his forgotten childhood, including the beauties of Nature. He realizes that his love of learning has diminished, just as the love he thought he felt for his father has been reduced by the returned memories of his mother. Narcissus agrees that Goldmund will never be a scholar, and says their friendship for now is coming to an end, which troubles Goldmund. Yet the two realize their paths are diverging. Narcissus begins to spend time alone, preparing to take holy orders and become a monk. Goldmund continues to dwell on his memories and thoughts as he, too, prepares for a major change.

In Chapter 6, Father Anselm offers Goldmund the afternoon away from studies if he will go into the fields and collect the plant called John's-wort for his pharmacy. Goldmund sets off happily on his horse, Bless. He finds and collects the plants and then falls asleep under the sun in the fields. A young woman emerges from the forest, approaches Goldmund, and is leaning over him when he awakens. She kisses him and he recognizes the girl from the house in the village, who is older now. Wordlessly, they make love. Later, she tells him her name is Lise. She learns that he lives in the cloister and asks him to meet her later. When Goldmund returns to the cloister, he seeks out Narcissus, who has withdrawn from everyone. Goldmund apologizes for disturbing him, explaining that he must leave the cloister and wanted to say goodbye. Narcissus guesses from Goldmund's demeanor that he has met a woman. Goldmund admits it, and says he is going to meet her. Narcissus warns that she might be married, but Goldmund replies that it is time for him to leave the cloister in any case. Narcissus says he will return some day, and vows that Goldmund will always be his friend. Goldmund merely strokes the hand of Narcissus, understanding his friend's avoidance of physical contact. He leaves and finds Lise, who takes him to a haystack where they make love again, to their mutual delight.

Chapters 5 and 6 Analysis

The reawakening of Goldmund's memories of his mother foreshadows a major change in his life. It is significant that these memories of her, as not only turbulent and unpredictable but also as lovely and kind, are accompanied by a renewal of his childhood memories of Nature. His mother is an elemental symbol in his life, closely aligned with the animal-like, instinctive world of Nature. In recalling both of these early influences on his perceptions, Goldmund begins to recapture a more sensual approach to life than the spiritual and intellectual one he has been pursuing in the cloister. He now realizes that his desire to be a monk was a wish implanted in him by his father, and that his true path lies neither in the cloister nor in scholarship. Even as Narcissus readies himself for the step that will determine his future, Goldmund is pushed into his own fate by the surprising encounter with Lise. He now understands that he must live in the wider world, just as Narcissus has known that he must remain cloistered. When the two friends part, it is clear that each has had a major impact on the other. The importance of that impact will only grow, despite the separation of the two, as the story progresses.

Chapters 7 and 8

Chapters 7 and 8 Summary

When Goldmund awakes in the morning, he finds Lise preparing to leave. He expects to go with her, but she says she must return to her husband, who will beat her for staying away all night, and Goldmund reflects that Narcissus's prediction was correct. He asks why she did not intend to say goodbye, and she says it was for fear that Goldmund would beat her, too. She insists on leaving. He enters the forest, feeling transformed by the previous night's experience, his senses alert to all of Nature. He eats corn and berries, but gets lost in the forest and has to sleep there. It takes two days and nights to reach the end of the forest, where he finds a village. At a hut, he meets an old woman who feeds him. A farmer and his wife arrive, and Goldmund has dinner with the family. The farmer's wife is captivated by his youth and beauty. Outside after dinner, she tells him if he stays the night in a haystack beyond the barley field, she will bring him food later. He realizes from her looks and actions that she wants to make love. Delighted by the prospect, which also enlivens his senses to the plants and animals around him, he waits for her at the haystack. She brings food, they make love, and she has to tear himself away from him. He feels very happy, but also sad. He remembers the food she brought, and eats it in the dark.

When Chapter 8 opens, a good deal of time has passed, during which Goldman has kept walking, rarely staying two days anywhere. He has grown thin and tanned, and has spent many nights with different women, not one of whom has ever wanted to accompany him on his wanderings, although he has never asked, because he loves his freedom. He is drawn most strongly to young, unmarried girls, but they are largely unavailable, and he enjoys learning about sex from the older women. He learns much about the ways of love, and becomes very skilled. After a year or two, he comes upon the castle of a knight who has two beautiful daughters. Lydia is eighteen and Julie is sixteen. When the elderly knight learns that Goldman has studied Greek and Latin, he hires him to help write the chronicle of his soldierly adventures. Goldman stays, and develops a fondness for Lydia. The younger girl, Julie, is beautiful but aloof. When guests come to the castle one night, Goldmund flirts with the lady guest, which outrages Lydia. The next day, he follows Lydia when she goes horseback riding, and she eventually lets him stroke her hair. This contact soon develops into hugging and kissing, and one night, Lydia comes to his bed. They both know she would never be allowed to marry him, and she staunchly refuses to have sex. Julie notices the flirtation and become jealous. One night, just before winter, Lydia is lying with Goldmund when Julie enters the room. She gets into bed with them and Goldmund strokes and cuddles them both, feeling foolish. Lydia becomes disturbed, but Julie is enjoying herself. As they leave, Goldmund urges Julie to return the next night. In the morning, the knight takes Goldmund on a long walk. He then tells him to keep walking and not come back, or he will be killed. Goldman sets off as the first snow begins to fall.

Chapters 7 and 8 Analysis

The purity of Goldmund's involvement with Lise is striking. He has brought with him the openness and kindness he learned in the cloister, which are a delight Lise, but which she finds hard to understand. Her fear that Goldmund would beat her, as he husband does, shows that her world is described by violence and possessiveness. For his part, Goldmund finds such worldly concerns hard to comprehend, and as he travels on, he remains naïve in his enjoyment of women, even though he is aware of committing adultery, and becomes protective of his personal freedom. He has become a strange combination of innocence and sensuality that women find irresistible. For his part, this new life is delightful but also disturbing to him, because he recognizes hollowness at the center of all this exciting, difficult transience. By the time he arrives at the knight's castle, he has developed wiles in place of innocent enthusiasm. The night that Julie gets into the bed with Lydia and Goldmund shows him in a new light, which is not appealing. He retains enough self-awareness to feel silly in trying to stroke both young women simultaneously, but his plea to Julie to return to him the next night is selfish and thoughtless. The knight's banishment of him seems like it could be a reprieve if Goldmund only would learn from his mistakes and change his ways, but the falling of the first snow as he sets off, symbolizes that his immediate future will be harsh and cold.

Chapters 9 and 10

Chapters 9 and 10 Summary

As Goldmund walks, trying to accustom himself again to the hardships of vagrancy and thinking tenderly of Lydia despite her betrayal, he is approached on horseback by Hans, a groom from the castle. Hans gives him a package from Lydia. Goldmund asks for a crust of bread, which he receives, and wants Hans's hunting knife, but is gently rebuffed. Hans rides away, and Goldmund opens the package, which contains a woolen vest knitted by Lydia, a ham, and a gold coin, but no note. Wearing the warm vest, he spends the night in a barn. In another village the next night, he helps a peasant woman give birth, and is amazed to see that the expression on her face while she screams in pain is similar to the expressions he has seen on women while making love to them. He is astonished by the thought that pain and joy are closely related. The next night, he sleeps with a neighbor's wife, and the following day he meets a fellow named Viktor, who describes himself as a traveling student, although he is too old for that. Viktor is a good talker and a charmer. They decide to travel together, and over the next three days, Viktor shows him tricks of the road about how to get food and shelter. Viktor admires Goldmund's fine clothes, which he explains were acquired during his time at the castle. Goldmund lets Viktor wear his vest. That night, when Viktor thinks Goldmund is asleep, he tries to rob him. When Goldmund opens his eyes, Viktor begins strangling him, and just before he loses consciousness, Goldmund locates his penknife and stabs Viktor to death, bloodying the vest from Lydia. He runs in the snow-covered landscape, lost and despairing, but with a fierce will to live. He arrives exhausted in the same village where the woman had given birth, and the neighbor's wife shelters him in the stable. When he recovers, he cannot find his gold piece but Christine, the neighbor's wife, explains that she has sewn it into his jacket for safekeeping. By the time he leaves, spring is about to arrive.

In Chapter 10, Goldmund wanders through the landscape and the seasons, having many more amorous adventures, his heart often anguished by the warmth and security of the homes he visits. He stays at a cloister one night, and the memory of Viktor's death haunts him. In the chapel, he sees a wooden madonna that takes his breath away. A priest tells him the statue is controversial, because it is so modern and worldly. He says the artist is Master Niklaus, and tells Goldmund where to find him. Goldmund hurries to the city, seeks out Niklaus and asks to become his apprentice. When Niklaus asks why he wants to carve, Goldmund mentions the connection between pain and ecstasy that he saw on the face of the woman who was giving birth, which impresses the master. He asks Goldmund to make a drawing, and Goldmund draws Narcissus. The master invites Goldmund to lunch, where he meets Lisbeth, the artist's beautiful but remote daughter. Later, Niklaus says Goldmund is too old to be an apprentice, but his drawing is beautiful, albeit flawed. He agrees to train Goldmund, but not under a formal contract. If he proves to be untalented at wood carving, his skills will be tested elsewhere. Goldmund accepts with joy and gratitude.

Chapters 9 and 10 Analysis

The gifts Goldmund receives from Lydia show the goodness of her heart and the practical turn of her nature, which are in keeping with her staunch refusal to make love with a man who could never be her husband. Similarly, his failure to include a note is a silent rebuke to him, and a warning that her kindness should not be misconstrued as an invitation to return. The groom's refusal to give his hunting knife to Goldmund foreshadows a scene in which a knife, or lack of it, will be prominent. Goldmund's sight of the woman's face as she gives birth is an important moment, because the relationship between ecstasy and pain is already becoming a central attribute of his new life of sensuality. He sees something of this in the madonna carved by Master Niklaus. Mary, of course, had tremendous joy in being chosen as the mother of Jesus, but also suffered great pain at his death. Also, the memory Goldmund now carries of his own mother suggests a woman who heeded her own demands for pleasure, no doubt at the price of pain. Niklaus is convinced to let Goldmund draw something after he hears the young man make the connection between joy and agony. Goldmund's drawing of Narcissus shows that he can summon deep feelings and put them into art, which is all Niklaus needs to know. When he takes on Goldmund, it is not because he needs an apprentice, but because he sees the artistic talent latent in the young man. Niklaus's dedication to art commands him to nurture Goldman's talent and let it flower.

Chapters 11 and 12

Chapters 11 and 12 Summary

Goldmund's life is transformed by the informal apprenticeship. He works at his art and finds lodgings in the city, where he enjoys art, women, and other pleasures. However, Niklaus chastises him for not working diligently enough, and Goldmund knows he is right. He is still driven primarily by lust for independence, women, and other sensual delights. Goldmund also realizes that Niklaus has cheapened his own talent by accepting many trivial commissions for the money and the recognition they would bring. Goldmund is fascinated by Lisbeth, but she shows no interest in him. He wants to make a statue of her, just as he would like to make a statue of his own mother. As his skills develop over a year, he works on a statue of Narcissus as John the Apostle. The experience is deeply spiritual for him, and there are times when he becomes lost to the world in the midst of the work. As time passes, he loses his boyishness and develops into an exceedingly handsome young man. He has no friends, and remains primarily committed to women. He comes to believe that his road eventually will lead him back to his mother, and to death. His father's life of the mind will never be the way for Goldmund. When he finally finishes his statue of Narcissus, the master says it is so good that he will ask the guild to make Goldmund a master. Goldmund replies that he will soon go back to wandering, which annoys Nicklaus. He invites Goldmund to dinner, and Lisbeth is there as well, as distant as ever. Afterwards, Goldmund rides on horseback to look at Nicklaus's madonna statue, which he has not seen now for a few years. He rides home and goes to bed full of uncertainty.

In Chapter 12, Goldmund skips work the next day. At the fish market, he pities the fish that are pulled from barrels to suffocate, and feels horror at the disinterest of humans in the death of animals. He thinks about Viktor, and feels sad and angry at himself and the world. Suddenly, he sees a vision of the "universal mother," who wears a mysterious and chilling smile. He goes to the master and explains that he wants to make a statue as beautiful as the Niklaus madonna some day, but he does not want to live like the master. Niklaus replies that Goldmund is feeling empty because he has finished an important work of art, and he should wait a few days for the melancholy to pass. Goldmund remains dissatisfied, and as he sits by the river, staring into the water, it occurs to him that his life is a pursuit of mystery. He feels he must follow the call of his mother. He is supposed to meet a local woman, but when he sees her in the window, he suddenly becomes disheartened and turns away. Meanwhile, the master prepares a special workroom for Goldmund, and offers to make him his future successor, which would entail his marriage one day to Lisbeth, to which she agrees. Goldmund is stunned, but he tells Niklaus that he has already decided to go away. Niklaus is so disappointed, he will not even shake hands. Goldmund packs his things and in the morning, the young daughter in the house where he is renting rooms, a girl with lovely eyes and a limp named Marie, makes him a cup of hot milk. He kisses her on the lips, and she closes her eyes reverently.

Chapters 11 and 12 Analysis

Working on his art takes Goldmund away from the road, but not from his devotion to sensuality. In this novel, art is allied to the sensual side of life, just as the intellectualism of philosophy is allied to the spiritual side of life. Even though Goldman is making religious art, he represents the world in physical images rather than examining it through disembodied ideas. This emphasis on visualizing experience and attempting to emulate it in art is more tangible and more involved in the everyday world than the exercise of lofty thoughts. Goldman's sensual interest in Lisbeth now expresses itself, at least partly, in his desire to make a statue of her. Similarly, his deep friendship with Narcissus is expressed in a carving that portrays much of the essence of the man, as great portraits can do. Yet when Niklaus offers to use his influence to make Goldmund a master artist, the pull of his free, sensuous life is so strong that he cannot accept the offer. His thoughts about the dying fish at the market, and Viktor, and the universal mother are the ways his mind is telling him that life is short and violent but replete with beauty, and must be lived to its fullest. An artist is always on a quest for beauty and truth, and Goldmund realizes that if he abandons these goals, the artist in him will die. This is why even after Niklaus prepares the young man's entire future, including eventual marriage to the formerly unobtainable Lisbeth, Goldmund throws it all away simply to embrace freedom. He has no choice but to pursue what he calls mystery, which is the ecstasy to be found at the heart of life's struggles.

Chapters 13 and 14

Chapters 13 and 14 Summary

Goldmund must again accustom himself to the difficulties of wandering, of living an instinctual life of motherly origin, away from cares of the mind, and in secret collusion with inevitable death. He struggles onward, years pass, and he lives as though there were nothing but love and hunger, although he longs to return to making art. He meets a young man named Robert, the son of an artisan, who had made a pilgrimage to Rome but found when he returned home a year later that he was not welcome, and has become a wanderer. The two travel together, and after they are chased away from a village one day, Goldmund enters an apparently empty hut where he discovers disfigured corpses. Robert surmises correctly that it is the plague. Goldmund studies the death-poses carefully, particularly that of a young boy who died while crawling across a doorway. Robert is terrified by the disease, but Goldmund is unworried, although deeply saddened by the devastation they see in town after town. In one place, he sees a girl in a window, and talks her into coming with them. The girl, Lene, is delighted to be away from her plague-ridden town, but Robert is afraid to come near her. The next day, they find a cabin in a birch grove. Robert builds a partition for his room, and the three settle down. Goldmund and Lene are a happy couple, but eventually winter approaches and when Lene asks what they will do, she sees that the other two have not given it a thought, because they are wayfarers, and no home is permanent to them. This depresses her, and Goldmund's advice that she should enjoy the moment is of little consolation.

In Chapter 14, Goldmund is hunting birds with a slingshot, thinking about leaving Robert and Lene, who has said she thinks she is pregnant. He intends to visit Niklaus and then Narcissus. Suddenly, he hears a call of distress that sounds like Lene. He runs, and finds a man trying to rape her. In a rage, he pulls the man away, lifts him and dashes his head on the rocks, killing him. Goldmund notices an expression of horrified joy on Lene's face, which shakes him. The man has bitten her on the breast, and she lies down to rest. Goldmund thinks of the expression he had seen on her face, and resolves to draw it some day. Lene becomes ill, and it is clear she has contracted the plague from her attacker. Robert is worried, and to get rid of him, Goldmund says he, too, is infected. Robert leaves, and Goldmund tends Lene until her death. He then burns the hut and begins walking toward the city where Master Niklaus lives. Thinking about Viktor and the other man he has killed, and of Lene and the other victims of the Black Death, he feels no fear, and is wide open to the pity of it all. He helps a beautiful, black-eyed girl named Rebekka to bury her father, but she then angrily rebuffs his advances. He leaves her sadly, convinced she will die. In an abandoned church near Master Niklaus's city, Goldmund marvels at the statuary and prays, asking why God leads people along roads such as his, which lead to lives of dissolution and uselessness. Looking again at the statues, he resolves to make carvings that will memorialize Lene, Lydia, Rebekka, and Master Niklaus as timeless expressions of the human condition.

Chapters 13 and 14 Analysis

As the years pass, Goldmund's devotion to the life of the road takes him so firmly in his grip that he seems obsessed or perhaps addicted. His thoughts of returning to artwork seem almost dreamlike, as if they are a delusion. The appearance of Robert in the story is principally a way for the author to depict the degree of Goldmund's indifference to his personal safety in the midst of the plague. He has not lost the deep curiosity or the empathy that are characteristic of artists, but his hardships seem to have placed him firmly in the moment, without thought of the future beyond vague notions of some day carving again. He picks up Lene on a whim, and the cottage home they make in the woods with Robert has a fairytale quality doomed to impermanence. The coldness that has overcome Goldmund, even though he remains warm at heart, is evident in his dispassionate thoughts about abandoning Robert and Lene, although she has said she is probably pregnant. This selfishness turns to rage when the man attacks Lene, and Goldmund's quick dispatch of the would-be rapist shows how thoroughly he now is influenced by his immediate, instinctual responses to situations. His life has become animal-like, with little recourse to thought. He does the right thing in staying with Lene until her death, but after he helps Rebekka, he cannot prevent himself from trying to seduce the bereaved woman. Goldmund's complexity is indicated, however, by his sincere belief that Rebekka will die if he leaves her alone. His prayer in the church shows that he has lost faith in himself as a good person, yet even in the midst of his despair, Goldmund resolves to one day commemorate in works of art the people he has met.

Chapters 15 and 16

Chapters 15 and 16 Summary

When Goldmund arrives in Niklaus's city, he is overwhelmed by a feeling of homesickness that he never before had experienced. Close to tears, he walks the familiar streets until he arrives at the master's door. He recognizes the old woman who answers but she will not let him in, even when he identifies himself. She says Master Niklaus is dead. Crushed, he pushes past her and rushes up the stairs, calling for Lisbeth. When she appears, he is shocked to see her bent over, yellow, and wrinkled from disease. She refuses his offer of help and insists that he leave. He goes to a tavern and then to the fish market, where he remembers how the sight of dying fish used to pain and anger him. A young woman with dark eyes calls his name, but he does not recognize her, until she reminds him that she is Marie, the daughter in the house where he used to lodge. She says the region is under the control of a harsh governor, Count Heinrich, whose concubine, Agnes, is disliked by everyone. Marie, still limping, takes him home and gives him drawing paper. For days, he draws the terrible sights he has seen on his travels through the plague-ridden countryside, and his burden is lessened. He begins taking strolls, and on one of them he encounters a proud and strong-looking woman of great beauty. It is Agnes, the governor's mistress, and for two days he haunts her, until she finally asks why he is following her. He professes his fascination with her, and she gives him a gold chain, and says to present it to the stable groom or the chambermaid, Berta, who are the only two people in the castle she trusts. She warns him it will be dangerous, but he comes that night, is led to her by Berta, and the two make passionate love. She asks him to come back the next night. He slips away, and finds Marie waiting up for him. She is apologetic that she is not more beautiful, and he pityingly strokes her hair.

In Chapter 16, Goldmund roams the hills impatiently for a day, waiting to see Agnes. He thinks about Viktor and Lene, and the statue he carved of St. John, and of how sad life is. That evening, he is with Agnes in her room when they hear a door slam nearby, followed by footsteps. Agnes tells Goldmund to leave through the door at the end of the closet, and pleads with him not to betray her. In the closet, the door to the hallway is locked from outside, and Goldmund realizes it is a trap. He grabs a handful of dresses in the closet, and when Count Heinrich appears, Goldmund claims to be a thief. The count's guards take him to the dungeon. Outside the cell, a priest sees him and tells the guards he will give the prisoner confession in the morning. The guards leave Goldmund tied up in the dark. He weeps, and sleeps fitfully, and wakes in agony from his tied-up posture. He rubs the ropes on the steps, cutting his wrists but freeing himself shortly before morning. He concocts a plan. When the priest comes to give him confession, he will murder the man, steal his robes, and escape. When the priest arrives, Goldmund sees that he wears the robes of the Mariabronn cloister where he was schooled. He grits his teeth, knowing it will be difficult to kill this man.

Chapters 15 and 16 Analysis

Goldmund's emotionalism at again seeing Master Niklaus's city indicates that his hardships have not destroyed his capacity for warm feeling, and his obsession with traveling has not made him immune to the joys of home. His sadness at learning that Niklaus has died and his desire to be of help to the sickly Lisbeth are genuine. The fish at the market return him to a simpler time, before the hardships he has endured and the horrors he has witnessed, but they also represent the ever-present threat of death, which has been constant during his life on the road. Marie represents the simple devotion of a man to a woman, which has lasted all these years but seems to be beyond Goldmund, because of his own devotion to the moment and the horizon. His fascination with Agnes is yet another indulgence of Goldman's love of danger and excitement, which overwhelms him to the extent that he hardly feels sympathy for the lovelorn plight of Marie. Goldmund's lust for Agnes saddens him but more than that, it revives the will to live in him. His eagerness to see her again and the danger of their tryst heighten his involvement in the world, and when he is caught, his response is to protect her by pretending he is merely a thief. Later, when the inevitability of his hanging looms as he waits in the dungeon for morning to come, he realizes that he retains a fierce will to live. The emotional lethargy that had overtaken him during the plague is gone, and in its stead is a primitive desire to survive, even to the point of making a plan to murder the priest and steal his robes. Goldmund has descended as low as he can go, at least in his own mind. When he sees that the priest is from his former cloister but merely reflects that it will be very hard now to murder the man, his desperation to live has almost reached the instinctive level of animals. His struggles to survive in the wider world have taken him very far indeed from the innocent young student among monks in a cloister.

Chapters 17 and 18

Chapters 17 and 18 Summary

Goldmund notices that the priest wears an abbot's insignia, and then he holds up a candle the man has placed on a table and is startled to recognize Narcissus. The abbot tells him that since he took the vows, his name has been John. Goldmund feels like crying, but remembers with shame how he cried as a boy in front of Narcissus, and he controls himself. Narcissus says Goldmund has been pardoned. Goldmund says he had intended to murder the priest who came to confess him, and Narcissus replies that he can have confession later. They talk about the statue of John that Goldmund carved, and his horse Bless, now dead, that Narcissus remembers despite being far removed from such worldly cares. Narcissus says Abbot Daniel died eight years earlier, and he has been an abbot for just one year. Goldmund asks if Narcissus burns Jews, a reference to anti-Semitic events of medieval times, and Narcissus staunchly denies it. He remarks that Goldmund has developed animosity toward theologians, and Goldmund replies that mostly through making art he has tried to find good in a world full of evil. Narcissus says he will take Goldmund as a guest into the cloister, where he will have a workshop for his art. They ride by horseback to the cloister. On the way, they spend the night at the castle of the knight with the two daughters, where Goldmund asks Narcissus no to tell his name, and to let him sleep in the stable. He learns that the knight and Lydia are gone, but Julie lives there with her husband. She is still beautiful, although she looks a bit evil. Later, as they arrive at Mariabronn, Goldmund is touched by the many familiar sights around him.

In Chapter 18, Goldmund moves into a guest cell at the cloister, and then to a room across from the forge. Nobody knows him except Narcissus, everyone leaves him in peace, and he feels very small, particularly in the presence of his old friend. He and Narcissus talk about art, and how Goldmund sees the world in images while the abbot regards it through abstract thought. Narcissus says both approaches are useful for people to become the best humans they can be, and each person must use the method appropriate to him. Narcissus thinks his path was clearer and was less fraught with risk and trouble than that of his friend. Goldmund wonders about the value of thought if it is not applied to the real world, but Narcissus says his thinking is frequently applied to actual situations. He shows Goldmund his workshop in an old shed, and says whatever materials he needs will be provided. The blacksmith's son, 20-year-old Erich, assists him occasionally. Goldmund has changed greatly and has aged from all his trials, even with gray in his beard now. As winter begins, he isolates himself to work on a special project for the cloister. He decides to carve new stairs and walls for a raised niche in the refectory. The stairs will look like a tree trunk and the walls will feature four apostles, and of whom will look like Brother Daniel and another like Master Niklaus. One day, Goldmund confesses to Narcissus, who gives him a light penance of prayers, but insists he must say them every day. Goldmund obeys. When he finishes the Brother Daniel carving, he shows it to Narcissus, who is so deeply moved that Goldmund is a little embarrassed.

Chapters 17 and 18 Analysis

Narcissus, the one who originally sent Goldmund on his way into the world, has now returned at his friend's darkest moment to rescue him from the gallows, yet this is only the surface level of the rescue. The deeper level is spiritual, because Narcissus not only helps Goldmund to unburden himself of the guilt of his sins, but gives him a safe roof over his head and the materials he needs to return to the artist's work that will restore his self-esteem. As grateful as Goldmund is, he remains sufficiently in thrall to his adventures to wonder about the knight, and it is significant that both the good old man and his good daughter are gone, presumably taken by the plague. The only one who remains is perhaps the most selfish of the three, Julie, an outcome that indicates the usefulness of self-interest in life's struggles. The discussions between Narcissus and Goldmund about art, imagery, and thinking provide a philosophical explanation of the lives of the two much different characters depicted in this novel. Goldmund's work on the niche in the refectory provides his long-sought opportunity to memorialize people he has known, in artwork that will last many years. He brings to the carving of Abbot Daniel the same sensitivity that he showed in the statue of Narcissus as St. John, thus demonstrating that the best within him has not been destroyed by the bad things he has done. Even so, Goldmund's disappointment in his own flawed character is why he feels a kind of shame at the emotion his work is able to evoke in Narcissus, the man he most admires.

Chapters 19 and 20

Chapters 19 and 20 Summary

Goldmund works on the carving project for two years, with Erich as his apprentice during the second year. The project becomes complex, including a sculpted garden and scenes from the lives of saints. For imagery, Goldmund draws on all his experiences, including women he has met and the horrors he witnessed during the plague. Astonished and impressed, Narcissus says he is learning much from Goldmund about art, and about his friend's deep sensitivities. Goldmund says he envies Narcissus, but the latter replies that each path in life has its difficulties. Goldmund begins work on an altar for a nearby chapel, but he lets Erich do much of it, except a madonna statue that he wants to make in the likeness of Lydia, the knight's elder daughter. He takes to roaming in the woods, and meets a peasant girl who likes him but refuses his advances, making him realize he is old in her eyes. Goldmund feels tamed and domesticated. He resolves to take a trip after the Lydia-madonna is finished. The statue is a triumph. Goldmund departs, and Narcissus worries that he might never see him again. Even so, he knows the absence of his friend is good for him, because Goldmund's adventures made Narcissus worry that his own, orderly life might be somehow insufficient. Weeks pass. Narcissus checks occasionally on Erich's work and cleaves to his own duties, although it is a struggle, because he realizes now how much he was attached to Goldmund.

In Chapter 20, at the end of summer, Goldmund returns to the cloister. Erich is shocked by the sight of the much older, gray-faced man who approaches him with a pained gait. He goes straight to bed without undressing. Later, he gets up, looks at his wrinkled face in the mirror, laughs, and goes back to sleep. When Narcissus meets Goldman, he sees not only exhaustion in his friend's face, but also an acceptance or resignation that appeals to him. Goldmund says that he got sick shortly after leaving the cloister, but did not come back for fear of looking silly. Goldmund grows more ill. Narcissus asks if Goldmund thinks of death, and he replies that he does, and he also thinks often about his life. One thing he learned, he says, is that sensuality can be soulful. He thinks he has made enough statues, and is ready to die. He says he is curious about death, not because of an afterlife, in which he does not believe, but because he thinks his mother, rather than Death carrying a scythe, will take him. He confides to Narcissus that he left the cloister because he had heard that Agnes, the governor's mistress, was nearby. He met her, and she was still beautiful, but she rejected him because he was old. As he rode away, his horse fell in a stream and Goldmund lay unconscious in the cold water for a long time. He had broken several ribs, but he kept traveling. Near death, Goldmund asks Narcissus how he will die when his time comes, with no mother to take him. Over the next few days, as Goldmund dies in silence, his final words sear the heart of Narcissus.

Chapters 19 and 20 Analysis

The carving project, which allows Goldmund to integrate his worldly experiences, both good and bad, with spirituality, is symbolic of the unification of Goldman's own personality. Through art, he manages to make some sense of his travails and see the goodness that lies unsullied within himself despite the mistakes he has made. One reason he and Narcissus admire one another is that neither was able to live as the other chose to live, and each can see the value in the path he did not choose. Goldmund's successful completion of the Lydia statue is as close as he will get to his long-held dream of depicting the universal mother, and the implication is that it is as close as Goldmund, a mere human, can come to emulating heavenly ideals. His return to his wanderings is now simply a return to his life's calling. Good or bad, it appears to be the life for which he is best suited, and the very unsuitableness of it for Narcissus is painful for the monk to accept. When Goldmund returns to the cloister and his illness worsens, he admits that he thinks of death, but his emphasis is on life. He understands now that he did not lose his soul, and the proof is that he was able to put it into his works of art. This realization makes even death an acceptable possibility. His confession to Narcissus that he left the cloister to pursue Agnes shows that he remained true to who and what he is, which is the only way he could have created great art. Throughout Goldmund's wanderings, his mother has been his symbol of the instinctual or sensual life in all its beauty and difficulty. On his deathbed, he feels that he will return to his mother, although perhaps such a mother is really a more universal one, as large as the world, or larger. When Goldmund asks Narcissus how he will accept death without a mother to whom he can go, this final question works on two levels. First, it is a reminder that no information ever has been given about the family of Narcissus, as if he never were anything but a novice destined for monkhood, as if he never had a life outside the cloister. Second, the question sharpens the doubt Narcissus already feels, which is that contemplation and spirituality are rewarding and useful, but do these activities amount to living completely, if they never are accompanied by deeper experience of the wider world?

Characters

Goldmund

Goldmund is the principal protagonist in this novel. He appears early in the story as a youth who is brought by his father to the Mariabronn cloister to study, with the aim of becoming a monk, but Goldmund does not yet understand his own personality or needs. He thinks that he wants to be a monk, and he is impressed by saintliness of the abbot, but he also is enthralled by the scholarship of the novice, Narcissus. Torn between these two ideals of piousness and intelligence, he does not realize that his own path will be a third way. Only at age 18, when he seduced by a young woman during an afternoon outside the cloister, does Goldmund finally recognize that his fate is to live in the wider world. A beautiful youth, he attracts women easily, and he engages in many amorous encounters over years of wandering, during which his original innocence develops into the wiles of a ladies' man, although he retains his essential kindness. He learns to draw and sculpt, and often regards his own life through the lens of art. His absent mother, a beautiful and wild noblewoman, becomes his muse. Goldmund's life of wandering puts him into dangerous situations, and he kills two men, the first one in self-defense and the second to protect a woman. He later is imprisoned and almost executed, but is saved at the last moment by Narcissus. On two occasions, once at the house of a master artist, and later when he returns to the cloister, Goldmund stops wandering long enough to create beautiful religious art. This helps him to reassess his life, which he often had considered to be sinful and worthless. Near death, he accepts that despite the mistakes he made and the wrongs he committed, his art shows that the goodness in him remained alive.

Narcissus

Narcissus, the novel's other title character, is a pious and scholarly monk who seems virtually born to the life of the cloister. At the story's outset, when he is a novice, he already is teaching and appears to be aware that his destiny is to be a monk and perhaps even an abbot. He says as much to Abbot Daniel, who seems to take this prediction with a grain of salt, but Narcissus declares he has an ability to divine people's nature and thereby intuit something of their future, which turns out to be true. His other gift is exceptionally high intelligence, which he uses to develop a complex philosophical view of life that contrasts sharply with the sensuous nature of Goldmund. Narcissus is the first recognize that Goldmund is meant for a life outside the cloister and encourage him to go into the wider world. He also realizes that Goldmund has pushed memories of his mother away from his consciousness and that he must recall them, which is a process that transforms Goldmund. Through an act of will, the ascetic and highly disciplined Narcissus keeps his friendship with Goldmund at arm's length, the better to avoid worldly contacts while pursuing his own spiritual destiny. This decision proves to be problematic for Narcissus, who hears about the wanderings and misadventures of his friend with a mixture of concern and wonderment. Narcissus remains at all times

true to his vows, yet Goldmund's experiences prompts the monk to question how much he might have lost of richness in his life by honoring God through renunciation of the wider world.

Abbot Daniel

Abbot Daniel is the kindly old man who heads the Mariabronn cloister at the start of the novel. Warmhearted and deeply spiritual, he also is wise and aware of interpersonal dynamics in the cloister, as a good leader should be. He tells Narcissus that he is a little worried the younger man might be arrogant, and is right that this is a potential weakness in the highly intelligent novice. When jealous talk arises concerning the budding friendship between Narcissus and Goldmund, Abbot Daniel takes heed but decides to trust his judgment that Narcissus has the good sense to make correct decisions about the relationship. When Goldmund falls into a feint in what appears to be a kind of nervous breakdown, Abbot Daniel is worldly enough to wonder if Narcissus has been engaging in evil-doing, but he is also wise enough to dismiss his doubts. In this, he is again proven correct. Both Narcissus and Goldmund are great admirers of Abbot Daniel, who evokes such feelings of love and loyalty from all the cloister members. Just as Narcissus represents the intellectual life and Goldmund the sensual life, Abbot Daniel is the novel's embodiment of humble spirituality. Later in the novel, his death is as peaceful as Narcissus predicted it would be, which seems a just reward for a life of spirituality.

Master Niklaus

Master Niklaus is another major influence on the life of Goldmund. He teaches Goldmund how to be a master sculptor. Master Niklaus has carved a beautiful wooden statue of the madonna that

Goldmund sees in a chapel, which immediately convinces him that he must seek out the artist to become his apprentice. Master Niklaus, who is wealthy and renowned, neither needs nor wants an apprentice who is already a young man rather than a boy, but he sees from a drawing Goldmund does that this young man is unusually talented. His decision to train Goldmund comes from an allegiance to art itself rather than from any personal need or desire, but after Goldmund reaches the status of a master, Niklaus wants him to becomes his successor. When Goldmund elects instead to return to his wandering, Niklaus is angered and disappointed. He no doubt realizes that he has compromised his own art by taking many frivolous commissions for the money and recognition they would bring, just as Goldmund has suggested, yet Niklaus also revels in his stature within the community, and believes he has offered Goldmund a priceless opportunity. The character of Niklaus, like other characters in the novel, is representative of a personality type. He is the man who neglects his highest ideals and principles in favor of pursuing worldly success. To do this, he must live in partial blindness, ignoring the calls of his deeper nature to risk or sacrifice wealth and fame in favor of creating the best art of which he capable. In making this practical decision,

Master Niklaus represents the choices of many people in countless types of work throughout the ages.

Goldmund's Mother

Goldmund's mother does not appear in the action of the novel, but is a recurring presence in Goldmund's thoughts. Her significance is as the book's main representative of the intuitive, emotional, and sensual parts of the human personality that the author equates with artistry. Of noble birth, this beautiful woman fell into the dangerous habits of wild living, and was rescued from near-oblivion by Goldmund's father, who married her. She bore Goldmund, and for a few years seemed to be reformed, but then she returned to her affairs with men and drinking, and eventually she disappeared from the lives of her husband and child. Goldmund's father influenced the boy to forget about his mother, and only when he was 18 did thoughts of her begin to return to Goldmund. Throughout the rest of the novel, she periodically appears in his mind as the embodiment of beauty, kindness, and a darker side, the fusion of which represents the artistic personality, which the author also identifies with femininity.

Goldmund's Father

Goldmund's father is an elderly man in the service of the Emperor when he brings his son to the Mariabronn cloister at the start of the novel. After that early scene, he does not reappear in the book, except in discussions about him between Narcissus and Goldmund, and in Goldmund's thoughts. Devastated and embittered by his wife's desertion of him and the boy, Goldmund's father develops a twisted plan to commit their son to a lifetime as a monk in atonement for his mother's sins. In young manhood, Goldmund realizes what his father has done, which diminishes his love for him even as his attachment to the memory of his mother grows. Goldmund's father represents the logic, rigor, and discipline that Hermann Hesse identifies with masculinity, in contrast to the feminine, artistic side of the human personality represented by Goldmund's mother.

Viktor

Viktor is a smooth-talking wanderer and con man with whom Goldmund travels for a short while. Viktor teaches the younger man such tricks of the trade as how to beguile people with stories and charm to get food and lodging from them. He spouts a bit of Latin and tells amusing stories, but he also is a thief, and one night when he thinks Goldmund is asleep, he tries to rob him. When Goldmund awakens, Viktor tries to strangle him to death, and Goldmund's only recourse is to stab Viktor with a pen knife, killing him. Viktor represents the dangers of a life of vagrancy, and the violence that sometimes lies in wait behind a false smile.

Lise

Lise is the first girl with whom Goldmund makes love. He initially meets her when several other boys from the cloister sneak him into town one evening to visit two girls at a cottage, one of whom is Lise. The evening produces nothing more naughty that drinking hard cider and petting, but that is enough to alarm and fascinate Goldmund. Quite a while later, he falls asleep one day in a field and is awakened by Lise, who wordlessly makes love to him. Goldmund leaves the cloister to be with her, but in the morning, she tells him she is married and must get home to her husband. She is his introduction to lust, as opposed to sexual union with more long-term goals, and this first lesson she gives him proves to have a major impact on Goldmund's life.

The Knight

The knight owns a castle on the other side of a forest from the cloister, where Goldmund arrives and is invited to stay. The knight, a man of some learning, has led an adventurous life and wants to write about it, for which he enlists Goldmund's aid as a student of classical languages. He is a well-to-do and upright man, somewhat elderly, with two beautiful teenaged daughters. When the knight discovers that Goldmund has been dallying with the girls, he walks a long way with Goldmund, stops, and tells him to keep going. It is a tribute to the knight's strong character that he decides not to harm the young man, but merely send him on his way.

Lydia

Lydia is the knight's elder daughter. Lovely, remote, and proper, and she knows that a poor wanderer like Goldmund could never be her husband, but she eventually gives into his wooing and develops loving feelings toward him. She allows him to caress and kiss her, and she even begins coming to his bed at night, but her sense of honor will not allow him to make love to her, because she must save herself for whomever her husband eventually will be. After Goldmund is banished by the knight, Lydia sends a courier after him to give him meat, a warm vest, and a gold coin, but she includes no note to provide him with any hint that he should return to her.

Julie

Julie is the knight's younger daughter. She is even more beautiful than Lydia, but initially is dismissive and even contemptuous of Goldmund. Later, when she realizes Lydia has begun to lie in bed at night with Goldmund, she invades his room and lies on the other side of him. Unlike Lydia's staunch self-control, Julie responds to Goldmund's caresses, inspiring him to plead with her to return to him the next night. Later in the novel, Goldmund sees her briefly from a distance when he visits the castle with Narcissus. By then, she is married and reigns at the castle with her husband. To Goldmund, she looks beautiful, proud, and a trifle evil.

Lisbeth

Lisbeth is the daughter of Master Niklaus. Like several other wealthy young women Goldmund encounters, she is beautiful but seems inaccessible. She is polite to him, yet shows no romantic interest in him, despite his handsomeness. Even so, after Goldmund's becomes a master artist and Niklaus suggests that he could eventually take over the business, this offer carries with it the implication that he would marry Lisbeth. She agrees, yet without apparent emotion one way or the other. Later in the book, after the plague has swept the land and Master Niklaus has died, Goldmund visits Lisbeth, who is now bent over, withered and yellowed by disease. She dismisses his offer of help and closes the door in his face, proud to the end.

Robert

Robert is a young man who made a pilgrimage to Rome and ended up being a confirmed wanderer. He meets Goldmund and the two begin traveling together. Robert admires Goldmund's education and artistic capabilities, although he is less enamored of his friend's womanizing. The two travel through the countryside as the Black Death ravages the citizens, and Robert lives in constant fear of contamination. After Goldmund takes up with a woman who contracts the plague, Robert runs away and does not reappear in the story.

Lene

Lene is a young woman Goldmund sees in the window of a house in a plague-ridden town. He invites her to travel with him and Robert, which she agrees to do, delighted to get away from the death all around her. The three find an abandoned cottage in the woods and live there, which leads Lene to believe she and Goldmund will stay together permanently. When she realizes he has other plans, she is crestfallen. After a plague-ridden man attempts to rape her and bites her, she contracts the disease and dies. Goldmund burns the cottage, with Lene's corpse lying inside it, before continuing his wanderings.

Rebekka

Rebekka is a young Jewish woman Goldmund meets. She has lost her father to the plague, and he helps her to bury him. He then tries to convince the grief-stricken woman to come with him. Outraged, she bitterly dismisses him, which makes a big impact on Goldmund.

Marie

Marie is a girl whose parents own a house in which Goldmund lodges while he is learning art from Master Niklaus. Marie has beautiful eyes but suffers from a limp. She has a crush on Goldmund, who kisses her lightly on the lips before he leaves the house after telling Niklaus that he has decided to return to his wanderings. Years later, when Goldmund revisits the city, he again encounters Marie, who gives him a place to stay and feeds him. She remains loyal to him despite his disinterest in her romantically, and his affairs with others.

Agnes

Agnes is the gorgeous mistress of the governor of the city in which Niklaus lives. She is tall, strong, blonde, and regal. Goldmund sees her, thinks she is the most beautiful woman he has ever seen. He manages to have an affair with her, but is captured in her rooms and sentenced to death. Cleverly, Agnes asks him not to betray her, and he obeys. Years after he escapes the gallows, Goldmund goes to see Agnes, hoping to renew their affair, but she now regards him as too old for her, and rejects him.

Count Heinrich

Count Heinrich is the governor of the city where Master Niklaus lives. Agnes is his concubine, and he protects her jealously. A haughty and cruel man, he sentences Goldmund to death without a second thought, even though he apparently believes that Goldmund was only trying to steal from the castle rather than having an affair with Agnes. Count Heinrich represents the ability of total power to corrupt a person.

Objects/Places

The Mariabronn Cloister

The Mariabronn cloister is where the early and final chapters of the story are set. A well-kept, tranquil place, it is the home of a group of monks and novices, as well as students, some of whom are expected to eventually take their vows. Narcissus is a novice there at the story's opening, and becomes one of the teachers of Goldmund, who arrives as a student. Late in the novel, Goldmund returns to the cloister with Narcissus, who is now the abbot. Goldmund works there as an artist and then dies there.

The Village

The village initially refers to a village near the cloister. Several of the boys sneak out of the cloister to visit girls in the village, bringing Goldmund with them on one occasion. Later, after Goldmund leaves the cloister and begins his wandering, the village becomes many villages, one after another, that he visits on his journeys. No village is ever named in the novel, and the village comes to represent the everyday world of most people, as opposed to the cloistered world of religion.

The Forest

The forest is a wood through which the boys must walk from the cloister to the village, but it soon becomes a symbol, just as the village is. After Goldmund leaves the cloister, he walks for two days through a forest until he reaches a castle. Throughout the book, any forest he encounters represents nature and the animal-like, instinctive life.

The Castle

The castle originally refers to the home of the knight and his two daughters, Lydia and Julie. After Goldmund is banished from this castle, he eventually comes upon another castle, in which Count Heinrich and Agnes live. Both castles in the story represent privilege, power, and the chasm between the classes in medieval times.

The Wooden Madonna

The wooden madonna, created by Master Niklaus, stands in a chapel that Goldmund visits. He is captivated by its beauty and modernity, which are unlike any religious art he has seen. To him, this statue represents an expression of feeling that has come straight from the artist's soul. It becomes the ideal toward which Goldmund strives in all the statues he will make as the novel progresses.

Master Niklaus's City

Master Niklaus's city becomes very important to Goldmund, especially after he leaves it following his years of artistic training there, and then returns long afterward. His emotions upon returning surprise him, because it feels like a homecoming, which he has never before experienced. The city represents his place or his belonging in the world, just as the cloister is his retreat from it.

Master Niklaus's House

Master Niklaus's house is the first place where Goldmund has a chance to make the art about which he has dreamed for some time. The house itself is usually off-limits to Goldmund, particularly because Niklaus wants to keep him away from his unmarried daughter, but the grounds contain a workshop, and Goldmund develops a love of the place because of his great respect for the master and because of how much he learns there about art. When he returns later in the story to find Niklaus dead and his daughter sick, Goldmund is deeply saddened.

The Eve-Image

The Eve-Image is an ideal that Goldmund carries in his mind throughout much of the book. It represents his ambition to carve a statue that would do justice to first woman and the eternal mother, or to put it another way, the feminine principle and power. He never quite achieves this goal, probably because it is unachievable by humans.

The St. John Statue

The St. John statue is Goldmund's first successful carving. Done as the likeness of Narcissus, it is the first time Goldmund translates the depth of his emotions into a work of art. He makes it at the house of Master Niklaus and does not take it with him on his travels, but it exists as proof to Goldmund that his artistic talent is genuine.

The Black Death

The Black Death overruns the countryside during Goldmund's wanderings. The horror and devastation it wreaks have a profound effect on him, evoking deep feelings of sympathy and pity, but also leading him to a fatalism that all but eliminates his fear of death. Yet his will to live at all costs returns after he meets Agnes, which shows that the Black Death symbolizes the inevitability of the grave, and that love and art are its greatest enemies.

Themes

The Spirit and the Flesh

Each of the two title characters in the novel represents one-half of the human condition. Narcissus crafts himself into almost pure spirit, while Goldmund devotes himself almost completely to the way of the flesh. To become what they are, each character must deny and repress the opposite half of himself. Narcissus will not even allow physical contact with another person beyond the briefest hug when his best friend, Goldmund, is leaving the cloister, perhaps forever. To Narcissus, feelings of brotherly love must be kept on a spiritual plane, safe from the emotional complications and worldliness of warm, tactile friendship. Goldmund understands this point of view but finds it strange and limiting. No sooner does he go into the world than he becomes immersed in all its physical experiences, both good and bad, including sex, drinking, travel, art, constant contact with strangers, and violence. Over the course of the novel, both characters come to realize that while their own way of living in the world has value, it is incomplete without at least part of the other's experience. Goldmund keenly rues the lost of his spiritual self, and admires Narcissus for his composure and fierce dedication to leading a monkish existence. For his part, Narcissus realizes through hearing of Goldmund's adventures that he has curtailed the potential for fullness in his own life. Neither man is influenced by the other to change course, because each has found his proper path. Hesse's point is that giving oneself to God or to the world is an act with powerful repercussions, which probably is predestined for each person.

The Thinker vs. the Artist

Among the monks in the cloister, Narcissus stands out as the greatest scholar. He is described as highly intellectual, and even brilliant. Throughout the book, he engages Goldmund in a number of philosophical discussions, during which he examines the differences between the two friends, how each of them perceives the world, and the diverging courses on which they are set. Goldmund is bright, and can follow most of these discourses, but he does not regard the world in the abstract terms of thought that Narcissus uses. Instead, Goldmund thinks in images. When he remembers his mother or friends and lovers he has met on the road, he sees pictures in his head of faces and places. Narcissus points out that this difference in the way the two see things - in abstractions versus in images - is fundamental to the sort of people they are. He is a thinker and Goldmund is an artist. Narcissus makes sense of the world through rationality and logic, while Goldmund understands it by re-creating it in images. The products of the thinker and the artist, or what they contribute to others, also differ. As a thinker, Narcissus can provide reasoned explanations of who people are and why they do what they do, which can help them to guide their own lives. As an artist, Goldmund can memorialize loved ones and create lasting beauty through his drawings and carvings. Narcissus helps Goldmund to see that each of their contributions has value, and that both of them have found their most appropriate ways to live fulfilling lives.

The Spark of Goodness

When Goldmund leaves the cloister and goes into the world, he is the personification of the innocent victim. Women, attracted to his great beauty, introduce him to sex, and he quickly becomes addicted. It is as if sexuality were a disease and Goldmund's innocence were a lack of immunity. He is overtaken by sensuality, which extends beyond sex to all the primal forces of life. He revels in food and drink, in travel and adventure, in work and new acquaintances, and in Nature herself. Such abundantly sensual living will extract its payment, which often takes the form of regrets. In Goldmund, regret extends to dismay and then to despair, especially after his unbridled wanderings lead him into violent situations. He kills a man in self-defense, and later kills another in a rage while protecting a woman. The boy who had wanted to become a monk has turned into a vagrant, a seducer, and even a killer. Goldmund is on the verge of being executed when Narcissus happens upon him and rescues him. With the help of Narcissus, Goldman returns to making art, and through the beauty of the religious work he creates, he realizes that all the wrongs he has done and the horrors he has experienced have not destroyed his soul. Goodness still resides there, shining through in the carvings he makes. Hesse's message is that by going into the dangerous world and becoming an artist, Goldmund had been true to his nature, and to his calling. In so doing, he has protected and nurtured the deepest and best part of himself, which could not be extinguished by either the hardships he endured or the sins that he committed.

Style

Point of View

The novel is told entirely in third person. The author delves into the thoughts of both Goldmund and Narcissus, allotting segments of the book to each of them, although the majority of the story concerns Goldmund's adventures outside the cloister. Consequently, Goldman's view of life is the one that is given the most thorough attention in the novel. Nevertheless, the ideas and concerns of Narcissus are a vital counterpoint to those of Goldmund, and Hermann Hesse depicts these thoughts in the chapters at the beginning and end of the story. Another way he shows the difference in perception between his two protagonists is through conversations between them. In those scenes, he often does not go into the thoughts of either character, using instead a dramatic viewpoint that allows them to express themselves through speech. The opinions and emotions of other characters in the book are depicted from a third-person, dramatic viewpoint, without delving into their thoughts. Often, Hesse shows how a character feels by describing that person's reaction to a situation, be it frightened, ardent, or hateful. He frequently describes duplicitous or selfish activities, demonstrating through action the often unstable nature of human relations. Following the style of traditional literature before the advent of postmodernism, Hesse does not interject his own voice as the author into the story. What he thinks about the characters and events described in his novel must be intuited by the reader from the action and the thoughts of Narcissus and Goldmund.

Setting

Hesse has set his novel in an undefined place, at a nonspecific time. Names are not provided for the country, the city, villages, forests, rivers, or other geographical markers, although one setting where key action occurs is identified. This is the cloister called Mariabronn. Other settings are described generically, such as "the chapel" or "the castle." From such clues, it is possible to ascertain that the story is set in a medieval time. The name Mariabronn and the names of several characters, such as "Viktor" and "Count Heinrich," suggest that the setting is Germanic, which is an easy mental leap to take, given that Hesse was German. As the novel progresses, it becomes evident that this decision to omit names is part of a strategy aimed at giving a fable-like cast to the story by setting it nowhere in particular, which therefore could be anywhere. Each setting, whether it is a village, a house, the forest, or even a smaller place such as a room or a haystack, becomes iconic by not naming it or setting it in a specific locale. This means that each setting becomes representative of thoughts or emotions evoked in most people by the mention of the word that describes it generically. For example, a chapel conjures universal images that would be diluted by describing it as a particular chapel with a name and age, made of a certain material in a specific architectural style. Hesse's objective clearly was to let the settings be representative or symbolic of

thematic issues he wished to explore, rather than allowing details of the settings to divert the reader's attention from those themes.

Language and Meaning

This book was translated from the German original, which means that its vocabulary, phrasing, use of common sayings, and other aspects of its language are influenced by choices made by the translator. Of course, that is always true of translated books, and critics have expended much ink on analyzing the relative merits of different translations of important works, but this novel's translation from German to English is perhaps particularly important, because German is a language unusually rich in psychological terminology, and Hesse's story is deeply concerned with states of mind. That said, the language in the novel is not complex or obscure. Much of it is aimed at creating a sense of a character's mood at the moment, be it contented, concerned, or despairing. The novel is shot through with emotionalism. Love in friendships and in sexual situations preoccupies characters, as does the attempt to find and keep God's love. The struggles of Narcissus and Goldmund to live in a spiritual manner and their tendency to be lifted or guided by religion are depicted in language that celebrates the joys and challenges of lofty ideals. In contrast, another use of language is in the deprivations and degradations of poverty, disease, and greed that Goldmund witnesses during his wanderings. In a novel marked by Goldmund's continuous fluctuations in joy and despair, the language used to convey those high and lows is often extreme, as if hardly a moment of mundane repose can be granted in the intense life of this vagabond artist.

Structure

The novel's physical structure is simple and straightforward. It has 20 chapters, all roughly similar in length, which are not subdivided internally or externally by grouping them into parts or books. The storyline's structure is likewise chronological, without flashbacks or leaps forward in time. The structure of the plot might be described as consisting of three segments, although they are not delineated in any formal manner. The first part consists of the initial meeting and developing friendship of Narcissus and Goldmund in the Mariabronn cloister. This part establishes a tone of spirituality, safety, kindness, and sincerity. The second segment, which is the longest, describes Goldmund's travels and adventures through the countryside over a number of years. In this section, the duplicity, greed, and dangers he encounters all serve to erode the sense of security that was established in the opening chapters. Their assault on goodness is not total, however, because Goldmund encounters fine people among the less-admirable ones, and he also enjoys interludes of relative calm and happiness. The final section concerns Goldmund's return to the cloister. At this point, he has seen and suffered much, and is a dramatically different person from the naïve youth who left the cloister years earlier. This only heightens his appreciation of the cloister and the spirituality it engenders. When he departs, it is only for a few months, and he returns ill, on the cusp of death. At the end of this third part, he dies in the same cloister where his mind was first awakened to his true calling; the place where, in that sense, he was born.

Quotes

"A man's wishes may not always determine his destiny, his mission; perhaps there are other, predetermining factors" (Chapter 1, p. 5).

"Some secret flaw seemed attached to Goldmund's birth, something unspoken that sought expiation" (Chapter 2, p. 15).

"Deep inside himself he felt the life he had dreamed of up to now, all his beliefs, all the things for which he felt himself destined, his entire vocation, threatened at the root by the kiss through the window, by the expression of those dark eyes" (Chapter 3, p. 26).

"Some day you will think of what I am going to say to you now: our friendship has no other purpose, no other reason, than to show you how utterly unlike me you are" (Chapter 3, p. 32).

"I call a man awake who knows in his conscious reason his innermost unreasonable force, drives, and weaknesses and knows how to deal with them" (Chapter 4, p. 42).

"His mother meant not only all that was graceful; not only were her gentle look of love and sweet, happiness-promising smile caressing consolations; but somewhere beneath this enticing exterior lay much that was frightful and dark, greedy and fearful, sinful and sorrowful, all that gave birth and death" (Chapter 5, p. 57).

"He thought that he, that all men, trickled away, changing constantly, until they finally dissolved, while their artist-created images remained unchangeably the same" (Chapter 10, p. 155).

"Instead of learning, monkhood, and virtue, powerful drives and instincts had become his masters: sex, women, desire for independence, wandering" (Chapter 11, p. 160).

"The figure he hoped to be able to make visible some day was not to represent any specific woman, but the source of life itself, the original mother" (Chapter 11, p. 163).

"Death and ecstasy were one. The mother of life could be called love or desire; she could also be called death, grave, or decay" (Chapter 11, p. 168).

"Obedient to no man, dependent only on weather and season, without a goal before them or a roof above them, owning nothing, open to every whim of fate, the homeless wanderers lead their childlike, brave, shabby existence" (Chapter 13, p. 192).

"To conquer her suddenly seemed a noble goal to strive for, and if he were to break his neck on the way it would not have seemed a bad death to him" (Chapter 15, p. 237).

"He clenched his teeth. It would be hard for him to kill this friar" (Chapter 16, p. 258).

"I saw that something remained of the fool's play, the death dance of human life, something lasting: works of art" (Chapter 17, p. 268).

"You don't look away from the world; you give yourself to it, and by your sacrifice to it raise it to the highest, a parable of eternity" (Chapter 19, p. 290).

"You'll laugh at me, but I don't like going away; and this dependence does not please me. It is like an illness; young healthy men don't have that" (Chapter 19, p. 296).

"He had not only sacrificed his horse, his satchel, and his gold pieces; other things, too, had gotten lost or deserted him: youth, health, self-confidence, the color in the cheeks and the force in his eyes" (Chapter 20, p. 303).

Topics for Discussion

In mythology, Narcissus is a beautiful youth who shuns the nymphs but falls in love with his own reflection in a pond, which he thinks is the face of a water nymph. In this novel, Goldmund is the beautiful boy beloved by women. Why do you think the author did not name him "Narcissus," giving the name instead to the monk?

When Goldmund realizes, with the help of Narcissus, that he has forgotten his mother, he falls into a feint. Why do you think he forgot her,? Why is it so traumatic to remember her?

After Goldmund has the first sexual experience of his life, with Lise, she tells him she has a husband to whom she must return. Goldmund's frame of mind is rather complicated at this point. Describe it, and explain why he is conflicted.

Master Niklaus offers Goldmund a workshop, the chance to become the successor to his business, and the hand of his beautiful daughter. Goldmund turns it all down in favor of wandering the countryside. Do you think this was a good or a bad choice? Why?

When Goldmund and Robert wander through the countryside in the midst of the Black Death, Goldmund seems strangely unworried about contracting the disease, yet he does not seem to have a death wish. How do you explain this attitude?

When the man with the plague tries to rape Lene, Goldmund lifts him up in a rage and dashes his head on the rocks, killing him. Explain how this young man, who once had been so enthralled by spirituality that he wanted to become a monk, could now find himself killing someone in a blind fury.

Goldmund is depressed by what he regards as a life of useless wandering and seduction, and yet when he sees the beautiful Agnes, he thinks that to seduce her would be a noble achievement. What does this tell you about who he has become, and how he thinks?

At the end of the novel, as Goldmund dies, Narcissus is shaken by his friend's final statement, that without a mother a person can neither love nor die. What does he mean by this, and why does it cause so much consternation for Narcissus?