

The Literary Portrait of a Sigma

Alpha Game | 20 May, 2014 | by VD

"During these years Goldmund had gradually lost the rest of the adolescent grace and boyishness that had pleased so many. He had become a beautiful, strong man, much desired by women, little popular with men. His mind, his inner face, had greatly changed as well since the days Narcissus awakened him from the happy sleep of his cloister years. World and wandering had molded him. From the pretty, gentle, pious, willing cloister student whom everybody liked, another being had emerged. Narcissus had awakened him, women had made him aware, the wandering had brushed the down from him. He had no friends; his heart belonged to women. They could win him easily: one longing look was enough. He found it hard to resist a woman and responded to the slightest hint. In spite of his strong sense of beauty, of his preference for the very young in the bloom of spring, he'd let himself be moved and seduced by women of little beauty who were no longer young. On the dance floor he'd sometimes end up with a discouraged elderly girl whom no one wanted, who'd win him by the pity he felt for her, and not pity alone, but also a constantly vigilant curiosity. As soon as he gave himself to a woman—whether it lasted weeks or just hours—she became beautiful to him, and he gave himself completely. Experience taught him that every woman was beautiful and able to bring joy, that a mousy creature whom men ignored was capable of extraordinary fire and devotion, that the wilted had a more maternal, mourningly sweet tenderness, that each woman had her secrets and her charms, and to unlock these made him happy. In that respect, all women were alike. Lack of youth or beauty was always balanced by some special gesture. But not every woman could hold him equally long. He was just as loving and grateful toward the ugly as toward the youngest and prettiest; he never loved halfway. But some women tied him to them more strongly after three or ten nights of love; others were exhausted after the first time and forgotten.

"Love and ecstasy were to him the only truly warming things that gave life its value. Ambition was unknown to him; he did not distinguish between bishop and beggar. Acquisition and ownership had no hold over him; he felt contempt for them. Never would he have made the smallest sacrifice for them; he was earning ample money and thought nothing of it. Women, the game of the sexes, came first on his list, and his frequent accesses of melancholy and disgust grew out of the knowledge that desire was a transitory, fleeting experience. The rapid, soaring, blissful burning of desire, its brief, longing flame, its rapid extinction—this seemed to him to contain the kernel of all experience, became to him the image of all the joys and sufferings of life. He could give in to this melancholy and shudder at all things transitory with the same abandonment with which he gave in to love. This melancholy was also a form of love, of desire. As ecstasy, at the peak of blissful tension, is certain that it must vanish and die with the next breath, his innermost loneliness and abandonment to melancholy was certain that it would suddenly be swallowed by desire, by new abandonment to the light side of life. Death and ecstasy were one."

- from *Narcissus and Goldmund* by Hermann Hesse

Archived from theredarchive.com