Narcissus And Goldmund – Herman Hesse Essay, Research Paper

Throughout this book Hesse continuously explores the idea of the conflict individuals experience when searching for their true identity. Narcissus and Goldmund, two medieval men whose characters are metaphors for the underlying theme of mans individual search for self and the human experience. Narcissus is a monk firm in his religious and intellectual beliefs or so he thinks, and Goldmund a youth hungry for knowledge and life experience. Narcissus the intellect living a purely academic life yet when Goldmund becomes part of his life, finds himself fighting the emotional part of his psyche. Goldmund is the total opposite, an individual born to live life to its fullest yet fighting those desires due to parental influences. The two men are diametrically opposite, even their names are metaphoric – Narcissus the embodiment of pure intellect and Goldmund who’s names translates as “Golden mouth” which indicates a hunger for life and worldly experiences.

The story of both individuals are metaphors of the ways and degree that one can lead a life. Narcissus has a hermetic existence in his ivory tower with his pure thought , reasoning and self sufficient loneliness for companions. He is closed off from life in the monastery the acetic who is totally unaware of life’s cycles. Goldmund’s so called vagabond lifestyle rich in experience, free spirit and free choices. I feel here that it is important to Hesse that it be stressed that the extreme of any life style such as in this story is actually dangerous to the individual, and according to Hesse himself ( Comments from a conversation with Rudolf Koester) “the development to become a personality with privilege to think, feel, and act independently is the primary responsibility of the individual. Extremes such as a complete withdrawal into a hermetically sealed ego is as dangerous as the individual who succumbs to the allure of conformity while yielding to pressure. The individual must establish a balance between the two forces”

I found it quite interesting that two men are total opposites and yet could be so connected to each other. As Hesse shows in this book each is in the minds of the other throughout their separate lives. This is enforced for example when Goldmund is carving a statue of John the Baptist only to see that the face that he has carved is that of Narcissus’. Maybe the two men have one thing in common in that they are both living lives that are quite extreme, which was the entire focus that Hesse wanted for this book.