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Tonio Kröger

Thomas Mann · *1903 · Kenneth Burke translation (1924)*

Tonio Kröger, the son of a consul and a southern mother in a north German town, loves the blond, merry boy Hans Hansen, who does not share his feeling. As a young writer in Munich, he feels set apart from ordinary life. He goes north to his old town and to Denmark, and he writes a letter to a friend about his love for the ordinary. Mann's novella is the story of an artist's divided heart.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

Can an artist belong to ordinary life, or does his work set him apart from the people he loves?

Tonio feels that he is both of the bourgeois world of his father and of the artistic world of his mother, and at home in neither. He loves the simple and the 'blond and blue-eyed,' and he knows that his art makes him observe and not share. The seaside hotel shows him a young pair who remind him of his first loves. The letter to Lisaweta at the end is a statement of what he has come to accept.

KEY CHARACTERS

Tonio Kröger
A writer divided between two worlds.

Hans Hansen
The school friend whom he loves.

Ingeborg Holm
His early love.

Lisaweta Iwanowna
His painter friend, who listens.

Grades 10–12
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01
Hans
CHAPTER I

Tonio, a boy in a northern town, loves the cheerful Hans Hansen and is hurt by his indifference.

- Hans is healthy, merry, and ordinary.
- Tonio's feeling is not returned.
- The boy's sense of being different begins.

02
Ingeborg
CHAPTER II

At sixteen, Tonio is moved by Ingeborg Holm, a blonde girl who also does not see him.

- The second love repeats the first pain.
- The dance lesson is a scene of humiliation.
- He turns more toward books and writing.

03
Munich and Lisaweta
CHAPTERS III–IV

In Munich, Tonio, now a writer, tells his friend Lisaweta that the artist is divided from ordinary life.

- Lisaweta is a painter and a confidante.
- Tonio's speech is a statement of the artist's situation.
- His success has not brought peace.

04
Journey North
CHAPTERS V–VI

He goes to Denmark by way of his old town, which no longer recognizes him.

- His old house is a public library.
- A policeman questions him as a stranger.
- The north is the place of his childhood.

05
The Seaside Hotel
CHAPTERS VII–IX

At the hotel, he sees a young pair who remind him of Hans and Ingeborg. He writes a letter to Lisaweta about his love for the ordinary.

- The dance in the hotel is a reminder of the old pain.
- The pair are not Hans and Ingeborg, but are like them.
- The letter is the story's conclusion.

Art and Life | Longing | Belonging | The Outsider

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 10–12

1. Tonio's mixed heritage is the key. Notice how Mann sets north against south.
2. The letter to Lisaweta is the story's ending. Read it as a statement of faith.
3. Hans and Ingeborg return in the hotel. Ask why Mann brings them back.
4. The story is short. Notice how repetition builds feeling.

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