



The Acolyte

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Characters Discussed

Jack Holberg, a blind musician who becomes Australia's major composer. In his early forties by the time the novel concludes, Holberg is a handsome, powerfully built man whose blindness seems to enhance his presence. A complex character, he is both gifted and obsessed, both kind and cruel. The novel's events and the other characters' lives revolve around his rise from an itinerant pianist in country towns to a composer of international reputation.

Paul Vesper, the "acolyte" to Holberg. In his twenties when he meets Holberg, the novel's first-person narrator subordinates his own personality to focus on the composer's story. He insists on portraying himself as an ordinary and dull-witted man, fit only to serve the extraordinary and brilliant Holberg. Through the narrative's ironic stance, however, Vesper emerges as witty, likable, and sensitive in his own right, even as he bears the insults and humiliation of serving as an "acolyte" before the dubious altar of artistic genius.

Sadie, Holberg's aunt and former guardian. Sadie is a lively seventy-year-old woman who, in a red wig and outlandish clothes, gambles and frolics at Australia's noted resort, Surfer's Paradise. Although she is a comic character to an extent, her relation to Holberg assumes significance, for, unlike the others, she does not forgo her individuality to feed his egotism.

Jamie, Holberg's young son, actually the child of his wife's sister. A sensitive and handsome boy, he struggles to discover his identity amid the members of the odd household, the conflicting family relationships, and his father's coldness.

Hilda, Holberg's wife. A colorless and unattractive woman in her thirties, she devotes herself entirely to Holberg and his work, even though she understands neither the man nor the art he produces. She patiently bears his cruelty and indifference, along with his frequent infidelities, and remains humble and servile, even to the point of feigning blindness at times.

Ilse, Hilda's sister and Jamie's mother. Common in appearance and personality like her sister, and generally inept as well, Ilse takes a perverse delight in suffering at the hands of Holberg. Like the others, she has let her own life fall into a kind of paralysis so that Holberg's genius might flourish.

Bibliography

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