Hermann Hesse's Spiritual Formula

Ştefan BORBÉLY

The 1946 Nobel Prize laureate, German-Swiss prose writer, poet and painter Hermann Hesse was an outstanding representative of the European post-romantic, decadent modernism of the first half of the twentieth century. Hesse developed a warm friendship with Thomas Mann, whose literary themes he partially shared, especially those concerning the relation between the sound, solid order of the bourgeoisie as opposed to the solitary, Bohemian, exuberant sensuality of the artist. Hesse was also attracted by the Oriental way of life and by Buddhist mysticism, which he came to know both through the personal remembrances of his family, some of its members having served as missionaries in India, and from a personal journey to Sri Lanka and Indonesia, undertook in 1911 together with his friend, painter Hans Sturzenegger from Schaffhausen. (The complete details about the writer's biography and work can be found in Prof. Em. Gunther H. Gottschalk's excellent *Hermann Hesse Project*, run since 1996 at the University of California at Santa Barbara: www.gss.ucsb.edu/projects/Hesse.)

Hermann Hesse turned his traveling experience into a diary, published in 1913 (*Aus Indien; From India*) and into a famous novel, *Siddhartha*, published in 1923 (Engl. transl. 1951). Oriental motifs will be always present in his work, as he considered that Oriental plenitude and serenity can constitute an antidote to gloomy, modernist, European self-isolation and alienation. Being rebellious and rather neurotic, his character inconsistency drew him into several deep psychotic crises, such as repeated conflictual relations with his parents, an escape tentative from school (depicted in a short story, *Unterm Rad*, 1906; Engl. transl. *Beneath the Wheel*), an early suicide attempt (1892), as well as several internships in mental institutions, where he also learned Jungian psychoanalysis.

In order to compensate for his personal sensitive fragility, Hesse tried to protect himself by continuously building up an Oriental simplicity around him, in the midst of a raging, violently political Europe. He left Germany and moved to Switzerland in 1912 (following the career of his obsessive model, the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche), gave up German citizenship in 1923, took up gardening and painting, settled in tiny villages like Gaienhofen (together with his first wife, photographer Maria Bernoulli, who was a neurotic herself), then moved to Montagnola, in Southern Switzerland, where he tried to integrate into the organic mildness of everyday peasant life, until his death in 1962). Although he firmly shared the belief that artists should live a marginal and Bohemian life, outside political and social constraints, his little essay *O Freunde, nicht diese Töne!* (*Oh Friends, Not These Tones*!), published in the November 3, 1914 issue of the "Neue Zurcher Zeitung", was widely read as a warning against public hatred and German nationalism on the threshold of WWI. During the war, Hesse helped refugees and committed himself to humanitarian work; later on, when the Nazis came to power in

Philologica Jassyensia, An II, Nr. 1, 2006, p. 13-22

BDD-A762 © 2006 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-19 07:51:12 UTC)

Germany, he, as "first voluntary émigré", also helped Thomas Mann and other refugees to find their way into freedom.

Obsessed by Friedrich Nietzsche, whose incandescent style he took up in an ardent manifesto saluting the end of the WWI and the coming of a "new era" (*Zarathustra's Widerkehr. Ein Wort an die Deutsche Jugend – Zarathustra's Return. A Word to the German Youth*, 1919-1920, the first edition of which was anonymous), Hermann Hesse turned Nietzsche's perception on the complimentary ambivalence of the "Apollonian" form and the "Dionysian" energy into the dual typology of the antithetical protagonists of his novels *Demian* (1919; Engl. transl. 1923), *Klingsor's Last Summer* (1920) and *Narziss und Goldmund* (1930; Engl. transl. *Death and the Lover*, 1932). These works also exhibit the novelist's vivid interest in C.G. Jung's analytical psychology. As the author pointed out in a later recollection, the plot in *Demian* was meant to approximate the classical individuation process. Goldmund's sunny career outside the monastery in *Death and the Lover* also resembles the individuation frame, by adding to the basic psychological complex the distinct traits of a maternal mythology, whose profound explanation can also be detected in Hesse's early childhood trauma.

Hermann Hesse came across Jungian psychoanalysis in May 1916, when he was treated for a nervous breakdown in a private sanatorium near Luzern. He met there a young physician, J. B. Lang, who made a great impression on him by treating his illness with un-Orthodox, Jungian methods, based on the hermeneutics of profound cultural symbols and archetypes. Dr. Lang was also the man who urged Hesse to "act out" his fears and complexes by taking up painting. The writer would always remain faithful to this "therapy", by completing more than 3,500 oil paintings and drawings, some of them hosted by the Hermann Hesse Museum in Montagnola.

A sample of this prestigious collection was brought to the United States in 1999 (Febr. 14 – May 30) by the Oglethorpe University Museum. The style of his paintings show colorful, mild (not radical) Expressionist traces, which also inflect the style of Klingsor, the painter from the novella *Klingsor's Last Summer* (*Klingsors letzter Sommer*, 1920). The color palette of these paintings also evinces sensual chaos and mental exuberance, bordering on a sense of death and extinction. Painting a wild, Dionysian self-portrait on the brink of his death, Klingsor deliberately turns the dreamy surface of his forms and colors into a destructive, elementary, "artistic" energy, inspired by demonic forces surging from the underworld. Drawing on Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* (1871-1872), itself inspired from Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation* (1816), the topic of artistic creation is conceived as a decadent, self-destructive process – a theme that provides the in-depth structure of Thomas Mann's major novels. Hesse's flamboyant protagonist is, in Nietzsche's specific terms, a Dionysian, exuberant "mid-day man" and a Sun-worshipper, who drives his art beyond form, into color torment and extinction. Hesse's characters are primarily reclusive figures, who enjoy shadowy places, in spite of their precious Bohemian solitude, which drives them out of towns and houses, into the open spaces of the forest and the plain. As a consequence, the Sun is mostly associated in his writings with destructive exuberance. As we shall see, after leaving the spiritual enclave of Castalia, Josef Knecht, the master of the *Glass Bead Game,* is also subdued by the power of the rising sun.

Hermann Hesse's typical hero is the anti-bourgeois, Bohemian, anarchist artist and wanderer, illustrated in the early novel *Peter Camenzind* (1904), in (*Knulp* (1915)

BDD-A762 © 2006 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-19 07:51:12 UTC)

and particularly in *Der Steppenwolf* (1927; Engl. transl. 1929 as *Steppenwolf;* revised transl. in 1963). *Steppenwolf* constituted one of the main "Bibles" of the young counter-culture movement of the sixties in the USA and in Western Europe. A famous Californian rock group, *Sparrow*, changed its name into *Steppenwolf*; their song, *Born to Be Wild*, released in 1968, is featured in the film *Easy Rider*. Harry Haller, the social outcast protagonist of the novel, attracted the young rebels of the sixties precisely because of his split, half male, half female personality, which he transcends by means of love and magic. Numerous *hippies* of the sixties considered themselves "steppenwolves" in their urge for transgressing social order and discipline. They also loved Harry Haller because of his refusal to take up adult values and his desire to remain a paradoxically immature child of the universe. Many characters depicted in Hesse's great novels bear childish traces, recalling Nietzsche's famous Zarathustra and his teachings. The utopian province of Castalia, which hosts the elite fraternity of the glass bead game players, is also depicted as a "childish" spiritual enclave, surrounded by the "mature" forces of politics and history.

The artist pictured as a melancholic, Bohemian social outcast obsessed Hermann Hesse from the beginnings of his literary career. Furthermore, it brought into his stories the structural opposition between the sterile fixity of the social settler, such as the family man, the bourgeois or the philistine, and the exuberant, spiritual richness of the wanderer. Hesse also shared with Nietzsche and Thomas Mann the attraction towards the "artistic", brilliant, Italian or Mediterranean South, as a counterpart to the foggy, gloomy German North. In this antithesis, which explains many characteristics of his protagonists, the "German" North plays the role of the structuring, restrictive form, while the Mediterranean South engages – similar to what it happens in Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* - the destructive, Dionysian energies of the underworld.

This structural opposition is used by Hesse for the first time in his early novel *Knulp*, whose protagonist is an elderly social outlaw. Knulp wanders back to his place of birth in order to find a tranquil passage to death and reintegration into the simple rhythms of nature. Old Knulp has always been a Bohemian wanderer who, despite his shabby attire and outworn shoes, seems endowed with an outstanding rhetorical style and human distinction. In his youth, Knulp left behind his northern place of birth in order to go travel south, in search for ecstatic artistry. He has never had a job or a house of his own, but has always managed to please everybody, because he is capable of relieving people from their sorrows, pains and unpleasant thoughts.

According to an ancient, classical definition, used among others by the Greek Athenaios, in his *Deipnosophistai* (third century A.D.), Knulp could be seen as a charming parasite, a social magician. Everywhere he stops, he is able to act as the perfect mirror of the others. Happily socializing with Knulp, who appears to know every person he meets in his Bohemian wanderings, people feel their life turning into a feast. Accordingly, men, women and children (animals as well) experience enthusiasm when he shows up, treating him well and urging him to stay around as much as he desires. In Nietzsche's terms, Knulp is the perfect "mid-day man", a social charmer without shadows, which means both social sincerity and the absence of sufferance and dark interiority. Hesse said about *Knulp* and the earlier *Peter Camenzind* (1904) that they both embody the anti-decadent figure of the "natural man" espoused by Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Due to his playful serenity, Knulp also appears – in Nietzsche's terms – as an

BDD-A762 © 2006 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-19 07:51:12 UTC)

"anti-Christ" figure, rather similar to Dionysus, the eternal "*xénos*" (alien) and wanderer. The last chapters of the novel openly depict Knulp as God's favorite son, on his way up to heaven, where he hopes that Good Old Father will save him from heavy burdens, as a reward for making people's life easier on earth.

The romantic antithesis between natural, organic existence and social alienation already marked Hesse's first success story, *Peter Camenzind* (1904), a *Bildungsroman* whose protagonist is the offspring of an isolated, archaic community (Nimikon), which lives in timeless harmony with nature somewhere at an extremely high altitude in the Alps. Peter grows up with the creed that there can be no essential difference between persons, flowers and trees, since all of these share the spiritual plenitude of the universe. When growing up, Peter's archaic wisdom turns into a humanitarian ideology based on altruism and simplicity. He develops a vivid cult for Saint Francis of Assisi, praises Buddha's Nirvana and Tolstoy's ascetic retirement from life, and sings exuberant hymns to a generic divinity called Dionysus-Hermes-Eros, which he finds in wine and in his love for an aged, enigmatic painter, Erminia Aglietti.

Traveling down to "civilization" (in his particular case, Florence and Italy, the hotbed of the European bourgeoisie), Peter experiences – similar to Rilke's Malte Laurids Brigge – the ridiculous scarcity of modern life. He eventually becomes contaminated by it, as he becomes a skilled journalist and gets to know Paris, a city he perceives as the quintessence of human inconsistency. Nevertheless, these tribulations cannot alienate Peter's natural, harmonious character inherited from his mountaineer ancestors. He remains, despite his bitter experiences related to the destructive effect of civilization, a "positive" person, unharmed by chaotic challenges and negativities. Hesse depicts him like a new Zarathustra, who fulfils his call by retreating into his high-altitude native village, where he manages an inn he used to patronize when his father was still alive. It is there that he regains the simple certainties of the cosmic natural energies connecting him to eternity.

Following Hesse's 1916 nervous breakdown, which entailed his confinement to a mental sanatorium after the sudden death of his father, the writer's style and his character typology gradually changed and diversified. The most relevant new topic was the Faustian, elementary darkness of the novel *Demian* (1919), articulated on the binary personality structure of the split man or double figure (*Doppelgänger*): another theme derived from Nietzsche. The cataclysm of WWI and the relief that accompanied its conclusion drew Hesse into the frantic conviction that great historical anomalies can only be avoided if humanity generates a superior spiritual elite, comprising thinkers and artists who can represent a standard for the others and relegate malignity beyond the margins of a balanced, mutual social understanding. Hesse considered that each person should realize his individuation, not by fighting against, but by integrating the dark energies of his personality, and by transforming the inner completion of his soul into a socially accepted moral norm. Light and darkness, considered as the intertwined moulds of a split soul, will mark Hesse's spiritual formula well beyond the novels *Steppenwolf* and *Narziss und Goldmund*. They would become associated with another complementary dichotomy: the antithetical formative influence of the father and the mother, which was typical of the expressionist categories adopted by Hesse's style at that time.

Embroiled in this conflictual relationship, which also underlies Thomas Mann's works (*The Buddenbrooks, Tristan, Tonio Kröger, Death in Venice,* etc.), the figure of

BDD-A762 © 2006 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-19 07:51:12 UTC)

the father embodies the structuring force which makes things stay within the form. Motherhood, on the other hand, is associated with the sensual, dispersive, exuberant drive of artistry. German expressionism shares Schopenhauer's and Nietzsche's belief in the existence of a dark, elementary energy, which comes to the surface in order to guide the artist towards extinction and the underworld. According to this formula, each artist belongs primarily to a dark, formative "Urmutter" (primeval God-Mother), whose energies flow into each creation, whatever its style or form of expression. As such, each artist is, metaphysically speaking, a "double" figure (*Doppelgänger*), since his personality combines the structuring, paternal consistency of the form and the opposite, maternal call of the originary underworld.

This dichotomy brings into Hesse's work a cherished theme, that of "going beyond" one's limits and personality, of "surpassing" the inner separation of the soul through integration. In *Narziss und Goldmund* (*Death and the Lover*), young Goldmund is brought to a monastery by his oppressive father, in order to gain instruction and to remove the sensual, artistic remembrance of an "indecent" mother from his memory. Left into the care of Narziss, a "fatherly" figure and one of the young masters of the convent, Goldmund ends up in a rebellion against the walls and their coercion. He leaves the monastery (a similar gesture to Hesse's own departure from the Theological Seminary in Maulbronn), becomes an artist and a lover, and thus actualizes the repressed, maternal energies of his being. It is therefore not surprising to learn that in each new girl he meets, in each new clay figure he moulds, and even in the figure of the Virgin what he discovers is the immersed image of a mother archetype, calling him from beneath, towards exuberance and extinction.

The revolt against the father figure (which can be also Gautama Buddha and his classical teaching) represents a main topic of *Siddhartha* (Engl. transl. 1951). Hermann Hesse's Indian story is based on the paradoxical spiritual evolution of a young Buddhist Brahmin. Siddhartha is, to a certain extent, an anti-Buddha, because Hesse's protagonist reverses the classical story of the historical Gautama Buddha who lived in the sixth century B.C. According to the standard Indian legend, the founding master of Buddhism got the name Siddhartha at birth (Gautama was his family name), and became Buddha Shakyamuni ("the sage of the Shakya clan") through a spiritual re-birth, after several years of asceticism and contemplation. He reached perfection through severe fasting and contemplation, and managed to attain complete spiritual insight, which yielded to him the sense of the pure concentration of the self and the possibility of transcendence towards the heavenly beauty of Nirvana.

Another legend maintains that while engaged in extreme fasting and surrounded by his disciples, Buddha discovered the uselessness of extreme mortification, and decided to "come back" into the world of the humans in order to preach the doctrine of salvation. Although five of his disciples abandoned him because of their disappointment with their master's having ceased his contemplation, Buddha set out as a missionary on his way to challenge the archaic Hindu wisdom. He initiated a growing community of monks and followers, who gathered around him and his favorite new disciple, Ananda.

The classical Indian legend distinguishes between two successive phases in Buddha's career, since an initial process of extreme asceticism, spiritual concentration and solitude is followed by a decisive option taken towards human altruism, teaching and generosity. In the first stage, Buddha reaches personal perfection, which allows him

BDD-A762 © 2006 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-19 07:51:12 UTC)

to control and surpass the endless chain of reincarnations. This implies going beyond our world and acting outside the ever-rotating wheel of time. In the second stage, he decides to become a teacher and a preacher, which is a radical repositioning of his self inside time and human suffering. By doing this, Buddha acknowledges the existence of history and helps people to find their way out of the tricky traps and vicissitudes of everyday existence.

Hesse's unorthodox plot starts with the revolt of the young Siddhartha against his condition as a Brahmin. He feels that the doctrine of sacrifice, which he learns as a very promissing future Brahmin, cannot help self-exploration, since it leaves aside the very sense of asceticism, which is inner peace and self-understanding. In order to explore his soul, Siddhartha leaves his father's house and joins the tribe of the wandering ascetics called *samanas*, who live in the forest and engage in relentless techniques of reclusion and concentration. Followed by his friend Govinda, and meeting eventually the great Gautama Buddha, who teaches in a nearby region, Siddhartha achieves a highly spiritual detachment, but also experiences the paradoxical revelation that by yielding to extreme asceticism and mortification, he risks ending up in self-alienation, given the gap that may widen between himself and the surrounding world.

To compensate for his estrangement, Siddhartha decides to leave the *samanas* behind and to make a step towards the sensual beauties of everyday life. By doing this he rediscovers many empirical details he has ignored so far: the vivid colors of nature, people's faces and their smell, the unpredictable metamorphoses of material beings, and, of course, love. Lured by a beautiful girl, he feels sensual rejuvenation in spite of his long years of mortification. Reaching a town, he meets an attractive courtesan, Kamala, who initiates him into the art of sexuality. In order to please her with precious gifts, he becomes a successful merchant, under the guidance of an older tradesman, Kamaswami, but he practices trade with detachment and joy, more as an art than as a way of living. In spite of his empirical success as a merchant, he finally decides to leave Kamala and Kamaswami, seeking to join his old friend Vasudeva on the banks of a huge river and become a humble ferryman.

The characters and situations of the novel are structured according to well-defined old Buddhist realities and symbols. Kamala, the courtesan, symbolizes earthly world as illusion and Samsara, the endless flow of births and reincarnations. According to the old Hindu teaching, due to the cumulative effect of one's actions in his former lives (called *karma*), the soul is condemned to be re-born again and again, remaining captive in the endless chain of reincarnations. The Buddhist teaching also says that through penance, asceticism and contemplation, a perfect soul can escape the cycle of reincarnations, reaching the pure realm of Nirvana. By leaving the samanas, Siddhartha voluntarily decides to continue his life within Samsara: his and Kamala's captivity in the world of illusions is represented by a bird living in a cage, released by the courtesan when Siddhartha abandons his career as a merchant and goes down to the great river.

On the other hand, Govinda, Siddhartha's disciple stays close to Nirvana, refusing to join his master when the latter decides to leave the ascetic life of the samanas. Siddhartha reveals to him that his decision to take up the earthly world is based on an unorthodox interpretation of the classical Buddhist doctrine, that is: on a solitary revolt against the very meaning of the master's teaching. He explains to Govinda that in order to achieve perfection, Buddha separates Nirvana and Samsara,

BDD-A762 © 2006 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-19 07:51:12 UTC)

although the universe as we see it does not show any sign of separation. On the contrary, it is a vivid integrity, an organic whole, in which Nirvana and Samsara do not oppose each other, but coexist in mutual completion. If a philosopher desires to become a sage, he must get to know both sides of the universe, not only Nirvana, since self-understanding also entails the harmonious integration of both halves of one's soul, not the privileging of one half against the other.

The river is the main symbol of completeness in the novel. Siddhartha and Vasudeva venerate it as a cosmic teacher, who binds the two sides of the universe together and links earth to eternity. The great river marks the center of the imaginary geography in Hesse's novel. Siddhartha crosses it several times: at first, when he is still a wandering ascetic (*samana*), he learns from the river that everything passes away, in an endless flow which links life to death in the cosmic cycle of reincarnations. Later on, when he comes back to the river as a ferryman, he experiences the revelation that the river contains, simultaneously, since time immemorial, all the nurturing energies and "images" of the world.

The novel *Demian* (Engl. transl. 1923) was published in 1919 under an English pseudonym (Emil Sinclair). It came out almost simultaneously with *Zarathustra's Widerkehr. Ein Wort an die Deutsche Jugend* (*Zarathustra's Return. A Word to the German Youth*), a rather short but flamboyant manifesto, through which Hesse greeted the end of WWI and expressed his ardent belief in the emergence of a new, spiritual era, rising like the Phoenix bird from its own ashes. Both writings enjoyed great popular success, although their author remained for a while unknown both to the public and to the specialists. It is true, for instance, that Thomas Mann, who was very enthusiastic about *Demian* (he even compared its author to James Joyce), contacted Samuel Fischer, the editor, in order to find out who the author was. His inquiry also marked the beginning of a strong friendship with Hesse, articulated in their vast correspondence, in Thomas Mann's family visit to Montagnola (Southern Switzerland, where Hesse had settled with his second wife, Ruth Wenger), and finally in his decisive lobby, which eventually led to his friend being awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1946.

Demian, whose name obviously recalls an ancient "daimon", or "demon", has in the novel the role of a guiding dark angel, who helps the protagonist to actualize the elementary, Faustian energies of his personality. The hero of the novel is a typical *Doppelgänger* figure, since he is torn apart, even from his earliest childhood, by the antithetical forces of light and darkness, which vie over his personality. Away from his family, who provides him with a serene childhood, and removed from the presence of his tranquil sisters, Emil Sinclair feels that his antisocial behavior is determined by some sort of metaphysical damnation. Max Demian, his more mature and peculiar classmate, helps him to act out the tormented energies of his soul, convincing him that he bears the "sign" of a demoniacal elite, whose roots can be traced back to Cain, the first prominent dark figure of the Bible.

Max Demian teaches Sinclair that each person should "go beyond" and become a superior being, rejoicing in the exuberant integrity of his existence, which is a combination of luminous and dark forces. "Going beyond", Demian explains, means living off-limits, beyond good and evil (as Nietzsche also clamours), and experiencing liberty as a totalizing cosmic eruption, in which God and Devil come together. It is the fervor of creating a "new religion", embraced by strong, solitary persons who march on

BDD-A762 © 2006 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-19 07:51:12 UTC)

their way towards human and cosmic completeness, that unites Demian and Sinclair. Although their social paths separate them for a while, they nevertheless share the belief that each person should find a spiritual "twin", who may help him to act out the repressed side of his personality.

The word *Abraxas*, marking the sign of the new religion, sends us back to the ancient Gnostics. Another Gnostic theme in *Demian* is the ambivalence of the "two Eves". One of them is, of course, the Biblical Eve. The other is Frau Eva, Max Demian's mother, the spiritual double of the biblical character, who also recalls the Gnostic Sophia, the embodiment of cosmic and earthly wisdom. The adepts of the new, intellectual order – the author suggests – should reunite under the spiritual guidance of a new Eve, against the larger resurrection background of the new mankind and civilization made possible by the WWI. In this respect, the humanitarian ideological message of the novel meets the topic of collective spiritual rejuvenation, proclaimed by Hesse in *Zarathustra's Return*.

The solitary wanderer, presented as the dark side of Knulp, also features in the deep structure of *Steppenwolf* (1927). Its protagonist, Harry Haller, lives in a tragic and distant self-isolation, but he is attracted, like Detlef Spinell, Thomas Mann's grotesque writer from *Tristan*, by clean and thoroughly organized bourgeois milieus. These he praises as the epitome of solidly outlined and well-structured forms. Harry Haller is also a *Doppelgänger* figure: his soul unites in a tragic contrast the passion for order and the "call of the wolf", which drives him to live as a social outcast, apart from human understanding and compassion. Hesse has a penchant for associating this renegade figure with the generic society of the so-called "underclass artists", which includes illusionists, circus workers, wandering magicians and acrobats. What Hesse also shares with Thomas Mann is the desire to show that art itself has two levels of self-expression: a sublime one, belonging to the genius, and a sarcastic, grotesque one, which is associated with the jester figure. Harry Haller's love for a girl, Hermine, who also bears the androgynous marks of *Hermes psychopompos* (the Greek god of the gateway to the underworld), drives him into a "magic theatre", where both halves of his fractured soul will finally come together.

Hermann Hesse's elitist belief in the existence of a "pure order" of poets and thinkers guided him throughout his whole existence, playing a decisive role in his option for the Swiss citizenship in 1923. His perception of Switzerland was twofold. O the one hand, it represented the politically independent, "perfect" country of the Alps, which hosted J. J. Bachofen, Jacob Burchkardt and Nietzsche, all of them illustrious professors at the University of Basel. On the other hand, this was the luminous realm of pacifist, culture-centered, pure, non-political German spirituality, which Hesse himself tried to express in his articles and manifestos against Hitler and Nazi Germany. His vibrant belief that artists should gather in a superior fraternity, guided by sublime values and mutual generosity, went into the novels *Die Morgenlandfahrt* (1932; Engl. transl. *Journey to the East*, 1956) and *Das Glasperlenspiel* (*The Glass Bead Game*, 1943; Engl. transl. in 1957), a luminous, spiritual utopia set in the year 2200.

The belief that people should act out the mission which lies within them guided Hesse throughout his entire life. This programmatic feature was inherited from the writer's family, comprising on both sides serene religious missionaries. Born in 1847 in Estonia, his Pietist father, Johannes Hesse, served in India as a Christian missionary.

BDD-A762 © 2006 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-19 07:51:12 UTC)

There he met Hesse's mother, Marie Gundert (born in 1842), who also belonged to a missionary family. Returning to Germany in 1873, they settled down in the small town of Calw, by the Black Forest, in the land of Württemberg, and began running a missionary publishing house, under the guidance of Hesse's grandfather, Hermann Gundert. As a consequence, Hesse would always share the opinion that each person should become a pacifist humanitarian, and that culture, built by a superior elite of thinkers and artists with pure humanitarian drives, can heal all the wounds of a tormented, materialistic civilization.

Die Morgenlandfahrt (*Journey to the East*) evokes the atmosphere of the medieval crusades, although the novel is firmly anchored in the realities of the twentieth century. The protagonist, called H.H. (most of Hesse's heroes are hidden autobiographical projections), joins a Bohemian spiritual movement, which reunites the cultural elites of the period. Their members, gathered in exuberant flocks, travel all across Europe, heading purportedly for the Far East. The sole goal of their spiritual crusade is the cultural fulfillment of each of them. The wandering community is run by a strict hierarchy, which benevolently surveys its members' devotion and self-realization. There is no place for politics on the journey: the participants act and think outside time and history, being guided exclusively by the inner rules of their community.

A similar timeless place is Castalia, the island-like republic which hosts the glass bead game players from, the novel with the homonymous title, published by Hesse in 1943, at the height of WWII, as a personal pacifist manifesto and protest. The young Josef Knecht, future *magister ludi* (master of the game), is featured as a pupil with brilliant personal qualities. These enable him to be selected for a special school inside Castalia, a spiritual order controlled by a strict, but very kind hierarchy of high officials and masters in the twelve branches of the humanities. The most distinguished elite of the hierarchy consists of the highly qualified glass bead game players, an exquisite way of combining all arts and their symbols into a dynamic synthesis based on the associative rules of mathematics and music. The game requires a special, Pythagorean initiation, which accustoms its players with the art of spiritual correspondences. Success consists – as it happened earlier with the Gnostics and the alchemists – in the complete neutralization of the players' psychological fluctuations.

The novel is a utopia: its action is set in the year 2200, which also marks, in Hesse's belief, the end of the "belligerent" and "sketchy" period of our heroic modernity. The new era, whose spiritual quintessence resides in the geographical enclave of Castalia, is deprived from genius and absolute intellectual creativity, but has an extremely sophisticated capacity of recycling old symbols and formulas into a very elaborate network of cultural analogies. All the inhabitants of Castalia are outstanding masters of their fields, having been extremely carefully selected and controlled during the decades of their formation. They live outside time and history, in a state of neutral, non-psychological serenity. Castalia nonetheless represents a heavy financial burden for an altruistic "state", whose name is not disclosed in the novel. When history in the outside realm accelerates its rhythms, entering a new era of political turmoil and belligerence, the very existence of the spiritual enclave is blown apart.

The novel tells the story of Josef Knecht, who completes his hierarchical ascension by becoming a respected *magister ludi*, Master of the Glass Bead Game. On his way to the top, he is sent by the officials of Castalia to carry out various outdoor

BDD-A762 © 2006 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-19 07:51:12 UTC)

missions. Such a journey takes him to an important Benedictine monastery, where he meets Pater Jakobus, one of the spiritual leaders of the Catholic Church. Hesse presents the old monk as a replica of Jacob Burckhardt, professor and an older colleague of Nietzsche's at the University of Basel. This is another playful gesture of reverence to Hesse's personal condition itself, as a voluntary émigré in the political enclave of Switzerland, surrounded by the rage of WWII. Under Pater Jakobus' guidance, Josef Knecht initiates himself in the art of history and realizes that even Castalia is prone to destruction and relativity, given its reluctance to acknowledge conflicts (except spiritual ones) and its crystal-clear fragility. Having served for many years as a brilliant *magister ludi*, Knecht experiences a crisis caused by his belief that by remaining a distinguished Castalian, he nonetheless contributes to the mystification which allows the province to survive, while being incapable of controlling its own destiny. In order to solve the dilemma, Josef Knecht decides to leave the appointment and continue his life as a private teacher in the worldly house of a friend and former debate adversary, the politician Plinio Designori. Unfit for his new condition, he dies almost immediately, while swimming in a cold, alpine lake, cherished by the heat of a rising sun.

La formule spirituelle de Hermann Hesse

Cette étude examine les différentes influences qui ont marqué, de traces profondes, l'œuvre de Herman Hesse: son amitié avec Thomas Mann (certains thèmes cultivés par Mann, tels que la relation entre la bourgeoisie rigide et l'artiste bohème, se retrouvant aussi chez Hesse), la vie orientale et le mysticisme bouddhiste, son propre caractère névrotique, le style incandescent de Fr. Nietzsche, la psychanalyse de Jung, la lumière et les ténèbres entre lesquels l'esprit se trouve emprisonné, l'influence contradictoire de la mère et du père sur sa formation individuelle, la Première Guerre Mondiale etc.

The "Babeş-Bolyai" University, Cluj-Napoca
Romania

BDD-A762 © 2006 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-19 07:51:12 UTC)