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# "The Lonely Romantic": Nature, Education, and Cultural Pessimism in the Early Works of Hermann Hesse

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“THE LONELY ROMANTIC”:  
NATURE, EDUCATION, AND CULTURAL PESSIMISM IN THE EARLY WORKS OF  
HERMANN HESSE

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University  
and Agricultural and Mechanical College  
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in

The Department of History

by  
Erik Paul Wagner  
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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the early works of Hermann Hesse in the historical context of early twentieth-century Germany. While Hesse's literary career spans over six decades, most scholarship focuses only on a brief period. Historians study his Weimar novels, as psychologically penetrating pieces that offer insights into this fascinating and chaotic era of German history. Yet, Hesse's early works have not received due attention in historical scholarship. This situation is unfortunate because Hesse's prewar writings provide interesting and relevant commentary on life in fin de siècle Germany.

Hesse's early writings offer unique insights into aspects of German culture and society, specifically regarding nature, education, cultural pessimism, and the Great War. As industrial society increasingly encroached upon middle-class life and the natural world, Hesse implored people to slow this destruction and love nature. Even though the German educational system became world famous, Hesse worried that its rigors often crushed the creativity and individuality of young men and women. In such a fast-changing world, many intellectuals pessimistically viewed progress and thought that society was in decline, but Hesse advised against such radical ideas. Finally, Hesse became an outsider during the Great War, as his pacifist commentary stood in contrast to widespread nationalism.

This study's close look at Hesse's early works will demonstrate that the Weimar image of the author does not allow for a complete picture of the writer or his relevance to German history. When Hesse's prewar writings are better understood, we will gain insights into the struggles faced by middle-class Wilhelmine society, in a time of drastic change, through the eyes of one lonely romantic and individualistic outsider.

## INTRODUCTION

Hermann Hesse was a German poet, psychological novelist, and Nobel Prize-winning author. Even today he is an individual familiar to many, not just professors and academia, but also to the lay reader, both in Europe and the United States. However, Hesse's place in German history is uncertain. Robert Galbreath observes "frequently mentioned, seldom studied, Hermann Hesse is a familiar nonperson to intellectual historians and specialists in Weimar culture."<sup>1</sup> Hesse's audience has indeed focused on the works of this period, and not without justification. What have become his most famous novels, *Demian*, *Siddhartha*, and *Steppenwolf*, were all written during this stimulating era. The first novel, *Demian*, speaks of the conflicted individual in modern society and portends the dangers of an upcoming war, while dealing with Emil Sinclair's transition from boyhood to manhood. *Siddhartha* offers a glimpse into the influences of Eastern culture that were permeating Weimar society, and traces the journey of an individual to find his place in life. Lastly, *Steppenwolf* presents a psychological view of the mind, while reflecting interwar cultural trends such as jazz music and the new woman. While historians have regarded these novels as artifacts of Weimar Germany, Hesse's earlier work has received little attention in comparison.

Two literary scholars, Ralph Freedman and Mark Boulby, however, have suggested that Hesse's writings should be significant for historians, because they reflect the literary, social, and intellectual history of Germany.<sup>2</sup> But this has not been the case, and the question must be asked, why? It may be that, besides the popularity of his Weimar novels, Hesse's position in history is

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Galbreath, "Hermann Hesse and the Politics of Detachment," *Political Theory* Vol. 2, No. 1 (February 1974): 62, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/190700> (accessed November 25, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Ralph Freedman, *Hermann Hesse: A Pilgrim of Crisis* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 15; Mark Boulby, *Hermann Hesse: His Mind and Art* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), vi.0

incomplete because of the manner in which his works have been recognized and studied. In the United States, Hesse is often read as a counter-cultural or mythical author, without connection to Germany. Hesse's image in the United States has been significantly molded and influenced by the 1960s counter-culture movement that coincided with the period of his greatest success in America.<sup>3</sup> Because of this, Hesse's writings that most directly intersect with counter-cultural ideas have been regarded in the United States; an idea Theodore Ziolkowski coined "Saint Hesse among the Hippies."<sup>4</sup> Also, Freedman argues that Americans tend to focus on mythical aspects of Hesse, causing him to be seen exclusively as a psychological author of man's interior and a mystic of the East.<sup>5</sup>

Not only has American opinion influenced the reception of Hesse, but so have traditional academic perspectives. Let us take one of the most prominent literary figures who can be found in historical analysis, Thomas Mann. Mann can be classified as an upper middle class artist; he wrote in a very refined and eloquent manner, appealing to scholars and the educated elite. In contrast, Hesse was from a modest family and wrote in a more readable and accessible style than did Mann. Hesse even acknowledged that striving for a truly democratic literary sphere was important to his fictional endeavors. In 1908 he pronounced, "they do not understand that I have more or less given up fat words and great maxims since *Camenzind* and that that is progress.

Particularly, they don't want to accept my material and believe I should write for noblemen and

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<sup>3</sup> Henry Pachter is bothered by the American misreading of Hesse. He argues that young Americans of the 1960s have read counter-cultural and drug influences that are actually not present in Hesse's works. He compares the American reading to the German reading of the 1910s-1920s that drew youths into war and towards Nazism. In the end, Pachter claims that Hesse is poor writer and poor storyteller and is happy that this youthful phase of his own life has passed. See Henry M. Pachter, "On Re-Reading Hermann Hesse," *Salmagundi* No. 12 (Spring 1970), 83-89, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40546583> (accessed December 6, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> Ziolkowski first coined this in 1969 and recalls it in an article celebrating Hesse in 2002. See Theodore Ziolkowski, "A Celebration of Hermann Hesse," *World Literature Today* Vol. 77, No. 1 (April - June 2003): 60-61, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40157786> (accessed December 10, 2014).

<sup>5</sup>Freedman, 10-11.

geniuses, and not for the vegetable dealers and idiots.”<sup>6</sup> Indeed, Hesse hoped to reach out to as many people around him as he could. Freedman agrees that Hesse stood apart from other arguably more famous authors, such as Mann, because he wrote for a much broader audience.<sup>7</sup> But this does not mean that Hesse was any less literary than someone like Mann.

Additionally, scholars who have examined Hesse’s early works note their contemporary success, but argue against their durability. As Theodore Ziolkowski concludes, before the war Hesse was a gifted and entertaining writer, but one without lasting significance.<sup>8</sup> Hesse’s popularity, however, reached its height before the First World War, and his status among German readers significantly declined afterwards as contemporaries viewed him as unpatriotic and non-German. In fact, it is only modern perception that interprets *Steppenwolf*, *Demian*, and *Siddhartha* as Hesse’s most popular novels.<sup>9</sup>

If we take a closer look at Hesse’s early literature, we find these pieces contain interesting observations about contemporaneous German culture and society. In particular, some of these views include a neo-romantic return to nature, dissatisfaction with the German educational system, and a sense of cultural pessimism. When Hesse’s works are considered in relation to these intellectual trends, it will become clear that the society and culture of this era significantly influenced his early writings. It is important to realize the effects of German culture and society on Hesse, because neglecting his earlier works creates a vacuum around his later ones.

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<sup>6</sup> Hermann Hesse to Helene Welti, Gaienhofen, December 29, 1908, in *Hermann Hesse Gesammelte Briefe: Erster Band 1895-1921*, ed. Ursula and Volker Michels (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1973), 152. “Erstlich verstehen sie nicht, dass ich mir seit dem Camenzind die fetten Worte und grossen Sprüche einigermassen abgewöhnt habe und daß das ein Forschrift ist. Namentlich aber wollen sie meine ‘Stoffe’ nicht gelten lassen un meinen, ich sole vom Herrenmenschen und Genies erzählen, nicht von Gemüshändlern und Idioten.”

<sup>7</sup> Freedman, 109.

<sup>8</sup> Theodore Ziolkowski, *The Novels of Hermann Hesse: A Study in Theme and Structure* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 4.

<sup>9</sup> While *Demian*’s publication was initially greeted with popular approval, it was only because Hesse had published it under a pseudonym, Emil Sinclair, and once Hesse was discovered as the author, sales immediately declined.

Hesse's early writings, indeed, divulge stimulating details about fin de siècle German life. Biographer Mark Boulby elaborates on the significance of Hesse's early novels, stating "Hesse's work, because of its eclectic nature, reflects much of the literary and intellectual history of Germany and indeed of Western Europe in the first few decades of this century."<sup>10</sup> While Hesse's writing may reflect Western European trends, his relationship to German culture that is most striking. Claude Hill substantiates that Hesse's firm bond to Germany must not be overlooked: "The question of Hesse's relationship to Germany would be of little interest were the poet a queer outsider who just 'accidentally' uses the German language and who does not rest firmly in German cultural tradition... an investigation with his German bonds is incomplete without at least indicating how deeply and exclusively the poet is 'German' in spirit and tradition."<sup>11</sup> It is quite clear, for example, that the German Romantics continuously influenced Hesse's style. His natural inclinations were even noticed by the German public who praised the writer as an outdoor author of nature and spirit, in opposition to a corrosive civilization.<sup>12</sup> His early fiction reflected the disenfranchised attitude of early twentieth-century Germans, who were not in accord with the modern, industrial nation-building process. As H. Stuart Hughes remarked, Hesse developed a radical sense of alienation from society and perceived troubles in German life before most thinkers.<sup>13</sup> By warning of the alienation and dangers caused by modern progress, Hesse became an indispensable author for many Germans who feared industrial advancement at the turn of the twentieth century.

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<sup>10</sup> Boulby, v.

<sup>11</sup> Claude Hill, "Hermann Hesse and Germany," *The German Quarterly* Vol. 21, No. 1 (January 1948): 15, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/400849> (accessed March 5, 2013).

<sup>12</sup> Hill, "Germany," 10.

<sup>13</sup> H. Stewart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society: The Reorientation of European Social Thought, 1890-1930* (New York: Vintage, 1958), 50.

Besides appealing to naturalist sentiments, Hesse attracted Wilhelmine readers because they viewed him as a teacher and an example on how to approach life. Hesse grasped both the internal struggle of the self and the external struggle of society, and readers turned to the author's "finely tuned interaction between his psychological conflict and historical events..." as an example for their own lives.<sup>14</sup> Hesse's fiction, spawned by his own personal turmoil, was written with every type of reader in mind. As Mark Boulby remarks, "its [Hesse's novels] real merit and its survival value do not lie so much in these contacts [literary movements] as in the considerable feat of art by which a personal conflict is universalized."<sup>15</sup> As a neo-Romantic, Hesse attempted to trace the wanderings of the imagination as they entered into everyday life, or at least give it basis in real experience.<sup>16</sup> Hesse perceived the threats modern society posed to the individual, and thought it was his responsibility to impart social values and wisdom to his conflicted age.<sup>17</sup> In the author's mind, the root of evil was human reluctance to accept individual responsibility and an unwillingness to improve the self, and as an artist he needed to be an example for others.<sup>18</sup> Humanity came first, in Hesse's opinion, and this was grounded in individual responsibility. His works, consequently, engage the idea of how can one improve the self as a first step toward the betterment of society.

Due to these outlooks, Hesse became a critic of German society and culture, but a moderate one. This means that he did not succumb to nationalism, anti-Semitism, and other radical extremes as many cultural critics did during this time. He perceived societal ills, and knew that the destruction of nature, regimented education, and cultural pessimism were all real

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<sup>14</sup>Freedman, 5, 7.

<sup>15</sup> Boulby, v.

<sup>16</sup> Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, trans. Angus Davidson (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 38.

<sup>17</sup> Roy Pascal, *From Naturalism to Expressionism: German Literature and Society, 1880-1918* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973), vii

<sup>18</sup> Hill, "Germany," 11.

problems, but he never turned to or offered a radical solution. Instead, he argued that social regeneration was possible if the individual took responsibility and the care to find his own self. Hesse observed that he was living in a time of mass culture, and knew the harm of sacrificing one's individuality.

Hermann Hesse was born July 2, 1877, in the village of Calw near the Black Forest. Johannes, Hesse's father, was a Russian citizen by birth and a Pietist missionary, while his mother, Marie Gundert, was born in India, the daughter of a missionary.<sup>19</sup> Already as a youth, Hesse did not live in harmony with the world. His energetic and impetuous behavior annoyed his parents and teachers. Lewis Tusken remarks that in today's terms Hesse was a "hyper" child, perhaps with attention deficit disorder. He was more comfortable with the surplus of stimuli offered in nature than the steady habits embraced by the middle class and would often find himself in trouble. For example, one time Hesse's parents scolded the boy for sneaking off into the forest and building a fire.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, the routine of school life elicited little enthusiasm for the young Hermann. He did not particularly enjoy school, even though he was an above average student. His education began at the age of six, when Hesse's parents sent the child to a boarding school, *Knabenhaus*, causing Hesse to feel ostracized by his family.<sup>21</sup> Several years later, Hesse passed a state examination, which allowed him to attend seminary at Maulbronn. Instruction at Maulbronn followed an extremely regimented system, requiring over forty hours of class a week, including school on Saturdays.<sup>22</sup> This strict order caused Hesse to suffer from headaches and

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<sup>19</sup> Joseph Mileck, *Hermann Hesse: Life and Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 1.

<sup>20</sup> Lewis W. Tusken, *Understanding Hermann Hesse: The Man, His Myth, His Metaphor* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 10, 12.

<sup>21</sup> Richard C. Helt, "*A Poet or Nothing at All*": *The Tübingen and Basel Years of Hermann Hesse* (Providence: Berghahn Books, 1996), 21.

<sup>22</sup> Tusken, *Understanding*, 17.

insomnia, and due to his illnesses, Hesse was withdrawn from the seminary in 1892. His removal relieved the school's teachers, who had begun to doubt the youth's sanity.

The summer after his dismissal from Maulbronn, Hesse's mental condition deteriorated to the point that he purchased a revolver with the intention of committing suicide. He did not execute the plan, but this would not be his only flirtation with suicide. Less than a year later, in January 1893, Hesse once again bought a revolver with the same intention.<sup>23</sup> After this second effort, Hesse's parents sent the youth to a sanatorium. In fact, the young Hesse was nearly declared mentally ill, but he was deemed too young.<sup>24</sup> During this phase of his life Hesse felt lost, claiming he "needed someone who understood him."<sup>25</sup> He clearly did not feel understood by his parents, not just because they sent him away to school and to a sanatorium, but also because of their religious convictions. Hesse claimed his father's Pietism had caused him despair and drove a wedge between him and his parents. Critical of Christianity, Hesse could not tolerate Christian love and claimed that poets were better than the Bible. But soon the young man would find reprieve. After leaving the hospital, Hesse began to read voraciously, and within two years he left his parental home for a new start in Tübingen.

Hesse's departure to Tübingen in 1895 granted the young man a sense of tranquility. Even before he settled on this decision, Hesse knew that he needed to make a dramatic change in his life. In fact, Hesse discussed with his friend, teacher, and mentor Doctor Ernst Kapff the possibility of immigrating to Brazil.<sup>26</sup> But these plans were childish dreams, and Hesse soon found himself as an apprentice bookdealer at Heckenhauer's in Tübingen. The town's aura of

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<sup>23</sup> Mileck, 5-12.

<sup>24</sup> Freedman, 58.

<sup>25</sup> Tusken, *Understanding*, 29.

<sup>26</sup> Hermann Hesse to Ernst Kapff, Calw, October 1, 1895, in *Kindheit und Jugend vor Neunzehnhundert*, ed. Gerhard Kirchoff (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1978), 9-16.

medieval romanticism pleased the young man, but he was still not entirely pleased with life.<sup>27</sup>

Hesse discovered the daily routine at Heckenhauer's to be interesting, but mentally debilitating and strenuous.<sup>28</sup> In another letter to Kapff, Hesse revealed that rather than work, he wished to

live genuinely. This meant lying in the grass, reading Goethe, and filling his days with idle fancies.<sup>29</sup> It was during these Tübingen years that German Romanticism began to leave an

impression on the young man. Writing once again to Kapff, Hesse claimed, "I almost have the desire to don Romantic armor and to represent the melancholic and sentimental poetry..."<sup>30</sup>

Hesse believed the Romantics not only to be strikingly Germanic, but also persons who spoke to his own individualistic and innate tendencies. Above all, Hesse held Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Heinrich Heine, and Novalis in high esteem. In August 1898, Hesse wrote a letter to Helene Voigt-Diederichs, wife of the publisher Eugen Diederichs, which concisely explained the appeal of this movement: "Romanticism! It has all the mystery and youthfulness of the German heart, all its energy as well as its sickness, and above all a longing for intellectual heights, and youthful, brilliant speculation, which our age absolutely lacks."<sup>31</sup> Hesse identified with the individuality and the aesthetic experience offered by Romanticism, and would later apply these tendencies to his own writings.

Due to his individualistic outlook, Hesse's relationships with his contemporaries were often difficult. He even commented that "since my time in school I have been damned to

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<sup>27</sup> Hermann Hesse to Johannes and Marie Hesse, Tübingen, October 18-20, 1895, *Kindheit*, 20-24.

<sup>28</sup> Hermann Hesse to Johannes and Marie Hesse, Tübingen, January 24, 1898, *Kindheit*, 231. "Von der etwas eintönigen Arbeit bekommt man einen Schreckliche dummen Kopf."

<sup>29</sup> Hermann Hesse to Ernst Kapff, Tübingen, February 7, 1896, *Kindheit*, 65-70. "Interessante, aber anstrengende Arbeit!... Wenn ich Zeit hätte, Privatier wäre und an eigene literarische Zukunft nicht dächte, so würde ich den Tag über ins Gras liegen oder Billard spielen, mich um all die Götterchen von Varnhagen bis Hauptmann den Teufel scheren, und die Abendstunden mit Tausend und Einer Nacht, Boccaccio, Cervantes, Fielding und solchen Schurppfeifereien füllen, Heines Gedichte exzerpieren, und als Dessert jeweils ein Stückchen Goethe genießen."

<sup>30</sup> Hermann Hesse to Ernst Kapff, Tübingen, April 1896, *Kindheit*, 96-98. "Fast hätte ich Lust, den romantischen Panzer anzulegen und die schwermütig sentimentalische Poesie..."

<sup>31</sup> Hermann Hesse to Helene Voigt-Diederichs, Tübingen, August 27, 1898, *Kindheit*, 278-281. "Dieser Romantik! Alles Heimliche und Jüngliche des deutschen Herzens ist in ihr, alle die Überkraft neben aller Krankheit, und vor allem eine Sehnsucht nach geistiger Hohe, eine jugendlich geniale Spekulation, welche unserer Zeit durchaus fehlt."

loneliness.”<sup>32</sup> Richard Helt notes that Hesse considered himself to be an outsider and friendless in Tübingen.<sup>33</sup> Yet this situation would not last. While in Tübingen, Hesse joined a group of young student writers known as the *petit cénacle*. The group provided Hesse both an intellectual and social outlet. Despite his dislike for school as a youth, Hesse longed for the intellectual stimulation of the university, and the *cénacle* fulfilled his yearnings. Hesse and the group engaged in philosophical and literary discussions, wandered off on hikes, or just conversed over beer. Regarding the group, Hesse remarked, “I am very happy to have found this harmless but stimulating and warm company.”<sup>34</sup> More importantly, however, it was during this time that Hesse realized that he wished to become a writer.<sup>35</sup>

In 1899, Hesse published his first works, *Romantic Songs (Romantische Lieder)* and *An Hour beyond Midnight (Eine Stunde hinter Mitternacht)*, but with little monetary or critical success. Not only did these compositions sell poorly, but his parents, who did not support Hesse’s desire to become a writer in the first place, reacted critically to the works.<sup>36</sup> When Marie read the *Romantic Songs*, she commented to Hermann that he should write on more decent topics. Influenced by her religiosity, Marie suggested to her son that finding God would help in this regard. She observed, “Your form and language sound fine – only I wish your poetry would have higher content... art must be pure and noble through and through; God gave you talent, and when you find him once again, and devote to him this beautiful gift, then you will make your old

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<sup>32</sup> Hermann Hesse to Ernst Kapff, Tübingen, April 1896, *Kindheit*, 96-98. “*Dass ich seit meiner Schulzeit immer zur Einsamkeit verdammt.*”

<sup>33</sup> Helt, 46-47.

<sup>34</sup> Hermann Hesse to Johannes and Marie Hesse, Tübingen, November 10, 1897, *Kindheit*, 221. “*Ich bin sehr froh, diesen harmlosen, aber doch anregenden und erwärmenden Umgang gefunden zu haben.*”

<sup>35</sup> Mileck, 15-21. The Tübingen *petit cénacle* was modeled on the French Romantic group of the 1820s/30s.

<sup>36</sup> Mileck, 19. For example, *An Hour beyond Midnight* only sold 53 of 600 copies. Hesse may have been trying to ease this pain, or maybe he was serious when he stated that the work “is for only a few readers” (“es ist für sehr wenige Leser...”), Hermann Hesse to Johannes and Marie Hesse, Tübingen, February 20, 1899, *Kindheit*, 333.

mother happy for you.”<sup>37</sup> His mother’s response, along with multiple negative literary reviews, distressed Hesse. He confided to Helene Voigt-Diederichs, “I am still troubled by all of the letters in response to ‘Songs’ and have many days with headaches.”<sup>38</sup> Regardless of this inauspicious beginning, the Tübingen years proved to be a major turning point of Hesse’s life.

Despite earning an assistantship in 1898, Hesse left Heckenhauer’s a year later. He moved to Basel, only to begin work at another bookstore, but the Swiss city lured the young man. Basel invigorated Hesse because it was a city of natural beauty and great thinkers. Hesse related the appeal of Basel to Helene: “Just think – to Basel! It is my favorite state, my state of states, and also the home of Burckhardt and Böcklin. Furthermore, I lived the greatest and most wonderful time of my childhood in Basel, and that has, for me, more magic than Burckhardt and Böcklin.”<sup>39</sup> Hesse hoped that Basel would rejuvenate him and launch his writing career. In spite of Basel’s appeal, Hesse still felt like a lonely outsider. Even though he expanded his circle of acquaintances and frequented social gatherings, specifically at Dr. Wackernagel’s, where he would go to “find a piece of home,” he never felt comfortable in a crowd.<sup>40</sup> Most of all, he missed the *cénacle*. Besides this social malaise, Hesse did not enjoy his job. Just like Heckenhauer’s, the young author found his new position time-consuming, physically draining, and monotonous. He considered days without work beautiful times, and he longed for the outdoors. Joseph Mileck affirms, “He was happiest when hiking in the area around Basel,

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<sup>37</sup> Marie Hesse to Hermann Hesse, Calw, December 1, 1898, *Kindheit*, 304-305. “*Die Form und Sprache gelingt dir fein – nur möchte ich dir für deine Dichtung höheren Inhalt wünschen...die Kunst muß rein und durchaus edel sein; Gott hat dir Talent gegeben, wenn du einmal Ihn gefunden hast und Ihm diese schöne Gabe weihst, dann erst wird dein altes Mutterle über dir [sic] glücklich sein...*”

<sup>38</sup> Hermann Hesse to Helene Voigt-Diederichs, Tübingen, December 4, 1898, *Kindheit*, 309. “*Ich bin noch verwirrt durch allerlei schwer zu beantwortende Briefe über die >Leider<, und einige Kofwegtage.*”

<sup>39</sup> Hermann Hesse to Helene Voigt-Diederichs, Calw, August 1899, *Kindheit*, 372. “*Denken Sie – nach Basel! Das ist ja meine Lieblingsstadt, meine Stadt der Städte, und außerdem die Heimat Buckhardts und Böcklins. Außerdem habe ich in Basel den größten und herrlichsten Teil meiner Kindheit gelebt, das hat für mich fast noch mehr Zauber als Burckhardt und Böcklin*”

<sup>40</sup> Hermann Hesse to Johannes and Marie Hesse, Basel, February 1, 1900, *Kindheit*, 444. “*Sonntag abends bin ich meist bei Archivars [Wackernagels], wo ich immer ein Stück Heimat finde.*”

boating on the Vierwaldstätter See, or wandering through the Berner Oberland on one of his frequent weekend excursions.”<sup>41</sup> In a 1903 letter to fellow author Stefan Zweig, Hesse claimed his heart had been touched more by nature and books than by people. He enjoyed roaming mountains and valleys as an eccentric and dreamer.<sup>42</sup>

Despite his loneliness, this period proved significant in Hesse’s life. He continued to read the Romantics, but soon introduced more Friedrich Nietzsche, Arthur Schopenhauer, and Burckhardt into his library. More importantly, Hesse wrote novels. As Mileck informs, in Tübingen, Hesse believed himself to be a writer, but in Basel he was able to convince the public.<sup>43</sup> Hesse published two significant works during this period, *Hinterlassene Schriften und Gedichte von Hermann Lauscher*, in 1900, and his first novel, *Peter Camenzind*, in 1904. Also, *Beneath the Wheel (Unterm Rad)* first existed in periodical form in 1904, and then as a book in 1906. Hesse worried about the success of these works, but this time they were enthusiastically received, and *Peter Camenzind* and *Beneath the Wheel* were even appeared in translation.<sup>44</sup>

Hesse’s stay in Basel came to an end when he moved to Gaienhofen with his first wife, Maria Bernoulli, in 1904. At Gaienhofen Hesse built a home and fathered three children, as he could now live comfortably off of his writing. Early on, Hesse remarked how this new phase in life pleased him, but this masked the true situation. Hesse showed little interest in his family, with whom he had difficult relations, or even his writing. In 1905, Hesse’s friend Ludwig Finckh, a member of the Tübingen *petit cénacle*, moved to Gaienhofen. Finckh became Hesse’s

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<sup>41</sup> Mileck, 23.

<sup>42</sup> Hermann Hesse to Stefan Zweig, Basel, February 2, 1903, *Gesammelte Briefe*, 94-96. “Von mir is wenig zu erzählen. Ausser ein par Liebschaften hat mein Herz eigentlich nie den Menschen, sondern stets der Natur und den Büchern gehört. Ich liebe die alten italienischen Novelisten und die deutschen Romantiker, noch mehr die Städte Italiens, und noch mehr als all das liebe ich die Berge, Ströme, Schluchtern, das Meer, Himmel und Wolken, Blumen, Bäume und Tiere. Wandern, rudern, schwimmen, angeln – das geht mir über alles. Nur treibe ich es nicht als Sportler, sondern als Träumer, Faulenzer und Phantast.”

<sup>43</sup> Mileck, 25-28.

<sup>44</sup> Hermann Hesse to Paul Gundert, Gaienhofen, July 23, 1906, *Gesammelte Briefe*, 135-136.

neighbor and inseparable friend for the next seven years, and they would devote days hiking or boating around the Untersee region.<sup>45</sup> Then, in 1907, Hesse experienced a mental crisis that led him to spend several weeks living naked on a mountain with the vagabond Gustav Gräser. During his time with Gräser, Hesse learned more of Eastern teachings and began to study theosophy, Daoism, Confucianism, and the Orient.<sup>46</sup> As a result, Hesse traveled to the East in 1911 but, much to Hesse's dismay, the trip was not as spiritually enlightening as he had hoped.<sup>47</sup>

During these Gaienhofen years, Hesse wrote less fiction than in Basel. This stemmed from his anxiety, but also because of his work as an editor and reviewer for periodicals, most prominently *März*.<sup>48</sup> He did write one Gaienhofen novel in 1910, however, *Gertrude*. But his restlessness continued leading him to make one last move before the outbreak of war, and that was to Bern in 1912. In Bern, Hesse completed his final prewar novel, *Rosshalde*, published in 1914. According to Mileck, this time marked the "lull before the storm when he chose to adjust, to look to the past, and to tell traditional stories."<sup>49</sup> The outbreak of the Great War signaled the end of the Swabian period of Hesse's literary career.

This study will trace the Swabian period of Hesse's career and its relevance to German society. It will follow, in chronological order, Hesse's four major prewar novels. Each of these novels provides a unique insight into a particular idea permeating Wilhelmine culture. The first chapter outlines Hesse's neo-romanticism by describing longings for nature in *Peter Camenzind* and several short stories. Industrialized society affected Hesse, who thought that the natural world was being forsaken in a time of progress. While politicians viewed the conquests of

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<sup>45</sup> Mileck, 38-42.

<sup>46</sup> Mileck, 45.

<sup>47</sup> Hermann Hesse to Conrad Haussmann, steamship 'York', November 1911, *Gesammelte Briefe*, 201-202.

<sup>48</sup> For a study on Hesse's prominent work with periodicals and newspapers see Annette Kym, *Hermann Hesses Rolle als Kritiker: Eine Analyse seiner Buchbesprechungen in 'März', 'Vivos Voco' und 'Bonniers Litterarä Magazin'* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1984).

<sup>49</sup> Mileck, 49.

nature as a positive for the betterment of society, Hesse lamented the destruction of the natural world, which was not only beautiful and sublime, but a teacher to mankind. Even though nature associations formed within Germany to promote awareness of the natural world, Hesse remained suspicious of their activities, which he often found disingenuous. Instead, Hesse suggested that the individual live in harmony with nature because this will not only bring self-fulfillment, but would lay the basis for an improved society.

Chapter two relates Hesse's concerns over the educational system in Germany, to which he gave voice in his second novel, *Beneath the Wheel*. Education certainly improved in the German lands throughout the nineteenth century, as literacy increased and more and more children attended primary school. In spite of this, the educational system remained conservative and geared toward maintaining the status quo. By the 1870s, however, some reformers argued that education harmed the development of youth. Following this activism, a new genre of literature emerged in the first decade of the twentieth century that voiced student concerns called *Schulliteratur*; Hesse's second novel is a prime example. In *Beneath the Wheel*, Hesse described a talented youth, who dedicated himself to school only to discover that he had not cultivated his own self, which eventually led to his demise. Hesse argued that monotonous rote learning, brutal peers, and uncaring teachers stultified a youth's creativity and individual growth. In the author's mind, each individual is unique and cannot fully realize his or her potential in the destructive assembly line of the German educational system.

The third chapter reflects Hesse's views on ideas of cultural pessimism and degeneration common to fin de siècle Europe. Some intellectuals believed that in spite of modern progress, society actually was in a state of decline, and in need of radical change. Hesse perceived this notion, but did not adopt a grim and foreboding outlook as did most cultural pessimists. Instead,

even while acknowledging the existence of pessimism, Hesse described how one can overcome such feelings in his final prewar novels *Gertrude* and *Rosshalde*. In each work, he presented an artist as a figure of degeneration, and contrasted them with healthy people who loved and affirmed life. By doing this, Hesse showed how easy it can be to fall into the trap of despair, while suggesting a way out of living a pessimistic existence. Hesse understood that pessimism was curable, but it was up to the individual to bear responsibility and overcome despair.

The study concludes with a brief look into Hesse's writings and experiences during the Great War. In contrast to the general war enthusiasm, Hesse spoke out against the war. He believed that nationalism and a herd mentality caused unnecessary bloodshed. Instead, Hesse argued for a transnational duty to humanity and the spiritual regeneration of Europe. The war, however, caused a significant shift in the writings of the author. Afterwards, Hesse was no longer the Swabian author of before, who wrote on cultural concerns, but became more of a psychological author of the inner-self. In other words, the war transformed Hesse into the Weimar author as he is often portrayed.

In the end, this study will hope to show that Hesse is more relevant to German cultural and intellectual history than has been previously recognized, since his early works articulate interesting viewpoints about Wilhelmine Germany. One reason that these works are important is that Hesse was a critic of German society and culture. He perceived certain ills in society, and gave voice to them in his novels. The author knew that the destruction of nature, a detrimental educational system, and feelings of unrelieved cultural pessimism were all real problems injuring German society. In his fiction, Hesse addressed these troubles, and hoped to provide a moderate and individual solution for each. Hesse's work offered a middle path for those rocked by change, but who were unwilling to tread in the waters of extremism. He argued that overcoming

these anxieties was possible if the individual took responsibility and the care to find his own self, since the healthy individual is the basis of society. Upon completion of this study, it should be made clear that the early works of Hesse offer perceptive and critical insights into the culture and society of Wilhelmine Germany.

## CHAPTER ONE: NEO-ROMANTICISM, LONGING FOR NATURE, AND *PETER CAMENZIND*

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Germany gained international recognition as it grew to become one of the world's greatest industrial powers. The period from 1850 to 1870 witnessed an upsurge in industrial investment and an agricultural decrease. The railway, which increased by three hundred percent between 1850 to 1870, from 6000 to 20,000 kilometers, drove industrial development forward in the German lands. Railroads, along with a growth in canal building, amplified the transportation of raw materials to factories and finished products to the market. Despite an economic recession (1873-1896) shortly after unification, German industry continued to mature. In fact, industrial output increased by about thirty percent per person during the recession, since it was primarily an agricultural depression. Germany developed so well industrially that it eventually caught up to and even surpassed Britain in certain areas of industry, particularly steel, iron, chemicals, and electricity, just before the outbreak of the Great War. This industrialization transformed Germany from an agricultural to an industrial society. As a result, old cities expanded because of new railway networks and new ones arose from industrial fervor.<sup>50</sup> From 1870 until 1910, the urban population in Germany rose from 8.9 to 26.7 million. Berlin signified the most prominent growth, expanding from 862,000 in 1871 to 2.1 million inhabitants by 1910.<sup>51</sup> On the eve of the Great War, Germany established itself as one the world's most modern and advanced industrial societies.

Because of this tremendous industrial growth, a war was being waged on the natural world. Government officials and industrialists increasingly strove to tame nature in their

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<sup>50</sup> Frank B. Tipton, *A History of Modern Germany since 1815* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 94-97, 134-144, 184-202.

<sup>51</sup> Volker Berghahn, *Imperial Germany, 1871-1918: Economy, Society, Culture, and Politics* (Providence: Berghahn Books, 2005), 47.

attempts to further progress. They altered rivers, drained marshlands, and created dams and canals in order to make the land useful to the state-building process. This reshaping of the German landscape did not just entail environmental changes, but also shows “how modern Germany itself was shaped in the process,” since this not only shaped economic and political developments, but cultural ones too.<sup>52</sup> While official government policy viewed land conquest optimistically, pessimistic reactions from conservationists emerged. This period gave rise to groups, associations, and literature that reacted against the conquest of nature, while praising the natural world. At the turn of century, when Hesse began his literary career, the author would be influenced by this dynamic. In his own way, Hesse spoke out against this conquest, while glorifying images of nature through neo-romantic descriptions to ideas of natural religion, which became essential to his writing style and literary goals.

### Land Reclamations and Reactions

Beginning in the late eighteenth century, the taming of nature intensified in German lands because state’s hoped to mold it into an exploitable resource. Such actions were distinctive, especially during the reign of Friedrich the Great, which not only beheld the growth of Prussia militarily and politically, but was also a time of amplified landscape repossession, through actions such as the taming of the Oder River.<sup>53</sup> The pace of land reclamation, however, accelerated during the course of the nineteenth century, most notably witnessed through the taming of the Rhine.

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<sup>52</sup> David Blackbourn, *The Conquest of Nature: Water, Landscape, and the Making of Modern Germany* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2006), 19.

<sup>53</sup> For information on the taming of the Oder see Blackbourn, *Conquest*, 35-50; David Blackbourn, “‘Conquests from Barbarism’: Taming Nature in Frederick the Great’s Prussia,” in *Nature in German History*, ed. Christof Mauch (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), 11-26.

The Rhine project not only reflected political progress, since the river was international, but it also revealed technological improvements resulting from the burgeoning industrial revolution.<sup>54</sup> Politicians sought to change the course of the Rhine in order to protect land and property from flood waters and also to speed ship transport. The driving force behind this project was hydraulic engineers, such as Johann Gottfried Tulla, who regarded rivers as imperfections in need of improvement.<sup>55</sup> The idea developed that such actions were positive, since they would restrict the river's "unlawful" claim to land and "impose order on nature" by transforming unproductive landscapes.<sup>56</sup> By the second half of the century, these engineers successfully shortened the Rhine and made it significantly straighter. After the river had been remade through human labor, floodplains were reduced, more productive land was available, and increased commercial opportunities were possible. The new fertile soil improved food supply and reduced malaria, which allowed population to rise. But negative side effects troubled this mission, as well. Former swamps became deserts, fauna dramatically changed due to lost floodplains, and downstream flooding increased dramatically. The most noticeable consequence, though, was the decline of fish, specifically salmon. Despite these negative consequences, engineers and politicians remained optimistic, since they positively observed the transformation of the Rhine from a meandering river into a shipping canal.<sup>57</sup>

Land reclamation increased as industrialization perpetuated expansion throughout the nineteenth century. In the eyes of government officials and scientists the conquest of nature indicated progress and modernity. In 1844, the Association of German Natural Scientists and

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<sup>54</sup> Marc Cioc, "The Political Ecology of the Rhine," in *Nature in German History*, ed. Christof Mauch (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), 33, 38.

<sup>55</sup> Cioc, 35.

<sup>56</sup> Rita Gudermann, "Conviction and Constraint: Hydraulic Engineers and Agricultural Amelioration Projects in Nineteenth-Century Prussia," in *Germany's Nature: Cultural Landscapes and Environmental History*, ed. Thomas Lekan and Thomas Zellar (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 35-37.

<sup>57</sup> Cioc, 31-45; Gudermann, 33-47; Blackbourn, 94-118; Much of the information for this paragraph is similar between these three sources.

Physicians stated, “science would ‘make the reasonless forces of nature subservient to the moral purposes of humanity.’”<sup>58</sup> Sounding like the Rhine engineers, scientists deemed reclamations as improvements to the landscape. The words of Max Nordau ring true for many individuals involved in this struggle: “On our earth, nature is our enemy, whom we must fight, before whom we dare not lay down our weapons.”<sup>59</sup> Indeed, land reclamation projects accelerated over the course of the century. By mid-century, off the Baltic coast of Prussia, Jade Bay signified the “unending human struggle against the dangerous, malicious sea.”<sup>60</sup> The development at Wilhelmshaven replaced marshland with a naval yard, as a symbol of modern times. The 1850s and 1860s witnessed a great expansion in canalization. Canal projects, fueled by new industrial steamships, transformed previous uncultivated lands into symbols of progress. Dam-building also reached a “golden decade” in the 1890s. The construction of dams produced optimistic hopes since it was supposed to irrigate fields, store drinking water, turn wheel mills, protect from floods, aid in land navigation, and provide electricity.<sup>61</sup> Simply put, economic and political concerns governed attitudes towards nature in the nineteenth century.

This march of progress, however, was not universally recognized as a positive outcome of modernity. As early as the late eighteenth century, Romantics perceived the threat official government policy posed to nature. Preoccupied with landscape aesthetics, Romantics and poets lamented the state-building process, believing untamed nature to be a place of solitude and the sublime. The sublime, a feeling of beauty and terror, would overwhelm the individual, reveal their smallness in the natural order, and thrust them into a greater understanding of the universe. Romantics adopted a critical attitude toward civilization, which they believed turned man into a

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<sup>58</sup> Blackbourn, *Conquest*, 173.

<sup>59</sup> Max Nordau, *Degeneration*, Translator unknown (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1895), 163-164.

<sup>60</sup> Blackbourn, *Conquest*, 129.

<sup>61</sup> Blackbourn, *Conquest*, 126-129, 143, 201-220.

cog in the wheel of society, causing alienation from one's own self. They argued that nature could teach mankind and become a model of understanding, rather than a resource to be exploited. Many authors responded to the conquest of nature. Theodor Fontane called the Oder project a "war of extermination."<sup>62</sup> In 1799, Novalis complained how human domination had "made the eternal creative music of the universe into the monotonous clapping of a monstrous mill."<sup>63</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's novella *The Sorrows of Young Werther* proclaimed unspoiled nature to be a paradise, and *Faust* described land reclamation as the price paid for the triumph of progress. Also, the Swiss-born author, Jean-Jacques Rousseau "criticized the draining of marshes as one of the destructive interventions in nature that threatened to obliterate physical distinctions in the face of the land."<sup>64</sup>

In the nineteenth century, individuals continued to preach against the conquest of nature. Johann Georg Sulzer believed children should be educated in nature in order to achieve true wisdom. Heribert Rau, following in the footsteps of Rousseau and Goethe, wrote an essay entitled, "The Gospel of Nature," which reflected a reverence toward untamed wilderness. Even Friedrich Nietzsche was repelled by pompous progress mongering, believing it to be hubris.<sup>65</sup> One of the most prominent mid-century figures of nationalistic nature romanticism, however, was Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl. Riehl viewed the German wilderness as a source of national character and coined the term cultural landscape, *Kulturlandschaft*, as a link between the Germanic people and the land. Central to his nationalistic portrayal of nature was the forest.<sup>66</sup> He described Germans as free people of the woods, and that German forests mirrored the

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<sup>62</sup> Blackbourn, *Conquest*, 69.

<sup>63</sup> Blackbourn, *Conquest*, 70.

<sup>64</sup> Blackbourn, *Conquest*, 71.

<sup>65</sup> Blackbourn, *Conquest*, 180-187.

<sup>66</sup> Thomas Lekan and Thomas Zellar, "The Landscape of German environmental History," in *Germany's Nature: Cultural Landscapes and Environmental History*, ed. Thomas Lekan and Thomas Zellar (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 3.

diversity among the German people. In fact, forests were one of the central areas of contention for conservationists during this period. Since the late eighteenth century, the need for timber dramatically reduced woodlands, and by the middle of the nineteenth century, industrial pollution began to devastate forests from afar.<sup>67</sup> Eventually, due to forest depletion, new scientific forests, even-aged and monoculture plantations, replenished woodlands, but at the price of Germany's once variegated forests. In response, an affinity for the forest, *Waldgesinnung* or *Waldbewusstsein*, became popular among conservationists and also stood for a love of the fatherland. The forest was used to rally anti-French sentiments, invent a heroic German past, and construct a German cultural identity.<sup>68</sup> In short, intellectuals and thinkers feared the destructiveness of land use and the disappearance of the German "wilderness."<sup>69</sup>

Concern also spread among ordinary citizens of the German lands. The countryside took on an intensified meaning as a place of refreshment in an industrial age.<sup>70</sup> As early as the 1770s, German visitors discovered the pleasures of the untamed Alps and seashores. In the following century, lakes, such as Constance in Switzerland, became prized possessions and sources of leisure as an escape from the growing city.<sup>71</sup> Additionally, conservationism expanded throughout the nineteenth century. Conservationists complained that the rapid growth of urban environments threatened beautiful, romantic, and natural areas. Over time, conservationist organizations formed, such as Homeland Protection, *Heimatschutz*. The *Heimatschutz* movement recognized human impacts on the natural order and preached a pastoral aesthetic of

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<sup>67</sup> Franz-Josef Brüggemeier, "Waldsterben: Construction and Deconstruction of an Environmental Problem," in *Nature in German History*, ed. Christof Mauch (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), 121-122.

<sup>68</sup> Michael Imort, "A Sylvan People: Wilhelmine Forestry and the Forest as Symbol of Germanism," in *Germany's Nature: Cultural Landscapes and Environmental History*, ed. Thomas Lekan and Thomas Zeller (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 55-59.

<sup>69</sup> Lekan and Zeller, *Germany's Nature*, 4-10.

<sup>70</sup> Roy Pascal, *From Naturalism to Expressionism: German Literature and Society, 1880-1918* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973), 124.

<sup>71</sup> Blackbourn, *Conquest*, 169.

living in harmony with rural nature.<sup>72</sup> As the century progressed, both intellectuals and ordinary citizens lamented the loss of nature and hoped for change.

One scholar recently commented that “‘Nature’ saturated the Wilhelmine experience.”<sup>73</sup> In the face of the destruction of natural habitats, organizations and institutions developed which attempted to bring nature to the people in Wilhelmine Germany. Popular health and hygienic reform movements swelled during this period. For instance, open-air baths became particularly popular in urban areas. These semi-private parks were places where men and women could exercise, sunbathe, enjoy the fresh air, and even swim in the nude. By 1912, over 380 baths operated across Germany. The goal was not to transform bath-goers into nature-people, but to accustom an increasingly urban population to the outdoors. Baths became a domesticated version of nature and an intermediary between the city and the wilderness.<sup>74</sup>

Natural lifestyles in urban settings were further popularized by groups such as the German League. Part of the *Lebensreform* movement, the German League matured into the largest health and hygiene support group in Germany, with around 150,000 members on the eve of the Great War. Both the German League and the *Lebensreform* embraced the common goal of reforming “lifestyle, particularly in the areas of nutrition, clothing, housing, and healthcare.” In addition, natural healing manuals and vegetarian restaurants gained increased popularity in urban settings, as nature became part of the urban every day in Wilhelmine Germany.<sup>75</sup>

This urbanized nature extended into community organizations and public institutions. Nature and beautification societies, *Verschönerungsvereine*, sprung up throughout Germany.

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<sup>72</sup> John Alexander Williams, *Turning to Nature in Germany: Hiking, Nudism, and Conservation, 1900-1940* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 220-224.

<sup>73</sup> Avi Sharma, “Wilhelmine nature: natural lifestyle and practical politics in the German Life-reform movement (1890-1914),” *Social History*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (Feb. 2012), 54.

<sup>74</sup> Sharma, 39, 40.

<sup>75</sup> Sharma, 43,44.

For example, the town of Pfalz created the *Pfälzerverein*, which aimed to bring the town's inhabitants closer to nature. In spite of its noble intention, the association was far from advocating a return to true natural wilderness. While the movement had romantic intentions, it integrated science, technology, and rationality into its functions. For instance, trails needed to be logically carved out in the forests in order to make the hikes more manageable and sensible for the townsfolk.<sup>76</sup> Similarly, industrial advancement altered German natural history museums, which witnessed a dramatic change around 1900. Museums now presented images of nature in natural surroundings instead of the traditional organization based on Linnaean taxonomic categories. In an industrial age, museums attempted to compensate for the disappearance of nature by drawing on social constructs of *Heimat* to represent nature to urban audiences.<sup>77</sup> Rather than glorify the wilderness as a place to escape industrial society, such associations and institutions sought to harmonize human and organic order.

In addition to public institutions, independent nature groups formed throughout the century. Naturist movements developed and concerned themselves with the social and cultural crises of industrialization and urbanism, but rather than despair nature's destruction, they hoped to overcome the gap between wilderness and urban modernity. Tied to the *Lebensreform* movement, naturists wanted to achieve a harmony between the industrial city and the rural countryside.<sup>78</sup> Several organizations sought to attain such a balance between nature and modernity. One group, the "Friends of Nature," *Touristenverein 'Die Naturfreunde,'* brought workers out of the city into the country. The group's social hikes aimed to rejuvenate workers

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<sup>76</sup> Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 63-70.

<sup>77</sup> Susanne Köstering, "Biology – *Heimat* – Family: Nature and Gender in German Natural History Museums around 1900," in *Germany's Nature: Cultural Landscapes and Environmental History*, ed. Thomas Lekan and Thomas Zellar (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 140-159.

<sup>78</sup> Williams, 2-17.

depressed by monotonous work and urban living. These hikes emphasized emotion, reason, and the solidarity of communal activity to restore health. Many workers praised the effects of these hikes, claiming that in nature the air is clean and one can see God. The Friends of Nature, however, was composed of well-educated, skilled workers, and the less skilled laborers generally lacked access to such excursions.<sup>79</sup> Yet some attempts to intertwine modernity and nature were more radical. For example, the Free Body Culture, *Freikörperkultur*, a socialist nudist group, formed as a holistic naturist movement with the goal of healing the mind, body, and soul. This movement, a leftist branch of *Lebensreform*, sought to educate individuals through rational nudism by promoting egalitarian, emancipatory, and democratic ideals. While it was a fringe movement before the Great War, its influence spread in Weimar Germany as evident by the founding of multiple Koch schools.<sup>80</sup>

One of the most notable groups that longed for a return to the natural world was the German youth movement, the *Jugendbewegung*, specifically the *Wandervogel* branch.<sup>81</sup> The movement recognized the upheavals of the Bismarckian state and appealed to youths who wanted to flee from the unpleasant realities of Wilhelmine Germany into a rural dream world. According to one member of the movement, these young romantics acted out of “love for our German homeland, its people, its nation, which is in danger of disappearing in the metropolis.”<sup>82</sup> Believing that they were outsiders in society, the *Jugendbewegung* shunned material civilization, turned to nature, and became anti-political and hostile to patriotism. Born in Steglitz, a suburb of Berlin, the *Wandervogel* became formally established in 1901 as a response to the

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<sup>79</sup> Williams, 67-96.

<sup>80</sup> Williams, 23-35. Koch schools were nudist institutions that taught people how to live naturally.

<sup>81</sup> Helt, 64: Hesse's good friend Ludwig Finckh participated in the *Wandervogel* movement.

<sup>82</sup> Konrad H. Jarausch. *Students, Society, and Politics in Imperial Germany: The Rise of Academic Illiberalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 289.

industrialization and materialism of city life.<sup>83</sup> As one scholar affirms, its birth in Steglitz reinforces that the group reacted “against urbanization brought forth by industrial process.”<sup>84</sup> In response to industrialized society, the youth movement “proclaimed instinct, the world of nature, and primitive habits as the remedies for a sick civilization.”<sup>85</sup>

The youth of the *Wandervogel* felt alienated in mass industrial society and yearned for a simpler existence.<sup>86</sup> Members encouraged youths to escape from cities in order to commune with nature.<sup>87</sup> The most favored activities involved hiking, building campfires, and telling the stories of German Romantic authors. The *Wandervogel* set off on group hikes and enjoyed the pleasures of nature without any regard for their parents, education, or religion. Not interested in the “oohs and ahhs” of nature, these youths preferred to rough it in conditions distant from those experienced by city dwellers.<sup>88</sup> Nature, for them, produced physical and emotional toughness, while folk songs and roaming stimulated a community of purpose.<sup>89</sup> Members regularly sang folk songs from their songbook, the *Zupfgeigenhansl*, to the accompaniment of a guitar. Nature and a rural dream world were essential to the *Wandervogel*'s escape from modernity.

Although Hermann Hesse was not involved directly in these nature movements, he absorbed and represented their ideas in his literature. As a young man, Hesse was aware of the conquest of nature happening around him. This destruction dismayed the young, romantic author. Hesse kept the natural world close to his heart and it became influential in his early writings, as evident by his proclivity to discuss images of nature in his letters, but more

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<sup>83</sup> Walter Z. Laqueur, *Young Germany: A History of the German Youth Movement* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), 10, 17.

<sup>84</sup> Gerhard Masur, *Prophets of Yesterday: Studies in European Culture, 1890-1914* (New York: Macmillan, 1961), 356.

<sup>85</sup> Masur, 358.

<sup>86</sup> Laqueur, 6.

<sup>87</sup> Robert Wohl, *The Generation of 1914* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 43.

<sup>88</sup> Howard Becker, *German Youth: Bond or Free* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1976), 77, 79-82.

<sup>89</sup> George L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (New York: Universal Library, 1964), 175.

importantly through his works of fiction. Concerns over the natural world manifested itself most vividly in his first novel, *Peter Camenzind*, which conveyed an intimate sense of nature and offered an extended critical commentary on city life.<sup>90</sup> Additionally, some of his fairy tales revealed the shortsightedness of radical reform and the ephemeral nature of progress.

### Nature in the Works of Hesse

As a young man, Hesse claimed the need to escape modernity and to keep his ideals of freedom of the inner-self intact in an age of homogenization and decay. Hesse's attachment to the natural world should already be evident from his brief biographical background and fulfilling these yearnings became a daily task for him. When Hesse moved to Tübingen, he missed the forest of his home, and had to take pleasure in a small garden.<sup>91</sup> Most days, during his work break, he would find a quiet place in nature to relax: "On midday break I climb up the mountain every day and lie for fifteen minutes in the sun and enjoy the wide and splendid image of the Swabian Alps."<sup>92</sup> This simple and quiet activity pleased Hesse more than anything. He remarked, "my favorite activity is to lie in the sun and watch the clouds pass above or the sea ripple before me."<sup>93</sup> In fact, Hesse moved to Gaienhofen in order to live "close to the soil," and would devote days to hiking and boating around the Untersee region, or simply working in his

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<sup>90</sup> Freedman, 108.

<sup>91</sup> Hermann Hesse to Johannes Hesse, Tübingen, June 21, 1896, *Kindheit*, 118-120; "*Ich vermisse den Wald. Dafür freue ich mich an einigen schönen Gaerten hier...*"; For a brief glance into the influence of gardens in Hesse's writings see Mimi Jehle, "The 'Garden' in the Works of Hermann Hesse," *The German Quarterly*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (January 1951): 42-50. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/402232> (accessed November 6, 2013).

<sup>92</sup> Hermann Hesse to Johannes Hesse, Tübingen, March 22-25, 1896, *Kindheit*, 89-91; "*In der Nachmittagspause steige ich jeden Tag auf den Schlossberg, liege eine Viertelstunde in der Sonne und genieße die weite, prächtige Aussicht auf die Alb.*"

<sup>93</sup> Hermann Hesse to Herr Ilg, Basel, January 29, 1903, *Gesammelte Briefe*, 93-94; "*meine Lieblingsbeschäftigung ist es, in der Sonne zu liegen und die Wolken oder das Meer zu betrachten.*"

garden.<sup>94</sup> Also, Hesse's time with Gräser in 1907 was influenced by the author's longings for the natural world. Gräser, a radical naturist, exposed Hesse to the benefits of the sun, air, and vegetarianism while living naked upon a mountain. Even though Hesse did not assimilate into Gräser's crowd he certainly longed for integration into the natural world. His love of nature transformed into a neo-romanticism that would infiltrate many of his early writings.

When Hesse began to write in the 1890s, natural imagery permeated his works. He believed that the artist had a duty to write about nature, especially in an industrial society. At an early age, Hesse alleged that talented people were sick and that good writing was being killed by factories.<sup>95</sup> In such a society, the artist must hold nature dear. In a fragment from 1897, Hesse declared, "The artist loves nature, because his eye is given the gift of seeing beauty and therefore always seeing something beautiful. He rejoices over this gift, if you believe, that he rejoices in foreign beauty."<sup>96</sup> Following in the footsteps of Goethe, Rousseau, and others, Hesse communicated Romantic longings for nature and placed himself at the vanguard of natural desires over modernity society. *Hermann Lauscher* (1900), a collection of short stories and poems, has been compared to Goethe's *Werther*, and his collection of stories in *Eine Stunde Hinter Mitternacht* (1899) and his poems in *Gedichte* (1902) have been noted for their neo-romantic tendencies.<sup>97</sup> In virtually all of his early writings, Hesse expressed the idea that only by living in accord with the natural world one can become a fulfilled person. This sentiment is most fully expressed in his first novel, *Peter Camenzind* (1904). Although the project took Hesse a long time to finish, *Peter Camenzind* contrasts Romantic and sublime images of nature with an

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<sup>94</sup> Mileck, 38-42; Freedman, 12.

<sup>95</sup> Hermann Hesse to Karl Isenberg, Tübingen, December 10, 1895, *Kindheit*, 42-44.

<sup>96</sup> Hermann Hesse fragment, 1897, *Kindheit*, 212; "Die Künstler liebt die Natur, weil seinem Auge die Gnade gegeben ist, schön zu sehen und darum immer Schönes zu sehen. Er freut sich dieser Gnade, wenn Ihr glaubt, er freue sich des fremden Schönen."

<sup>97</sup> Mileck, 28-31.

industrial society which alienates the individual from true harmony with himself and with the world.<sup>98</sup>

*Peter Camenzind* tells the story of an eponymous young man born in an Alpine mountain village. The village is close-knit, small, and almost two-thirds of the residents are Camenzinds. As a boy, Peter is vigorous and embarks on long hikes through mountainous passes, enjoying the beauty of the world that surrounds him. Peter, an only child, appears destined to live the working man's life of his father until he writes a certain letter. Peter's father occasionally works at a local monastery, but he falls sick and cannot make the journey. He asks his son to inform the monastery, but instead of going there to deliver the news, Peter writes to the priest of his father's illness. A week later, Peter discovers a priest sitting in his house and the holy man convinces the boy to become a student. Peter's father is angered by the idea, but Peter stands firm and attends a preparatory-school. In spite of his father's irritation, and the death of his mother, Peter continues down the scholarly path.

Peter leaves his hometown and enters into the world to study philology in Zürich. While in Zürich, Peter befriends a student musician named Richard, who discovers that Peter's real gift is poetry. Richard introduces Peter into a new life, with new social networks. It is at this time he meets the mediocre painter, Erminia Aglietti, with whom he falls in love. Peter eventually fails in his studies, and after the accidental death of Richard, who drowns in a river, Peter leaves the university to wander around Europe. Peter remains constantly on the move after his time in Zürich. He settles down in several places, including Paris and Basel, working as a journalist, but never feeling fulfilled. Peter takes to alcohol to deal with the struggles of life because the pub is

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<sup>98</sup> Hermann Hesse to Rudolf Wackernagel-Burckhardt, Calw, October 19, 1902, *Gesammelte Briefe*, 90-92; In an oft quoted passage, Hesse states that at the pace he is going it will take ten to twelve years to finish the novel – “*Seit fast einem Jahr arbeite ich an einem Roman, der, wenn er im bisherigen Tempo forstschreiter, vielleicht 10 bis 12 Jahren fertig kann.*” Part of the reason this took so long to write is because Hesse was suffering from eye trouble, a common occurrence in his life, for three months over the summer.

the only place where he feels comfortable in the city. Eventually, Peter travels to Italy and begins to see the beauty in life again. But since Peter is a wanderer, he does not stay in Italy long and returns to Basel. Through his friendship with a local carpenter, Peter meets the person who most completely alters his life, the cripple Boppi. Peter not only cares for Boppi, but becomes intimate friends with the handicapped man. Yet just as their friendship blossoms, Peter is dealt a blow through Boppi's death. Afterwards, Peter wants to escape back to Italy, but receives a telegram that his father is ill. He returns to the village of his youth to care for his aging father. Peter immerses himself in the daily life in the village and discovers that he feels more comfortable here than out in the world. In spite of this, Peter still keeps a stack of papers in his desk and the hope that he will one day write a great work and become a poet.

Theodore Ziolkowski comments that *Peter Camenzind* is a *Bildungsroman* that readers of a certain age should not miss.<sup>99</sup> Another scholar notes that the novel, “appealed to the counterculture of nature and dream created in response to new age pressures.”<sup>100</sup> Furthermore, it is a novel about love and friendship. The publicity on the cover of the 1975 Bantam translation calls the book a “romantic novel of ideal love that launched Hesse's career.” While the novel is all of these things, these words of praise, as well as the brief synopsis of *Peter Camenzind*, mask the hidden importance of Hesse's first novel. There is another vital force at play in the story, and that is the natural world. While American scholars tend to view Hesse as a writer of man's interior, psychological life, and mysticism of the East, German commentators have previously viewed Hesse as an author of the outdoors, nature and spirit, and a great critic of corrosive civilization.<sup>101</sup> The German view stems, in part, from Hesse's popularity at the turn of the

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<sup>99</sup> Ziolkowski, *Novels*, 5, 90.

<sup>100</sup> Tusken, *Understanding*, 47.

<sup>101</sup> Freedman, 10-11.

century when many Germans felt mass, industrial society threatened the simple way of life.<sup>102</sup>

This understanding certainly seems to fit *Peter Camenzind*; throughout the text, the reader is struck by the infusion of nature to almost every page. The natural world saturates the entire work, and Peter's development and personal growth is enveloped in the language of nature.

Some scholarship has noted the importance of nature in *Peter Camenzind*. One researcher comments that *Peter Camenzind* represents a return to nature, missing since the Biedermeier period, and argues that it is a novel of escape from the decadence of the age. In this story, the love of nature expresses both a love of man and a love of something infinite, which "ennobles and purifies" Peter.<sup>103</sup> Another scholar remarks that Hesse's first novel sketches a mythical story of nature, while attempting to represent natural landscapes, as a result of natural history and Darwinian processes.<sup>104</sup> A more recent essay by Colin Riordan analyzes the influences of the natural world in *Peter Camenzind* in the context of nature and modernity before 1914. Riordan studies the problematic relationship between nature and mankind in German literature, and concludes his work with several pages on Hesse. He comments that *Peter Camenzind* is not only filled with a passion for nature, but also "an apparent emotional affinity with ecological issues including holism, notions of Gaia and animism, as well as harmony with nature, nature as refuge and sheer anti-modernism." He is struck by the text's anti-modernism in which "industry and technology are very much in the background while nature is foregrounded as an idyllic refuge." Using several of Hesse's later poems as evidence, however, Riordan states that wilderness is an alienating experience and that Hesse eventually grants aesthetic

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<sup>102</sup> Freedman, 7.

<sup>103</sup> Boulby, 9-23.

<sup>104</sup> Andreas Solbach, "Dezisionistisches Mitleid: Dekadenz und Satire in Hermann Hesses *Unterm Rad*," in *Hermann Hesse Today: Hermann Hesse Heute*, ed. Ingo Cornils and Osman Durrani (Amsterdam: Ropodi, 2005), 68.

appreciation to industry.<sup>105</sup> Although Riordan understands the prevalence of nature in this first novel, he does not go far enough in his analysis and even misconstrues some ideas, particularly in this early stage of Hesse's career. For example, it is only natural that an author who lived without electricity or running water when he first moved to Gaienhofen would push technology into the background. Also, the poems Riordan uses to claim that Hesse found the wilderness alienating come from the interwar period, and are not representative of the alienation of the city that is clearly present in Hesse's early work.

In reality, the novel's critique of modernity is much deeper than has generally been recognized. As the following analysis of *Camenzind* will demonstrate, Hesse argued that when an individual genuinely beholds the beauty of nature before him, images of the sublime and natural religion are revealed, but such impressions, however, become corrupted in an urban setting. Hesse demonstrated a critical attitude toward the city, which is not only false but is the true cause of alienation for the individual. Additionally, Hesse disparaged the urban person's inauthentic love of nature and implicitly attacked the naturist organizations common in Wilhelmine Germany. In the place of such ersatz settings and feelings, Hesse revealed a Romantic fervor for the natural world. Most importantly, the author suggested that only through a sincere love of nature, separated from the baseness of society, can one understand his or her innermost self and feel a kinship with mankind. In *Peter Camenzind*, Hesse illustrated that mankind, even in an age of modernity, can only become fulfilled when their lives are rooted in nature because nature is at the heart of existence.

The novel opens with a Romantic description of the Alpine region surrounding Peter's hometown, immediately separating this work from the industrial and positivist society of the

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<sup>105</sup> Colin Riordan, "German literature, nature and modernity before 1914," in *Nature in Literary and Cultural Studies: Transatlantic Conversations on Ecocriticism*, ed. Catrin Gersdorf and Sylvia Mayer (New York: Rodopi, 2006), 324-329.

modern age. The narrator, Peter Camenzind, describes the beauties of nature around him. Like the author, nature pleases Peter more than any person. He writes, “I knew of nothing more wonderful than roaming idly about the mountains and meadows or along the lake. Mountains, lake, storm, and sun were my companions. They told me stories, molded me, and were dearer to me for many years than any person or any person’s fate.” Peter anthropomorphizes the landscape of the Alps, calling the mountains and trees “recluses and warriors.” He stands in awe of the ancient mountains, which long ago wrestled each other until one arose victorious. The mountains continuously do battle with lake, storm, and wind, but in the end prevail “proudly, sternly, and with clenched teeth, like ancient, indomitable warriors.” But more than the mountains and trees, Peter loves the clouds, which he calls a beautiful and sublime gift from God. Clouds are not only soft and delicate, but somber and “merciless as emissaries of death.” Even as a young boy, Peter does not take these sights for granted, because they inspire “respect and awe” in his heart.<sup>106</sup>

When Peter is old enough, he climbs the mountain that stood over his village. His experience typifies the romantic idea of the sublime. Peter beholds “both the terror and beauty of the mountains,” as he traverses the rocky terrain. When he reaches the peak of the mountain, he witnesses, “gaping ravines, filled with ice and half-melted snow, glass-green glaciers, moraines ugly beyond belief, and suspended above all this like a bell, the dome of heaven.”<sup>107</sup> Peter experiences his own smallness as he looks upon the vastness of creation: “Quite overcome, I saw with fear and joy in my heart the immense distances bearing down upon me. So that was how fabulously wide the world was!”<sup>108</sup> He also gazes upon the “beauty and melancholy” of the clouds, and after recovering from his astonishment he “bellowed like a bull with joy and

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<sup>106</sup> Hermann, Hesse, *Peter Camenzind*, trans. Michael Roloff (New York: Bantam, 1975), 1-3, 13-14.

<sup>107</sup> Hesse, *Camenzind*, 15

<sup>108</sup> Hesse, *Camenzind*, 16.

excitement, into the clear mountain air.”<sup>109</sup> Standing at the mountain’s peak, it is his first hymn to the beauty of nature induced by an unforgettable and sublime experience.

Not only does Peter anthropomorphize and glorify the sublimity of the natural world in his youth, but nature also brings him closer to God. Through Peter’s excursions in nature he discovers a natural religion reminiscent of Rousseau’s Savoyard Priest in *Emile*.<sup>110</sup> Peter declares:

All this was certainly enough to round out childhood, and even a lifetime. For all these events spoke the loud and unbroken language of God, which never crossed the lips of man. If you have heard God’s words proclaimed in this fashion during childhood, you will be able to hear them echo within you for the rest of your days, sweet, strong, terrible; you will never escape their spell. A native of the mountains can study philosophy and natural history, and even dispense with God altogether, but when he experiences the Föhn or hears an avalanche crash through the forest, his heart trembles and he thinks of God and death.<sup>111</sup>

God reveals himself through nature, and nature offers individual a connection to God. Modern education and science teach against such an idea, but Peter affirms that when one confronts the beauty and terror of nature God will become known. What is essential, however, is that this experience must come naturally, through one’s own understanding. The young Peter, who has yet to encounter modern society, understands the wonder and sublimity of nature through his own experience. But things change when he accepts the priest’s offer.

School shocks Peter as it thrusts him into modern society and tears him away from nature. He finds this new setting uncomfortable and observes, “I am incompetent as ever in the art of living. My early, one-sided preoccupation with the earth, flowers, and animals has stunted in me the growth of social graces.” The boy, so at home and at peace in the world of nature, is pushed into something new and abnormal. Even though his peasant constitution makes him

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<sup>109</sup> Hesse, *Camenzind*, 16.

<sup>110</sup> Mileck, 33. Mileck even comments that *Peter Camenzind* demonstrates “a Rousseausque refuge in nature.”

<sup>111</sup> Hesse, *Camenzind*, 10.

strong in physical activities, the tediousness of school produces anxiety and depression. This melancholy causes Peter to dream of being an animal and living a free existence, but upon waking he confesses “the recovery of my human dignity fills me not with pride or joy but with regret.”<sup>112</sup> He senses that living natural, or more animal like, is better than the social constraints that he is now bound by. Peter remains despondent until he discovers literature, which becomes his new retreat in the city. He continues on this path, however, assuming that education could offer, “a realm of pure intellect and an unambiguous dead-certain science of truth.”<sup>113</sup>

Instead of finding truth in education, Peter only discovers alienation. He feels out of place in settings different from his rural hometown. Peter recounts a time he went into a modern town to pursue a girl he liked from school, but the place brought him only melancholy. Peter writes, “Today uneasiness, fear, and sadness overcame me – as though I were destined to travel into flatter and flatter lands, to lose the mountains and citizenship of my native land forever... I felt not at home here, I felt permanently kidnapped from my mountain region and certain that I would never be as cheerful, smooth, and self-assured as anyone from the lowland.”<sup>114</sup> The phrase “permanently kidnapped” powerfully describes the alienation that has swept over Peter in society. Not only are new landscapes drawing Peter further from his true self, but the excursions that previously brought peace and joy to his soul begin to depress him. He comments, “The beauty did not divert my attention; I only savored it quietly and sadly. The more beautiful everything was the more alien it seemed, as I had no part in it and stood at its edge.”<sup>115</sup> The summer before Peter leaves for the university he even stops climbing-mountains and hiking, since he has to help his father work. He confides, “it enraged and exhausted me to observe how

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<sup>112</sup> Hesse, *Camenzind*, 20.

<sup>113</sup> Hesse, *Camenzind*, 22.

<sup>114</sup> Hesse, *Camenzind*, 33.

<sup>115</sup> Hesse, *Camenzind*, 31.

the common daily life callously demanded its due and devoured the abundance of optimism I had brought with me.”<sup>116</sup> Even in his earliest excursions into society, be it school or village work, Peter becomes more alienated the farther he is drawn from the natural world.

Finally the day arrives for Peter to leave his home to study in Zürich. Not only does Zürich solidify Peter’s alienation, but it introduces him to the modern city. Zürich is the first real city Peter experiences, but he is too naïve at this point to analyze it and wanders around “wide-eyed and bewildered for several weeks.”<sup>117</sup> During his first few weeks in Zürich, Peter befriends Richard, and briefly supplements the joy of nature with friendship. One day, Peter and Richard hike up a mountain and Peter relates, “I became aware for the first time in my life of the delight of standing alongside a friend, gazing together into the remote and hazy vistas of life.”<sup>118</sup> During this hike Peter describes the beauty of the world around him to Richard and the musician discovers Peter to be a poet because of his understanding of nature. In this brief moment, Peter is at harmony with both society and nature, but Hesse foreshadows that this feeling would not last since society would soon corrupt the innocent youth. At the summit of the mountain, Richard teases Peter because he does not yet know of Nietzsche or Wagner, and comments to Peter, “you’ve no idea how enviably unspoiled you are.”<sup>119</sup> Soon Peter would know not only of these two men, but of a society that he was unaware of in his Alpine hideaway.

This change begins when Richard introduces Peter to new people and social gatherings. At first, Peter participates in conversations about philosophy and politics. Even though he understands these topics, this dialogue does not attract him in the least. He discovers that these discussions only analyze conditions and structures of the state, society, science, art, and teaching,

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<sup>116</sup> Hesse, *Camenzind*, 36.

<sup>117</sup> Hesse, *Camenzind*, 45.

<sup>118</sup> Hesse, *Camenzind*, 49.

<sup>119</sup> Hesse, *Camenzind*, 50.

but construct nothing positive. The group he is with only concerns itself with criticism, not improvement. It is easy to discuss and criticize society, but it is more difficult to truly understand the world and one's place in it. Peter laments, "Yet only a small minority seemed aware of the need to develop their own selves and to clarify their personal relationships to time and eternity."<sup>120</sup> Peter does not take sides on worldly issues, believing that modernity was not self-enlightening, and that the majority neglected to develop themselves inwardly. Eventually, Peter avoids these gatherings, noting "I realized the danger of frequenting this circle and later came to think of this fledging crew... with nothing but horror and pity."<sup>121</sup> Even after living several years in society, Peter never grows accustomed to these social gatherings. While living in Basel, he occasionally attends meetings held by a group of academics, but still feels ill at ease, because "the majority of them were stereotyped examples of *homo socialis* and all of them seemed to have some affinity with one another, sharing gregariousness and superficiality that I alone lacked." These soirees give Peter "no pleasure" and he finds "this chitchat boring and humiliating."<sup>122</sup> Whether amongst college students or professionals, and even after several years of residing in a city, Peter still regards social gatherings as unbearable and alienating.

Not only is Peter critical of social gatherings, but also of the city-dwellers' excursions into nature. One evening, while he is still a student at Zürich, Peter joins the group of artist friends in a beautiful garden by the lake. The company, "talked, joked, laughed, and finally burst out in song." One of the members even wears "his beret at a rakish angle," and plays a guitar.<sup>123</sup> Peter seemingly partakes in the joy of friendship and nature that one can only find roaming outside modern industrial society, but in reality this scene is a critique of those groups who

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<sup>120</sup> Hesse, *Camenzind*, 52.

<sup>121</sup> Hesse, *Camenzind*, 79.

<sup>122</sup> Hesse, *Camenzind*, 95-102.

<sup>123</sup> Hesse, *Camenzind*, 67.

falsely venture into nature and sing its praises. Peter declares, “it all seemed stupid and ridiculous to me now. I felt like hitting the fop in the velvet coat, who still carried his guitar ostentatiously on a silk band around his neck. And there were still fireworks to come. It was all so childish.”<sup>124</sup> Later in the novel, Peter is again judgmental of bourgeois excursions into nature. He recounts one day that Richard took him for a walk in the forest to replenish his soul. The friends play in a cool stream and sing songs in peace until a group of tourists, described as a “blissfully ignorant troupe,” enter their retreat and disrupt their solace.<sup>125</sup> In one final scene, after Richard had died, Peter condemns the common person’s love of nature. He admonishes, “They go on outings, delight in the beauty of the earth as they trample meadows and tear off flowers and sprigs, only to discard them or let them wilt at home. That is how they love nature.”<sup>126</sup> The first scene reminds the reader of a *Jugendbewegung* movement, while the second two seem to parody the nature societies. These scenes are powerful because Hesse subtly displays a sense of contempt for those nature groups so prominent in Wilhelmine Germany.<sup>127</sup> Society’s excursions into nature are childish or destructive, since urban people do not genuinely appreciate nature. For these groups, nature is simply a commodity to use during one’s free time, not a source of personal growth.

Alienation overwhelms Peter, as false beliefs and fake people are found in every nook and cranny of society. Though it could not gratify him, Peter still longs for a worldly life, thinking that his ambition as a poet would fulfill him. At first, he does not know that this cannot satisfy him. He remarks, “I did not know yet that I suffered from a longing which neither love

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<sup>124</sup> Hesse, *Camenzind*, 70.

<sup>125</sup> Hesse, *Camenzind*, 80-81.

<sup>126</sup> Hesse, *Camenzind*, 108-109.

<sup>127</sup> Hesse even commented once how spas were destroying the Black Forest and that the spa guests were afraid of nature. Hermann Hesse, Open Letter, Badenau, July 9, 1909, *Gesammelte Briefe*, 154-158.

nor fame can satisfy.”<sup>128</sup> Not realizing that nature is the cure to his alienation, Peter begins to drink wine, hoping to find solace in intoxication. Wine becomes Peter’s new “faithful friend,” and he often drinks alone at night, while dreaming of mountains and stars. During this phase of his life Peter writes on society and culture “with a critical, ironic eye.”<sup>129</sup> He perceives the religious views of the city to be foolish. City folk consider faith irrational and are ashamed to speak of God, but they believe “in names like Schopenhauer, Buddha, Zarathustra, and many others.”<sup>130</sup> Other urban dwellers are fond of joining movements. Some movements strive for universal peace, others seek to improve the status of the lower classes, and others battle alcoholism. All of these movements, however, are impregnated with false people of the city, who yearn to help others, but who did not truly possess their own unique spirit.<sup>131</sup>

Peter even begins to notice that his first attraction to society, literature, offers him little to no pleasure. He comments that he would often read the magazine *Simplicissimus* even though it “never failed to infuriate” him.<sup>132</sup> Later on during his social experiment, he reviews two books by people he knew from his student days in Zürich. Both works displease Peter and his remarks are critical. The first author told “pornographic stories about café society and brothels in the capital”, while the second wrote on “neurotic introspection and spiritist stimulants.” Peter mocks both novels, which offends one of the authors very much. The author attacks Peter’s review, claiming that the man of nature does not understand the work’s true intent, and this creates a scandal in a literary journal. This event vexes Peter, who comments, “this overdose of Berlin snootiness was a little too much for me and I sent the malcontent a letter that did not disguise my

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<sup>128</sup> Hesse, *Camenzind*, 77-79.

<sup>129</sup> Hesse, *Camenzind*, 73-76.

<sup>130</sup> Hesse, *Camenzind*, 78.

<sup>131</sup> Hesse, *Camenzind*, 97.

<sup>132</sup> Hesse, *Camenzind*, 98.

contempt for his overblown metropolitan modernism.”<sup>133</sup> Peter detests the smugness of the city and its people, and it is not just Berlin. For a brief time, Peter lived as a journalist in France. On France, Peter writes very little except that he wasted his time “in that corrupt place” and calls it “my ungodly Paris period.”<sup>134</sup> As a result of the alienation caused by the city, Peter senses that he “would be a stranger in society for the rest of my life.”<sup>135</sup>

In spite of the alienation and melancholy bearing down on Peter’s soul, a kernel of the natural world lay hidden in his heart. In moments when unexplainable weariness and sadness overcome Peter, he finds himself unconsciously turning to nature. Peter mentions that he “would lie for hours by the window gazing down upon the black lake and up at the mountains silhouetted against the wan sky, with stars suspended above.” He also goes on long walks, “being by myself for days on end and spending nights out in the open.”<sup>136</sup> One night, while at a social gathering, Peter leaves the company of society and walks alone to a hill and lays in the grass beholding “the dark landscape stretched out before me in beauty’s strong repose.”<sup>137</sup> Even though he is not yet conscious of it, nature beckons him and attempts to provide him solace during his troubled days in the city.

Peter’s disdain for the city and the reaffirmation of his love of nature begin during his trip to Italy. He comments, “Though I had written satires on contemporary life, I did not realize the ridiculous shabbiness of modern culture until I set foot in Florence.” Something in Italy is different than in Switzerland or France, since industrialization and modernity has not taken so firm a root there. The Renaissance city’s timelessness separates it from modern society,

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<sup>133</sup> Hesse, *Camenzind*, 133.

<sup>134</sup> Hesse, *Camenzind*, 91-92.

<sup>135</sup> Hesse, *Camenzind*, 88.

<sup>136</sup> Hesse, *Camenzind*, 60-61.

<sup>137</sup> Hesse, *Camenzind*, 63.

allowing Peter to feel more at ease.<sup>138</sup> In addition, Italy reintroduces Peter with sublime landscapes. While in Genoa he witnesses the sea for the first time, and describes it “tossing darkly with unfathomable yearning, eternal and immutable, it hurled itself toward me and I sensed something within me fashioning a friendship for life and death with this foam-flecked surge.”<sup>139</sup> Only when Peter observes Italy’s sublime nature is he able to recapture some of the peace that left him years ago.

A great change engulfs Peter after Italy that allows him to rediscover delight in nature. He wanders through the German country, specifically into the Jura, and remarks, “whenever I saw these woods, mountains, meadows, and orchards, I sensed that they stood there waiting for something. Perhaps for me.” There indeed is something waiting for Peter and that is natural religion. Peter ventures into nature and writes “I listened to the wind sing in the trees, listened to brooks roar through gorges and gentle streams glide through the plains, and I knew these sounds were the language of God: if I understood their dark, archaic, beautiful language, it would be the rediscovery of paradise.”<sup>140</sup> Peter remembers the natural religion that can only be discovered in the wilderness. Nature slowly liberates Peter from the alienation that has long gripped his being. He comments, “As I learned to love nature as if it were a person, to listen to it as if to a comrade or traveling companion speaking a foreign tongue, my melancholy, though not cured, was ennobled and cleansed.”<sup>141</sup> After several long years in society, Peter rediscovers the natural religion of his youth and resolves to lead a new life dedicated to nature.

What separates Peter’s natural longings from others is that he understands that by loving nature he can love mankind. Though he still wonders how, he hopes that by being able to speak

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<sup>138</sup> In fact, this is probably influenced by Hesse’s own love of the Renaissance period, which is a time period much greater than the modern age.

<sup>139</sup> Hesse, *Camenzind*, 85-88.

<sup>140</sup> Hesse, *Camenzind*, 108-109.

<sup>141</sup> Hesse, *Camenzind*, 110.

the language of the woods and streams, he would be able to impart this love on mankind, so to teach others to love.<sup>142</sup> Peter's rediscovery of nature causes him to reevaluate the aim of the work he one day wishes to write. The goal of Peter's proposed book is "to teach people to listen to the pulse of nature," and for them to realize that they "are children of the earth, part of the cosmos." He wants to remind people about their innermost rights and the immortality of the night, rivers, oceans, clouds, and storms. Peter wishes "to teach men to find the sources of joy and life in the love of nature." He continues, "I wanted to preach the pleasures of looking at nature, of wandering in it, and of taking delight in the present." Peter appeals people to notice the mountains, oceans, and wilderness, overflowing around them, rather than worldly and material things. He comments, "I wanted you to feel ashamed of knowing more about foreign wars, fashions, gossip, literature, and art than of the springs bursting forth outside your towns, than the rivers flowing under your bridges, than the forests and marvelous meadows through which your railroads speed." Peter wants man to know nature, not only because of its sublime beauty, but because it makes man whole and unites mankind. Only through understanding nature could man truly understand himself, but as of yet man hides in a "protective envelope of illusions and lies... whereas no one really knows his own innermost nature." In the end, this discovery bewilders Peter, because he notices these worldly traits in himself, but unlike the man of society, he is at least aware that to unite one's innermost being and to shed the chains of alienation, one must be in harmony with the natural world.<sup>143</sup>

This realization leads to Peter's fulfillment as a complete human being. He forgets about "society's shabby nonsense" and spends more time with the common people. Peter first returns home, where he cares for his father, with whom he had been estranged since the day he first left

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<sup>142</sup> Hesse, *Camenzind*, 114.

<sup>143</sup> Hesse, *Camenzind*, 133-136.

to study in Zürich. Shortly after, Peter again travels to Italy and enjoys the company of common folk and its landscapes. Rooted in simple life and the natural world, Peter feels alienation leaving and the peace of youth returning to his soul. But it is his acquaintance with a carpenter, after returning from Italy, which ultimately changes Peter's life. Peter enjoys his visits with the carpenter, which starkly contrast to the academic gatherings of old. He notes, "With immense relief, I felt surrounded by reality, rather than drawing-room noise."<sup>144</sup> The carpenter's company pleases Peter, but the working man introduces him to someone more important. It is through this friendship that Peter meets the hunchbacked cripple, Boppi.

Even though Boppi initially repulses Peter, this meek individual would finally transform the wanderer. Like Peter, Boppi loves nature, and the pair frequently visit the zoo. The two share a kinship with each other and admire the animals and the natural beauty they experience together. In the winter, when the zoo is closed, the friends tell each other stories about animals though as if they were animals themselves. Peter's friendship with Boppi ultimately proves the unity of nature and mankind that Peter so desperately sought. Through this friendship, Peter adopts a philosophy of compassion and suffering that would guide the rest of his life.<sup>145</sup> He looks beyond Boppi's physical defects and loves him for who he is. The compassion he feels for Boppi and their mutual love of nature allows both individuals to transcend the bounds confining mankind. Unfortunately, Boppi is not meant to live long, but he is sublime in death. Even though Boppi is in pain and moments from death, "a delicate blush spread over his wan face, he closed his eyes and for a moment looked supremely happy."<sup>146</sup> The cripple's death is Hesse's final homage to Romanticism in the novel. Romantic authors looked upon beauty and death as

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<sup>144</sup> Hesse, *Camenzind*, 140.

<sup>145</sup> Solbach, 68.

<sup>146</sup> Hesse, *Camenzind*, 171.

sisters, and Hesse channels such an ideal through Boppi's sublime passing.<sup>147</sup> After Boppi's death, Peter returns to his home village and gives up the dream of being a great writer, at least for the moment, because he now knows that the greatest happiness is found in a simple life surrounded by nature.

Through this novel, Hesse exhibited an exceptional longing for nature. *Peter Camenzind* fits into the yearning for nature common during the Wilhelmine period and acknowledges the ills of modernity. Hesse was critical of city life and society produced in a modern industrial world. The city is the home of false people and ideas, and causes alienation for those who dwell in it. Even when city-dwellers claim a love for nature and embark on nature excursions, those outings are a mindless, trampling of the landscape. In contrast to this image, Hesse illustrated a more genuine type of nature that man should embrace. When one experiences creation genuinely, he or she can perceive the sublime and natural religion that exists in the world. Most importantly, nature can bind man and society together, but it starts with the individual. Only through a true appreciation of nature can one truly understand his or her own self, and thus learn to love mankind. In a time of rapid change and cultural crisis, nature offered a panacea to societal ills.

Such naturalistic preoccupations would stay with Hesse throughout the Wilhelmine years, and this becomes even more evident in Hesse's often overlooked short stories. A short story written two years after *Peter Camenzind*, "Shadow Play"/ "*Schattenspiel*," briefly encapsulates the link between poetry and beauty, which can only originate from the natural world. The story centers on a poet named Floribert, who lives in a baron's castle. The narrator comments that Floribert only writes poetry when inspiration comes from nature: "Only when the west wind came, and when he saw the far circle of the blue mountains and the flock of clouds over the stream and the yellow reeds, and when he heard the tall trees rocking themselves during the

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<sup>147</sup> Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, trans. Angus Davidson (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 31.

evening in the old park, did he think up long poems.”<sup>148</sup> Even in such moments of inspiration, Floribert finds it hard to put these images into words. Besides his love of nature, Floribert, along with the baron and the baron’s brother, find beauty in a woman of the castle, Lady Agnes. Whenever Floribert dreams of Lady Agnes, it is through images of the natural world. When thinking about Lady Agnes, Floribert draws “on everything he loved and considered beautiful – the west wind and the blue horizon and all the light meadows of spring.”<sup>149</sup> In the end, the poet is killed for his love of Lady Agnes when the baron’s brother accidentally shoots Floribert, thinking it is the baron, when poet went to her house one night with flowers. In spite of the story’s brevity, it is clear that Hesse believed that poetry and beauty were vitally linked to the natural world.

Another particularly illuminating tale is the 1910 story “Dr. Knoegle’s End” (“*Dr. Knögle’s Ende*”). Dr. Knoegle, a former teacher, becomes a vegetarian for health reasons. Knoegle practices mixed vegetarianism, meaning he would eat raw and cooked vegetables, as well as dairy products. Unlike some vegetarians, he does not follow fanatical ideas or favor social reform, because still believes himself to be a patriot and philologist. In general, he gets along well with most of the vegetarians he encounters, and since the results of this cure is so successful, he registers for the International Vegetarian Society. The society had acquired a piece of land in Asia Minor, aspiring to establish a kind of vegetarian Zionism where people “could live their lives there without being subjected to the mockery of the crude world.” There are numerous types of vegetarians and eccentrics at this retreat, but the most striking group is the pure pulpists. The pulpists desire to be as natural as possible by living in the open and only eating things that can be plucked from trees or bushes. The leader of the pulpists is a man named

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<sup>148</sup> Hermann Hesse, “Shadow Play,” in *The Fairy Tales of Hermann Hesse*, trans. Jack Zipes (New York: Bantam Books, 1995), 28.

<sup>149</sup> Hesse, “Shadow Play,” 31.

Jonas, but who most people call “gorilla,” because he only wears a loincloth and has renounced language. One day the former teacher crosses paths with “gorilla” and the savage pounces on Knoegle and strangles the teacher to death.<sup>150</sup>

“Dr. Knoegle’s End” is certainly one of Hesse’s more unique and whacky tales, but it is significant because it tells us about Hesse’s attitude toward radical reform groups. He warned the reader about a false return to nature that can take measures to the extreme. Vegetarian movements were common at the time in Germany, and Hesse’s own experience with Gräser provided him insight into how reform groups could move beyond rational bounds. Through the early image of Knoegle, Hesse revealed that moderate reform can allow one to live a healthier and more natural lifestyle, but one that does not shun the world or become too extreme. But when this reform moves from the individual to the group, it can become corrupted. The International Vegetarian Society, a generic name that could be taken for any such radical reformist organization, is critiqued in Hesse’s narrative. On the one hand, the group is filled with eccentric people with an aversion to work. The narrator comments, “what they wanted most of all was to lead their modest lives without work and annoyances.”<sup>151</sup> They did not seek to cultivate their own selves and grow as people, but rather live a somewhat comfortable life detached from society. On the other hand, such movements could result in unrealistic transformations, as portrayed by Jonas. Hesse describes Jonas in primitive terms – he has a tan and hairy body, and “could be seen swinging through the branches with agility and quickness.”<sup>152</sup> Additionally, Jonas renounces language and communicates only in gestures, which he thinks is “the infallible language of nature and would later become the world language

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<sup>150</sup> Hermann Hesse, “Dr. Knoegle’s End,” in *The Fairy Tales of Hermann Hesse*, trans. Jack Zipes (New York: Bantam Books, 1995), 50-59.

<sup>151</sup> Hesse, “Dr. Knoegle,” 53.

<sup>152</sup> Hesse, “Dr. Knoegle,” 55.

of all vegetarians and nature people.”<sup>153</sup> The naturalness Jonas adapts quickly turns into savagery, and he is barely distinguishable from a gorilla, the animal after which he is named. This savagery is not merely physical but mental, because it transforms Jonas into a beast who loses his humanity. That is why he kills Knoegle, since the teacher represents a link to not just to society, but to humanity, in general. Whether the lazy eccentric or the gorilla, Jonas, Hesse contended that such reformist nature organizations are unrealistic and do not contribute to any positive growth of the individual or society.

Perhaps the most important tale for this essay is Hesse’s 1910 story “The City,” “*Die Stadt*.” “The City,” which tells the mythical history of a civilization, reveals how the author remained critical of modern industrial society and its corrupting influence. The first line of the story begins with an engineer exclaiming, “We’re moving onward!” People arrive in this pristine land with lush prairies, high mountains, dense forests, and rich wildlife in order to construct a new civilization. The people begin to tame nature and a great city arises out of the wilderness. The once beautiful landscape, abundant with life, becomes a monument of civilization: “streets cut through the wilderness” and “the first airplane shrieked through the horrified land.” Eventually a young generation grows up, which never knows of the wilderness that once covered this land. To them the city “had existed since eternity.”<sup>154</sup>

A hundred years later, an earthquake devastates the city. From the destruction, a new and greater city springs up, as the wood structures become stone structures. In this rebuilt city, a museum is constructed. Young people stroll through the museum and hear stories of their history. The students “learned all about the glorious laws of development and progress, how fine things were made from raw material, how human beings evolved from animals, how educated

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<sup>153</sup> Hesse, Dr. Knoegle,” 56.

<sup>154</sup> Hermann Hesse, “The City,” in *The Fairy Tales of Hermann Hesse*, trans. Jack Zipes (New York: Bantam Books, 1995), 443-44.

people developed from wild ones, and how culture was formed out of nature.”<sup>155</sup> They know nothing of the wilderness of old, only that progress is good and positive.

The city’s prestige declines, however, when a new country across the sea flourishes and a bloody revolution disrupts the old city’s order. Gradually this once grand place deteriorates. People continually leave the city until only a few remain. At this time, nature encroaches upon the land that had been taken from it years ago: “the forest climbed farther down from the mountains to the prairie. Lakes and rivers sprang up and dried out, and the forest moved on and gradually took over and covered the entire country, the remains of the old street walls, the palaces, the temples, and the museums. Foxes and pine marten, wolves and bears inhabited the isolated spot.” Now a woodpecker cries the words of the engineer those many years ago – “We’re moving onward!” – as it “regarded the growing forest and the glorious, green progress on earth with satisfaction.”<sup>156</sup>

In spite of its brevity, “The City” is a powerful tale. Hesse critiqued the conquest of nature by demonstrating the ephemeral quality of civilization. Mankind viewed nature as a resource to be exploited and only abuses it. Hesse began with an engineer, the main figure in reclamation projects, who sees the land as a resource to be tamed and exploited. The author ridiculed progress, and the arrogant belief that man can harness nature once and for all. Hesse also presented a critique of museums, which neglect to present the truth behind the conquests of nature by promoting mankind’s progress. As Hesse demonstrated in *Peter Camenzind*, people can only have meaningful existences by understanding their connection to the natural world. Similarly, only by working with nature can a civilization be whole. Progress for progress sake, will only lead to decline. Hesse ended on a cautionary note, that mankind’s exploitation of

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<sup>155</sup> Hesse, “The City,” 46.

<sup>156</sup> Hesse, “The City,” 48-49.

nature is only ephemeral, and that one day nature will emerge triumphant if such exploitation continues. Rather than taking advantage of the natural world, mankind must learn to live in harmony with creation.

## Conclusion

Beginning during the reign of Friedrich the Great, and with increasing vigor during the nineteenth century, the German lands beheld a conquest of nature. Rivers were tamed, dams erected, marshlands drained, and canals built, as political and economic policy sought to tame and improve the land. While these efforts brought some advances, such as increased food supply and better transportation, the costs tainted the benefits. Land reclamation led to soil erosion, more severe floods, and a drastic decline in plant and animal life. Unconcerned by these negative outcomes, government officials believed they were improving the land. In the face of this land policy, groups emerged that lamented this destructive progress of civilization, ranging from the Romantics, who idealized sublime nature as an escape from the alienating effects of society, to naturist groups that wanted to harmonize modernity and nature.

As a young man, the natural world captivated Hesse and he revealed himself to be a Wilhelmian author of nature. While he did not join any associations or groups, Hesse took action with his pen. His first novel, *Peter Camenzind*, overflowed with ideas of the beauty and sublime quality of nature as opposed to the artificiality of society and modernity. Peter is a youth who discovers the sublime and natural religion in nature as a child. When he enters society, however, he becomes alienated from nature. Cities are filled with false people and values, and even when they claim a love for nature, it is base and disingenuous. Though Peter

struggles with his alienation, Hesse describes how this can be overcome. There is a symbiotic relationship between man and nature. Only through nature can one understand oneself, and thus learn to love mankind. Hesse expanded on these ideas in his short stories. "Shadow Play" suggests that true poetry is linked to beauty and nature. "Dr. Knoegle's End" harshly criticizes a vegetarian society, since the group does not promote positive cultivation of the self within nature. Finally, "The City" demonstrates the ephemeral quality of civilization in comparison to nature. If society progresses for its own sake without thinking of its connection to the natural world, the only outcome is decline. Hesse described how modern society must start to live in harmony with nature. His stories outlined how this begins with the individual, because to live in accord with nature, one must live in accord with one's own self. In his first writings, Hesse revealed how to be a critic of nature and an advocate of not of reactionary sentiment, but of individualistic communion with the natural world.

## CHAPTER TWO: EDUCATION, GENERATIONAL CONFLICT, AND *BENEATH THE WHEEL*

Germany is often recognized to have been one of the most educationally advanced and developed countries in late nineteenth-century Europe. Education not only affected the upper stratum of society, but also influenced the middle and lower classes. As a result, by the end of the century Germany achieved a literacy rate of well over ninety percent. Furthermore, the worldwide prestige of German universities reflected the apparent success of the German educational system. Students from across the globe attended some of the country's and the world's finest universities. Scholars, like W.E.B. DuBois, to take one example, studied in Germany and brought new practices of sociology with him to the United States.<sup>157</sup> Also, countries like Japan found the German model of education attractive, and sent students abroad to learn from and about Germany universities so that they could adopt similar practices during their own modernization process.<sup>158</sup> Across the globe, the German educational system attained a positive image and was much admired.

There was, however, an adverse side to the German educational system. For example, Prussian nationalism and militarism, as well as questions between confessions and secularization, all negatively influenced educational policy. This type of history, while illuminating, tends to utilize political, social, and analytical approaches, which focus on legislative debates or the actions of small groups of radical teachers, but does not offer a ground-level illustration as to how students experienced education in Wilhelmine Germany. In spite of

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<sup>157</sup> One recent example is Andrew Zimmerman's *Alabama in Africa*, which demonstrates the influence of German education and the international exchange of ideas. Andrew Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire, and the Globalization of the New South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

<sup>158</sup> Erik Grimmer-Solem's article on the impact of German social science in Japan details how Japan chose Germany as a model of education and modernization over British and French systems. Erik Grimmer-Solem, "German Social Science, Meiji Conservatism, and the Peculiarities of Japanese History," *Journal of World History*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (June, 2005), 187-222.

Germany's international recognition and apparent domestic success, some groups and individuals did not view education as a constructive force in German society, especially for youth. Student movements, like the *Wandervogel*, or literature, namely the *Schulliteratur* of the first decade of the twentieth century, are particularly instructive in this regard. Many students and authors disapproved of an educational system that focused on rote learning and stultified the growth of the individual student. The fact that many youths and authors espoused similar ideas about the educational system reveals that their complaints were common to a good number of students and offers historical relevancy, as it advances some of the finest insights as to how students experienced German education. One of the preeminent voices of this type of sentiment is found in Hermann Hesse's *Beneath the Wheel*.

### German Education in the Nineteenth Century

The German educational system, ranging from elementary to university level, impressed foreign visitors and outside nations during the nineteenth century. German states were among the first to establish elementary schools and require attendance in the late eighteenth century, as defined by the General Civil Code of 1794. While most youths would not advance into higher education, elementary schools, *Volksschulen*, trained students in literacy and Christian piety.<sup>159</sup> Another impetus for the increase of education resulted from the Napoleonic Wars. In order to encourage the moral and physical recovery of the nation, the Prussian government amplified its educational efforts after 1815. *Volksschulen* reformed curriculum and expanded throughout the

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<sup>159</sup> Marjorie Lamberti, *State, Society, and the Elementary School in Imperial Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 22.

German states, so “that by 1830 almost all Germans could read and write.”<sup>160</sup> One reason for the general impressiveness of German elementary education, according to Gordon Craig, results from the high rate of literacy in the country, which not even “politically progressive” countries, like Great Britain, could boast.<sup>161</sup> Furthermore, by 1841, eighty-one percent of school aged children in Prussia attended elementary school.<sup>162</sup> Attendance continued to increase after the passing of child labor laws, and by 1864 only seven percent of school-aged children did not attend school.<sup>163</sup> Undoubtedly there is also a connection between the rise in German education and literacy and industrial growth. Since modern industry depended on more technical skills, a basic level of education proved essential to increased industrialization.<sup>164</sup>

In spite of the impressive growth at the elementary level, several flaws still harmed the German educational system. One scholar detects three common grievances surrounded education: overloading of the curriculum and the insistence on the acquisition of knowledge, rigid discipline and the remoteness of teachers from students, and lack of inspiring purpose.<sup>165</sup> And there were many other complaints. Even though the majority of children attended school, it was generally only for eight years in the *Volksschulen*, and these elementary schools were not entirely conducive to academic excellence. Overcrowded classrooms were common, especially in the countryside where over 100 students could be crammed into a small school house; many of these schools were staffed by underpaid and underqualified teachers.<sup>166</sup> In contrast to Craig’s praise of German elementary education, Marjorie Lamberti notes that Britain spent more per

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<sup>160</sup> Gordon A. Craig, *Germany 1866-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 187.

<sup>161</sup> Craig, 186.

<sup>162</sup> Lamberti, *State*, 19.

<sup>163</sup> Lamberti, *State*, 23-24

<sup>164</sup> Craig, 187.

<sup>165</sup> Pascal, 217.

<sup>166</sup> Lamberti, *State*, 102.

capita per pupil than Germany.<sup>167</sup> Furthermore, the high costs of continued education hindered all but the upper strata of society. To complete higher education, one needed to spend between 4,000 and 8,000 Reichsmarks, a cost well beyond the means of working-class and lower-middle class households. In addition, the dropout rate was staggering, since about two thirds of the students who began secondary school dropped out, making the potential financial burden much more difficult to bear.<sup>168</sup> Even if educational opportunities were spreading, for the majority of youths, instruction remained at the most basic level.

Even though some state scholarships were available to children of poorer families, in general, only the wealthy, upper class could afford the costs of higher education, which led them on the course to the Gymnasium and the university. Most students who advanced to higher education came from the *Bildungsbürgertum*, a status group whose members considered themselves educated (*gebildet*), and feared the uncultured (*ungebildet*) masses.<sup>169</sup> As a result, conservatism tinted education, and historians have generally agreed that Germany's educational system upheld the status quo. This argument reaches back to the Civil Code of 1794, which defined the *Volksschulen* as an instrument of the state, and solidified the partnership between church and state.<sup>170</sup> Old-fashioned and traditional minded administrators made sure that discipline, order, and obedience were the focus of the education. Indeed, conservative and aristocratic Prussians dominated the politics of education, as schools became agents of Prussianization, which indoctrinated youths into becoming good, militaristic subjects.<sup>171</sup> That the system was certainly tied to the state is evident by Kaiser Wilhelm II's Cabinet Order of May 1, 1889. Wilhelm II famously declared, "I have been occupied with the idea of making the

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<sup>167</sup> Lamberti, *State*, 136.

<sup>168</sup> Craig, 191.

<sup>169</sup> Jaraush, 81-82.

<sup>170</sup> Lamberti, *State*, 13.

<sup>171</sup> Berghahn, 91.

school in its various grades useful in combating the spread of socialistic and communistic ideas.”<sup>172</sup>

As the narrative above reveals, scholarship suggests that German schools were an instrument of social and political control. Lamberti challenges this idea, however, claiming that “the concept of the school as an instrument of social control to train the lower classes to be obedient and loyal to the state authorities, and industrious and contented in their humble occupations, has been a belabored theme in recent historical literature on education.”<sup>173</sup> She contends that Wilhelm II’s proclamation was never really implemented and that social control never gained solid footing. Instead, she argues that confessional tendencies impacted the organization of schools much more. Lamberti provides evidence that between 1886 and 1906, over ninety percent of children were educated in a school of their own confession, and that most school inspectors came from the clergy.<sup>174</sup> As a result of this confessional system, Lamberti notes that students did not share a common educational experience throughout Germany.

Besides giving more weight to confessional tendencies than conservatism, Lamberti also highlights the reform efforts among certain educators. Beginning in the 1840s, and with increased effort in the second half of the century, progressive teachers sought to reform the educational system and remove the influence of the church.<sup>175</sup> Radical educators, who clamored for change, were supported by the German Teachers’ Association, *Deutscher Lehrerverein*, founded in 1871. The German Teachers Association “afforded progressive pedagogues an invaluable means of disseminating the ideas of school reform,” as well as encouraging “its

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<sup>172</sup> Quote found in various sources including Craig, 189 and Lamberti, *State*, 7.

<sup>173</sup> Lamberti, *State*, 7.

<sup>174</sup> Lamberti, *State*, 96.

<sup>175</sup> Lamberti, *State*, 26.

members to enter the political battles for school reform.”<sup>176</sup> Disapproving of societal class divisions, the association objected to the conservatism and stratification of German education. Radical pedagogues criticized the factual knowledge and rote learning diffused in most schools. In place of this, the organization wished to establish common elementary schools, *allgemeine Volksschulen*, which would be inter-confessional and emphasize equality among students. These schools would focus on the individual student, by nurturing the child’s imagination and stressing the development of the child, rather than the traditional material knowledge disseminated in schools.<sup>177</sup> Following this new pedagogy, *neue Pädagogik*, teachers would act as guides not authority figures, seeking to cultivate the creative capacities of children. Sounding much like the education espoused in Rousseau’s *Emile*, new pedagogy emphasized observation and experience in the pursuit of knowledge.<sup>178</sup> These progressive ideas did catch on and spread in cities such as Hamburg, Leipzig, Bremen, and Munich, but even though Lamberti claims that new pedagogy exercised great influence, it did not impact the vast majority of schools or official policy.

At the legislative level of government, educational reform was near impossible. In the 1870s, the Minister of Education, Adalbert Falk, wished to expand the curriculum to include history, geography, and natural sciences, while reducing the emphasis on rote learning and ancient languages.<sup>179</sup> Like the members of the German Teachers Association, Falk hoped to break the traditional bond between church and state and create an inter-confessional school, which should promote tolerance and social harmony. Falk’s School Supervision law of 1872 attempted to secularize school inspection and bring in professional educators as inspectors.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Marjorie Lamberti, “Radical Schoolteachers and the Origins of the Progressive Education Movement in Germany, 1900-1914,” *History of Education Quarterly*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (Spring 2000): 26-27, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/369179> (July 7, 2014).

<sup>177</sup> Lamberti, “Radical,” 29-33.

<sup>178</sup> Lamberti, “Radical,” 34-38.

<sup>179</sup> Craig, 189.

<sup>180</sup> Lamberti, *State*, 45, 84.

Nonetheless, many politicians, including Otto von Bismarck, rejected Falk's proposals and wanted to strengthen the state's control over education, even by means of the church.<sup>181</sup> The dispute over reform continued into the 1890s and 1900s, as parliament debated a school bill. When a bill was finally passed in 1908, it disappointed radical teachers and neglected new pedagogic theories, while reinforcing the power of the state and the church.<sup>182</sup> All things considered, despite the growth and primacy of elementary education, and the efforts of some progressive pedagogues, the German educational system restricted the social order.

A similar picture plays itself out in the German university system. German universities garnered much praise, since its lands boasted more and better universities than its neighbors in the nineteenth century. Unlike elementary institutions, universities were blessed with freedom and independence, in the first half of the nineteenth century, due to a broad liberal spirit, *Bildungsliberalismus*, that characterized German universities. An ardent neo-humanist tradition pervaded the university atmosphere, as the goal of university education "was not encyclopedic information, but genuine scientific culture."<sup>183</sup> Neo-humanists concerned themselves with the all-around development of the free individual, *allgemeine Menschenbildung*, which would transform students into responsible citizens.<sup>184</sup> Famous scholars, such as Theodor Mommsen and Wilhelm von Humboldt, declared this humanist tradition to be the true end of education, even when materialism and empiricism advanced over the course of the century. Above all, the concept of academic freedom – which consisted of academic self-government, freedom of teaching (*Lehrfreiheit*), and academic freedom (*Lernfreiheit*) – attracted praise from foreign observers.

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<sup>181</sup> Lamberti, *State*, 40-44.

<sup>182</sup> Lamberti, *State*, 183-201.

<sup>183</sup> Craig, 193.

<sup>184</sup> Jarausch, 83.

This liberal spirit transformed in the second half of the century, however, as conservatism began to influence universities. German universities underwent an ideological reversal from the liberalism of pre-1848 to turn of the century right-wing activism. One cause was an enrolment boom, during the middle part of the century, that overcrowded lecture halls. Also, professors distanced themselves from students, due to increased specialization, which damaged *Bildung* and alienated students.<sup>185</sup> Another reason for the shift came from the conflict between governmental ideals and neo-humanist perceptions. Infused with more Prussian nationalism, universities began to form an idea of a *Kulturstaat*. To reinforce this notion, the political lecture, *Politikvorlesung*, became an effective instrument to spread Prussian ideology and loyalty to students who would become future state officials.<sup>186</sup> As Konrad Jarausch notes, “academic freedom in Imperial Germany was limited by the enlightened absolutism of the appointment process, which allowed only a certain breadth of political opinions to be represented at the universities.”<sup>187</sup> While the traditional neo-humanist spirit did not die out, universities now nurtured nationalistic sentiments. Many professors sided with the nationalism of Heinrich von Treitschke, rather than the humanism of Kurt Breysig, who reacted against Prussian smugness and believed the state to be the enemy of the individual and *Bildung*.<sup>188</sup>

In this illiberal setting, students turned to societies and corporations as institutions of self-education. Student associations, like the Corps, often supported this illiberal shift since they tended to be elitist, hierarchical, and pro-Prussian. Right leaning tendencies infected most student organizations, even the traditionally national and liberal *Burschenschaften*.<sup>189</sup> One of the most influential societies during the second half of the century, the *Verein Deutscher Studenten*

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<sup>185</sup> Jarausch, 49-51.

<sup>186</sup> Jarausch, 161-166.

<sup>187</sup> Jarausch, 174.

<sup>188</sup> Jarausch, 217.

<sup>189</sup> Jarausch, 247-250.

(VDSt), played a crucial role in pushing students to the right by persuading members to embrace nationalism, imperialism, and anti-Semitism.<sup>190</sup> Despite claims of political neutrality, the state sought to instill patriotism into students, and groups, such as the VDSt, did just that. In the eyes of the state, such organizations exerted a positive influence.<sup>191</sup> As a result, “within one and one-half decades academic youth had moved from assimilationist liberalism to exclusivist illiberalism.”<sup>192</sup> By the turn of the twentieth century, many academics abandoned liberalism in favor of monarchism, imperialism, and anti-socialism.

### What About the Students?

As seen in the preceding, historians tend to focus on the politics and policy of German education. Historians have analyzed the debates and political decisions that have affected education and the voices of politicians and reformers are readily heard. But what about the people most influenced by education, the students? How did youths experience this system? History is generally silent on this issue.<sup>193</sup> Students were affected more by their immediate environment, the actual school, than by policy or pleas for reform. In order to see how the educational system affected the youth of Germany one needs to examine the youth movements and literature of the era. In this regard, the history of the *Wandervogel* movement and the genre of *Schulliteratur* become instructive tools to evaluate how students experienced education.

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<sup>190</sup> Jaraus, 293.

<sup>191</sup> Jaraus, 342.

<sup>192</sup> Jaraus, 355.

<sup>193</sup> As one reviewer of Lamberti’s monograph on German education remarks, she wishes that Lamberti presented the actual day-to-day experience of pupils and parents. Review by Reece C. Kelly, in *German Studies Review*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (May, 1990): 335-336, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1430732>.

The *Wandervogel* embraced the natural world, but it also supported the struggles against education and their elders. The movement originated when a student at Berlin University, Hermann Hoffmann, began to take students on mountain and river excursions. When these young men set off on group hikes, it was not just to commune with nature, but was regarded as a revolt against parents, education, and religion. Even though Hoffman probably did not envision a popular movement stemming from these early expeditions, this hiking troop soon gathered momentum.<sup>194</sup> The *Wandervogel* acquired greater significance when Karl Fischer became the first leader of the group. Under Fischer's guidance, the movement grew and trips became more frequent. Fisher, who did not complete his own academic studies, spoke to the sentiments many youths held towards education and authority.<sup>195</sup> At its height, the *Wandervogel* movement numbered around 60,000 middle class students between the ages of twelve and eighteen.

The emergence of a generational gap defined the *Wandervogel*. Howard Becker asserts, "German youth of Karl Fischer's day loathed and hated the world of their elders."<sup>196</sup> Believing their elders to be too intellectual and their culture stagnant, the movement preferred a more active lifestyle. Additionally, the group protested adult tutelage and rejected the saber rattling patriotism of their fathers.<sup>197</sup> The *Wandervogel* regarded it as their duty to struggle against their elders.<sup>198</sup> One reason for the *Wandervogel's* rejection of adults resulted from their educational experiences. The students of the movement despised the archaic educational system of rote learning and the "mechanical and boring routine of school," which ignored the development of

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<sup>194</sup> Laqueur, 15-16.

<sup>195</sup> Laqueur, 23.

<sup>196</sup> Becker, 73.

<sup>197</sup> George L. Mosse, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 95; Mosse, *Crisis*, 178; Jarausch, 290.

<sup>198</sup> Wohl, 43.

the individual, made life miserable.<sup>199</sup> The *Wandervogel* knew that school, as well as home life, could not provide the essential environment necessary for young people to find themselves.<sup>200</sup> Disregard for parents and teachers caused the *Wandervogel* to reject the “straightjacket of German social intercourse.”<sup>201</sup> Wishing to “live at own initiative, on their own responsibility, and with deep sincerity,” these youths became incomprehensible to their elders, and refugees from their parental homes.<sup>202</sup>

In spite of their rejection of the education of their elders, the *Wandervogel* did not reject learning. The movement preferred intuitive education, which focused on individual experience not rote memorization. Excursions became a way of understanding of the natural world through physical adventure with a community of like-minded people. In addition, the *Wandervogel* venerated the work of Friedrich Nietzsche believing his writings positively supported their ideology. On the one hand, Nietzsche reinforced the *Wandervogel's* dislike of education, since he believed that German education was diluted and in decline.<sup>203</sup> On the other hand, the *Wandervogel* identified with the anti-nationalistic writings of Nietzsche because of their own hostility toward patriotism.<sup>204</sup> They also admired Julius Langbehn's *Rembrandt as Educator* (*Rembrandt als Erzieher*), which contained Nietzschean and *völkisch* elements, and alleged that the German education system harmed youth and was “a kind of massacre of the innocents.”<sup>205</sup> Even though the *Wandervogel* were not overly susceptible to *völkisch* nationalism, Langbehn's work became one of the most influential books read among the youth movement.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Peter D. Stachura, *The German Youth Movement 1900-1945: An Interpretive and Documentary History* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), 18-19.

<sup>200</sup> Laqueur, 30.

<sup>201</sup> Stachura, 15.

<sup>202</sup> Laqueur, 30, 58.

<sup>203</sup> Craig, 1870.

<sup>204</sup> Becker, 102; Laqueur, 6-8.

<sup>205</sup> Tipton, 218.

<sup>206</sup> Becker, 102.

While the *Wandervogel* actively protested against the educational system, it did not produce noteworthy literature. One must look beyond the movement to find authors who wrote about the conflict of youth with their education and elders. In the first decade of the twentieth century, a literary genre called School Literature, *Schulliteratur*, became rather popular. *Schulliteratur* satirized the German education system. Novels portrayed authoritarian schools, which broke down the student, leading to his inevitable demise, often death. According to some scholars, this genre falls victim as uncomplicated satire, but this should not be a deterrent of its importance. One commentator notes that this genre, especially those focusing on boarding-school life, “reflected the psychological thought of the century,” and that the German variety is unique within this trend.<sup>207</sup> School novels gave voice to the lamentations of students – voices that are silent in all the debates surrounding school reform – and were written by some of the period’s most notable authors, including Heinrich Mann, Robert Musil, and Hesse.

Heinrich Mann’s *Professor Unrat*, published in 1905, is one of the classic examples of this literary reaction against education. This novel reveals the politicization of Mann, as it demonstrates a loathing of the autocratic teacher and established education.<sup>208</sup> Mann disdained the sense of total control both teachers and the school had on students. Because of this, the novel does not follow the travails of a student, but rather a teacher, Professor Raat, who seeks to manipulate his students’ lives. Raat is not highly-regarded by his students, who nickname him *Unrat*, which translates to mud, garbage or filth. Especially troubling for the old professor is a group of three students – Lohmann, von Ertzum, and Kieselack. One day, after reading a poem written by Lohmann, Raat discovers it is dedicated to a Rosa Froehlich. Raat believes this Rosa is corrupting his students and he tracks her down, eventually finding her at a club where she

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<sup>207</sup> Harry Goldgar, “The Square Root of minus One: Freud and Robert Musil’s *Törless*,” *Comparative Literature*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (Spring 1965): 118 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1769999> (accessed December 12, 2014).

<sup>208</sup> Pascal, 104.

sings, called The Blue Angel. Raat catches his adversaries there, but an armistice is temporarily drawn between them for fear that either party would let the headmaster know of this scene. Over time, Raat swoons over Rosa and she uses this to her advantage by manipulating Raat for her own material purposes. The school discovers Raat's relationship with Rosa and fires him. Undeterred, Raat continues the relationship, and the two eventually marry and have a child. Two years later, Lohmann returns to the village, after having studied abroad. One day Raat discovers his former pupil and Rosa having a conversation, and in a furious rage he tries to strangle Rosa and then steals Lohmann's wallet. The story ends with Raat being taken away by the police.

This piece of *Schulliteratur* is unique in its focusing on the student's traditional antagonist, the teacher. Throughout the story, Mann revealed how teachers could devastate the lives of students. Even though Raat's classroom and his three enemies are not particularly rowdy, he is out to get every student, since he demands complete control and obedience. Raat agitates his students and his disciplinary actions are not guided by constructive principles to aid in a student's growth but rather to fulfill his own personal longing to make a student's life miserable. More than any student, Raat loathes the witty and alert Lohmann. One day Raat throws Lohmann out of the classroom for no justifiable reason. The teacher worries about this, however, since "he felt as if Lohmann were laughing at him, and he wrestled with the problem with a growing passion, determined to show the rascal that he was the better man of the two. He wanted to send him out of the room again!"<sup>209</sup> Later, at the Blue Angel, Raat even tries to assert his authority outside of the classroom. Lohmann is smoking a cigarette and Raat tells him to throw it away, but Lohmann will not. Lohmann's "opposition to his tyrannical rule" angers Raat.<sup>210</sup> The teacher threatens to take the student to his parents, who were hosting a business

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<sup>209</sup> Musil, 28.

<sup>210</sup> Musil, 168.

gathering that evening, and Lohmann acquiesces. Even several years after Lohmann finishes Raat's course, the teacher still wants to control the young man. When Lohmann visits Rosa two years later, the tyrant Raat attacks his former pupil simply because he was talking with his wife. Through the dynamic between Raat and Lohmann, Mann painted a shocking picture of a teacher so insecure that he feels the need to prove that he was a better man than his teenage student.

Although the novel's main feud focuses on Lohmann and Raat, Ertzum is most affected by the educational system. Early in the story, it is made clear that Raat seeks to make things impossible for Ertzum, as he had done with previous generations of the student's family. "You aren't the first of your name to come up against me!" the teacher yells, "I've put a spoke in the wheel of more than one – and I'll see to it that things are difficult for you – if not impossible – as I did for your uncle."<sup>211</sup> School pervades every aspect of his life, even at home. Upon returning home late one night, "Ertzum cast a despairing look at the window on the second floor, which was that of his own room. The books and clothes up there smelt of school. The thought of the classroom followed him day and night."<sup>212</sup> School haunts Ertzum and even his retreat becomes corrupted. Because of his teacher, even at the club, Ertzum feels "the school yoke heavy on his shoulders."<sup>213</sup> All of this begins to drive the young boy mad, and Ertzum confesses to Lohmann, "I could put a bullet through my head."<sup>214</sup> Ertzum never attempts suicide, but his educational experience ruins him. Unlike Lohmann, who goes into business with a friend's father and begins to make something of his life, the last we hear of Ertzum is that he is destitute and alone. While this story offers the unique perspective of the tyrannical teacher, generally the students and

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<sup>211</sup> Robert Musil, *Young Törless*, trans. Eithene Wilkins and Ernst Kaiser (New York: Pantheon Books, 1955), 13.

<sup>212</sup> Musil, 98.

<sup>213</sup> Musil, 165.

<sup>214</sup> Musil, 175.

student relations take center stage in the school novel and for this side we now turn to Robert Musil's famous piece of *Schulliteratur*.<sup>215</sup>

A year after Mann's work, Robert Musil published his own school novel, *The Confusions of Young Törless* (*Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törless*). Unlike Mann's novel, this story is seen through the student's perspective, and is partially based on Musil's own experience at a boarding school in Austria.<sup>216</sup> Musil's novel outlines Törless's painful process of self-discovery, the brutality of bullying, and the agonizing interactions between peers. The story revolves around the quiet and indifferent Törless and his relations with Beineberg and Reiting, the two worst boys of the class, and Basini, an effeminate and weak boy. One day Beineberg and Reiting discover that Basini stole some money, and the feeble youth becomes their toy. Beineberg and Reiting increasingly harass and bully Basini in their attic hideout. Over time, Beineberg's and Reiting's beatings and rapes of Basini become commonplace. Törless often witnesses these acts, and although he does not participate, he looks on with indifference. Over a holiday break, Basini and Törless form an awkward bond when the two bullies are away, but Törless is not fond of Basini's affection. Basini, however, loves Törless because he does not treat him brutally like the others. Törless falls into a moral and psychological dilemma. He breaks his friendship with Beineberg and Reiting, as well as his relationship with Basini, whom he tells to turn himself in to the headmaster. In the end, Basini is the one expelled from school, rather than the two abusive

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<sup>215</sup> Heinrich Mann also wrote a short piece that tells of the tyranny of students toward each other called "Abdankung." This short story is the tale of an exceptional youth, who was originally a tyrant of others, but over time, his role shifted so that he became the dominated one. This change led to uncertainty, and ultimately to his suicide. For an analysis of this piece see Darren Ilett, "The End of a Schoolyard Tyrant: Power, Homoeroticism, and Language in Heinrich Mann's "Abdankung," *The German Quarterly*, Vol. 84, Issue 2 (April 2011): 177-195, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.libezp.lib.lsu.edu/doi/10.1111/j.1756-1183.2011.00110.x/pdf> (accessed December 2, 2014).

<sup>216</sup> Like Hesse, Musil turned to personal experience when composing this piece. Another similarity to Hesse is that both were bored by their occupations, Musil was a university assistant, and both were reading much Novalis. For a more literary analysis of this work see Elisabeth Slopp, "Musil's 'Törless': Content and Form," *The Modern Language Review*, Vol. 63, No. 1 (January 1968), 94-118, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3722648> (accessed December 2, 2014), or Goldgar's "The Square Root of minus One" for a Freudian interpretation of the novel.

students. The school, unconcerned with the abuse, worries more about housing an effeminate boy at its institution. As for Törless, this experience leaves him cynical, and the school requests his leave.

Clearly, relationships between students, as portrayed in the novel, were often brutal and psychologically and physically damaging for young men. One can suspect that Musil witnessed such cruelty during his own time at the academy. But, Musil also critiques the diffusion of knowledge at the institution. During this time of conflict and confusion, Törless questions his studies. In one scene, Törless enters his mathematics teacher's office to discuss imaginary numbers. Törless cannot logically grasp this concept, but his teacher tells him that he does not need to understand it, just believe it. This answer is unacceptable for Törless, and he comments,

They learn their stuff off by heart just the way the chaplain can reel off the catechism, and if you go and ask them anything out of turn it always gets them in a fix.... There you are, you see, there's the swindle of it! They simply can't put their stuff across to someone who just has his brains and nothing else. It only works after he's spent ten years going through the mill...their intellect takes them just far enough for them to think their scientific explanation out of their heads but once its outside it freezes up, see what I mean?<sup>217</sup>

Törless is distressed by his teachers' robotic way of teaching, because he does not understand anything outside of the web of education that has been spun around him. In general, teachers can only teach word for word from a book, and are unable to answer questions that fall beyond their purview. If someone branches off from the prescribed path, like Törless, educators become fearful of such an intellect, because it is not obedient and it cannot be controlled. That is why Törless is dismissed from the institution, because his intellect is too refined for his school. In many ways, Musil's novel is also a microcosm of the social relations beginning to unfold in Europe. Musil described the loneliness of the individual and the breakdown of community that

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<sup>217</sup> Musil, 119.

is spreading in an industrial society.<sup>218</sup> This alienation was also felt in the schools and Musil's piece of *Schulliteratur* offers a glimpse at the changes in German society at the fin de siècle.

### Hesse and Education

Judging by his decades-long fixation with the subject of youthful alienation from institutionalized authority, Hermann Hesse was profoundly, and not happily, shaped by his years at school. It should be remembered that as a youth, Hesse did not particularly enjoy his education. This began when his parents sent him to boarding school at the age of six and it only worsened when he attended seminary at Maulbronn, so much so that he flirted twice with suicide. In fact, Hesse even commented that all he "learned at school was Latin and lies."<sup>219</sup> Even though formal education negatively affected Hesse, he continued to study on his own.

Hesse's letters are brimming with information regarding his own self-education, which commenced instantly after returning from the sanatorium in 1893. Hesse steeped himself in German Romanticism and literature on Renaissance Italy. His self-education intensified once he moved to Tübingen. He studied literary and intellectual history, and hoped to write a biography on Novalis. Hesse remarked, "My private studies are devoted to the Romantic school and are leading me already to examine historical detail. The correspondences of Schlegel – Schleiermacher – Hardenberg – Tieck – Dorothea-Karoline are especially interesting. Until now, Novalis has become more and more the focus of my interests..."<sup>220</sup> Above all, however, Hesse

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<sup>218</sup> Pascal, 24, 223.

<sup>219</sup> Hermann Hesse to Karl Isenberg, Gaienhofen, November 25, 1904, *Gesammelte Briefe*, 130; "Gelernt habe ich dort nur Latein und Luegern."

<sup>220</sup> Hermann Hesse to Johannes and Marie Hesse, Tübingen, September 15, 1898, *Kindheit*, 282-283; "Mein Privatstudium der romantischen Schule gedieht und führt schon in historische Details. Die Briefwechsel der Schlegel – Schleiermacher – Hardenberg – Tieck – Dorothea-Karoline sind überaus interessant. Bis jetzt steht immer noch Novalis mehr im Mittelpunkt meines Interesses..."

exhibited a particular fondness for Goethe. In fact, most of his letters from 1896 mention Goethe, as the young man was infatuated with this legendary *Dichter*. Hesse's reading became his main pleasure during his time in Tübingen. In 1896 he commented, "actually, it is the private work, my little studies, that gives my life value."<sup>221</sup> In Hesse's correspondence to his father, the young man often asks to borrow books and for suggestions of what to read. Johannes, a well-read individual who had published works of his own, eagerly listened to and entertained his son's new desire for learning. In early 1898, Johannes commented, "I believe that you get more from reading and studying than many students. That is wonderful."<sup>222</sup> It is apparent through Hesse's letters that he valued learning, but he needed to learn in his own way, and in topics of interest for him, and not by the rote and classical standards of the educational system.

Since education played a significant role in Hesse's own life, it would come to occupy an important place in his literary endeavors. In 1904, Hesse commented that "education is the single modern cultural question that I take seriously and that occasionally stimulates me."<sup>223</sup> That same year, Hesse wrote one of the best examples of *Schulliteratur*, *Beneath the Wheel*. One critic, Mark Boulby, believes that this book is Hesse's most conformist novel in substance and that self-insight is limited, because the author follows the school novel formula.<sup>224</sup> In response to Boulby, Adreas Solbach agrees that the school novel interpretation is too narrow, but instead seeks a postmodern reading focusing on how the story presents the idea of masculine socialization.<sup>225</sup> Both Boulby and Solbach approach the novel from the side of literary criticism,

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<sup>221</sup> Hermann Hesse to Marie Hesse, Tübingen, July 2, 1896, *Kindheit*, 124; "Eigentlich ist es doch die Privatarbeit, die mir das Leben wert macht, mein bisschen studieren."

<sup>222</sup> Johannes Hesse to Hermann Hesse, Calw, January 26, 1898, *Kindheit*, 234; "Ich glaube, Du kommst mehr zum Lesen und Studieren als mancher Student. Das ist schön."

<sup>223</sup> Hermann Hesse to Karl Isenberg, Gaienhofen, November 25, 1904, *Gesammelte Briefe*, 130; "Die Schule ist die einzige modern Kulturfrage, die ich Ernst nehme und die mich gelegentlich aufregt."

<sup>224</sup> Boulby, 62.

<sup>225</sup> Solbach, 69. According to Solbach, masculine socialization is the process in which education's brutal disciplining offers an initiation ritual on the student's path to manhood where one's "wild man" becomes tamed. In Solbach's

but there is much to learn from it for historians of the period. The very conformity of the novel makes it a prime illustration of the feelings of the age towards education. Lewis Tusken appropriately remarks that *Beneath the Wheel* demonstrates “a bitter critique of adult hypocrisy and the educational system that had cast him [Hesse] out.”<sup>226</sup> Hesse’s disapproval of education went beyond his own personal experience and can be regarded as a critique of the German educational system, as a whole. Hesse abhorred the arbitrary and tyrannical teachers that characterized the Wilhelmine education system. Instead, he desired natural teachers, who would be guides and could nurture the true cultivation of the individual.<sup>227</sup> Furthermore, as biographer Ralph Freedman states, “critique of academic life became a critique of his time.”<sup>228</sup> Hesse was critical of the age in which he lived, and education was a symptom of the problems within society. A closer inspection of *Beneath the Wheel* will reveal the pressure education placed on some middle-class students in Wilhelmine Germany.

*Beneath the Wheel* follows the life and education of an intelligent young boy, Hans Giebenrath. Hans is the pride of his village, because he is a prodigy in a community of ordinary, working folk. Several individuals take an interest in fashioning Hans’s mental capacities. The pastor, the principal, and others rigorously train Hans for a state examination that offers a seminary scholarship. With his training complete, Hans travels to Stuttgart to take the government exam. Unsurprisingly, the well-trained boy comes in second, allowing him to receive a free education at the seminary of Maulbronn. After this success, Hans spends days alone fishing and swimming, and avoiding the studies that caused incessant headaches. Yet this

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analysis, Hans failed on this path because of his friendship with Heilner, who exploits Hans in his attempt to achieve a divergent type of masculinity that retains his “wild self.”

<sup>226</sup> Tusken, *Understanding*, 54.

<sup>227</sup> Freedman, 42-43.

<sup>228</sup> Freedman, 66

freedom is not to last, because his teachers snatch his summer vacation away in order to prepare him for Maulbronn.

When Hans arrives at Maulbronn, he is viewed as one of the most intelligent students in the school, with the potential to be at the head of the class. Even though he initially succeeds academically, Hans feels lonely as he has not yet found a true friend. Eventually, however, he befriends the seminary's black sheep, Hermann Heilner. Hans begins to regress in his studies because of the influence of Heilner, who shows little interest in school himself. One day, Heilner runs away from Maulbronn and hides in the woods outside the school. When he is finally caught, the school expels the problem child. As for Hans, once considered to be the brightest student at Maulbronn, he is now treated as an outcast, because he rejected school for his infectious friendship with Heilner. Ultimately, the school believes that Hans is suffering from mental illness and sends the boy home. Upon returning home, Hans laments his lost youth and worries about his uncertain future. Finally, at the urging of his father, Hans becomes a blacksmith's apprentice. Only a week into this new adventure, Hans is found dead in a river.

Unlike the romantic opening pages of *Peter Camenzind*, Hesse begins this novel with a picture of Joseph Giebenrath, Hans's average father, and the old-fashioned village in the Black Forest. In such an ordinary setting, Hans's intelligence is exceptional. Since prospects for Hans are brighter than most in his village, "his future was mapped out" by means of the state examination.<sup>229</sup> As a result, a strict regimentation is thrust upon Hans and schooling pervades all aspects of his life. His days are long and arduous: "Every day, when Hans completed his classwork at four in the afternoon, he had an extra Greek lesson with the principal; at six, the pastor was as kind as to coach him in Latin and religion. Twice a week, after supper, he received an extra math lesson from the mathematics teacher." Ironically, to ensure "that Hans' mind not

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<sup>229</sup> Hermann Hesse, *Beneath the Wheel*, trans. Michael Roloff (New York: Bantam, 1970), 4.

be overburdened and his spiritual needs not suffer from these intellectual exertions, he was allowed to attend confirmation class every morning, one hour before school.”<sup>230</sup> Besides confirmation class, his only leisure hours are on Sundays, but he is “urged to do outside reading and to review the rules of grammar,” on this day of rest.<sup>231</sup> This training forces Hans to study until midnight on most nights. This pursuit takes a toll on him, and he begins to look emaciated and wrinkled. He even begins to worry, sensing “that the free and wild pleasures of boyhood were receding into the past.”<sup>232</sup> With no release from his training, Hans thinks back to the days when he raised rabbits or went fishing, and although he is still young, those memories feel like an eternity ago. This image provides us a snapshot of the unnatural pressures to which some children forced for the sake of education, and how such regimentation is abnormal.

Finally, with his preparation complete, Hans travels to Stuttgart, the site of the state examination. The anticipation for the test causes Hans to feel like a prisoner. When he enters the examination room, Hans “felt like a criminal in a torture chamber.”<sup>233</sup> But he finds the first test easy, and the rest go nearly as smoothly, even though the ease of the exams worries the boy. In addition to the examination, this is Hans’s first experience with a modern industrial city. As in *Peter Camenzind*, Hesse paints a negative portrait of the city, as Hans feels lost and fears the strange urban surroundings: “He felt deeply intimidated by the sight of the city, the unfamiliar faces, the high, pompously ornate buildings, the long, tiring streets. The horse trams and the street noises frightened him.”<sup>234</sup> Hans dislikes all aspects of the city, even walking, because one walks in circles and in crowded areas. Even though he is in Stuttgart for only a couple of days, Hans senses that his time in the city has been much lengthier than it actually has been and he

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<sup>230</sup> Hesse, *Wheel*, 5.

<sup>231</sup> Hesse, *Wheel*, 6.

<sup>232</sup> Hesse, *Wheel*, 9.

<sup>233</sup> Hesse, *Wheel*, 20.

<sup>234</sup> Hesse, *Wheel*, 16.

longs for simpler pleasures: “he felt as if he had been in the city for weeks and would never be able to leave it. His father’s garden at home, the mountains blue with fir trees, the fishing holes by the river seemed like something experienced long ago.”<sup>235</sup> Through this illustration, Hesse paints another image of alienation for Hans.

Once he returns home, Hans longs for relaxation after years of arduous preparation. The first thing he does at home is to fetch his swimming trunks and jump in the river. Besides swimming, Hans enjoys the solitude and freedom of walking around the forests near his village and fishing. During this period of respite, Hans’s father asks him what he wishes to do if he fails the examination. Hans is reminded of his earlier conversation with another student who asked Hans his plans if he failed the examination. This student planned to attend the Gymnasium, so Hans asks his father if he could do the same. Joseph responds, “what extravagant notions. You seem to think I’m a bank president.”<sup>236</sup> No such route is open to Hans, because the educational system is closed off for someone from a working-class family from a small, ordinary village. Resigned to this fact, all Hans wants to do is fish. The narrator relays Hans’s simple hopes for summer vacation: “Hans was certain he would not be bored during the long seven weeks of vacation, for he could spend entire days alone with his fishing rod by the river.”<sup>237</sup> Hans discovers that he passed the exam, much to his relief, because he did not let the village down, but he tries not to let this interfere with his vacation.

The change in Hans is instantaneous, as being outdoors and separated from academic pursuits invigorates him and allows him feel like a child once more: “He inhaled deeply as if he wanted to make up doubly for all the time he had lost and to be once more a carefree, uninhibited

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<sup>235</sup> Hesse, *Wheel*, 25.

<sup>236</sup> Hesse, *Wheel*, 30.

<sup>237</sup> Hesse, *Wheel*, 33.

boy.”<sup>238</sup> The natural world cleanses Hans from the previous two years of study. He reflects, “Greek, Latin, grammar, style, math, and leaning by rote, the whole tortuous process of a long, restless and hectic year quietly sank away in the warmth of this sleepy hour.”<sup>239</sup> The freedom of wandering through the forest, fishing, and enjoying the beauties of nature had positive effects on Hans. Now instead of studying until midnight, he falls asleep satisfyingly tired at ten. Unfortunately, this ends all too quickly.

Since Hans has passed the state examination, his teachers find that it is time to prepare him for the academy. The narrator comments, “For three years now he had been the object of special attention. The teachers, the pastor, his father and particularly the principal had egged and urged him on and had never let him catch his breath.”<sup>240</sup> Now, even during his summer retreat, Hans’s teachers seek to overwork the young man yet again. First, the pastor convinces Hans to take extra Greek lessons, because the students at the academy would be more intelligent than those Hans had encountered before. At first, this does not bother Hans because there is still a balance in his life. He is able to go fishing or swimming in the morning, and afterward finds his studies with the pastor beautiful and worthwhile. But quickly educational pursuits overrun his summer vacation and strip the youth of his freedom. Such is the goal of education, as the narrator forcefully proclaims:

It is his [the teacher] duty and responsibility to control the raw energies and desires of his charges and replace them with calmer, more moderate ideals. What would many happy citizens and trustworthy officials have become but unruly, stormy innovators and dreamers of useless dreams, if not for the effort of their schools? In young beings there is something wild, ungovernable, uncultured which first has to be tamed. It is like a dangerous flame that has to be controlled or it will destroy. Natural man is unpredictable, opaque, dangerous, like a torrent cascading out of uncharted mountains. At the start, his soul is a jungle without paths or order. And, like a jungle, it must first be cleared and its growth thwarted. Thus it is the school’s task to subdue and control man with force and

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<sup>238</sup> Hesse, *Wheel*, 36.

<sup>239</sup> Hesse, *Wheel*, 39.

<sup>240</sup> Hesse, *Wheel*, 47.

make him a useful member of society, to kindle those qualities in him whose development will bring him to triumphant completion.<sup>241</sup>

Hans's teachers certainly nudge the boy down this path. Not long after he begins instruction with the pastor, the principle convinces Hans to take additional lessons. Quickly, Hans's summer vacation is overwhelmed with studying, and "he had more than enough homework now and often he sat bent stubbornly over some task until late at night...now he was almost glad it [summer vacation] was over."<sup>242</sup> Only the Pietist shoemaker Flaig finds this trend disturbing: "What nonsense that is, Hans, and a sin besides... why do you think you have vacations? Certainly not to sit around your room and go on learning. You're nothing but skin and bones."<sup>243</sup> Education relentlessly pushes the student ahead, as a machine to be overworked, not a living being to be cherished. Because of this, humans lose the freedom and creativity that fosters true educational growth. Instead, there needs to be a balance between the pursuits of knowledge and those of pleasure, as evident by Hans who is happiest when he is able to study and fish. In Hesse's opinion, the natural cultivation of individuality was more desirable and beneficial to young people than what school and the modern world demanded.

With summer vacation at an end, Hans departs for the Cistercian monastery at Maulbronn. The Protestant academy is quiet and remote. The narrator remarks, "only between noon and one o'clock does a fleeting semblance of life pass over it... [and the seminary students] are removed from the distracting influence of their towns and families and are preserved from the harmful sight of the active life."<sup>244</sup> The academy is attractive, however, for those seeking an education who are not truly wealthy. Although the education is provided for by the state, it does not mean that it is free. As it will soon be discovered, the cost of education is more than money.

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<sup>241</sup> Hesse, *Wheel*, 54.

<sup>242</sup> Hesse, *Wheel*, 58-59.

<sup>243</sup> Hesse, *Wheel*, 60.

<sup>244</sup> Hesse, *Wheel*, 63.

It is the mind, spirit, individuality, and even the life of a student. The seminary's goal is to make students feel that the study of Hebrew and Greek is all that matters, and to transform them so that when they leave, "you can distinguish a Maulbronn student as such for the rest of his life."<sup>245</sup> It is somewhat ironic that in an industrial age, an avenue that should hold intellectual endeavors in high-esteem is nothing more than a monotonous assembly line.

In the village, Hans was under the pressure of his teachers, but Maulbronn adds new social pressures to the mix. At first, Hans is content to spend his days studying, since there is enough of that to do. Things drastically change for Hans, however, when he befriends the poet and outsider, Hermann Heilner. Hans's first meaningful conversation with Heilner comes on a day the former discovers the latter ruminating and writing poetry by a lake garden. As the youths talk, Heilner reveals his disdain for the academic life: "All these bores and cowards who grind away and work their fingers to the bone and don't realize that there's something higher than the Hebrew alphabet. You're [Hans] no different...I don't have any use for that kind of Homer. Anyway, what does all this old Greek stuff matter to us?... All this classical stuff is a big fake."<sup>246</sup> This strange fellow, who does not seem to share the same concerns as Hans, intrigues the exceptional young man. Hans appreciates Heilner because he now has a friend, even if it comes at a price. Heilner interrupts Hans's studying and opposes his diligence. Heilner calls homework "hackwork," and tells Hans, "you're not doing any of this work voluntarily but only because you're afraid of the teachers or of your old man. What do you get from being first or second in the class? I'm twentieth, and just as smart as any of you grinds."<sup>247</sup> Not only does Heilner spread seeds of doubt through remarks such as this, but he also pulls his friend away

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<sup>245</sup> Hesse, *Wheel*, 64. Pascal comments on this situation calling the Protestant seminary "a nursery social conformists, bribed by the promise of clerical status," Pascal, 181.

<sup>246</sup> Hesse, *Wheel*, 84-85.

<sup>247</sup> Hesse, *Wheel*, 92.

from study through fits of melancholy. The narrator remarks that Heilner “had a pathological need to be pitied and fondled.”<sup>248</sup> After these bouts, Hans plunges himself into his homework late at night with great difficulty. Soon, he discovers “how this friendship exhausted him.”<sup>249</sup> When the time comes, however, Hans does not stand by Heilner. In one scene, Heilner hits another student, and is reprimanded by the academy. Hans does not fight for Heilner, but idly stands to the side, because his indoctrinated scholarly drive takes over. The narrator comments, “It was his ambition to succeed, to pass his examination with the highest honors and to play a role in life, but a not a romantic or dangerous one. Thus he remained in his corner hideout.”<sup>250</sup> Shortly after this incident, Hans escapes home for winter break. He takes pride in the fact that he is an academy boy and that he has outstripped everyone in his village, but he appears sicklier than before. Besides his constant headaches, “people felt that he did not look well, or well fed, and was far too pale and they doubted whether he got enough to eat at the monastery.”<sup>251</sup>

Shortly after returning from break, one student accidentally dies after falling through thin ice. This event bothers Hans, not because of the student’s death, but because of his disloyalty to Heilner the previous semester. He reflects on how his only friend could be abruptly taken from him. Hans’s unfaithfulness causes him to ruminate on “another world where people were judged not by their grades and examination marks and scholastic success but solely in accord with the purity or impurity of their consciences.”<sup>252</sup> Hans recognizes that his academic pursuits should not be his sole goal in life since it has harmed his friendship and his inner peace. This realization leads to Hans’s downfall at the academy. Conscious of what he had done to Heilner the previous semester, Hans confesses to his friend, “I’d rather end up at the bottom of the class than have

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<sup>248</sup> Hesse, *Wheel*, 93.

<sup>249</sup> Hesse, *Wheel*, 94.

<sup>250</sup> Hesse, *Wheel*, 98.

<sup>251</sup> Hesse, *Wheel*, 102.

<sup>252</sup> Hesse, *Wheel*, 106.

things go on like this. If you want, we can become friends again and show the others that we don't need them."<sup>253</sup> Reunited with Heilner, Hans quickly alienates himself from the school

because he is not following the prescribed path:

The teachers watched in horror as their model student turned into a problem child and succumbed to the bad influence of the dubious Heilner. Teachers dread nothing so much as unusual characteristics in precocious boys during the initial stages of their adolescence. A certain streak of genius makes an ominous impression on them, for there exists a deep gulf between genius and the teaching profession. Anyone with a touch of genius seems to his teachers a freak from the very first... A schoolmaster will prefer to have a couple of dumbheads in his class than a single genius, and if you regard it objectively, he is of course right. His task is not to produce extravagant intellects but good Latinists, arithmeticians and sober decent folk... thus the struggle between rule and spirit repeats itself year after year from school to school. The authorities go to infinite pains to nip the few profound or more valuable intellects in the bud. And time and again the ones who are detested by their teachers and frequently punished, the runaways and those expelled, are the ones who afterwards add to society's treasure. But some – and who knows how many? – waste away with quiet obstinacy and finally go under.<sup>254</sup>

This quote, reminiscent of Törless's complaint against his teachers and education, reveals one of Hesse's great critiques of the educational system. Teachers and schools demand obedient children who will mindlessly take part in the assembly line of education. Schools do not develop each student individually, and teachers especially fear those with sharp intellects, who reject conformity. Since Hans pairs himself with Heilner, he comes under the suspicion of the school. Only the headmaster tries to save the former star pupil, warning him of Heilner's negative influence. But it is in vain, since "only boys who had no wills of their own, and those who were dishonest, got along famously with him [the principal]. For the same reason, the strong-minded and honest ones had a very hard time of it because the merest hint of disagreement irritated him."<sup>255</sup> Hans now counts himself among the strong-minded, and because of this, his education no longer preoccupies every moment of his existence.

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<sup>253</sup> Hesse, *Wheel*, 111.

<sup>254</sup> Hesse, *Wheel*, 113-114.

<sup>255</sup> Hesse, *Wheel*, 115.

Around the time Hans chooses Heilner and rejects Maulbronn, his physical breakdown intensifies. The narrator comments, “During the day he walked about without energy and without paying much attention, worked with painful slowness and without pleasure.”<sup>256</sup> One day, a teacher calls on Hans to speak in class, but the pupil just sits and stares silently. Hans’s lack of obedience angers the teacher, but the boy seems ill. The teacher sends him to the infirmary where a doctor tells Hans that he is suffering from a nervous disorder. In addition, Hans has difficulty concentrating and needs to exert great effort in order to read or write. His memory also fails him; he is “unable to absorb anything new, and [his mind] grew poorer and more untrustworthy from day to day.”<sup>257</sup> Rote learning and the monotony of school finally seem to have taken its toll on Hans’s mind. As a result, his work goes from bad to worse, and the teachers become disgruntled with him. Only Heilner does not see anything wrong with his friend, but he soon leaves Hans alone at the monastery.

One day, Heilner decides to run away from Maulbronn and takes refuge in the woods a few miles from the academy. Even though he is cold and tired, he finds joy in the deed: “He breathed with a great feeling of relief and stretched his limbs as though he had just escaped from a narrow cage.”<sup>258</sup> Heilner takes pride in his act, because he is able to show that he has a stronger will than his superiors. Eventually, school officials discover Heilner and bring him back to face punishment. Since Heilner is unwilling to submit to the will of the authorities, they expel him “in disgrace...never to return.” Even though Heilner was the black sheep during his time at the monastery, the other students begin to view him in a new, more positive light since “the passage of time and his absence modified the general opinion of him and many looked back upon

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<sup>256</sup> Hesse, *Wheel*, 124.

<sup>257</sup> Hesse, *Wheel*, 129.

<sup>258</sup> Hesse, *Wheel*, 134.

the fugitive, once so anxiously avoided, as an eagle escaped from captivity.”<sup>259</sup> The students perceive that they are prisoners in Maulbronn, prisoners of their teachers, and prisoners of an educational system that stifles their own personal growth. None, however, will take as drastic measures as Heilner because to do so means expulsion or to become an outcast, which is Hans’s new role at the academy.

Hans’s new status does not last long. Even though he gives up on his studies and his once frequent headaches now became rare, the damage has been done.<sup>260</sup> Education has broken the young man:

No one, except perhaps Wiedrich, the sympathetic tutor, detected behind the slight boy’s helpless smile the suffering of a drowning soul casting about desperately. Nor did it occur to any of them that a fragile creature had been reduced to this state by virtue of school and the barbaric ambition of his father and his grammar-school teacher. Why was he forced to work until late at night during the most sensitive and precarious period of his life? Why purposely alienated from his friends in grammar school? Why deprived of needed rest and forbidden to go fishing? Why instilled with a shabby ambition? Why had they not even granted him his well-deserved vacation after the examination?

Hans is physically still at Maulbronn, but mentally he is finished. The pressures of education have taken their toll, and “now the overworked little horse lay by the wayside, no longer of any use.”<sup>261</sup> Once again, Hans visits the doctor who reasserts that the youth has a nervous disorder, and he should leave the academy. The headmaster feels unease, at this time, but not for his student. He worries about his own reputation and that of the school after Hindinger’s death, Heilner’s expulsion, and Hans’s dismissal. The narrator comments, “He had trouble suppressing the thought that part of the blame for the disappearance of the two talented boys might be attached to him, but as he was a courageous and upright man, he eventually succeeded in

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<sup>259</sup> Hesse, *Wheel*, 135.

<sup>260</sup> Hesse, *Wheel*, 137.

<sup>261</sup> Hesse, *Wheel*, 139.

dispelling these useless and gloomy doubts.”<sup>262</sup> The school shows no concern for its charges, and Hans is sent home so it could be rid of the problem. As he leaves the academy, Hans wonders, “What use had it all been?”<sup>263</sup>

Hans’s return home is of little concern for the village, because he is now a broken and rusted-out machine: “he was no longer a vessel which could be stuffed with all sorts of things, no longer fertile ground for a variety of seeds; he was no longer worth their time and effort.”<sup>264</sup> Hans, who cannot find solace and feels abandoned, begins to have suicidal thoughts. The thought of death approaches Hans “in the guise of a treacherous comforter that gradually became familiar and indispensable.”<sup>265</sup> Hans even plans out how he would kill himself. He develops his plan so thoroughly that he selects and tests the branch upon which he is to hang himself. During his final wanderings, Hans reflects back on his lost youth, and visits sites of his lost childhood. Upon reflecting on the people he used to know, such as the man who taught him how to fish, Hans realizes they had a more positive influence on his life than any of his teachers.

Hans eventually abandons the idea of suicide, but he continues to listlessly roam the countryside with no real purpose in life. Even a temporary crush on a neighbor’s niece does nothing to break Hans’s malaise. One night, the girl kisses him, but he quickly pushes her away. Perhaps it is embarrassment that makes Hans want to flee, but it appears that there is something more behind it. He stumbles home dizzy and cold until he falls asleep on his bed, but in short time he wakes, feeling exhausted and in pain. Finally, he falls asleep on tear-soaked pillows. This scene signifies Hans’s hopelessness, which he has yet to fully realize. In spite of Hans’s poor mental state, Joseph has had enough of his son’s languishing and forces Hans to take a job

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<sup>262</sup> Hesse, *Wheel*, 140.

<sup>263</sup> Hesse, *Wheel*, 141.

<sup>264</sup> Hesse, *Wheel*, 145.

<sup>265</sup> Hesse, *Wheel*, 146.

as a mechanic's apprentice. At first, the job pleases Hans: "Not since the days of his boyhood hobbies had he tasted the pleasure of seeing something concrete and useful take shape under his hands."<sup>266</sup> Although his task is monotonous, as he has to smooth a wheel with a dull file, the physical labor satisfies him. But this feeling does not last. Hans soon finds himself once again victim to his longing and the work begins to bore him: "Hans felt more wretched than ever, glanced at the clock throughout the day and kept scratching hopelessly at his wheel."<sup>267</sup> The job physically exhausts him, but one Sunday he reluctantly joins his new co-workers on a pub crawl. He discovers that the mechanics all tell the same stories and that life is caught in a boring routine, but he admires those who embrace this existence. Drunk, Hans decides to leave the group early and the next day he is found dead, floating in a river.

For readers and critics, Hans's death is a topic of debate. Was it was an accident or suicide? Hans had previously planned out his suicide, but he supposedly gave up the notion. Hesse seemed to have intentionally left Hans's death ambiguous. Solbach argues that Hans's life only provokes a small amount of sympathy and the reason Hesse leaves his death obscure is to keep hold of this sense of pity for the character.<sup>268</sup> Evidence, however, points to the fact that Hans's death was indeed suicide. During the cider-making festivities, Hans is struck by a thought: "his soul had left that childhood land which can never be found again. His small fragile ship had barely escaped a near disaster; now it entered a region of new storms and uncharted depths through which even the best-led adolescent cannot find a trustworthy guide. He must find his own way and be his own savior."<sup>269</sup> This notion comes to Hans after he dismisses suicide, but he knows that he could not turn to anybody, and must carry out his own destiny himself, but

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<sup>266</sup> Hesse, *Wheel*, 195.

<sup>267</sup> Hesse, *Wheel*, 199.

<sup>268</sup> Solbach, 73.

<sup>269</sup> Hesse, *Wheel*, 173.

he is unsure how to do this. Later, while on the drinking tour, Hans notices something unusual, besides drunkenness. He acknowledges that he is beginning to feel drunk, and that it is a pleasant sensation, but “he was conscious too of something like a thin veil before his eyes through which everything looked more remote, almost unreal and much as it looks in dreams.”<sup>270</sup> This veil is mysterious, but his innermost being is revealing something to him. When Hans’s body is discovered, Hesse tells us that Hans almost looks sublime in death: “the white lids covered the eyes and the half-open lips looked contented, almost cheerful.”<sup>271</sup> This seems to point to the conclusion that he willingly took his own life since he died in peace. Even in an essay written after the Great War, Hesse maintains that it is better to suffocate and to die than to approve of a world that destroys youth.<sup>272</sup> It appears that Hans has made peace with himself and came to the understanding that in order to be his own savior and to break free from his discontent, he has to take his own life.

Regardless of how he died, Hans’s death is symbolic. Lewis Tusken remains unsure how Hans died, but remarks that his death is significant because “a young and promising life had been ruined and sacrificed.”<sup>273</sup> The novel ends with an interesting dialogue between Flaig and Joseph. The shoemaker turns to Hans’s father, pointing to two men in frock coats and states, “There you see a couple of gentlemen, who helped to put him where he is now...I just meant the schoolmasters.” Joseph replies “But how? What do you mean?” Flaig responds, “Oh nothing...Perhaps you and I failed the boy in a number of ways too, don’t you think?”<sup>274</sup> This dialogue leaves no doubt that the pressures of education extinguished a bright burning candle.

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<sup>270</sup> Hesse, *Wheel*, 209.

<sup>271</sup> Hesse, *Wheel*, 215.

<sup>272</sup> Peter Heller, “The Writer in Conflict with His Age: A Study in the Ideology of Hermann Hesse,” *Monatshefte*, Vol. 46, No. 3 (March 1954): 138, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30166035> (accessed March 6, 2013).

<sup>273</sup> Tusken, *Understanding*, 61.

<sup>274</sup> Hesse, *Wheel*, 216.

The novel ends in such a manner that one must reflect on how the teachers and pressures of school have destroyed Hans, and perhaps many more like him. *Beneath the Wheel* was certainly based on some of Hesse's own experiences in school. And yet, the novel was widely popular, which suggests that others identified with Hesse's story. The pressures of education were increasing, and *Beneath the Wheel*, along with other pieces of *Schulliteratur*, were readily accepted by Germany's middle-class reading public. Hesse poignantly displayed the struggles of youth within the educational system of fin de siècle Germany. Although he does not condemn all education, Hesse argued that a balance must be found between knowledge and natural living.

### Conclusion

Education in modern German history is often pictured in a positive light. The German states were among the first to establish compulsory education and by the end of the nineteenth century most youths in Germany attended elementary school and could read and write. Even at the university level, German scholarship was praised. Neo-humanist and liberal-minded professors aided in the vision of German universities that cultivated the growth of the individual, and these universities were held in worldwide esteem. In spite of this, some individuals at the fin de siècle believed that the German educational system actually harmed the development of young people. Most youths in Germany could not study beyond the elementary level, and classrooms were often overcrowded and directed by clergymen or underqualified teachers. More importantly, in all levels of education, there was a tendency toward conservatism, which supported the status quo. Consequently, students and writers at the turn of the century perceived the flawed practices in the German educational system.

Youth movements, such as the *Wandervogel*, and genres, such as *Schulliteratur*, spoke out against an educational system that harmed young men. The *Wandervogel* rejected their parents and teachers, and found instruction among fellow youths more enlightening for personal growth. Novels, like Heinrich Mann's *Professor Unrat* or Robert Musil's *Törless*, demonstrated the tyranny of some teachers, without concern for their pupils, or the brutality students' display toward one another and educators' narrow-mindedness, respectively. Hermann Hesse was drawn to this type of literature, since his own experiences with education negatively affected him. But Hesse's *Beneath the Wheel* goes further than the other novels in detailing the regimentation of academic study and its terrible costs. In order to prepare for the state examination, Hans is practically studying every waking hour every day of the week, as his teachers push and prod him into such a routine. But life does not get any easier at Maulbronn, where on top of the constant studying, social pressures now influence Hans. The pressures of school and the pressures of friendship collided in a fateful mixture that ends with Hans's dismissal from Maulbronn. This breaks the boy and his death releases him from the mechanical routine of life.

In spite of the negative conclusion of this novel, positives can be extracted from the story and Hesse's own life. Hesse's path of self-education offers an example on how to approach knowledge. Even if the state would not promote individual growth, it was for the individual to improve his own self through self-education. More importantly, a balance between education and personal creativity is beneficial for personal cultivation. Such a moderate path is important for Hesse and this will be further revealed in the following chapter. Like a mechanized education, Hesse cautions against cultural pessimism, but rather than fret the possibilities of either, Hesse warns the reader to find a middle road.

### CHAPTER THREE: FIN DE SIECLE CULTURAL PESSIMISM AND DEGENERATION IN *GERTRUDE* AND *ROSSHALDE*

Some scholars have characterized the second half of the nineteenth century in Europe as an age of optimism. The spread of industrialization and nineteenth-century liberalism positively affected the lives of many people. For example, Germany passed early welfare measures including sickness, accident, pension, and insurance laws in the 1880s. Also, education and literacy rates increased drastically in Germany, England, and France during the nineteenth century. Science, however, perhaps made the greatest leaps forward. Knowledge about subatomic structures increased, while studies in matter and energy progressed rapidly, as well. A new understanding of infection developed when Robert Koch and Louis Pasteur almost simultaneously discovered the germ theory in the 1880s. Sanitation improved, both in the medical profession and in public health, and deaths from infectious disease declined. This scientific progress and the optimism it generated became embodied in the popular system of thought called positivism. Attributed to Auguste Comte, who venerated humanity and progress, positivism alleged that mankind has advanced through theological and metaphysical ages and has entered a scientific age that could and would create a better society.

Despite these encouraging developments, not everyone was impressed by this progress. Though Bismarck's welfare measures seemingly advanced politics, the chancellor's *Kulturkampf* and Socialist laws proved that the government could still victimize certain groups of citizens. As science explained more, the more it became inexplicable. Max Planck's development of quantum theory introduced the unpredictability of matter and destroyed the Newtonian system. Most notably, Albert Einstein's General Theory of Relativity explained much about time and space, but it was beyond the comprehension of most people. In such an ever-changing

atmosphere, discontent with modern progress fomented in some reaches of society. First of all, some thinkers interpreted and transformed positivism into Social Darwinism. This theory diverged from positivism in that it argued against the common good and believed that competition was essential to progress. Many conservative nationalists, who preached pan-German and racist ideology, would adopt this train of thought. Intellectuals leaning toward this negative view of society's advancement emphasized the degenerative nature of technological progress. Ideas of cultural pessimism and degeneration began to develop around the turn of the century. Such concepts alleged that society was a diseased organism, and rather than advancing toward harmony, it increasingly became more ill. Many figures during this period were extremist individuals who highlighted the fact that society was degenerating. In relation to this trend, Hesse latched onto themes of degeneration and cultural pessimism in his last two prewar novels, specifically focusing on the role of the artist in society. But unlike many cultural pessimists, who offered radical solutions, Hesse provided a divergent and more moderate example. He urged the reader not to lose heart, but to move beyond pessimism and embrace life's struggle.<sup>275</sup>

### Discontent with the Modern

The near-century that followed the Napoleonic Wars was, with few minor exceptions, one of peace. The European balance of power succeeded at maintaining concord and prosperity,

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<sup>275</sup> Nearing completion of this work, I came across a similar article. This author begins describing the discontent with modernity in the early twentieth century, and uses Hesse and Nietzsche as examples. However, the author's goal is to study the influence of counter-worlds and utopias on frameworks regarding religious study and religious discourse during the terror and uncertainty of the twentieth century. More importantly, he analyzes Hesse's later works (*Steppenwolf* and *The Glass Bead Game*). See Kocku von Stuckrad, "Utopian Landscapes and Ecstatic Journeys: Friedrich Nietzsche, Hermann Hesse, and Mircea Eliade on the Terror of Modernity," *Numen*, Vol. 57, No. 1 (2010): 78-102. <http://web.b.ebscohost.com/libezp.lib.lsu.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=678b418f-032b-4c24-b68f-4793ff2acc%40sessionmgr115&vid=1&hid=109> (accessed December 14, 2014).

while the long, sustained success of the Industrial Revolution increased wealth. According to one historian, these trends stimulated “an indestructible feeling” among many Europeans.<sup>276</sup> In spite of this, several nineteenth-century intellectuals cautioned of an impending change, but their warnings went unheeded. For example, themes of sadness, death, ennui, and deep melancholy permeated the works of Charles Baudelaire. Soren Kierkegaard believed that the individual was born to suffer, and commented, “I despair, therefore I exist.”<sup>277</sup> Others, such as Fyodor Dostoevsky and Friedrich Nietzsche, presented similar outlooks and admonitions that also went unnoticed. The period from 1890 to 1914, however, witnessed a profound transition in European thinking. This shift was characterized by a reaction against the belief that reason conquers all.<sup>278</sup> By the end of the century, the union of art, science and religion had dissolved. Some artists withdrew into a dream world and depended on their own emotion because they could not take anything from the world. This caused the artist to remove art from life, as art became superior to life.<sup>279</sup> Furthermore, youth movements, feminism, and socialism displayed additional trends of social revolution during this period. Even in this time of unrest, however, “it cannot be said of the world before 1914 that it felt itself to be dancing on the verge of a volcano.”<sup>280</sup> Nonetheless, this period revealed the cracks in society and showed signs that intellectual changes were in the offing in the decades leading up to 1914.

A reaction against positivism exemplified one of the intellectual transformations during this period. Around 1890, intellectuals used the term positivism in a loose sense to discuss human behavior in terms of analogies drawn from natural sciences. Haunted by a sense that they lived in an age of derivative philosophy and scholarship, these thinkers challenged positivism’s

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<sup>276</sup> Masur, 6-7, 24.

<sup>277</sup> Masur, 35-37, 78-82, 82-88.

<sup>278</sup> Masur, 97.

<sup>279</sup> Masur, 156.

<sup>280</sup> Masur, 297.

logic. H. Stuart Hughes argues that for these intellectuals, positivism became the “philosophy of radical anti-intellectualism,” causing them to revolt against it after 1890.<sup>281</sup> Drawing on previous intellectual traditions, such as German idealism, positivism’s critics asserted that the universe lay in spirit rather than in data. Some appealed to Romanticism, where one could draw from spiritual longings or the idea of the artist as a rebel. Other thinkers recognized the individual consciousness as a source of vitality and creation, which fashioned its own world separate from society. By 1905, these modes of thought and the individualistic search for an ideal led many to adopt irrational or anti-rational viewpoints, opposed to positivistic reason.<sup>282</sup> This era generated a general “disenchantment of the world,” and for some this meant a radical turn toward cultural pessimism.<sup>283</sup>

This pessimism has most famously been branded as fin de siècle “cultural despair” by the historian Fritz Stern. Stern examines the rise of the “German ideology” through the works of cultural critics that reveals “the pathology of cultural criticism... [and] demonstrate[s] the dangers and dilemmas of a particular type of cultural despair.”<sup>284</sup> This “particular type” was ideologically conservative, and reacted against and loathed modernity and liberalism. For example, Paul de Lagarde disdained the Second Reich and supposed that Bismarck’s empire was causing Germany to collapse spiritually into a secular and industrial society. Lagarde thought Jews, materialism, Philistinism, modernity, and liberalism were all signs of decay, proving that Germany needed spiritual regeneration. He also despised academia because scholars reached conclusions scientifically, while he analyzed ideas arbitrarily and through intuition. In Lagarde’s opinion, a national religion based on anti-Semitism, the *Volk*, and mystical nationalism could

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<sup>281</sup> Hughes, 14, 37-39.

<sup>282</sup> Hughes, 183, 338-339, 359, 365.

<sup>283</sup> Hughes, 332.

<sup>284</sup> Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of the Germanic Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961), xi.

restore Germany. Embracing Darwinian views, Lagarde's cultural despair supported the emergent anti-Semitic or *völkisch* movements.<sup>285</sup>

The 1890s signaled a turning point in cultural despair, as evident by the publication of Julius Langbehn's *Rembrandt als Erzieher*, the most popular book of this type. Among its primary arguments, the text claimed that science, modernity, and liberalism were destroying German culture. Langbehn reviled science and considered that art must supplant it. Also, he condemned German education, which he referred to as a "massacre of innocents." Instead, Langbehn argued that education should be reformed in order to train children's minds and bodies into strong people of the *Volk*.<sup>286</sup> Langbehn's work reached out to a wide audience, indicated by the thirty-nine editions produced in its first two years of existence. Stern argues that this was an alarming sign of troubled times, but it also showed how many longed for the spiritual regeneration of Germany even in an age of industrial and social progress.

The notion of German ideology caught on in scholarship, and George Mosse advanced on Stern's argument. Mosse recounts the political *völkisch* mysticism present in Stern's study, adding that there was something "alien and demonic" in Germany before the war.<sup>287</sup> In Mosse's analysis, dissatisfaction with unity in 1871 and unprecedented industrial growth both shook the foundations of traditional society, which aided in the rise of *völkisch* thought. This German ideology, a product of Romanticism, was irrational and emotional, and presumed that science could not solve problems of higher existence.<sup>288</sup> *Völkisch* thinkers, dissatisfied with society, felt alienated in a country that lacked spiritual unification even though it had just attained political

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<sup>285</sup> Stern, 90.

<sup>286</sup> Stern, 127.

<sup>287</sup> Mosse, *Crisis*, 1-2.

<sup>288</sup> Mosse, *Crisis*, 13, 65

unity.<sup>289</sup> In their rejection of modernity, German ideologists embraced the peasant *Volk* and an idyllic past. Harkening back to Stern, Mosse asserts that Lagarde founded this ideology, and Langbehn was its prophet.<sup>290</sup> Through this analysis, we can conclude that highly developed notions of cultural pessimism clearly materialized in late nineteenth-century Germany.

In order to interpret their plight, many German thinkers turned to the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche. Stern affirms that Nietzsche influenced the leading figures of the movement.<sup>291</sup> Mosse suggests that many German ideologists, who appreciated neo-romanticism, viewed Nietzsche as a Romantic soul and latched onto his philosophy. Other cultural pessimists considered Nietzsche to be the prophet of new Germanism in an alienated, modern society, while others proclaimed him to be an *Überdeutscher*, and a knight of the *Volk*.<sup>292</sup> For these pessimists, Nietzsche represented a rejection of modernity and a return to a glorified past of strong, vitalist Germans. In spite of this, Stern cautions that these thinkers often misread Nietzsche.<sup>293</sup> In general, these thinkers misattributed Nietzsche's philosophy to cultural despair and refashioned it to deal with their anxieties about modernity. They turned Nietzsche into an anti-Semitic and German nationalist, who spoke for the *Volk*, when in fact Nietzsche was not any of these things.

But it was not just cultural pessimists who looked upon society and witnessed its decay. This period also saw a form of pessimism develop amongst intellectual positivists, who perceived a decline in society and called their era degenerate. Many scientific-minded people began to believe that the modern world caused society to deteriorate, and the spread of

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<sup>289</sup> Mosse, *Crisis*, 149.

<sup>290</sup> Mosse, *Crisis*, 22-31.

<sup>291</sup> Stern, xvii.

<sup>292</sup> Mosse, *Crisis*, 64, 157, 206-208.

<sup>293</sup> Stern, 283-288. Stern provides an interesting anecdote on the mindset of these cultural pessimists in regards to Nietzsche. In 1890, Langbehn began to visit Nietzsche, who was mentally ill at that time and residing in a sanatorium. Langbehn resolved to become Nietzsche's guardian so that he could aid the ailing philosopher and nurse him back to health. He would frequently visit the invalid, attempting to get the sick man to sign over his supervision papers. Nietzsche, however, in a moment of lucidity threw a table at Langbehn and stormed out of the room, ending this foolish dream.

degeneration “owed a great deal to the broad crises of liberal society optimism.”<sup>294</sup> Unrest caused by the forces of industry, capitalism, and social mobility contributed to notions of degeneration. Menaces in European society, such as crime, violence, suicide, alcoholism, prostitution, and madness, were regarded as apparent signs of degeneration. Certain doctors argued that these maladies could be physiologically constructed, alleging that criminals could be defined through bodily features, most notably skulls and faces. Many intellectuals confronted this newly constructed phenomenon through the language of modern science. Scientific language sought to comprehend the consequences of modernity which resisted incorporation into a smooth narrative of progress. Some pessimists believed that “society was an organism threatened by death” and that its ability for regeneration was in question.<sup>295</sup> Darwin’s theories, which seemed too optimistic in tying evolution to progress, came into question because decadence and degeneration seemed just as possible.<sup>296</sup> The idea of degeneration spread as a symptom and a cause of society’s problems, and it was not simply a reflection of social change, but also an attempt to comprehend it.

In the 1890s, Max Nordau published a famous piece of literature attempting to comprehend his degenerate era. Even though Nordau was a liberal, bourgeois, positivist who optimistically viewed science and progress, he still held that modern culture was the site of degeneration. Nordau understood that the *fin de siècle* deviated from previous decades. He characterized this era as one with contempt for traditional values and morality, where the impotent despair of sick men gave rise to degeneration.<sup>297</sup> Nordau outlined several characteristics of degeneration, including unbounded egoism, impulsiveness, moral insanity,

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<sup>294</sup> Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, c. 1848-c. 1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 67.

<sup>295</sup> Pick, 32.

<sup>296</sup> Masur even notes that progress was unduly emphasized and that Darwin neglected degeneration; Masur, 74.

<sup>297</sup> Nordau, 3-5.

emotionalism, pessimism, incapacity for action or adaptation, and finding praise for Buddha or for the concept of Nirvana.<sup>298</sup> He believed that three forces reacted against Enlightenment rationalism and engendered degeneration: mysticism, egomania, and false realism. Nordau also supposed that modern German writers were plagiarists, who were incapable of observing life, and who knew and experienced nothing. He argued that the likes of Goethe and Schiller could not be produced in this age, because it was a period of degenerate authors.<sup>299</sup> Of these degenerates, Nordau concluded, “they are often authors and artists,” and their books and art exercise a powerful influence on the masses.<sup>300</sup>

Most important for the following discussion of degeneration in the works of Hesse is Nordau’s view on egoism. Nordau claimed that the egoist was not infected by a disease, but was an invalid who could not see things clearly.<sup>301</sup> This type of selfish degenerate tended to withdraw from the external world, because of an inability to adapt to life conditions due to anti-social inclinations.<sup>302</sup> Nordau claimed that egomania found its philosopher in Friedrich Nietzsche, and the positivist sternly criticized Nietzsche and his philosophy. He professed that Nietzsche’s system was contradictory and lacked depth. According to Nordau, Nietzsche’s rants contained no sense, not even nonsense. Nordau believed that Nietzsche was a sadist marred by insanity since birth. Thus, Nordau concluded that anyone who followed Nietzsche must be “born imbecile criminals, and simpletons drunk with sonorous words.”<sup>303</sup> Nordau argued that egomania, along with mysticism and false realism, would soon characterize modernity’s

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<sup>298</sup> Nordau, 18-22.

<sup>299</sup> Nordau, 106; One such degenerate author was Langbehn, and Nordau comments he is “the author of that imbecile book.”

<sup>300</sup> Nordau, viii.

<sup>301</sup> Nordau, 243.

<sup>302</sup> Nordau, 253-261.

<sup>303</sup> Nordau, 432-469.

conscience. Degenerates, Nordau claimed, were strangers to the world in which they lived, and became ever more common in the fin de siècle.

While modern scholarship recognizes these trends of pessimism and degeneration, it also warns of overemphasizing the idea of cultural despair. This was not an era of unrelieved pessimism, and late nineteenth-century optimism did not simply give way to cynicism or did a belief in progress yield to despair.<sup>304</sup> But a group of young writers did succumb to cultural pessimism, and Hesse belongs to this group. Hesse's response to this situation provides a curious and remarkable example, however. His final two novels before the war, seemingly unremarkable works that did not sell well in comparison to his first two, offer unique connections with the ideas of cultural pessimism and degeneration. The first novel, *Gertrude*, presents images of the physical and mental degeneration of the artist in modern society, while the second, *Rosshalde*, reveals the decline of the family, headed by an isolated and egotistical painter. Even though both novels experiment with ideas of pessimism and degeneration, in the end, Hesse strongly warns against being overwhelmed by such notions.

### Psychology of Despair – *Gertrude*

As early as 1903, Hesse wrote, "I confess that more and more I hold the eternal accusation against 'our skeptical and corrupt time' as false... I do not view the great sensitivity and the general nervousness as decadence, but rather these are only the unfortunate consequence of our rapidly changing forms of life... And I believe it to be false that the uncertainty that I and

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<sup>304</sup> Suzanne Marchand and David Lindenfeld, "Germany at the Fin de Siècle: An Introduction," in *Germany at the Fin de Siècle: Culture, Politics, and Ideas*, ed. Suzanne Marchand and David Lindenfeld (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 8, 21.

others have can be blamed on ‘our bad time.’”<sup>305</sup> The author did not believe that society was degenerating, but realized that the world was progressing at an unprecedented rate, due to industrial processes that had drastically altered life. Since Hesse did not blame his era, the responsibility for these perceived troubles had to fall elsewhere. While Hesse acknowledged the prevalence of pessimistic trends in society, he argued that such ideas could be overcome by individual choice. Hesse encouraged the individual to move beyond pessimism and to embrace life rather than give in to despair. A year before the publication of *Rosshalde*, Hesse offered simple advice based on his own personal experience: “Besides, I have entirely outgrown the pessimistic worldview... I love the world and life, and I can find pleasure in pain.”<sup>306</sup> According to Hesse, a love of life that embraced both the good and the bad became a way of overcoming despair, since life is a balance of contrary forces.

Hesse’s third novel, *Gertrude*, written at Gaienhofen in 1910, was his first attempt at comprehending this situation. It is a story of a young musician named Kuhn who leaves home and goes to the capital to study music, specifically the violin. While at the music school, Kuhn cripples his leg in a tobogganing accident. At first, this injury disturbs Kuhn, since he feels that his childhood has been cut short. After a while, however, he adjusts to his handicap and travels to Switzerland to enjoy its natural beauty. Returning to the music school for his last semester, Kuhn befriends an opera singer named Heinrich Muoth. The two friends contrast each other as Muoth is an extrovert, while Kuhn is an introvert. Muoth, however, expands Kuhn’s world by pushing him into society. But after graduation, Kuhn returns to his ordinary village. Nothing

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<sup>305</sup> Hermann Hesse to his family in Calw, Basel, February 12, 1903, *Gesammelte Briefe*, 96-97; “Doch gestehe ich, dass ich mehr und mehr die ewige Anklage gegen ‘unsere skeptische, verderbte Zeit’ für unrichtig halte.... Die grosse Empfindlichkeit und allgemeine Nervosität halt nicht für Dekadenz, sondern nur für die leidige Folge unsrer so rasch veränderten Lebensform....Aber dass an meiner und anderer Leute Unsicherheit ‘unsere schlechte Zeit’ schuld sei, halte ich für falsch.”

<sup>306</sup> Hermann Hesse to Volkmar Andeä, Bern, December 29, 1913, *Gesammelte Breife*, 237-238; “Ubrigens, aus dem pessimistischen Weltanschauung bin ich ganz hinausgewachsen... aber ich liebe die Welt und das Leben und kann auch in Schmerzen jene Lust finden..”

touches Kuhn's heart during his ten months home except visions of creating a great symphony or an opera. While at home, Kuhn begins to receive mysterious checks, which turn out to be from Muoth, who has been publicly performing songs to the violinist's compositions. Kuhn realizes his potential career as a musician, so he returns to Munich. In the city, Muoth helps Kuhn obtain a position as second violinist at an opera house. Soon, Kuhn becomes a well-regarded violinist and minor composer. Because of this he is invited to play at a merchant's house, where he becomes a frequent guest. It is here that Kuhn meets and falls in love with Gertrude.

In order to spend more time with Gertrude, Kuhn commences work on an opera with her. Even though Kuhn loves Gertrude, she only sees him as a friend. The opera remains their secret for a time, but soon others need to be involved. Muoth is the first person Kuhn asks to join in the creation of the opera. One day, while visiting Muoth, Kuhn notices a letter with Gertrude's handwriting on the singer's desk. Immediately Kuhn understands that the two are a couple. After this discovery, Kuhn plans to kill himself, but before he has a chance, he receives a telegram informing him of his father's impending death. Because of his father's death, Kuhn remains home to care for his mother, but their time together is strained and unpleasant. During this period, Kuhn finishes his opera. He then returns to Munich and begins to reconnect with his musician friends, while putting the final touches on the composition. Work on the opera reunites Gertrude, Muoth, and Kuhn, but the composer must deal with Gertrude and Muoth's marriage, which naturally upsets him. The opera, however, becomes a resounding success. Yet, shortly after this accomplishment, Muoth and Gertrude's marriage collapses and the three friends part ways. Weeks later, Kuhn receives a telegram from Muoth and finds the singer in a miserable and alcoholic state because of his separation from Gertrude. After a sentimental night of drinking with Kuhn, Muoth commits suicide.

That *Gertrude* is a novel about music is undeniable. Music occupied a particularly important place in Hesse's life and was a vital part of his artistic creation. Biographer Joseph Mileck notes that life without music was unthinkable for Hesse.<sup>307</sup> In Theodore Ziolkowski's analysis, music was a symbol of totality and harmony for the author.<sup>308</sup> And it was, indeed. As a young man, Hesse bought a violin, as an instrument of introspection and meditation, even though he only played occasionally. He also appreciated classical music, especially Chopin, whose music Hesse thought was warm, spiritual, and harmonious.<sup>309</sup> In a letter written three years after *Gertrude*, Hesse confirmed music's great appeal: "My relationship with music is like you would expect, an immediacy. I do not make music myself, except that I often sing or whistle. But I need music constantly, and it is the sole art form that I unconditionally admire and take as absolutely indispensable..."<sup>310</sup> Hesse projected his own love for music into the novel, and into Kuhn, specifically. Kuhn views music similarly to Hesse, as its melodies bring harmony and peace. The violinist comments, "[when playing] all prejudices vanished; music drew us together and we were of one mind," and when "I was playing, I felt happy and at peace."<sup>311</sup> Through music Kuhn can express his innermost self and escape social pains. Additionally, where Hesse acknowledged that natural religion can be found in nature in *Peter Camenzind*, in *Gertrude* he attached this romantic idea to music: "the shortest song and most simple piece of music preach that heaven is revealed in the purity, harmony and interplay of clearly sounded notes."<sup>312</sup> According to Hesse, order and harmony exists in the world, but we must train ourselves to find them, as we do with music.

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<sup>307</sup> Mileck, 42.

<sup>308</sup> Ziolkowski, *Novels*, 27.

<sup>309</sup> Hermann Hesse to Helene Voigt-Diederichs, November 9, 1898, *Kindheit*, 295-297.

<sup>310</sup> Hermann Hesse to Alfred Schaefer, ca. 1913, *Gesammelte Briefe*, 238-239; "Mein Verhältnis zur Musik ist, wie Sie vermuten, ein unmittelbares. Ich selber mach keine Musik, nur daß ich viel singe und pfeife. Aber ich brauche stets Musik, und sie ist die einzige Kunst, die ich bedigungslos bewundere und für absolut unentbehrlich halte..."

<sup>311</sup> Hermann Hesse, *Gertrude*, trans. Hilda Rosner (New York: Bantam, 1974), 116, 84.

<sup>312</sup> Hesse, *Gertrude*, 3.

But just like *Peter Camenzind*, which can be read as a nature novel masquerading as a friendship story, *Gertrude* too can be seen as a piece of literature warning against cultural pessimism masked in a music novel. Even though *Gertrude* garnered little success, the hints of cultural pessimism make it a prescient work for this theme on the eve of the Great War. Hesse even commented that *Gertrude* did not deal with a great subject but it was a psychological novel. In this book, Hesse hoped “to probe the balance between love of the world and flight from the world, on the one hand, and between satisfaction and thirst, on the other.”<sup>313</sup> *Gertrude* confronts the problem of overcoming pessimism and degeneration, as revealed by Kuhn, or giving into it, like Muoth, which leads to an untimely death.

*Gertrude* reveals how the choice of becoming an artist is linked to degeneration. As in the previous two novels, a generational conflict presents itself, but this time it results from Kuhn’s supposedly degenerate career choice. While Kuhn’s parents allow him to choose his own path, both worry about the young man embarking on such an uncertain career. Kuhn’s decision slightly upsets his father, but his mother’s disapproval is more vociferous. Kuhn remarks that “she saw in my choice of career an unfortunate sign of degeneration and in my accident an obvious punishment and the hand of Providence.”<sup>314</sup> Even after Kuhn begins to establish himself as an artist his mother remains skeptical of his career choice. It had been a year since Kuhn had seen his parents, but when he returns home for Christmas he senses a distance between him and his mother because of her “lack of faith in my career as a musician and disbelief in the

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<sup>313</sup> Hermann Hesse to Theodor Heuss, November 21, 1910, *Gesammelte Briefe*, 186: “*Ich war der Meinung, stofflich in der >>Gertrud<< insofern Neues zu probieren, als das Buch von der schwierigen Balance handelt, die im echten Künstler zwischen Lieber zur Welt und Flucht vor der Welt einerseits, anderseits zwischen Befriedigung und Durst beständig vibriert.*”

<sup>314</sup> Hesse, *Gertrude*, 24.

seriousness of my endeavors.” It was not that his mother disliked music but that she thought of musicians as “a poor sort of person.”<sup>315</sup>

Kuhn’s handicap is another sign that the young man is somehow a degenerate, as the quotation above indicates. After the accident, Kuhn notices his youth, which he “had scarcely begun to enjoy consciously, grievously cut short and impoverished.”<sup>316</sup> Because of his handicap, people look at Kuhn differently and avoid him as a “degenerate.” Kuhn comments how people disassociate with him after the accident: “I suddenly saw how sad and artificial my life had been during this period, for the loves, friends, habits and pleasures of these years were discarded like badly fitting clothes.”<sup>317</sup> Even after Kuhn reconciles himself to his condition, others still question his value because of his handicap. When Muoth secures an audition for his friend, the conductor is taken aback because of Kuhn’s crippled leg. He acts shocked, because Muoth did not disclose this information and does not want to give the violinist a chance because of this injury.<sup>318</sup> Moreover, Kuhn even suggests that his handicap hinders his romantic dreams with Gertrude because she could never fall in love with a cripple.<sup>319</sup> In such moments, Kuhn melancholically ponders, “it was then not rare for me to spend hours feeling that I would have exchanged my music and all that was of value to me for a straight leg and a gay disposition.”<sup>320</sup> In the end, Kuhn’s portrayal as a degenerate involves both his physical handicap and his career choice, but it is his friend who may be more characteristic of this fin de siècle malady.

Muoth, more so than Kuhn, personifies degeneration. Through the singer, Hesse illustrates a character inflicted with prime attributes of this illness – violence, alcoholism, and

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<sup>315</sup> Hesse, *Gertrude*, 117-118.

<sup>316</sup> Hesse, *Gertrude*, 16.

<sup>317</sup> Hesse, *Gertrude*, 21.

<sup>318</sup> Hesse, *Gertrude*, 69.

<sup>319</sup> Hesse, *Gertrude*, 107.

<sup>320</sup> Hesse, *Gertrude*, 102.

suicide. Before they become friends, Kuhn's feelings toward Muoth are unclear because strangeness surrounds the singer. Kuhn testifies, "there were wild tales of women and adventure, and without remembering one of them, I seemed to recall something about bloodshed – the linking of his name to a story of suicide or murder."<sup>321</sup> While Muoth does not kill anyone until he takes his own life, he does have a violent streak as revealed by his abusive relationship with a woman. One particularly unforgettable scene shocks Kuhn. On his way to meet Muoth, the violinist meets a kind young woman, named Lottie, who had been in a relationship with the singer. Lottie tells Kuhn how Muoth had ended it and began to treat Lottie as an unfamiliar person. This bothers her so much that she prefers that Muoth would start beating her again. The fact that Muoth hit a woman upsets Kuhn, because he cannot understand how a relationship could be so violent. He utters, "if that was love, with cruelty here and humiliation there, then it was better to live without love."<sup>322</sup> One day, Kuhn mentions this incident to Muoth and the singer callously remarks, "forget about Lottie. It served her right. No woman is beaten if she doesn't want to be."<sup>323</sup> Violence and abuse were characteristics of criminality, and these attributes, along with the fact that Muoth is an artist, marks him as a fin de siècle degenerate.

Another aspect of degeneration present in *Gertrude* commonly appears in many of Hesse's other works, suicide. Hesse readily engaged this controversial topic that worried many people. Beginning in the 1890s, some thinkers supposed that there was a suicide crisis that marked the decay of the age.<sup>324</sup> It was only fitting that Hesse should employ this topic once again in *Gertrude*. The first mention of suicide in the story comes during an early conversation

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<sup>321</sup> Hesse, *Gertrude*, 39.

<sup>322</sup> Hesse, *Gertrude*, 76-78.

<sup>323</sup> Hesse, *Gertrude*, 157.

<sup>324</sup> Tom Taylor, "Images of Youth and the Family in Wilhelmine Germany: Towards a Reconsideration of the German Sonderweg," *German Studies Review*, Vol. 15, German Identity (Winter 1992): 62-64, <http://jstor.org/stable/1430640> (accessed July 7, 2014).

between Muoth and Kuhn. Muoth comments that youth is not as wonderful as old people claim and that is why youth suicide is common: “youth is a real swindle – a swindle of the press and textbooks. ‘The most wonderful time of one’s life!’ Old people always seem much more contented to me. Youth is the most difficult time of life. For example, suicide rarely occurs among old people.”<sup>325</sup> After this scene, both young men would have their own encounter with suicide. First is Kuhn, after discovering that Muoth and Gertrude are in a relationship. Knowing of Muoth’s violent past and of his own love for Gertrude, the violinist plans to commit suicide with a revolver. Before he can execute the plan, however, he receives a telegram informing him that his father is dying. Kuhn almost gives up on life too soon, but the telegram saves the composer and brings him back to the world. This event causes Kuhn to look beyond his own egoism because he must live for his mother. This idea, living for others, would slowly influence the rest of his life.<sup>326</sup> Muoth, on the other hand, carries out the deed. It is unclear what happened, but weeks earlier the singer turned to alcohol. Referring back to the singer’s last days, Muoth’s conductor reveals to Kuhn, “He has sometimes come on stage almost drunk, and if he ever misses a drink, he acts and sings badly... Muoth is deliberately ruining himself.”<sup>327</sup> Muoth destroys ruins himself, indeed. A night after trying to console his friend, Kuhn returns to Muoth’s apartment the next day to find him dead on the bed. The despair that almost took Kuhn from the world had taken Muoth.

Despite acknowledging degeneration within the novel, Hesse did not succumb to pessimism and despair, like many of his contemporaries. While Hesse recognized that ideas of degeneration existed during this period, he warned the reader not to yield to despair. After Kuhn’s father dies, the young man converses with a former teacher, Lohe. Kuhn tells Lohe that

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<sup>325</sup> Hesse, *Gertrude*, 93.

<sup>326</sup> Hesse, *Gertrude*, 125-129.

<sup>327</sup> Hesse, *Gertrude*, 202-203.

everything seems meaningless and stupid, and Lohe determines that the young man is mentally sick. The former teacher pronounces,

you are suffering from a sickness, one that is fashionable, unfortunately, and that one comes across every day among sensitive people. It is related to moral insanity and can also be called individualism or imaginary loneliness. Modern books are full of it. It has insinuated itself into your imagination; you are isolated; no one trouble about you and no one understands you. Am I right?... if this sickness were general, the human race would die out, but it is only found among the upper classes in Central Europe. It can be cured in young people and it is, indeed, part of the inevitable period of development.<sup>328</sup>

To overcome these roots of despair, Lohe suggests that Kuhn think about others more than about himself and to learn to love someone more than his own self. Kuhn's father offers similar advice as the teacher, recommending that by moving beyond egoism, Kuhn can begin to find meaning in the world.<sup>329</sup> Kuhn decides to try to live like this because it does not offer philosophy or opinions but rather a practical attempt to make an unhappy life tolerable.<sup>330</sup> Kuhn slowly overcomes his melancholy as he moves away from egoism, beginning with the death of his father. He understands that he must live to help others and that succumbing to hopelessness only brings despair. In contrast, Muoth does not adopt such a practice, even though Kuhn recognizes that Muoth suffers from this illness more than anyone else.<sup>331</sup> Instead, Muoth continues on his egotistic path and wallows in his illness until it leads him to an alcoholic and suicidal finale.

One fascinating aspect of the book in regards to cultural pessimism centers on Hesse's treatment of Nietzsche. *Gertrude* can be considered Hesse's first serious attempt at bringing many Nietzschean elements into his writing. Hesse recognized the cult of Nietzsche developing in his day, and found it "sad and ridiculous...How few understand him, how gloomy and pitiful

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<sup>328</sup> Hesse, *Gertrude*, 139-140.

<sup>329</sup> Hesse, *Gertrude*, 119.

<sup>330</sup> Hesse, *Gertrude*, 141-142. This living for others is similar to Peter's philosophy of compassion in Hesse's first novel.

<sup>331</sup> Hesse, *Gertrude*, 172.

they seem in comparison to him...”<sup>332</sup> Yet, Hesse acknowledged that Nietzsche presented a difficult undertaking for readers and called reading the famous philosopher’s works “a stimulating, but difficult task.”<sup>333</sup> Nevertheless, while most people misunderstood Nietzsche as a prophet of doom and gloom, Hesse identified the life-affirming stance of Nietzsche. In *Gertrude*, Hesse draws heavily from Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy*, juxtaposing Apollonian and Dionysian elements as represented by the characters of Kuhn and Muoth. On the two friends, Kuhn remarks, “he was a man of the theater and an adventurer, I thought, and he was perhaps destined to live a tragic and public life. On the contrary, I wanted a quiet life.”<sup>334</sup> Joy in life, however, comes from a balance of these two instincts. Both Kuhn and Muoth benefited from their friendship because it allowed Apollonian and Dionysian individuals to converge and help each other grow. Hesse implied this through the unity and music produced by the pair when together. In connection, there is the idea that everything originates from the same source and that one must look beyond binaries. Nietzsche argued that everything emanates from the lap of being, and that all should be embraced. Since Hesse believed that “without sorrow, deep and heartfelt experience was not possible,” he projected the balance of pain and pleasure into Kuhn’s life.<sup>335</sup> The violinist remarks, “I don’t want to thrust aside and be rid of anything but weakness and constriction. I want to feel that pleasure and pain arise from the same source, that they are aspects of the same force and portions of the same piece of music, each beautiful and each

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<sup>332</sup> Hermann Hesse to Helene Voigt-Diederichs, Tübingen, August 27, 1898, *Gesammelte Briefe*, 39: “Traurig und lächerlich erscheint mir die laienhafte, ergieloe Nietzscheschwärmerei unserer jungen Literatur. Wie wenig verstehen sie ihn, wie dunkel und erbärmlich sind sie neben ihm, und wie verzweifelt wenig kommt bei dem ewigen Anbeten und Zitieren heraus.”

<sup>333</sup> Hermann Hesse to Johannes and Marie Hesse, Tübingen, September 10, 1897, *Kindheit*, 202; “...eine anregende, aber schwere Arbeit.

<sup>334</sup> Hesse, *Gertrude*, 40.

<sup>335</sup> Hermann Hesse to Cesco Como, Basel, June 21, 1903, *Gesammelte Briefe*, 105-107; “ohne Schmerz ist kein tiefes und herzliches Erleben möglich.”

essential”<sup>336</sup> Finally, there is a Nietzschean desire to create in the novel. Often Nietzsche’s *Übermensch* is regarded as an ominous figure, who moves beyond the bounds of society, but a real *Übermensch* is someone who overcomes himself and is able to give something to the world, often through creation. Even after Kuhn becomes crippled, he is joyful that he “would compose again!” and is overcome by an “intense desire to make music, to create.”<sup>337</sup> Muoth even remarks to Kuhn, “you are a composer, a creator, a little god!”<sup>338</sup> In the end, Kuhn overcomes his handicap and the degenerative qualities others place on him, because of his creation for the world, his opera. In *Gertrude*, Hesse offered an alternative view of Nietzsche that went beyond the bounds of nationalism and cultural despair. Nietzsche and Hesse, despite some apparent darkness and despair in their writings, both affirmed life.

Through physical and mental degeneration, abusive relationships, and suicide, Hesse cautioned the reader of the dangers of pessimism, degeneration, and despair. Two final lines from the novel reinforce this notion. First, Kuhn is asked if his handicap made him despondent and if music really makes it better. He responds, “it [his leg] does not please me, you can be sure of that, but I hope it will never bring me to despair.”<sup>339</sup> Second, Kuhn knows that despair will only lead down a dark path. Later in the novel Kuhn adds,

fate was not kind, life was capricious and terrible, and there was no good or reason in nature. But there is good and reason in us, in human beings, with whom fortune plays, and we can be stronger than nature and fate, if only for a few hours...we cannot evade life’s course, but we can school ourselves to be superior to fortune and also to look unflinchingly upon the most painful things.<sup>340</sup>

Kuhn understands that to overcome such a sickness is strength, even if it is fleeting. In true Nietzschean fashion, one must embrace both the pleasure and the pain. Like his character, Hesse

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<sup>336</sup> Hesse, *Gertrude*, 47.

<sup>337</sup> Hesse, *Gertrude*, 18.

<sup>338</sup> Hesse, *Gertrude*, 92.

<sup>339</sup> Hesse, *Gertrude*, 47.

<sup>340</sup> Hesse, *Gertrude*, 213.

was displeased with the current atmosphere surrounding German life and society, but he did not despair, because to do so would be to lose touch with reality and to lose hope for a better future. Instead, one should embrace the pain and pleasure, realizing that both come from the same source. In the end, perhaps, Hesse achieved his goal. *Gertrude* was not his best story, but it was a psychological novel, which offers keen insights into Hesse's reaction to this fin de siècle illness. Rather than fall into the trap of cultural pessimism infiltrating circles of German society, *Gertrude* warned against extremes and the pitfalls of despair.

### *Rosshalde – A Finale?*

*Rosshalde*, Hesse's final prewar novel, is the story of a middle-aged artist, Johann Veraguth, and the decline of family life in early twentieth-century Germany. Johann and his family live separately. His wife and son, Adele and Pierre, reside in the Rosshalde estate, while Johann stays in a studio he built himself away from the manor. Lonely and removed, Johann spends his days painting and secluding himself from external reality. Pierre, however, brings Johann joy and is his only appeal to this life. Both parents struggle over Pierre, as Johann wants the boy to live with him in the studio, but Adele will hear nothing of the sort. One day, an old friend of Johann's, Otto Burckhardt, visits Rosshalde much to the painter's pleasure. Otto, a plantation owner in India, brings fantastic stories, material goods, photographs, and a cheerful disposition with him to Rosshalde. He has a positive effect on the painter, who has isolated himself for so long. Also around the time Otto arrives, Johann's first son, Albert, returns to the estate during school break. In contrast to the welcoming embrace of Otto, Albert and Johann do not get along and avoid each other. When the whole family is at the dinner table one evening,

Otto notices the hopelessness of the Veraguth family. Because of this scene, Otto urges Johann to change this life. The two friends engage in a heated conversation, in which Otto truly sees the bleakness of his friend's situation. Otto tells Johann to let go of his home and past, in order to make a new start in India.

After Otto leaves, his words weigh heavy on Johann's mind. Unsure of what to do, Johann resigns himself to his work while contemplating a decision. Clarity is difficult to obtain, but he eventually resolves that he will go to India in several months' time. Meanwhile, Pierre becomes ill. At first, no one worries, because a doctor assures the parents that the boy just has an upset stomach. Thinking Pierre is on the mend, Johann decides to create one last painting and tells his wife of his plan to leave for India, but she realizes that Johann will leave the family for good once he departs. Soon Pierre's condition takes a turn for the worse, and Adele tells Johann that he can have Pierre. But it is too late for Johann and the boy. Johann obtains Pierre at the moment he decides to begin anew and when the boy is on death's doorstep. The family cannot reconcile wholeheartedly, even during this tribulation. After Pierre dies, the family is torn apart. Johann still plans on settling in India, Albert returns to school, and Johann leaves the Rosshalde estate to Adele, knowing that it will soon be sold.

*Rosshalde* is a tricky *Künstlerroman* to situate. The novel is about many things, including the story of an artist, the decline of family life, friendship, and youth. Hesse admitted that the novel held a unique status for him. He commented, "My novel *Rosshalde* is coming soon as a book, but I see in it only a kind of conclusion to my previous writings that appears more pitiful than ever and I have the feeling that I must either wrap it up entirely or try something new..."<sup>341</sup> In some ways the novel is a finale or packing up, as Hesse returns to many

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<sup>341</sup> Hermann Hesse to Otto Blümel, Bern, December 24, 1913, *Gesammelte Briefe*, 236: "Mein Roman >Roßhalde< kommt bald als Buch, ich sehe darin aber nur eine Art Schlußpunkt unter meine bisherige Dichterei, die mir

themes of his previous works. Johann often paints outdoors and in some moments “nature’s mysterious flow burst through the glassy surface, giving an imitation of the wild, full breath of reality.” Johann also comments that art “permits us not only to feel the oppressive incomprehensibility of all nature but also to love it with a kind of sweet astonishment.”<sup>342</sup> There are also glances into education, through Pierre who wishes he was finished with school and teachers who taught only boring things.<sup>343</sup> The generational conflict is present between Albert and Johann, who hate each other and treat one another “like the ambassadors of two hostile powers.”<sup>344</sup> The resentful son adds, “He has ruined your life and my home, he has turned our beautiful, happy, wonderful Rosshalde into a place of misery and loathing.”<sup>345</sup> Finally, Nietzschean elements appear in *Rosshalde*. Johann observes that formerly the Apollonian and Dionysian elements in art seemed so important but they do not anymore, but creation still holds a particular appeal: “and with relish he breathed the heady air of art, the bitter joy of the creator who must give himself till he stands on the brink of annihilation, and can find the sacred happiness of freedom only in an iron discipline that checks all caprice and gains moments of fulfillment only through ascetic obedience to his sense of truth.”<sup>346</sup>

*Rosshalde*, in many respects, marked the completion and culmination of Hesse’s prewar period. But also central to the story of *Rosshalde* are features of cultural pessimism. Once again, there is an idea of the artist as a degenerate, as a comparison between Johann and Otto makes apparent. Also, criticisms of science and medicine are presented through a conversation about inherited traits and the doctor’s misdiagnosis of Pierre. Finally, Hesse’s comments the

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*kläglicher erscheint als je, und habe das Gefühl, ich müsse nun entweder ganz einpacken oder aber ganze Neues wagen...*”

<sup>342</sup> Hermann Hesse, *Rosshalde*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Bantam, 1972), 7.

<sup>343</sup> Hesse, *Rosshalde*, 20, 52.

<sup>344</sup> Hesse, *Rosshalde*, 48.

<sup>345</sup> Hesse, *Rosshalde*, 105.

<sup>346</sup> Hesse, *Rosshalde*, 92, 95.

agonies of on youth must be noted. Youth was not a new topic to Hesse's work, but the way he treated it this time around signals a definitive change from before.

First, we can return to an idea present in *Gertrude* – the artist as a degenerate. In the previous novel, Kuhn's mother verbally states that the artist lives degenerate lifestyle, but in this work we have no such statement. Nonetheless, the portrayal of Johann's life and a comparison to his friend makes the presence of degeneration clear. First, Johann's relationship with his family is poor. Johann estranges himself from his wife and his eldest son, and lives his daily existence away from his family. In spite of this, the artist does not wish to lose Pierre. Even though Johann seeks to win Pierre's love, the painter's actions suggest otherwise. Johann spends more time in front of a canvas in his studio retreat than with Pierre. Even in moments when the child comes to his father's workshop, the artist cares more for his projects than his son. Pierre comments on this distance whenever he visits his father:

You know, Papa, when I go and see you in the studio, you always stroke my hair and you don't say anything and you have entirely different eyes, and sometimes they're angry. Yes. And then if I say something, I can see by your eyes that you're not listening, you just say yes, yes, and you don't pay attention. And when I come and want to tell you something, I want you to listen to me.<sup>347</sup>

Besides neglecting his son, the messiness of the profession adds to the artist's abnormal lifestyle. Johann's son disparages the profession. Pierre remarks that he cannot stand his father's studio because painting is filthy and the strong fumes give him headaches.<sup>348</sup> But since Johann's work drives his life, this leaves little room for family, even his beloved Pierre. Despite the fact Johann feels shame "at the thought of his impoverished, loveless life," he does nothing to change it. The narrator affirms, "He went back to his painting and indeed, overcoming his disinclination and surrendering to old habit, he recaptured the industrious tension which tolerates no digressions

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<sup>347</sup> Hesse, *Rosshalde*, 87-88.

<sup>348</sup> Hesse, *Rosshalde*, 19.

and concentrates all our energies on the work in hand.”<sup>349</sup> Johann’s art causes him to withdraw from the external world, rather than adapt to it, even at the expense of familial relationships.

The key to understanding the artist as a degenerate, however, lies in a comparison between Johann and Otto. Unlike Johann, Otto has a positive and cheerful disposition and also a healthy mind and body. The businessman’s presence is immediately noticed upon at the estate, as he brings “a lighter, more cheerful, more childlike atmosphere...into the house.”<sup>350</sup> This impression directly contrasts with the air surrounding Johann. When Johann shows Otto around the estate, the old-friend is surprised to learn that the artist is living in the studio. Otto finds the studio to be a wretched place and comments the “general effect was almost of poverty; the home of an ascetic, hard-working bachelor” and “noted with concern the absence of any sign of well-being, creature comfort, or enjoyment of leisure.”<sup>351</sup> Moreover, Otto is physically healthier than the artist. The narrator comments, “the taller and stouter Burkhardt with his ruddy face and warm eyes full of the enjoyment of life stood like a large child before the painter, whose face seemed sharp and severe in its setting of prematurely gray hair.”<sup>352</sup> Johann even notices how much livelier Otto looks than him, and how “every fold of his [Otto’s] clothing breathed self-assurance and serene enjoyment of life.”<sup>353</sup> In contrast, Otto looks upon his friend “surprised that so superior a man should become such a child in misfortune, as though seeking his way blindfolded and with tied hands through brambles.”<sup>354</sup> Physically, the divide between the two friends is vast, as Johann’s path has led him to a miserable sort of existence, but mentally the gulf is deeper.

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<sup>349</sup> Hesse, *Rosshalde*, 10.

<sup>350</sup> Hesse, *Rosshalde*, 24.

<sup>351</sup> Hesse, *Rosshalde*, 29.

<sup>352</sup> Hesse, *Rosshalde*, 27.

<sup>353</sup> Hesse, *Rosshalde*, 30.

<sup>354</sup> Hesse, *Rosshalde*, 46-47.

An after dinner conversation, in which Otto “became fully aware of the loneliness and hopeless coldness that had descended on his friend’s marriage and life,” provides the most telling contrast between the two friends.<sup>355</sup> Otto advises Johann that he cannot go on living the way he is because it is destroying him. Johann’s rebuttal claims that things were never good from the start, and how he intentionally separated himself from his family: “I put myself more and more in the wrong, and in the end I had nothing more to give or communicate. I became more and more industrious and gradually learned to take refuge in my work.”<sup>356</sup> Johann tries to convince Otto that he is fine with this lifestyle because it allows him to focus on his work. But Otto knows the truth and perceptively remarks, “when you tell me one thing and my eyes another, I believe my eyes, and I can see that you’re in a very bad way. Your work keeps you going, but it’s more of an anesthetic than a pleasure... you’re not happy, at best you’re resigned.”<sup>357</sup> Otto argues that Johann is discontented because he has given up hope, and he urges Johann to find hope or else he is a coward who let this disease take him over: “I understand that perfectly, but it’s a horrible state to be in, it’s a nasty abscess, and anyone who has such a thing and refuses to cut it open is a coward.”<sup>358</sup> Otto calls Johann a coward by design, but the painter, who was once quick to offend, is not anymore. Otto encourages Johann to move away from the life he has bound himself to and experience reality once again. He appeals to the painter, “Look, you’ve forgotten what the outside world is like. You sit here buried engrossed in your work and your unhappy marriage. Take the step, break away from all that; you’ll open your eyes and see that the world has thousands of wonderful things to offer you. You’ve been living with dead things

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<sup>355</sup> Hesse, *Rosshalde*, 56.

<sup>356</sup> Hesse, *Rosshalde*, 62.

<sup>357</sup> Hesse, *Rosshalde*, 66-67.

<sup>358</sup> Hesse, *Rosshalde*, 67.

too long, you've lost your contact with life."<sup>359</sup> Otto even warns that this household atmosphere will eventually corrupt Pierre and turn the child into a misfit. And Otto is right. Johann resigns himself to this lifestyle because it gives him an excuse to cut himself from the world and wallow in his melancholy. But the friend's words have an impact on Johann. While a change is not instantaneous, Johann's conversation with Otto slowly begins to influence the painter. Johann feels "his old illusion, the sick illusion that he was an old man who could do no more than endure life. The deep, potent hypnosis of resignation had been broken, and through the breach poured the unconscious instinctual forces of a lifelong curbed and cheated."<sup>360</sup> It is the ability to let go and change which Johann learns from Otto that allows him move beyond his egoism later on.

In *Rosshalde*, Hesse also offers some interesting comments on scientific issues, specifically on inherited traits and medical treatment. Hereditary traits were common in discussions about social Darwinism and degeneration during the fin de siècle. Some scientists who believed that the world was in decline, thought that degenerative traits were inherited. In contrast to these opinions, Hesse argued against the pessimistic view that traits are congenital, but that upbringing has a greater impact on one's life. He presented this debate in a discussion between Albert and Adele who are having a conversation on the attributes that each of the children have acquired from their parents. Albert, who is a student, would probably be familiar with the scientific notions surrounding heredity. He remarks, "my friends say that every child has all the elements in him that will shape his whole life, and that there's nothing to be done about it, absolutely nothing. For instance, if somebody has the making of a thief or a murderer it just can't be helped, he'll be a criminal and that's that. It's horrible. You believe it, don't you?"

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<sup>359</sup> Hesse, *Rosshalde*, 74.

<sup>360</sup> Hesse, *Rosshalde*, 81.

It's absolutely scientific." The educated young man considers such an idea to be true, because it is based on science. But Adele has a different notion. She counters,

When a person becomes a thief or a murderer, scientists may be able to prove that he has always had it in him. But I'm sure there are lots of good straight people who have inherited plenty of evil from their parents and grandparents and go on being good all the same, but science can't very well investigate that. I should say that good will and a good upbringing are more reliable than heredity. We all know what's good and right, or we can learn, and that's what we've got to go by. Nobody knows exactly what hereditary mysteries any man has inside him, and it's best not to worry too much about them.<sup>361</sup>

Despite his academic conviction, Albert immediately comprehends that his mother's reaction is right. In contrast, to cultural pessimists who believed that science offered proof of degeneration, Albert, like Hesse, understands that a person cannot be appraised solely based on the traits of his or her ancestors. Such thinking narrowly reduced people to groups and did not take the individual person into consideration, a consideration that mattered for Hesse. Additionally, Hesse implied that science does not contain all of the answers. He concluded that science, while attempting to establish a grand narrative can fall short, and that one must be cautious as to not let such interpretations cloud one's judgment.

Hesse elaborated further on this doubt about scientific progress in the sections involving the doctor's treatment of Pierre. When Pierre first falls ill, Johann immediately finds the village doctor to check on his son. The doctor's presence is soothing, not because of any treatment performed, but rather because he creates "an atmosphere of businesslike confidence" which puts the family at ease. Without haste, he examines the boy, and determines that the "obviously sensitive and nervous" child is suffering from a spoiled stomach.<sup>362</sup> He tells the parents there is no need to worry. But Pierre does not recover as the doctor thought. In fact, the boy's situation worsens. When the doctor returns to Rosshalde, he is "struck by the intense look of revulsion

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<sup>361</sup> Hesse, *Rosshalde*, 109.

<sup>362</sup> Hesse, *Rosshalde*, 142.

and misery in the child's face."<sup>363</sup> Overcoming his initial shock, the doctor asks the family questions about the child's behavior in order to formulate a diagnosis, but in reality, it appears that he knows little of the true nature of the illness.

Several days later, the doctor returns looking for Johann with news of Pierre's ailment. The doctor finds Johann's servant, but the servant tells him that the painter is working and cannot be disturbed. He leaves a telegram for Johann that states, "Not as insignificant as I thought preferable to tell your wife."<sup>364</sup> Upon receiving the note, Johann rushes to the doctor's office, but the answers he provides to the painter are vague and not assuring. The doctor reticently tells Johann, "if I'm not greatly mistaken, your little boy is dangerously ill," suggesting that the disease is meningitis. Naturally, Johann inquires whether his son's condition will improve. The wavering doctor remarks, "The decision between life and death doesn't rest with us. Every day we physicians meet with surprises. As long as a patient has breath, we have hope for him."<sup>365</sup> The doctor does not even answer Johann's question of the disease's treatability and the father continues to ask the doctor questions. Finally, all the doctor can say is "whether your child will get well, we don't know."<sup>366</sup> This less than reassuring doctor reveals the paradoxes in science and medicine at that time. While science supposedly progressed to the point that it claimed it could determine criminality, it still could not properly diagnose and help a sick child. Hesse remarked that scientific advancements were misplaced and untrustworthy. If science put as much time into curing real diseases rather than falsely trying to link inherited traits to criminality, then it could truly progress.

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<sup>363</sup> Hesse, *Rosshalde*, 158.

<sup>364</sup> Hesse, *Rosshalde*, 166.

<sup>365</sup> Hesse, *Rosshalde*, 171.

<sup>366</sup> Hesse, *Rosshalde*, 172.

Finally, with Pierre's fate at hand, Hesse once again returned to his beloved topic, the special qualities and sufferings of youth. According to Lewis Tusken, the key to the novel is not Johann, but Pierre. Tusken remarks, "Veraguth-Hesse is longing to regain those childlike qualities that are identified with Pierre, i.e., the closeness to nature that is also the *sine qua non* of artistic greatness."<sup>367</sup> In *Rosshalde*, Pierre characterizes the freedom for which young Hesse yearned: "Pierre was very well off, better off indeed than children whose parents live in harmony; his upbringing was not regulated by any program, and when, as sometimes happened, he was in trouble in his mother's domain, the lakeside territory offered him a secure refuge."<sup>368</sup> Pierre wants to finish school, so that he can run around outdoors and get dirty, but without being scolded, of course.<sup>369</sup> Also, Pierre hopes to stay young and not become an adult. He remarks, "But I don't really want to grow up. Old people can be so disagreeable."<sup>370</sup> He even comments that he does not want to do anything when he grows up. He wants to be "nothing. I'd like best to be a bird or something like that."<sup>371</sup> Pierre desires to roam free and live a natural life. But his freedom and naturalness does not last, as the boy seems to know his fate by looking upon his family. He is present when Johann and Otto reminisce upon their lost youths, and Johann laments, "the disappointment of his young hopes, and the joyless half existence, at odds with his innermost nature, to which he had been condemned."<sup>372</sup> Pierre is aware of his father's melancholy and his family's poor relationship, and his sickness frees him from this fate.

Pierre's death is more than just the novel's symbolic end of the Veraguth family and the Rosshalde estate. His death signifies an important event in Hesse's writings. The language of

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<sup>367</sup> Lewis W. Tusken. "Hermann Hesse's 'Roßhalde': The Story in the Paintings" *Monatshefte*, Vol. 77, No. 1 (Spring, 1985): 60-66. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30157503> (accessed March 6, 2013), 63.

<sup>368</sup> Hesse, *Rosshalde*, 3.

<sup>369</sup> Hesse, *Rosshalde*, 20.

<sup>370</sup> Hesse, *Rosshalde*, 52.

<sup>371</sup> Hesse, *Rosshalde*, 115.

<sup>372</sup> Hesse, *Rosshalde*, 62.

Pierre's death scene is more brutal and violent than anything Hesse had written before. In contrast to Boppi, who dies in pain but happy, or Hans who appears sublime when drawn from the river, Pierre's death is intense and hideous. Lying on his sickbed, the narrator comments, "What remained was a pale, prematurely aged face, a gruesome mask with simplified features, in which nothing could be read but pain and disgust and profound horror."<sup>373</sup> The child has aged beyond his years. Not only could the parents physically see this, but Pierre notices it mentally as well: "Pierre looked back into his childhood, which had still been reality days and weeks ago, with the yearning and sadness of an adult. He was no longer a child. He was an invalid from whom the world of reality had slipped away and whose soul, grown clairvoyant, already sense the presence of lurking death on all sides."<sup>374</sup> Moments before death, Pierre lets out a piercing scream, "so full of deep animal suffering." His family runs up the stairs to find the child dying, "as white as snow, his mouth hideously distorted; his emaciated limbs writhed in furious convulsions, his eyes stared in unreasoning horror..."<sup>375</sup> If Pierre is the key to the novel and if he represents the freedom and purity of youth, his death surely has great significance.

This pessimistic ending is remarkable, considering Hesse's love of youth and his attempt to affirm life. Does this scene refute Hesse's optimism in an age of despair? Or is it a finale that will allow Hesse to have a new start? Despite Pierre's horrendous death, *Rosshalde* actually urges the reader to overcome despair. In fact, the novel is about surmounting the worst kind of anguish for Hesse, the death of youth. Above all, Johann, just like Hesse, trembles at the thought of letting go of his youth and past, and Pierre's death is forceful in accomplishing this. Even in the face of this tragedy, Johann affirms his own life and his new path since he still plans on moving to India. The artist discards his egoism, by listening to his friend and letting go of his

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<sup>373</sup> Hesse, *Rosshalde*, 176.

<sup>374</sup> Hesse, *Rosshalde*, 186.

<sup>375</sup> Hesse, *Rosshalde*, 188-189.

beloved son and family. As he leaves, Johann allows his family to do as they please, giving them the freedom to make their own futures too. *Rosshalde*, read in this way, is not only an affirmation of life, but a finale to the early writings of Hesse. Hesse wrote the greatest tragedy he could think of so that he could affirm life, in the face of the worst kind of despair, in order to move onto new pastures.

### Conclusion

The last few decades before outbreak of the Great War witnessed an overwhelming sense of optimism because of the progress of modernity. Government policies and city life were improving, which helped all classes obtain better lifestyles. Science was also on the rise, and many intellectuals thought that science would one day secure the well-being of everyone. In spite of these trends, some thinkers believed that Europe was in a state of decay. Cultural pessimists rejected the positive aspects of progress while looking toward darker cultural characteristics. These individuals ranged from reactionary, *völkisch* thinkers, like Julius Langbehn, to liberal positivists, like Max Nordau. Regardless of ideological differences, many intellectuals viewed modern progress in a pessimistic light.

Interestingly, Hesse latched onto these ideas in his final prewar novels. While matters of cultural pessimism and degeneration are not central focus of each work, these ideas strikingly appear within *Gertrude* and *Rosshalde*. *Gertrude* describes how the artist is perceived as a degenerate in society. This is because the artist can be a violent, suicidal, alcoholic, but more simply because he is an artist. *Rosshalde*, in a similar vein, continues with this idea as the artist as a degenerate, but this time by showing how the artist withdraws from the world and lives a

corrupt family life. Despite these acknowledgments of degeneration, Hesse offered an escape from this disease. Hesse countered pessimists and degenerates by telling them to rescind their egoism and affirm life. He acknowledged that this ailment is a fad in Europe, but one that is surmountable. In a time of such rapid change and progress, Hesse offered a moderate answer to cultural despair.

## EPILOGUE: HESSE AND THE GREAT WAR

“How lovely it would be, for instance, if a war had broken out and a lot of soldiers came up the road on horseback, or if a house was on fire somewhere or there was a big flood. Ah, such things only happened in picture books, in real life you never got to see them, maybe they didn’t even exist,” Pierre pondered as he wandered about the Rosshalde estate one melancholic evening.<sup>376</sup> The tragic youth, dreaming of a large-scale, world event, did not think that such a thing was possible, yet, such an event arrived in 1914. Just a few months after Hesse published *Rosshalde*, war broke out in Europe. According to Ziolkowski, *Rosshalde* had prophetic significance and foreshadowed Hesse’s own turmoil and the outbreak of the First World War.<sup>1</sup> While it may not be feasible to connect this novel with the outbreak of war, the story did signal an end to the Swabian period of Hesse’s career.<sup>377</sup> The Great War not only shook the foundations of Europe, but it also unsettled Hesse’s world. Even though Hesse did not fight in the conflict and experience the trenches, as did other authors, 1914-1918 proved to be a difficult period in his life. The brutality and duration of the war, along with a series of personal issues, exhausted Hesse’s mind. The author, who appealed to pacifism and transnational humanitarianism, increasingly expected little hope in a positive outcome. Even though he did not write as much during the war, Hesse’s wartime words reflected on his conflict with the war and his appeals to humanity. By the end of the Great War Hesse was a different man.

When the war broke out, Hesse found himself at a crossroads. Hesse’s generally unpolitical and pacifist leanings conflicted with an initial support for Germany. Hesse

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<sup>376</sup> Hesse, *Rosshalde*, 111.

<sup>377</sup> Ziolkowski, *Novels*, 4-5.

commented that early on his “sympathies and aspirations belong[ed] to Germany.”<sup>378</sup> In a letter to his father, just weeks into the war, Hesse declared his wish for German victory, so that his homeland could be the first voice in the peace settlement. Hesse believed that a German led peace would be better for the future life and culture of Europe than a peace settled by British “moneybags and illiterate Russians.”<sup>379</sup> But Hesse did not desire total German military conquest, rather he wanted Germany to be a benevolent victor.<sup>380</sup> The reason Hesse hoped for a German victory originated in his belief in Romanticism, which he thought could be the basis for a more humanitarian and international Europe.

Even though Hesse proclaimed his affinity for Germany, his antiwar sentiments remained more powerful. He remarked that “the beginning of the war tore me apart,” and that he was “tormented by the brutality” of the fighting.<sup>381</sup> The author found death and destruction unnecessary, and realized that the great offensives senselessly slaughtered countless soldiers – “The Balkans eat men alive, and the ridiculous French offensive has unnecessarily devoured tens of thousands more.”<sup>382</sup> More importantly, Hesse could not support the rampant outburst of nationalism overwhelming the country, since he found the idea utterly repulsive.<sup>383</sup> He criticized

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<sup>378</sup> Hermann Hesse, “O Freunde, nicht diese Töne!” in *If the War Goes On...: Reflections on War and Politics*, trans. Ralph Mannheim (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1971), 9.

<sup>379</sup> Hermann Hesse to Johannes Hesse, Bern, September 9, 1914, *Gesammelte Briefe*, 244-246. “Wenn das geschähe, und wenn Osterreich halbwegs aushält, dann könnte Deutschland beim Friedensschliessen die erste Stimme haben, und es wäre für Leben und Kultur der nächsten Zukunft etwas zu hoffen. Anderfalls käme England oherauf, und dann wäre Europa in Händen dieser Geldsäcke und der analphabeten Russen...”

<sup>380</sup> Hermann Hesse to Sister Adele, Bern, February 27, 1915, *Gesammelte Briefe*, 269. “Einstweilen wünsche ich freilich unsrem Vaterland lauter Sieg, aber nicht, um die andern tot zu machen, sondern um als Führer oder doch starker Mitführer eines einiger werdenden Europa weiterzuarbeiten[...].”

<sup>381</sup> Hermann Hesse to Harry Maync, Bern, September 1914, *Gesammelte Briefe*, 247. “ich war bei Beginn des Krieges verweist...”

Hermann Hesse to Conrad Haussmann, Bern, October 25, 1914, *Gesammelte Briefe*, 247-248. “Am Krieg plagt mich zur Zeit am meisten die Brutalität” (Hesse uses the verb *plagen*, to torment, with a much higher frequency during his wartime letters)

<sup>382</sup> Hermann Hesse to Mathilde Schwarzenbach, Bern, September 1915, *Gesammelte Briefe*, 283-284. “Der Balkan wird nun auch Leute fressen, und die dumme grosse Offensive der Franzosen hat auch wieder ganz unnutz viele Zehntausende verschlungen.”

<sup>383</sup> Hermann Hesse to Volkmar Andreä, Bern, December 26, 1914, *Gesammelte Briefe*, 255.

people who did not wish for peace but a war of conquest.<sup>384</sup> Also, the hyper-nationalist outlook on literature, which expressed itself so regularly after 1914, concerned the author. He professed that “the general boycott against the art and poetry of ‘foreign’ people is a painful derailment.”<sup>385</sup> Hesse lamented the loss of borrowed culture in wartime society – “A lovely Japanese fairy tale, a good French novel... must now be passed over in silence.” Besides diminished cultural exchange, Hesse bemoaned how certain artists and scholars participated in the war effort by “writing bloodthirsty war songs or rabid articles fomenting hatred among nations.”

Overwhelming nationalism, not only in Germany, but in all belligerent countries, devalued cultural interchange and a sense of universal brotherhood that Hesse believed to be essential for peace.<sup>386</sup> Hesse grieved over this development because the artist had a duty to society to stand above the war and speak for humanity.

Above all, Hesse concerned himself about the future of Europe. Hesse thought that Europe’s nations must get over this conflict and their respective faults in order to secure a more humane future. Just a few months into the war Hesse commented, “that we must become better friends with England and France as soon as possible and better than before, seems to me essential for the future and that would have been easier without war. France’s miserable politics, England’s jealousy, and our own political mistakes must now be atoned for... who was or wasn’t ‘guilty’ cannot be discussed...”<sup>387</sup> Hesse desired that the European powers become friends and

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<sup>384</sup> Hermann Hesse to Conrad Haussmann, Bern, July 15, 1915, *Gesammelte Briefe*, 273-274. “Sorge macht mir nur die starke AntiFriedensstimmung, bei uns und noch mehr in Frankreich. Die Akquisitionslust mancher Patrioten bei uns, die den Krieg geradezu als Eroberungskrieg könnte erscheinen lassen, macht auch keinen guten Eindruck im Ausland.”

<sup>385</sup> Hermann Hesse to Conrad Haussmann, October 25, 1914, *Gesammelte Briefe*, 247-248. “der allgemeine Boykott gegen Kunst und Dichtung ‘feindlicher’ Voelker ist eine arge Entgleisung.”

<sup>386</sup> Hesse, “O Freunde, nicht diese Töne,” 10-12

<sup>387</sup> Hermann Hesse to Alfred Schlenker, November 10, 1914, *Gesammelte Briefe*, 248-250. “Wir müssen nachher so bald als moeglich mit England und Frankreich besser Freund warden als vorher, das scheint mir für die Zukunft unentbehrlich, und das wäre ohne den Krieg besser gegangen. Frankreichs miserable Politik, Englands Eifersucht, unsre eignen politischen Fehler müssen wir nun büssen, und mit uns bluten Österreich, Belgien, Frankreich

learn to work together because that was the only way to secure lasting peace. He anticipated a new European spirit after the war, one that was devoid of nationalism, but one overflowing with a Goethean spirit. Hesse turned to Goethe in this time because the famous author's internationalism and devotion to humanity could be a model for the future. According to Hesse, Goethe "was never a patriot" contaminated by German nationalism, but "a citizen and patriot in the international world of thought, of inner freedom, of intellectual conscience." Hesse believed in the guidance provided by Goethe, arguing that "there will be war until the majority of human beings are able to live in the Goethean realm of the human spirit."<sup>388</sup> The pacifist author explored beyond national concerns into the realm of transnationalism in hopes of European regeneration, but the shouts of nationalism drowned him out.

Hesse's appeals for a humanitarian and transnational European future went unheeded, as the German public attacked the author's pacifism. In an increasingly nationalistic Germany, the press condemned Hesse's ideal of a "duty to transnational humanity," "*Verpflichtung zu übernationaler Humanität*."<sup>389</sup> The press further criticized the author for not doing his duty and fighting for Germany, even though a doctor assessed that Hesse was not fit for service, *nicht felddienstfähig*.<sup>390</sup> Hesse did not avoid service to the war effort, however, since he acquired a position as a civil servant working for prisoners of war, specifically a prisoners' library system. Naturally, many considered such a service inessential to the war effort. As the conflict raged on, Hesse began to lose hope in society. In an open letter in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* in October 1915, Hesse remarked that the possibility of communication dwindled severely and that there

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*furchtbar mit. Wer da 'schuldig' sei oder nicht, kann nicht diskutiert werden, und fuer jede Partei is es nötig, fest an ihrer Recht zu glauben."*

<sup>388</sup> Hesse, "O Freunde, nicht diese Töne," 12-14.

<sup>389</sup> Hermann Hesse to Conrad Haussmann, Bern, October 1916, *Gesammelte Briefe*, 290-291.

<sup>390</sup> Hermann Hesse to Fritz Brun, Bern, January 14, 1916, *Gesammelte Briefe*, 317.

appeared no possibility of peace.<sup>391</sup> Hesse believed that the masses were becoming ever more blind and irresponsible because of the war, claiming that they had chosen the murderer Barabbas over Jesus.<sup>392</sup> The strain of defending his pacifist position, in combination with personal issues, caused the author's mental breakdown in 1916.

In March 1916, Hesse's father passed away, and this was followed by his wife's admittance into a sanatorium only a few months later. These personal issues, along with the attacks Hesse received in press, instigated a mental collapse. As a result, Hesse undertook a new and popular form of therapy, psychoanalysis. Hesse visited J.B. Lang, a student of Carl Jung, in Lucerne over sixty times during the following year and a half.<sup>393</sup> As part of his therapy, Hesse painted. Increasingly, he lost the desire to write and became more like his character Johann Veraguth, a painter who isolated himself from the world. Hesse wrote to his friend and fellow pacifist, Romain Rolland, that he felt lonely, sick, and bitter during this phase of his life.<sup>394</sup> As a result of the war and his mental breakdown, Hesse's relationship with the world changed, as he began to turn away from the external realm toward the inner self.<sup>395</sup>

Hesse recovered enough to return to an active life just before the war's end, but the author had lost faith in politics. Hesse personally disdained politics as a result of his own work with prisoners of war. Not only was the author upset that the prisoners received only awful books, such as propaganda, but the inhuman treatment of prisoners genuinely enraged him.

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<sup>391</sup> Hermann Hesse, "Brief aus Bern," Bern, October 13, 1915, *Gesammelte Briefe*, 291-296.

<sup>392</sup> Hermann Hesse to Hans Sturzenegger, Bern, January 3, 1917, *Gesammelte Briefe*, 342-344. "Die Völker sind immer dumm gewesen. Sie haben auch, als sie die Wahl zwischen Jesus und dem Mörder hatten, mit grossem Eifer für den Barrabas gestimmt. Sie werden vielleicht immer für den Barrabas stimmen. Aber das ist doch kein Grund für mich, mitzustimmen."

<sup>393</sup> Hesse engaged in a dialogue with Jung, too. Jung would have been a fitting guide for Hesse, since the psychologist sought to help the modern individual cope with living in a disenchanted world. For more on Jung see Jay Sherry, *Carl Gustav Jung: Avant-Garde Conservative* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010).

<sup>394</sup> Hermann Hesse to Romain Rolland, Bern, August 4, 1917, *Gesammelte Briefe*, 358.

<sup>395</sup> Hermann Hesse to Felix Braun, Bern, June 7, 1917, *Gesammelte Briefe*, 348-349. "Der Krieg hat mich an neue Beziehung zur Welt gebracht, wie jeden, aber mich nicht politisiert. Im Gegenteil, Äusere Welt und innere scheiden sich mire noch schaefer als sonst, und was mich interessiet, is lediglich die innere."

Hesse blamed prisoner conditions on reckless politics, which overlooked everything humane and turned a blind eye to prisoners who were not only treated poorly, but systematically ruined.<sup>396</sup> In an article from August 1917, called “To a Cabinet Minister,” Hesse publicly announced his lack of faith in politicians. Hesse comments on a speech from one German minister, but it was a speech that one could hear from the mouth of any minister from any of the belligerent nations. In his speech, the minister claimed that his nation wanted peace and collaboration, but it was not yet attainable, so the war must go on. The tone of the speech lacks love and humanity, but implies “hundreds of thousands more human sacrifices.” The author argues that the minister’s lack of culture makes it difficult for him to comprehend this dilemma and how “a parable of Jesus, a line of Goethe, or a saying of Lao-tzu” would open up his eyes. The article urges the minister to seek culture and humanity and to sacrifice money and prestige in order to condemn the war. Hesse believed that such a speech would be a step in the right direction, but knew that very few would be willing to take it.<sup>397</sup>

Hesse realized that politicians only wanted war to end if it meant victory. Four months later, Hesse reflected on the unlikely cessation of hostilities in “Shall There Be Peace?” The article opens with Hesse reaffirming politicians’ “unswerving will to fight on till final victory,” and because of this “everything goes on as before, and if anywhere a peaceful blade of grass tries to pierce the ground, a military boot is quick to trample it.” Even though peace talks had begun in the East, Hesse worries about an offensive on the Western Front that would result in “the final hideous triumph of dynamite and machines over human life and the human spirit!” In this dire situation, the article calls upon mankind to do what the politicians could not, be earnest and seek

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<sup>396</sup> Hermann Hesse to Max Bucherer, Bern, December 25, 1917, *Gesammelte Briefe*, 366-368. “*rücksichtslos Politik über alles Menschliche...nicht nur schlecht behandelt, sondern fast systematisch ruiniert.*” An article Christmas also comments on this

<sup>397</sup> Hermann Hesse, “To a Cabinet Minister,” in *If the War Goes On...: Reflections on War and Politics*, trans. Ralph Mannheim (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1971), 15-19.

an end to hostilities.<sup>398</sup> As late as the summer of 1918, Hesse considered the possibility of peace as distant. In another article, Hesse declared that Europe does not know peace, an age-old ideal that is difficult to attain, and dejectedly asserts that the magnitude, mechanization, and horror has not frightened people about the realities of war.<sup>399</sup> War seemed likely to continue, but within a few months of this article, the hostilities concluded.

Immediately after the armistice was signed, Hesse reflected on the war experience in several essays. In a piece called "History." Hesse described the history he had been taught in Latin school, specifically the history of the War of 1870, which depicted the Prussian victory as a glorious and heroic event. Pictures of Bismarck hung on every wall, and Sedan Day was the greatest holiday of the year. Such a glorious portrayal of war had captivated his schoolmates, but as a young man Hesse realized that this history "was a hoax devised by grownups in order to belittle us and keep us in our places." As a result, Hesse began to distrust official voices. He remarked that once the Great War broke out, the masses talked about the "greatness of the times," something he failed to perceive. Instead of this herd attitude, Hesse valued those people who listened to their own soul and lived by their principles during the conflict. When the war finally ended, Hesse found the public's response strange because they did not rejoice the end of irrational killing. Instead, people either celebrated the end of despotism or their nation's victory, but "not the fact that after four years of horror the senseless shooting has stopped."<sup>400</sup>

Hesse contemplated the outcome of the war in two more articles, both written in December 1918. In the story called "The Reich," Hesse briefly outlined the history of modern

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<sup>398</sup> Hermann Hesse, "Shall There Be Peace?," in *If the War Goes On...: Reflections on War and Politics*, trans. Ralph Mannheim (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1971), 33-38.

<sup>399</sup> Hermann Hesse, "War and Peace," in *If the War Goes On...: Reflections on War and Politics*, trans. Ralph Mannheim (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1971), 57-60.

<sup>400</sup> Hermann Hesse, "History," in *If the War Goes On...: Reflections on War and Politics*, trans. Ralph Mannheim (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1971), 61-68.

Germany. The story tells of a poor and divided land, but one rich in poets, thinkers, and musicians. Eventually, however, this land unites and industrializes. The once poor and divided land becomes rich and, losing touch with its heritage of art and culture, now praises money and power. Its growing strength alarms neighboring states and these sides break out into war. Even though the country is defeated, a light beckons. If the defeated nation looks inward and recaptures its old essence the country could thrive again.<sup>401</sup> Hesse hoped that the war would be an educational experience for Germany, and he described this in his second December article “The Path of Love.” The article criticizes Germans for misbehaving like children during the war, and advises Germany to bear the consequences. The author urges Germany to accept defeat and to grow from it. Hesse reasons that Germany needs to follow a path of sincerity and love in order to secure a promising future. He also hopes that ideas such as the League of Nations and disarmament will be seriously considered. If such a path is traveled, the article contends, the war will not have been fought in vain.<sup>402</sup> Hesse believed that much work still needed to happen, since the Great War confirmed that at “present-day mankind is still far closer to the gorilla than to man. We are not yet human, we are on the way to humanity.”<sup>403</sup> In order to achieve this goal, Hesse begged Germans to look both inward and towards humanity. He discouraged the herd instinct, all too common in a time of mass politics, counseling instead an altruistic self-will.<sup>404</sup>

Even though Hesse claimed that he turned away from writing during the war, especially when he began to paint, the author still wrote several short stories, besides the articles mentioned above, that are of importance regarding his changing worldview. In his letters, Hesse mentioned

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<sup>401</sup> Hermann Hesse, “The Reich,” in *If the War Goes On...: Reflections on War and Politics*, trans. Ralph Mannheim (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1971), 67-72.

<sup>402</sup> Hermann Hesse, “The Path of Love,” in *If the War Goes On...: Reflections on War and Politics*, trans. Ralph Mannheim (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1971), 73-78.

<sup>403</sup> Hermann Hesse, “Thou Shalt Not Kill,” in *If the War Goes On...: Reflections on War and Politics*, trans. Ralph Mannheim (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1971), 123-127.

<sup>404</sup> Hermann Hesse, “Self-will,” in *If the War Goes On...: Reflections on War and Politics*, trans. Ralph Mannheim (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1971), 79-85.

that he was incapable of writing a war novel or war poetry, which is understandable since he did not live the front experience that gives this genre its aura. But when the war broke out, Hesse declared that the world needed a return to poetry, because only through poetry could a peaceful Goethean age be realized. While he did not write as voluminously as before, Hesse still produced stimulating pieces of fiction beginning with the 1915 novella *Knulp*. Hesse deemed *Knulp* one of his favorite writings, perhaps because it was a reflection on his own life in a time of uncertainty.<sup>405</sup> The story seemingly has little to do with the war, but it also signifies the break in Hesse's style that he hoped for around the time of *Rosshalde*. Divided into three parts, the story describes the life of a sociable wanderer by the name of Knulp.

Part One, "Early Spring," introduces Knulp after he had been discharged from a hospital due to his poor health. After a few days on the road Knulp finds shelter with an old friend, Emil Rothfuss, a tanner in the village Lächstetten. While at his friend's, Knulp asks Rothfuss if he has any children, to which the tanner replies, "No, not yet... It's better to wait for the first few years."<sup>406</sup> Later in the conversation Rothfuss wonders why Knulp chose the existence he did instead of becoming a master craftsman and living a normal life. Knulp answers by going to bed. The next day, when Rothfuss questions his friend again, Knulp answers, "The way I see it, everybody's got to figure out for himself what's true and what life is like; those are things that you can't learn from any book."<sup>407</sup> Eventually, one evening after taking a neighbor girl out dancing, Knulp returns to Rothfuss's home only to find the tanner's wife, who is in love with the vagabond, waiting for him, and he knows it is time to leave. Perhaps Hesse was reflecting on his own life choices, wondering if he should have married, had children, taken up an honest

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<sup>405</sup> Hermann Hesse to Stefan Zweig, Bern, November 20, 1915, *Gesammelte Briefe*, 306-307. "Der [*Knulp*] ist mir, neben *Rosshalde* und einigen Gedichten, das Liebste von meinen Schriften."

<sup>406</sup> Hermann Hesse, *Knulp: Three Tales From the Life of Knulp*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1971), 6.

<sup>407</sup> Hesse, *Knulp*, 27.

profession, or even become a vagabond. While this section is more personal for Hesse, the following provides insight into his political outlook.

In “My Recollections of Knulp,” we learn more of the main character from an unidentified vagabond. The two vagrants find themselves lying in a meadow together and begin converse about beauty and the sublime. They talk of beautiful women and scenes in nature, but Knulp adds a darker element to this beauty. He states, “But there’s more to it. The most beautiful things, I think, give us something else besides pleasure; they also leave us with a feeling of sadness or fear.”<sup>408</sup> This discussion is followed by thoughts on good and evil, the human soul, and politics. During these talks Knulp revealed that he wished to be in the Salvation Army because members of this group are serious and earnest. Knulp states,

I’ve spoken with a lot of people and listened to a lot of speeches. I’ve listened to priest and schoolteachers and mayors and Social Democrats and Liberals; but deep in his heart not a one of them was in earnest; not a one made me feel that if need be he’d sacrifice himself for his wisdom. But in the Salvation Army, with all the music and ruckus, I’ve seen and heard two or three fellows who were really in earnest.<sup>409</sup>

Even though this passage says nothing about war, the quote reveals Hesse’s lack of faith in the politicians: the same politicians who led Germany into war. Social Democrats and Liberals should have been voices of reason, and sought a path other than war, but both supported the declaration of war and the war effort. Hesse disapproved these actions, and desired for politicians to be more sincere, like members of the Salvation Army. Perhaps if politicians were more genuine war could have been avoided. The second part ends with Knulp absconding from his fellow vagabond one night after a day of drinking.

In the final section, “The End,” Hesse returns to two themes that are especially important in his early works, education and youth, and brings Knulp’s life to its conclusion. The chapter

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<sup>408</sup> Hesse, *Knulp*, 55.

<sup>409</sup> Hesse, *Knulp*, 66.

opens in classic early Hesse style, describing nature on a bright October day. As Knulp wanders back to his birth village he runs into an old classmate from Latin school, Machold, who is now a doctor. Machold realizes that Knulp is sick with consumption and offers him aid. The old friends strike up a conversation, in which Knulp reveals a great deal about his youth. After a few days' rest, Machold sends Knulp to a hospital in Gerbersau, but Knulp does not go. Instead Knulp wanders the countryside. The story culminates with Knulp's conversation with God. The vagabond wonders about his life's choices, and responding to his doubt God answers, "Look, I wanted you the way you are and no different. You were a wanderer in my name and wherever you went you brought the settled folk a little homesickness for freedom."<sup>410</sup> This statement brings peace to Knulp, who can now accept his end. Perhaps the reason Hesse enjoyed writing this story was that he too was coming to terms with his own life in this time of uncertainty. Like Knulp, Hesse wished to return home during the war, but as a resident of Switzerland, he found it extremely difficult to travel to Germany. Not only did Hesse project onto Knulp his desire to see his childhood home, but also his wish to come to terms with his life's choices, during a time of turmoil and strain. In the end, *Knulp* provides a unique insight into Hesse's mental state during the war.

Even if this novella pleased Hesse, several of his short stories provide profounder insights into the war experience. During the war, Hesse produced two tales that stand out among his fictional war writings for their dystopian overtones. The first, "If the War Goes on Another Two Years," written at the end of 1917, introduces Emil Sinclair, the hero of *Demian*. Dejected by the war, Sinclair had withdrawn from the world into another realm, called the "cosmos." Upon returning to society, in 1920, he hopes to find the world at peace, but is disappointed to discover that the war is still ongoing. In fact, conditions are much worse than when he initially departed.

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<sup>410</sup> Hesse, *Knulp*, 113.

The world is divided into two factions that engage in constant war, because “if eternal peace was not to be had, both parties were resolutely committed to eternal war.” As a result, the state directs and controls every component of society. Sinclair awakens to this world, and is soon arrested for not having proper documentation. The fact that Sinclair is well-dressed, carries no papers, and is clueless about the present order surprises the officials questioning this cosmic wanderer. But Sinclair is equally shocked at the dystopic world he woke up to, so much so that he declares, “I have an enormous desire to die.” Dismayed by the situation, Sinclair frees himself from the civil servants, who had granted him temporary documentation, and he hides under a bush and retreats back to the “cosmos.”<sup>411</sup>

With no end of the war in sight, Hesse followed this short story with another called “If the War Goes on Another Five Years,” in the beginning of 1918. The year is now 1925, and the war continues and the dystopic state remains. In order to aid in the war effort, the state has turned to drastic measures including the “elimination of citizens demonstrably unfit for public service.” In the story, a seventy-year-old man named Philipp Gassner is deemed such a citizen, but when the public officials come to the old man’s house, they are shocked to find the old man recalcitrant. The officials question his patriotism since he is unwilling to make the same sacrifice as youths at the front. During the questioning, the officials discover a twenty-six year old man in the home, who happens to be Gassner’s son. Interestingly, the son knows nothing of war, because Gassner had isolated him from the outside world for over a decade. The officials bring in Gassner’s son. The state finds this man a fascinating psychological anomaly and is excited about the possibility to scientifically investigate this “prewar man.”<sup>412</sup> In both of these

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<sup>411</sup> Hermann Hesse, “If the War Goes on Another Two Years,” in *If the War Goes On...: Reflections on War and Politics*, trans. Ralph Mannheim (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1971), 20-28.

<sup>412</sup> Hermann Hesse, “If the War Goes on Another Five Years,” in *If the War Goes On...: Reflections on War and Politics*, trans. Ralph Mannheim (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1971), 39-42.

tales, Hesse pondered on the dark and grim possibilities that lie in Europe's future if the war continued. In a world of rampant nationalism and with politicians who wanted to secure their nation's victory, only a short leap needed to be taken for a totalitarian dystopia to form, in Hesse's mind. Faced with such a desolate future, Hesse longed for divine intervention to save the world from its current state.

In January 1918, Hesse recreated the story of Noah's Ark in a piece titled "The European." The tale opens with God saving the world from war by means of a great flood. Even as the earth floods, Europe continues to fight its war until the bitter end. After the earth is flooded, a lone European floats about the sea recording the events that had just taken place until an ark eventually rescues him. Onboard the ark, all of the animals and people saved entertain and enjoy themselves, while the European silently spends his days to himself – "All were sociable and merry, only the Europeans held aloof, busy with his writing." One day, Noah announces a "merry contest" where the passengers are to perform a feat in which they excel. All the creatures display their magnificent talents, all except the European. When questioned about his gift, the European replies, "My gift is the intellect." This baffles the passengers, who ask to see his intellect in action, but the European states one cannot visibly show intellect. Some take him to be a joker, but many others wonder why a man from the war country is aboard the ship. Noah ponders this as well and realizes that the European serves a somber purpose. He is a warning, a ghost, to the others. He is alone on the ship, with no wife, because Europeans had corrupted the earth and brought judgment upon it and now they will not be able to corrupt the new earth. The tale is pointed and harrowing. Hesse believed that if Europe brought little to the earth, except death and destruction, then perhaps it would be better if it ceased to exist.<sup>413</sup>

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<sup>413</sup> Hermann Hesse, "The European," in *If the War Goes On...: Reflections on War and Politics*, trans. Ralph Mannheim (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1971), 43-51.

In one final piece of prose, “Zarathustra’s Return: A Word to German Youth,” Hesse suggested how postwar Europe could attain regeneration, by appealing to Nietzsche’s prophet, as the title should suggest. The preface claims that a herd mentality caused Germans to reject the anti-patriotic and anti-German spirit of Nietzsche when the war broke out. In the wake of defeat, Zarathustra comes down from the mountain to offer words of wisdom to the youth of Germany. When Zarathustra appears among the youth, they anticipate his words of guidance, but the wanderer provides none. Instead, Zarathustra informs the youths that they cannot follow him or any formula, but that they must follow the desires of their own selves. He requests the youth to “unlearn the habit of being someone else or nothing at all, of imitating the voices of others and mistaking the faces of others for your own.” Zarathustra insists that one must learn to live his own life and embrace his own destiny. One should not turn to mass politics, appeals to the fatherland, or herd mentality, but rather look inward for rejuvenation and individual growth. In order to achieve this end, one must embrace action, but not action that first asks “what ought I to do?” According to Zarathustra, true action comes from suffering, which is self-learned through solitude, not from following the herd. He urges the youth to reject teachers, books, and public speeches, and to look inward to find truth.<sup>414</sup> As it is apparent, Hesse harkened to Nietzsche’s prophet, because he believed the disaster of the Great War resulted from the herd mentality, since nationalism and mass politics helped fuel the devastation of the war. In contrast, Hesse encouraged mankind to look inward and to seek personal growth because this is the only way to improve the self and avoid future conflict.

During the war, Hesse confided to a friend that he had experienced three turning points in his life. The first was around the time he wrote *Lauscher*, in which he decided that he was to

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<sup>414</sup> Hermann Hesse, “Zarathustra’s Return,” in *If the War Goes On...: Reflections on War and Politics*, trans. Ralph Mannheim (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1971), 86-117.

become a poet and writer. The second happened in his thirtieth year, when he had a crisis that led him to Gräser. Finally, he states his trip to India in 1911 as his final turning point.<sup>415</sup> To this list another can be added, the Great War. Scholars have noted the importance of this event for Hesse. Theodore Ziolkowski argues that the war signaled a second turning point for Hesse, with the first being when he decided to become a writer.<sup>416</sup> Claude Hill believes it is Hesse's first turning point, stating that the concussion of this war shook the roots of his existence.<sup>417</sup> In any event, the war indeed altered Hesse's life. Hesse reflected on this period in a preface to a 1946 collection of his wartime writings entitled *If the War Goes On*. The author admitted that compiling this work had been unpleasant: "every single article reminded me painfully of times of suffering, struggle, and loneliness, times in which I was beset by enmity and incomprehension and bitterly cut off from pleasurable ideals and pleasant habits." Hesse reflected on the "bloody absurdity" of the Great War, which shocked and jolted his being. He stated how his generally "happy and undeservedly successful life" was turned into a hell.<sup>418</sup>

After the war, Hesse began to neglect cultural and societal issues and to focus on the inner self. Claude Hill affirms this shift and claims that the war changed the motto of Hesse's life work to the *Weg nach Innen*, path towards one's inner self.<sup>419</sup> Ralph Freedman concurs there was a perceptible shift in Hesse's writing, since he now perceived dream and hallucination instead of nature.<sup>420</sup> H. Stuart Hughes adds that postwar, Hesse oriented himself psychologically

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<sup>415</sup> Hermann Hesse to Walter Schädelin, Kurhaus Sonnmatt, May 21, 1916, *Gesammelte Briefe*, 325.

<sup>416</sup> Ziolkowski, *Novels*, 7.

<sup>417</sup> Claude Hill, "Hermann Hesse als Kritiker der bürgerlichen Zivilisation," *Monatshefte*, Vol. 40, No. 5 (May 1948): 243. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30164681> (accessed June 12, 2014). "Die bis an die Wurzeln seiner Existenz rührende Erschütterung kam erst durch den Krieg."

<sup>418</sup> Hermann Hesse, "Foreword to the 1946 Edition," in *If the War Goes On...: Reflections on War and Politics*, trans. Ralph Mannheim (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1971), 3-7.

<sup>419</sup> Hill, "Kritiker," 243, 253.

<sup>420</sup> Freedman, 180.

and adopted a more pessimistic and cynical view on life.<sup>421</sup> This transformation in Hesse's writing would become apparent in his Weimar novels.

A shift in Hesse's work is clearly discernable after the war. Eastern influences more profoundly made their mark on Hesse's writing. Though he occasionally employed Eastern ideas in his early novels, Hesse now would write more thoroughly about this stimulus. After the war, instead of writing on things particularly German, Hesse wrote novels based in the East, most famously *Siddhartha*. The war confirmed Hesse's judgment from his 1911 trip to the East, where he found the Chinese to be the most principled and humane people of the world, in contrast to the corrupt West. Because of the war, Hesse no longer believed in Europe, but in the noble people of Asia, whose influence could aid Europe.<sup>422</sup> In a 1921 essay, Hesse described how Chinese culture was permeating Europe and suggested that Europeans could "find reminders of a mode of thought that we have neglected" and wisdom in their ancient books.<sup>423</sup> Since nationalism and destruction reigned in Europe, Hesse turned to the wisdom of Eastern ideologies for a better hope in the future of humanity.

The clearest example of this shift in Hesse's thought, however, can be found in his first postwar novel, *Demian*. The opening pages of *Demian* starkly contrast with those of his other novels, such as *Peter Camenzind*. The first piece draws the reader in with a neo-romantic description of the natural world and the beauty of sublimity of nature. In contrast, *Demian* opens with a boy who is caught between two worlds. One is the light, bourgeoisie, and illusory world of his parents, and the other dark, dangerous, and truthful world of the inner self. The story

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<sup>421</sup> Hughes, 379.

<sup>422</sup> Hermann Hesse to Romain Rolland, Bern, August 4, 1917, *Gesammelte Briefe*, 358. "Ich glaube nicht an Europa, nur die Menschheit, nur an das Reich der Seele auf Erden, and dem alle Völker teilhaben und dessen edelste Verkörperungen wir Asien verdanken."

<sup>423</sup> Hermann Hesse, "Thoughts about China," in *If the War Goes On...: Reflections on War and Politics*, trans. Ralph Mannheim (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1971), 127-131.

describes Sinclair's struggle to find his true self in such an environment. This work is all about the move inward, *Weg nach Innen*. Nothing makes this idea plainer than the novel's epigraph: "I wanted only to try to live in accord with the promptings which came from my true self. Why was that so very difficult?" Emil Sinclair's search for self-actualization remains problematic, and this mirrors Hesse's own world.

Hesse tried to live according to his own desires, but he always found it challenging because of the society around him. He was a child of nature, who embraced a Rousseauian outlook of the world, but this conflicted with an increasingly industrialized and urban society. Hesse also enjoyed reading and learning, but he noted how schools within the German educational system actually stunted individual growth, rather than promote *Bildung*. He finally realized that he was living in a suspicious, herd culture, one that embraced the negatives of the world, rather than seeking to overcome. In hindsight, the answer to the question that opens *Demian* seems all too clear. The structures of German society made living in accord with one's true promptings difficult in Hesse's mind. As a result of the Great War, Hesse became even more isolated from society. He abandoned social concerns and strove to discover the path to individual enlightenment. And it was this shift in worldview that created the Weimar Hesse.

## CONCLUSION

In 1946, Hermann Hesse, to his great surprise, received the Nobel Prize in Literature. Not only was it astonishing that a German author won the award a year after the Second World War, but it was more unexpected that the author would be Hesse. His unforeseen selection shocked the author, as well as the world. Claude Hill commented that Hesse's award "not only surprised the Americans, who did not know him, but also the Germans, who had forgotten him."<sup>424</sup> The Swedish Academy, however, deemed that Hesse merited this honor. The academy praised the author who they found to be the "best representative of the German cultural heritage in contemporary literature," along with Thomas Mann. The speech by the Swedish Academy at the ceremony concluded: "Hesse's award is more than the confirmation of his fame. It honours a poetic achievement which presents throughout the image of a good man in his struggle, following his calling with rare faithfulness, who in a tragic epoch succeeded in bearing the arms of true humanism."<sup>425</sup> The academy extolled the balance between stylistic elegance and humanitarian ideals in Hesse's prose. But the bestowing of this prize did more than just signal a life achievement for Hesse. The Swedish Academy rescued the author from obscurity.

Once again, Hesse's place in the world is becoming murky. Even though his works are readily available in bookstores, Hesse seems to be familiar only to a small group of people. Despite the sporadic readership, Theodore Ziolkowski argues there is hope for Hesse and his works. In an article celebrating Hesse in 2002, Ziolkowski believes that a new generation of scholars is emerging that "is giving serious critical and scholarly attention" to Hesse.

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<sup>424</sup> Hill, *Kritiker*, 241; "Als vor einem Jahr Hermann Hesse der literarische Nobelpreis verliehen wurde, waren nicht nur die Amerikaner erstaunt, die ihn nicht kannten, sondern auch die Deutschen, die ihn vergessen hatten."

<sup>425</sup> Anders Österling, "Award Ceremony Speech." The Official Web Site of the Nobel Prize, [http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/literature/laureates/1946/press.html](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1946/press.html) (accessed December 8, 2014).

Ziolkowski hopes that this is the case and that our understanding of the man and his works will continue to grow with time.<sup>426</sup> Despite Ziolkowski's commentary, Hesse studies have not returned him to the prominence he enjoyed in the 1960s and early 1970s, and his Weimar works remain preeminent. In order to obtain a more complete picture of the author, his generally neglected early works merit more attention. As the preceding has shown, Hesse's Wilhelmine literature is more profound and meaningful than has been previously recognized. These early works are not just pieces of fiction, but windows into the culture and society of fin de siècle Germany. When we read the early works of Hesse we find interesting commentary on the Wilhelmine era, albeit through the eyes of one lonely romantic. Through the analysis of Hesse's prewar novels, short stories, and letters, it is clear that the author wrote on trends that characterized Wilhelmine society, specifically nature, education, and cultural pessimism.

The first chapter treats the impact of industrial society on the natural world. Hesse drew on his own neo-romantic longings and criticized civilization's corrosive effects that abused the natural world. He despised the urbanity of the modern industrial city, preferring the sublime reprieve of nature. Nature was important to Hesse because he thought that only through nature could one understand oneself, and thus learn to love mankind and improve society. Such ideas spoke not only to Hesse, but to many Germans who felt alienated in a new, fast-moving industrial society. In chapter two, Hesse confronts the German educational system. Even though Germany's educational system was highly developed, many reformists and writers criticized a system they thought that maltreated youth. Hesse articulated student concerns ranging from parental issues to the narrow-mindedness of teachers, and indifferent peers to monotonous learning. Schools sacrificed individual creativity so that a student could become just another spoke in the wheel. Hesse knew, however, that education could positively construct the

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<sup>426</sup> Ziolkowski, "Celebration," 61.

individual, but it needed to be true *Bildung* and not the rote learning of the school. Chapter three analyzes Hesse's outlook on the notions of cultural pessimism permeating society. Despite exhibiting some of these negative aspects that pervaded society, Hesse's outlook toward despair differed from most cultural pessimists. Instead of agreeing that society was a sick organism, Hesse argued that the disease of cultural pessimism was a fad in Europe. Rather than give into despair, Hesse countered pessimists by urging them to rescind their egoism and to affirm life. The era was simply a time of such rapid change and progress, not terminally ill, and Hesse offered an individualistic and vitalist answer to cultural pessimism. The study ends with a glance into Hesse's wartime experience, which is valuable because he is one of the few authors who did not fall victim to the siren songs of nationalism. Hesse advised pacifism and appealed to a transnational humanitarianism, in hopes that the pointless bloodshed would end as soon as possible. While his cries for pacifism may have gone unheeded, Hesse's divergent voice in those first dark years of war are noteworthy.

But the war significantly changed Hesse's worldview. Before the war, Hesse commented on social problems more explicitly. Throughout these early works, Hesse appealed to the individual to do his or her best to help society. He believed that the individual was essential in an industrial, urban, and mass cultural age. By holding onto one's unique individuality, the person could only benefit the world since so many were falling victim to the rapid speed and alienation of modern times. But the author's calls for individual responsibility to society went unheeded, as the Great War demonstrated, since Germans had relinquished individuality for mass nationalism. In such a world, the only thing that Hesse could do was turn away from it. Individuality, which once stood as the foundation of a healthy society, became increasingly isolated from the outside world. Now the individual should grow in order to first fulfill one's

own true self rather than benefit society. This turn toward the inner self helped create Hesse's notable Weimar works.

In the end, Hermann Hesse is more than just an author of the interwar period, as many understand him to be. By analyzing the early works of Hesse, it expands both our understanding of the author and his time. It allows the scholar and reader to develop a fuller picture of Hesse's life and work. Through this examination of his early writings, we can see that he offers interesting and critical commentary on Wilhelmine society. While Hesse does not speak for everyone in Germany at this time, his criticisms give voice to those folks living in the countryside experiencing their livelihoods give way to industrialization or burgeoning middle-class folk trying to advance in society through education. Even though he is one lonely romantic, Hesse universalized his conflict so that anyone feeling the pangs of modern progress could seek advice through his stories. In the end, Hermann Hesse could be more than a familiar nonperson to intellectual historians and scholars of Weimar. He can be a valuable source, and one that is readily accessible, for anyone who wishes to learn more, not just of Weimar society, but Wilhelmine Germany, too.

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