

HERMANN HESSE: THE POLITICS

OF A LIBERAL HUMANIST

(1914-1933)

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## P R E F A C E

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Hesse's writings on war and politics remain, unfortunately, a subject which has been neglected for several decades. The reason for this is, perhaps, because his political ideas are not easily extricated from his fiction. For only three of his novels deal tangentially, at best, with political questions: Demian (1919), Steppenwolf (1927), and The Glass Bead Game (1943). Instead Hesse's writings on war and politics are found exclusively in his letters, in his essays and articles in newspapers and journals, and in much of the vast and disorganized material which composes the Hesse Nachlaß in the Deutsches Literaturarchiv of the Schiller-Nationalmuseum in Marbach a. N.

As new volumes of previously unpublished and uncollected letters, essays, reviews, and other autobiographical material appear—thanks mainly to the efforts of Hesse's son, Heiner Hesse, his publisher, Siegfried Unseld, and his editor, Volker Michels—it becomes apparent that the man whom many had considered the "mountain recluse of Montagnola" was in reality one of Germany's severest critics. Of the areas in which our understanding of Hesse's thought is now modified, the most conspicuous is politics.

Yet Hesse's politics remain a subject as controversial

as the man himself. He has been variously portrayed as a radical, a reactionary, an anarchist, a conservative, a liberal, an intellectual engaged in literary, abstract politics, an apostle of the apolitical revolution, and even a strange bird of intellectual history.<sup>1</sup> Avoiding these ideological labels, this essay will portray Hesse as a liberal humanist who was never able to rid himself of the distinction between culture and politics, as a man of letters, and as a Kulturkritiker always interested in his times, and always critical of his times. Thus far in the American renaissance of Hermann Hesse, only the novelist has been appropriated by the American dissidents. The man of letters and the essayist have so far been ignored. It is in this vein that I hope to make a contribution to the vast domain of Hesse scholarship.

What is still needed today in Hesse scholarship is

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<sup>1</sup>See for example, Timothy Leary, "Hermann Hesse: Poet of the Interior Journey," Psychedelic Review, Vol. 1, No. 2, Fall 1963, pp. 167-182; Jeffrey L. Sammons, "Notes on the Germanization of American Youth," The Yale Review, Spring 1970, pp. 342-356; Egon Schwarz, "Hermann Hesse, die amerikanische Jugendbewegung und Probleme der literarischen Wertung," Basis: Jahrbuch für deutsche Gegenwartsliteratur, Band I (1970), edited by Reinhold Grimm and Jost Hermand, pp. 116-133; "Cultivating Hesse," The times Literary Supplement, 31 August 1973, No. 3,730, pp. 899-991; Krystyna Devert, "Hermann Hesse: Apostle of the Apolitical 'Revolution,'" George A. White & Charles Newman (ed.), Literature in Revolution (New York, 1972).

a biographer who will analyze the wealth of material now appearing so that the next study on Hesse will not merely be another re-interpretation of everything that has preceded it, "but a substantial and sophisticated new evaluation."<sup>2</sup> There still exists the need, writes Hesse-scholar, Theodore Ziolkowski, for "a reasonably objective criticism that deals responsibly with Hesse as a writer and thinker on the basis of a thorough acquaintance with his oeuvre (and not merely a few novels in translation) as well as with the cultural and intellectual background from which he emerged."<sup>3</sup> This evaluation represents an effort in that direction.

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<sup>2</sup>(anonymous), "Cultivating Hesse," The Times Literary Supplement, 31 August 1973, Nr. 3,730, p. 991.

<sup>3</sup>Theodore Ziolkowski, (Editor), Hesse: A Collection of Critical Essays (New York, 1973), pp. 3-4.

## C O N T E N T S

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I / ATTITUDE TOWARD CULTURE: THE PRE-WAR YEARS

If one seeks a common thread running throughout the writings of Hermann Hesse, the one that immediately comes to mind is his distinction between culture and politics. This distinction within the context of German Idealism, is based on the sharply dualistic separation of art and life, of the individual and society. In absolutizing this distinction, Hesse, as we shall see, made a natural condition out of what was at best historically valid, thus unwittingly affirming the status quo. It was not until after 1933, with the rise of National Socialism, that events gradually persuaded Hesse that the separation of the world of culture from the political world was unworkable and problematic.

In his attitude toward culture, Hesse turned to the Romantic vision of Novalis, where the dialectical tension between opposites and an "exclusive contemplation of the self" becomes the foundation and basic presupposition of culture.<sup>1</sup> Hesse's profound preoccupation with Novalis, particularly with his Hymns to the Night (1799), was revealed in a letter written as early as September 4, 1898, to Helene Voigt-Diederichs, wife of Hesse's publisher, Eugen Diederichs: "I have deeply submerged myself for a long time in Novalis' Hymns, and often ponder their

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<sup>1</sup>Novalis, Hymns to the Night & Other Selected Writings (New York, 1960), pp. 66-67.

contents."<sup>2</sup> The idea of Novalis' antithesis of the Light (Enlightenment) and the Night (Romanticism) was in my opinion to preoccupy Hesse for his entire life. This conflict between Enlightenment and Romanticism, Geist and Natur, was a common motif of all of Hesse's essays and letters. Within the German cultural tradition, this antithesis revolves around reason, reflection and tradition, on the one hand, and around instinct, emotion, and intuition, on the other. Nietzsche had called this conflict the Apollonian and Dionysian sides of human nature. Novalis had spoken of the antithesis of the Light and of the Night, and Hesse was to term this conflict the Geist-Natur Dualismus. Hesse's conception of culture was thus distinctly dualistic. He conceived of culture as a struggle between Enlightenment and Romanticism, which, to him, meant Geist and Natur.

Explicit in Hesse's attitude toward culture and in any understanding of his intellectual ideology is this one basic antithesis: the yearning for surrender to nature, on the one hand, and to the reflective consciousness on the other. This double allegiance to Romanticism and Enlightenment must be considered not only as basic to his conception of culture, but also as determinants

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<sup>2</sup>Hesse an Helene Voigt-Diederichs, 4. September 1898, Hesse/Helene Voigt-Diederichs Briefe 1897-1900 (Diederichs, 1971), S. 70-71.



in his political position between the extremes of Left and Right. For Hesse's objective was always the inner freedom and self-realization of the individual, yet he also shared the heritage of German Idealism, the idea of the autonomy of rational man as it filters down from Kant. Hesse called for an intellectual balance between the extremes of these two positions, between the success of human reason and the irrational expressions of man's metaphysical impulses. Yet for most of his life, Hesse was to vacillate between these two positions, as he himself later admitted in an autobiographical story entitled Kurgast (A Guest at the Spa), written in 1923.

Sometimes there is nothing in the world that attracts me so much and seems so indispensable as the intellect, as the possibility of abstraction, of logic, of ideas. Then again: when I am satiated with it and need and long for the opposite, all intellect disgusts me like spoiled food . . . For just as I must constantly alternate between eating and fasting, sleeping and waking, I must also swing back and forth between naturalism and intellectualism, between experience and Platonism, between order and revolution, between Catholicism and the spirit of the Reformation. That a person all his life long should be able consistently to honor intellect and despise nature, always be a revolutionary and never a conservative, or the other way about, that seems to me, of course, very virtuous, dependable, and steadfast, but it equally seems to me deadly, repulsive, and crazy.<sup>3</sup>

For Hesse all ideological factions, political and

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<sup>3</sup>Hesse, Autobiographical Writings (New York, 1972), p. 155.

intellectual, religious and scientific, were based on the presupposition that just such crazy behavior was not only possible but natural! Hesse remained one of the few German intellectuals who never wavered in his insistence that both reason and unreason were essential to the comprehension of the human world.

For his attitude toward culture, Hesse was also indebted to the writings of Nietzsche. His enthusiasm for Nietzsche dates back to his days in Basel (1899-1903), which Hesse called above all the city of Nietzsche and Jakob Burckhardt. Explicit in Nietzsche's writings on politics was the idea that culture and the state were antagonists, each living on the other. It was Nietzsche's belief that the state should serve culture, not vice versa. This ideal with its contemptuous attitude toward politics was expressed in Götzen-Dämmerung (Twilight of the Idols), written in 1889:

Culture and the State - one should not deceive oneself over this - are antagonists. . . . All great cultural epochs are epochs of political decline: that which is great in the cultural sense has been unpolitical, even anti-political. . . . Goethe's heart opened up at the phenomenon Napoleon - it closed up to the Wars of Liberation. . . . The moment Germany rises as a great power, France gains a new importance as a cultural power. . . . Politics devours all seriousness for really intellectual things - Deutschland, Deutschland über alles was, I fear the end of German philosophy.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Nietzsche, Twilight of the Idols (Penguin, 1968), pp. 60-63.

No German "poet" gave greater impetus to the antithesis between culture and politics than Nietzsche. From this antithesis the ideal of Hesse's life and thought was to emerge: the intellectual who sought self-perfection far from the modern world, who desired to live for his education free from politics, nationality, and newspapers.

Seeking self-perfection far from the modern world, Hesse turned to the writings of Jakob Burckhardt. In a newspaper account of his early life in Basel (1899-1903), while he was a book dealer, Hesse wrote that

. . . here everything was saturated by the spirit, the influence and the example of the man who for several decades had served intellectual Basel as a teacher and, in cultural affairs, as arbiter elegantiarum. His name was Jakob Burckhardt . . . Though I, too had read him—The Civilization of the Renaissance in Tübingen, and Constantine in Basel—I was too deeply influenced by Nietzsche to be susceptible to Burckhardt's direct influence. The indirect influence, however, was all the more powerful. I lived, a receptive young man eager to learn, in the midst of a circle of people whose knowledge and interests, whose reading and travels, whose style of thought, whose understanding of history and conversation were influenced and shaped by no one so much as Jakob Burckhardt.<sup>5</sup>

In the Introduction to the 1946 edition of his political essays, Krieg und Frieden: Betrachtungen zu Krieg und Politik seit dem Jahr 1914, Hesse singled out Burckhardt

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<sup>5</sup>Hesse, "Ein Paar Basler Erinnerungen," Die Weltwoche (Zürich) 22. März 1951, S. 17. Hesse Nachlaß.

as one of the three great influences which had combined to inculcate in him an opposition to the forces of "mass psychosis," together with an instinctive moral attitude in political affairs: "Three strong influences, at work throughout my life, have made me what I am. These are the Christian and almost completely unnationalistic spirit of the parsonage in which I grew up, the reading of the great Chinese thinkers, and last not least, the work of the one historian to whom I have ever been devoted in confidence and respect, veneration, and grateful emulation - Jakob Burckhardt."<sup>6</sup> Burckhardt was to exert a constant influence on Hesse's attitude toward culture.

One basic idea of Burckhardt's seems to have made the most profound impression on Hesse: Burckhardt's conception of culture as distinguished from politics and the state. In his observations on history Burckhardt tried to distinguish Kultur from the other powers, that is, he tried to differentiate the state (and religion) from culture: "The three powers are ultimately heterogeneous to each other and cannot be co-ordinated, and even if we were to co-ordinate the two powers, state and religion, culture would still be something entirely different."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Hesse, "Geleitwort zur Neuausgabe von Krieg und Frieden (1946)," Politische Betrachtungen (Frankfurt, 1970), S. 131.

<sup>7</sup>Jakob Burckhardt, Force and Freedom: An Interpretation of History (New York, 1955), p. 95.

The history of culture was thus distinct from the history of politics. Burckhardt scorned the belief that the State was the highest and supreme goal of mankind, and distinctly contrasted the art galleries, museums, and cultural treasures of old Europe to power politics, and the class wars and national wars which he prophesied were to come. Burckhardt recognized that works of art were destined to outlive the works of war and of politics. In the realm of the mind, man must reach for something "higher": music, meditation and morality, art and poetry, must be raised, according to Burckhardt, above the politics of nationalism and the strife of political parties. For Burckhardt, the life of the German soul was divorced from politics and the affairs of state. As he put it in July of 1870: one can not have a culturally significant nation, and a nation of political significance at the same time.<sup>8</sup> If the political significance of the nation was even dealt with, Burckhardt observed it from a certain point of detachment: from the detached point of view of the moralist and the liberal humanist, always emphasizing the freedom of the individual.

The excessive individualism of Burckhardt greatly influenced Hesse. In his attitude toward culture, Hesse's

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<sup>8</sup>Burckhardt quoted in Emil Dürr, Freiheit und Macht bei Jakob Burckhardt (Basel, 1918), S. 139.

focus of interest, following his historical mentor, was always the inner life of human beings rather than the externals of human development. He was more concerned with literature, language, music, and the other fine arts than with economic factors, military adventures, territorial expansion and revolutions. Like Burckhardt, Hesse was interested in a transcendent realm of the spirit where the individual could perfect himself. Hesse perceived the rise of powerful individuals who recognized no law above their own will. Such a human condition was the highest ideal to which man could aspire. It was this which he called "culture" as opposed to those situations in which politics and the state were the dominant forces.

The influence of Burckhardt on Hesse culminates in Hesse's last novel, Das Glasperlenspiel (The Glass Bead Game, 1943), where Pater Jacobus, a brilliant Benedictine historian, becomes in fact Jakob Burckhardt. Employing the technique of montage, Hesse has Pater Jacobus speak directly word for word from Burckhardt's fullest and most influential lecture, Das Revolutionszeitalter (The Age of Revolution): "Times of terror and deepest misery may come. If however, any happiness is to be extracted from that misery, it can be only a spiritual happiness, looking back toward the preservation of the cultural achievements of the past, looking forward toward serene and stalwart defense of the things of the spirit in an

age which otherwise might succumb totally to material things."<sup>9</sup> For his distinction between the spiritual and material things of life, between culture and politics, for his desire to preserve the achievements of the past, and for his devotion and reverence for culture and the perfecting of the individual, Hesse was indeed greatly indebted to Jakob Burckhardt.

His ideals of self-perfection and cultivation, culture and humanity, were also derived from the works of Goethe. "Of all German writers, it is Goethe to whom I owe most, who occupies me most, claims my attention, encourages me, who forces me to either emulation or opposition."<sup>10</sup> Goethe's Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship (1796), in particular, became Hesse's cultural gospel. In an essay entitled Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre, written in 1911, Hesse acknowledges that the eighteenth century was Europe's last great cultural epoch. This epoch, according to Hesse, manifested a noble, generous form of humanism, an absolute reverence for human culture, and an ideal belief in the greatness and future of human culture. Man was placed in the position of the gods, the dignity

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<sup>9</sup>Hesse, Das Glasperlenspiel, Gesammelte Schriften, VI, (Frankfurt, 1957), S. 472. Subsequent references referred to as GS. This passage was originally identified as belonging to Burckhardt's Das Revolutionszeitalter by G. F. Hering, "Burckhardts Worte im Glasperlenspiel," Die Zeit, Nr. 28. 10 Juli 1947. S. 6. Hesse Nachlaß.

<sup>10</sup>Hesse, "Dank an Goethe," Schriften zur Literatur II (Frankfurt, 1972), S. 145.

of mankind was the crown of the world and the foundation of every belief. This ideal of humanism had been the basis of an immensely rich culture, and this humanistic ideal Hesse found in Goethe's novel.

This novel is not only a book but a world, a world accompanied by human laws and reasonableness, not chaos with confused aspiring powers, but rather a gently arranged multiplicity in whose coherence the unwrought necessities of life seem to be alleviated through the spirit of kindness and goodness. Here freedom of the will is not proclaimed, but the right and the triumph of human reason and excellence. In this world old man and child, Weltmann and Sonderling, believer and unbeliever wander in brotherhood and the light of love and the right of humanity. The secret and magic of this work is that its harmony and deep inner unity tremble from its multiplicity, and blossom forth from its fresh and sensual, vividly depicted intensity. Here no fixed faith or Weltordnung is presupposed, no rules of society proclaimed; the uniformity and clarity of the totality grows out of no scheme or programme; it has no other foundation than love, the love of the poet for all mankind, and his belief in the cultural capability of man.<sup>11</sup>

Basic to Hesse's conception of culture was this Goethean balance of freedom and order, harmony, unity, and reason.

Hesse's attachment to these ideals of the Enlightenment manifests itself in his attitude toward music. For music is one of the most conspicuous elements in his life and work. In the chaos of modern culture it was music, of

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<sup>11</sup>Hesse, "Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre," Schriften zur Literatur II (Frankfurt, 1972), S. 174-175.



all the arts, which according to Hesse, remained comparatively uncontaminated, and could provide a refuge from the crass reality of materialism, mechanization, politics and war. In this vein, Hesse was drawn ever closer to the music of the Enlightenment, music permeated by the spirit of order, discipline, faith, reason and optimism, music epitomized by Mozart's Die Zauber Flöte. In the music of the Enlightenment "we possess . . . the inheritance of classical antiquity and Christianity, a spirit of serene and valiant piety, an unsurpassable chivalrous morality."<sup>12</sup> Music was not only an enticing passion and source of refuge and oblivion, but a major factor in man's ethical development. For Hesse, as for Shaftesbury and Schiller, music, the highest art, and morality, the highest virtue, form a sort of unio mystica at the core of human culture. Behind the purely aesthetic questions of music there was something that interested Hesse: the actual spirit of true music, its morality.<sup>13</sup>

Basically a moralist, Hesse was interested primarily in the ethical implication of music, its meaning and connotation for the individual soul, and it follows that Hesse's conception of music must have a firm rational

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<sup>12</sup>Hesse, Das Glasperlenspiel, GS, VI, S. 116.

<sup>13</sup>Hesse an Otto Basler, 25. August 1934, Briefe (Frankfurt, 1965), S. 122.

structure. Ultimately music for Hesse was a barometer of the social and political conditions, and offered a guide and model for the moral life. Music was one of the basic cultural influences by means of which an individual soul could find itself, and develop into a personality. In music, Geist, order and strict form, reason and morality, reign supreme.

One of the key concepts Hesse used to convey the essential meaning of true music in its moral connotations was Heiterkeit. The basic constituent of this term is balance. For Heiterkeit denotes the transcending of opposites, such as the conflict between Geist and Natur, and implies a happy equilibrium. "True music has its cause. It is borne of equilibrium. Equilibrium arises from righteousness and a meaningful universe. Hence one can talk of music only with one who has perceived the meaning of the universe."<sup>14</sup> It is not by accident that the music of the eighteenth century reached its climax in the age of rationalism and humanism, of the moral philosophers Shaftesbury and Leibniz, and in an ordered and harmonious universe—in theory, if not in reality. For Hesse the degeneration of morality and politics is mirrored in the debasement of genuine music:

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<sup>14</sup>Hesse an Otto Basler, ibid.

The more Saturnalian the music, the more dangerous becomes the nation, the deeper sinks the ruler. . . . Intoxicating music departs from the nature of true music and is not serene, heiter . . . . The music of a well-ordered age is controlled and cheerful, ruhig u. heiter, and so is its government. The music of an uneasy epoch is excited and excessive and its regime is perverted. The music of a decaying state is sentimental, and its regime is imperiled.<sup>15</sup>

Music represents in almost every instance in Hesse's writings the symbolic manifestation of totality because in the counterpoint and harmony of music the most disparate elements can be synthesized into an harmonious whole; in music life and the spirit, Geist and Natur, could be synthesized. Music for Hesse thus expressed the basic unity of the universe by dissolving its contrapuntal differences into transcending harmony. In its harmony and discipline music was a factor which heightened the development of the individual and the cultural evolution of society. But when unrestrained, music provided the daemonic impetus which could draw the individual and society into the abyss. Hesse was highly critical of the mass effects and emotional saturation achieved by means of too full and elaborate harmonic emphasis. Hesse saw decadence setting in with Beethoven, and culminating in Brahms and Wagner.

Unlike Thomas Mann's conception of music with its

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<sup>15</sup>Hesse, Das Glasperlenspiel, GS, VI, S. 100.

dark and daemonic rôle, Hesse's conception of music of light and enlightenment was founded on man, on faith in the individual human being and the formative power of human reason, all symbolized in the sublime harmonies of Mozart. Hesse rejected all music after Beethoven, while Mann fascinated himself with the musical trend which begins with Beethoven, and culminates in Wagner and ultimately in the atonality of Schönberg and Mann's own fictitious composer, Adrian Leverkühn.<sup>16</sup> Hesse would reject Leverkühn's music as chaotic, daemonic, ungenuine, unecht, and amoral. Yet oddly enough, it is Hesse who is so frequently dismissed as an unhealthy and introspective Romantic, while the cultural historians gravely intellectualize, not without reason perhaps, every pronouncement on music by Mann. In comparison with Mann, Hesse assumes the attitude of a pure classicist, and can in fact be described, certainly in his attitude toward music, as a true spirit of the eighteenth century, and as an exponent of a cosmopolitan, liberal humanism.

The term "liberal humanism" which will occur frequently in this essay is best defined, as it applies to Hesse, as an attitude of mind characterized by a positive acceptance of culture, indeed a veneration of higher culture, and the giving of an ethical tone to human affairs. The

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<sup>16</sup> Thomas Mann, Doctor Faustus: The Life of the German Composer Adrian Leverkühn as Told by a Friend (New York, 1948).

term is meant to suggest the unique compatibility of humanism with liberalism. The most positive aspect of liberal humanism is the freedom of the individual conscience and the responsibility for the moral health of the individual self and of society. Disciplining itself through conscious self-cultivation, liberal humanism regards ethics and culture as its principal self-justification. Its deepest driving forces are the liberal ideas of the Enlightenment. Like the philosophe, the liberal humanist tends to construct his own ideal world, a world elevated and detached from the material and political realms. For Hesse the liberal humanist is most in his element in the rôle of critic, rather than that of creative destroyer. Becoming in time the exclusive weapon of middle-class German intellectuals like Hesse, liberal humanism comes to represent the separation of culture from politics.

In light of this separation of culture from politics, it is not surprising that Hesse's pre-war literary activity made few direct references to social and political problems. Yet Hesse was, nevertheless, as early as 1907, co-editor of März: Monatshefte für deutsche Kultur (1907-1912), a liberal democratic journal noted for its opposition to the authoritarianism of Wilhelm II, the militarism of the Empire, and the reactionary Junkertum

of Prussia.<sup>17</sup> Indeed the title of this journal makes obvious reference to the "March days" of the 1848 Revolution, referring specifically to the lusty winds of March that the revolutionaries hoped would initiate a cultural reawakening for Germany. Devoted to deutsche Kultur, this bi-monthly journal was launched and named by Albert Langen, the liberal Munich publisher. In 1911, it became a weekly and in its last years, during the First World War, it was managed by the Swabian liberal politicians, Theodore Heuß and Conrad Haußmann.

In his literary activity for März, Hesse formed a lasting friendship with Conrad Haußmann. Haußmann acknowledged their warm relationship in a letter to Hesse on October 2, 1909: "I am glad and grateful that you remain a true friend. With the failing of my health, it is always comforting to have a healthier, hearty and happier man as a friend."<sup>18</sup> Hesse was, in fact, as his biographer observes, in full sympathy with Haußmann's liberal and democratic political attitudes.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Hesse, "Erinnerungen an Conrad Haußmann," Neue Zürcher Zeitung, Februar 16, 1922. Hesse Nachlaß.

<sup>18</sup>Conrad Haußmann an Hermann Hesse, 2. Oktober 1909. Wilhelm Lukas Kristl, "Der März von Ludwig Thoma und Hermann Hesse: Zur Geschichte einer Zeitschrift," Börsenblatt für den Deutschen Buchhandel - Frankfurt Ausgabe - Nr. 69, vom 31. August 1971, S. A314. Hesse Nachlaß.

<sup>19</sup>Bernhard Zeller, Hermann Hesse in Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten (Hamburg, 1963), S. 62.

Yet Hesse always made a clear distinction between political attitudes and the realm of culture. In a letter to Haußmann on July 11, 1910, Hesse distinctly emphasized that his own disposition was exclusively directed towards literary affairs. Hesse suggested that if an article was to be written for März on Ferdinand Freiligrath, a revolutionary poet of 1848, it should be done by Haußmann, since the subject matter was more politisch than poetisch-künstlerisch.<sup>20</sup> In the same breath Hesse seemed angered that März had become more exclusively a periodical for freisinnige Politik rather than a periodical for deutsche Kultur. In another letter to Haußmann on July 3, 1912, Hesse stated that he felt März would have more of a future, if it were a cultural periodical and not a political weekly. Hesse further suggested that Karl Scheffler, editor of Kunst und Künstler (1902-1933), should be solicited to embellish culturally the Feuilletons of März, which for Hesse had become too political.<sup>21</sup> Despite his criticism of März, however, Hesse, by lending his name to the publication, identified himself with its campaign for international peace and understanding.

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<sup>20</sup> Hesse an Conrad Haußmann, 11. Juli 1910, Gesammelte Briefe 1898-1921 (Frankfurt, 1973), S. 179.

<sup>21</sup> Hesse an Conrad Haußmann, 3. Juli 1912, Gesammelte Briefe 1898-1921, op. cit., S. 212.

Hesse not only wrote for März, but also for Langen's politically active counterpart, the satirical weekly, Simplizissimus during the period 1907-1912. Within the tradition of liberal opposition, this famous German weekly, as its editor Franz Schönberner noted, "was independent of all commercial or political allegiances and was able to fight the good fight against the most dangerous enemy of mankind—human stupidity—wherever this hydra raised one of its ugly heads."<sup>22</sup> What attracted Hesse to Simplizissimus was its absolute independence. "It was at liberty to comment on all political and cultural events, without being tied to any political party . . ."<sup>23</sup> To this periodical Hesse owed his first political awakening: "From the early days of its publication I read Simplizissimus. In the second half of the 1890's it played an important rôle in my life. Instead of my apolitical attitude, I now became critical and somewhat revolutionary."<sup>24</sup> What attracted Hesse to Simplizissimus was its striving for peace and justice, and its criticism of the Wilhelminian Régime.

During his association with the "politisches Witzblatt,"

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<sup>22</sup> Franz Schönberner, The Confessions of a European Intellectual (New York, 1946), p. 2.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 311.

<sup>24</sup> Hesse, "Erinnerung an den Simplizissimus," Schriften zur Literatur I (Frankfurt, 1970), S. 295.



Hesse soon perceived the two different ideologies of its editors. The one was international and pacifist, represented by Albert Langen; the other, epitomized by Ludwig Thoma, a Munich writer and editor, was nationalistic, "heimatlich und volkstümlich." With the death of Albert Langen in 1909, Ludwig Thoma became the leading editor, and the internationalistic tone soon became somewhat inaudible. Hesse greatly regreted this change of thinking. His aversion to any form of "Hurrah-Patriotismus" was to remain constant. In 1912, well before the outbreak of the war, disgusted with the oppressive atmosphere of nationalism and militarism, Hesse left Germany for life long exile in Switzerland. To use Nietzsche's words, Hesse remained always a "good European," seeing national boundaries as absurd, serving only to provoke the insanity of wars.

If other people loathed the borders between countries as I do, then there would be no more wars and blockades. Nothing on earth is more disgusting, more contemptible than borders. They are like cannons, like generals: as long as reason, humanity and peace exist, little attention is paid them—but as soon as war and insanity appear, they become urgent and sacred. Der Teufel hole sie!<sup>25</sup>

Hesse therefore sought refuge in Switzerland—a proper home for a true humanist and internationalist.

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<sup>25</sup>Hesse, Wanderung (1920), Gesammelte Schriften (Frankfurt, 1957), III, S. 387.

For was not Switzerland a land which had always enjoyed a unique place in the history of European culture, a land with a long record of independence and neutrality, and a land providing a refuge for intellectuals trying to escape the vulgar din of European mass politics? For Hesse Switzerland was a land where German language and literature were detached from German politics. In a letter to Walter von Molo, written in 1945, Thomas Mann commented on Hesse's self imposed exile: "I envied Hermann Hesse, in whose companionship I found comfort and strength . . . because he had broken away early, with the all too accurate explanation - 'A great, important people the Germans—who can deny it? The salt of the earth, perhaps. But as a political nation, impossible! As such, I want to have nothing to do with them.'"<sup>26</sup>

This statement is not anti-political, to be sure, but represents Hesse's disgust with the politics of the moment. It again reflects Hesse's willingness to dialectically separate German culture from the political nation, a willingness which, as we shall see, will influence his reflections on war and politics during the war.

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<sup>26</sup> Thomas Mann, Letters of Thomas Mann 1889-1955 (New York, 1971), p. 480.

II / REFLECTIONS ON WAR AND POLITICS  
(1914-1918)

With the outbreak of war in August, 1914, Hesse refused not only to serve in the Kaiser's armed forces, but refused to support with his pen a war he felt was senseless. In this he was quite alone, with the exception of Hesse (and perhaps Fritz von Unruh), most German writers of those nationalistic and euphoric August days of 1914, gave enthusiastic support to the war, promoting it as some kind of holy crusade for deutsche Kultur. Thomas Mann, for example, wrote nationalistic essays which he later came to regret. At a time when Mann was attempting to defend the Prussian and German positions (Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen, 1918), Hesse was adamant in his stand against war and militarism. In a letter to Hesse written on November 25, 1945, Mann acknowledges this fact: "You were already most articulately resisting the frenzied German pursuit of power (in 1914), while I was still entangled in a romantic-protestant defense of teutomania against revolution and civilization."<sup>1</sup>

Hesse's first official statement against war and militarism was an essay entitled "O Freunde, Nicht Diese Töne!" (O Friends, not this way!), written as early as September 1914, and published in the Neue Zürcher Zeitung on November 3. The title of this war-time essay evoked

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<sup>1</sup>Hermann Hesse / Thomas Mann Briefwechsel (Frankfurt am Main, 1968), S. 111-112.

the words of Schiller's An die Freude (Ode to Joy), and the last sentence of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony ("O friends, not this way!") to protest against the war as a "taking back" of Beethoven's symphony with its call to brotherly love. The article deplored the defection of most German intellectuals to the camp of the super-patriots, and pleaded in passionate sobriety for maintaining the historic standards of German culture. "The elimination of war remains our noblest aim and the ultimate consequence of Western Christian civilization . . . That love is superior to hate, and sympathy to anger, that peace is more noble than war, are convictions that this wretched world war must impress upon us more firmly than we have ever felt them before."<sup>2</sup>

In this article Hesse's devotion to culture and humanity rises above the politics of the German people. In referring to Goethe, who held so conspicuously aloof from the War of Liberation, Hesse's own attitude toward the Germans is clearly revealed.

Despite the fact that Goethe wrote no national anthems in 1813, he was never an anti-patriot. His devotion to culture and humanity meant more to him than his devotion to the German people, which he knew and loved better than anyone else. He was indeed a citizen and patriot in the international world of thought, of inner freedom, of

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<sup>2</sup>Hermann Hesse, "O Freunde, Nicht Diese Töne!" Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 3. November 1914. Hesse Nachlaß.

intellectual conscience. In the moments of his best thinking, he perceived the histories of nations no longer as separate, independent destinies, but rather as subordinate parts of a totality. Perhaps such an attitude of mind will be condemned as an ivory-tower intellectualism that should hold its tongue in moments of serious crisis. Yet it is the spirit in which the best German thinkers and writers have lived.<sup>3</sup>

This attitude of mind was too much for most Germans of 1914. Not only was the attitude condemned as an ivory-tower intellectualism but its author as Landesverräter and Gesinnungslump. Only one European intellectual spoke on Hesse's behalf. After indicting European intellectuals for their blind poetic mobilization, Romain Rolland, the great French pacifist, in an article in the Journal de Genève on April 19, 1915, saw one German poet stand alone:

. . . the one German poet who has written the serenest and loftiest words, and preserved in the midst of this demoniacal war an attitude worthy of Goethe, is Hermann Hesse. . . . All will remember his noble article in the Neue Zürcher Zeitung of November 3, "O Freunde, Nicht Diese Töne!" in which he implored the artists and thinkers of Europe to save what little peace might yet be saved, and not to join with their pens in destroying the future of Europe.<sup>4</sup>

As Hesse himself notes, "I saw protest against the war, against the raw, bloodsoaking stupidity of man, against those intellectuals who preached in favor of

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<sup>3</sup>Hesse, "O Freunde, Nicht Diese Töne!" op. cit.

<sup>4</sup>Romain Rolland, Above the Battle (Chicago, 1916), pp. 157-158.

war, as a duty and a harsh necessity."<sup>5</sup> In Hesse's view, the very individuals who should have stemmed the tide of hatred and stupidity—the writers and intellectuals—were eagerly volunteering their services to stir up hatred and strife. For Hesse this represented the supreme trahison des clercs, the most degrading form of blasphemy against the spirit. At a time when German intellectuals were rehabilitating a sense of patriotism and nationalism by bringing about a synthesis of nationalism and individualism, Hesse, on the contrary, was distinguishing radically between the two terms, opposing them to each other in the true spirit of liberal humanism. In Hesse's view, the more single-mindedly "the world concentrated on patriotism and nationalism, on war and heroism (Krieg und Heldentum), on honor and other old ideals, the more remote and improbable any whisper of genuine humanity sounded."<sup>6</sup>

What angered and annoyed Hesse most about the war, was the brutality with which politics and the military destroyed great works of culture. On September 19, 1914, the Second German Army attacked and destroyed the cathedral of Reims. In a letter to Conrad Haußmann on October 25,

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<sup>5</sup>Hesse, unpublished letter dated 1930, Hesse Nachlaß.

<sup>6</sup>Hesse, Demian, Gesammelte Werke (Frankfurt, 1957), III, S. 254.

1914, Hesse protested the "devilish" attack as unnecessary, and described the general boycott against the Kunst u. Dichtung of hostile nations as an evil derailment from human intelligence. For Hesse it pointed out all too clearly that "we advanced students of culture and humanity were still a weak minority of oddities (Sonderlingen)."<sup>7</sup> What vexed Hesse even more was when he "read newspaper articles by prominent writers in which they disclosed the blessings of the war, the clarion call of the professors, and all the war poems issuing from the studies of famous poets."<sup>8</sup> What distinguished Hesse from other intellectuals of 1914, was that he lacked the great compensation so many others possessed: national enthusiasm.

At a time when the old ideals of patriotism, hatred, and narrow nationalism threatened to dominate the minds of the intellectuals throughout Germany, Hesse remained free of all ethnocentric prejudice, not only in a political sense, but especially in a cultural sense. The realm of politics mattered less to him than the realm of culture. With the outbreak of war, Hesse felt himself deeply rooted in the enlightened tradition of eighteenth-century humanitarianism. Men of all races and cultures were equally close to him, as members of a common, albeit diverse

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<sup>7</sup>Hesse an Conrad Haußmann, 25. Oktober 1914, Gesammelte Briefe (Frankfurt, 1973), S. 248.

<sup>8</sup>Hesse, "Life Briefly Told," Autobiographical Writings (New York, 1972), p. 50.



humanity. For Hesse "man" was "mankind." The individual's highest goal was to achieve consciousness of himself as part of the whole, not of a national whole, but of the whole of humankind.

National hatred was as peculiar a thing to Hesse, as it was to Goethe. In a letter to Alfred Schlenker, Hesse's doctor, written in March of 1915, Hesse recalled the words of Goethe to Eckermann: "National hatred one finds on the lowest levels of culture, where it exists in its strongest and most violent form."<sup>9</sup> But there was a level, Hesse observed, on which it completely disappears. There one finds oneself above the nations. This level of culture, which Hesse called eine übernationale Humanität, represented for him the Romantic land of poets and scholars, not the Reich of Kasernen und Kanonen. In an essay entitled Individuelle Denkart in Deutschland, published in the Neue Zürcher Zeitung on July 11, 1915, Hesse deplored the fact that "instead of the Germany of Goethe we now had the Germany of Bismarck, that instead of the land of the poet and scholar, the Reich of the Kaiser and the cannon, instead of the homeland of Romanticism, the homeland of universal, compulsory military service."<sup>10</sup> Germany of 1915, had violently

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<sup>9</sup>Hesse an Alfred Schlenker, März 1915, Gesammelte Briefe 1895-1921 (Frankfurt, 1973), S. 271.

<sup>10</sup>Hesse, "Individuelle Denkart in Deutschland," Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 11. Juli 1915. Hesse Nachlaß.

changed, and Hesse could not perceive Kaisers and cannons as goals to be pursued. Goethe's Gartenhaus remained dearer to Hesse than the German gas factory. This Goethean level of culture was congenial to Hesse's nature, and he had entrenched himself in it long before the outbreak of war.

Despite Hesse's protest against the war, he did not join the ranks of organized pacifism. Never enthusiastic about any organized attempts to regenerate humanity, attempts which according to Hesse, were more concerned with reforming society than with the more vital transformation of the individual, and which generally did little more than consume themselves in theory, Hesse felt obliged to take issue with the pacifist movement. The pacifists, so far as Hesse could discern from their writings, demonstrated no desire or ability to adapt themselves to reality.<sup>11</sup> In an article entitled "Den Pazifisten" in Die Zeit on November 7, 1915, Hesse censures them at length for their apparent inability to perceive the need for more action and less talk, for their lack of concern about the world of tomorrow, and for their lack of interest in the immediate alleviation of the suffering of the war victims.

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<sup>11</sup>Hesse, Brief aus Bern, offener Brief in der Frankfurter Zeitung vom 13. Oktober 1915. Hesse Nachlaß.

No one doubts the genuineness of your convictions. But it is time, now more than ever, when convictions must become deeds of action, when the believer must make some sacrifices. Are you willing to do this, you internationalists, you friends of humanity? I do not doubt that many of you are serious, that many of your wives stand in hospitals, that many of you have given a dollar or more to the Red Cross. But taken together, you represent the most unproductive, sterile organization in the world. You sacrifice the life of the ideal, you throw away reality for dreams of the future. I indict you for speaking when so much needs to be done, for attending conventions and hearing speeches. Instead of being active here and there, instead of gathering or packing comforts for the troops, Liebesgaben, . . . you fail to place your idealism at the disposal of the victims.<sup>12</sup>

This negative evaluation of pacifism—"it was not in order, it was decayed, there was something benumbed and dead in this ideal"<sup>13</sup>—drew an immediate rebuke from Alfred H. Fried, Europe's leading pacifist at that time. In an article in the journal, Die Friedens-Warte: Blätter für Zwischenstaatliche Organisation in January of 1916, Fried deplored Hesse's misrepresentation of the pacifists as foolish dreamers, and emphasized that one should not confuse the relief organizations for prisoners of war, Kriegsgefangenenfürsorge, whose task was alleviation, with pacifism, whose task was that of preventing war. "We do not wish to make wars

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<sup>12</sup>Hesse, "Den Pazifisten," Die Zeit (Wien), Nr. 4713, Jahrgang 14. 7. November 1915. Hesse Nachlaß.

<sup>13</sup>Hesse, "Den Friedensleuten," Die Propyläen, 13(1915), S. 180-181. Hesse Nachlaß.

milder, or shorter; we wish to make war completely avoidable."<sup>14</sup> In their accusations and counter-accusations, Hesse and Fried represented the extremes of a house divided against itself. Their discord stems from their difference in attitude. Each was a pacifist, to be sure. But one was determined to prevent war through idealistic organization and leadership, while the other was inclined to alleviate the suffering of the victims, and to appeal more passively to the individual conscience.

Hesse's appeal to the individual conscience, "an den Einzelnen und sein Gewissen," to humanity for humaneness, resulted for him in alienation and hate. He was pilloried as a defeatist and insulted as an unpatriotic pacifist, a deserter from the fatherland, a traitor, and a partisan of the enemy. In a frequently reprinted, anonymous article, "Ein deutscher Dichter," the Kölner Tageblatt of October 24, 1915, reported that "like a knight of the woeful countenance, like a d'Annunzio-Rappaport, Shirker Hesse wandered away, a man without a fatherland, a man who inwardly long ago shook the dust of this native earth from his boots."<sup>15</sup> For Hesse the repercussions of his anti-war stand were drastic indeed. Overnight

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<sup>14</sup> Alfred H. Fried, "Hermann Hesse und die Pazifisten," Die Frieden-Warte (Zürich), Nr. 1, Jahrgang 18, Januar 1916, S. 21. Hesse Nachlaß.

<sup>15</sup> (anonym). "Ein deutscher Dichter," Kölner Tageblatt, Nr. 610, Jahrgang 53, Sonntag 24. Oktober 1915. Hesse Nachlaß.

Hesse lost friends and acquaintances, and soon saw his books disappear from the windows of the booksellers. In a "conjectural biography," published later in 1925, in the Neue Rundschau, Germany's leading liberal monthly, Hesse wrote that

the consequence of my anti-war stand was that in the press of my fatherland I was declared a traitor . . . Of all my friends—and I thought I had many in the press—only two (Theodore Heuß and Conrad Haußmann), ventured to stand up for me. Old friends gave me to understand that they had been nourishing a viper in their bosoms, and that these bosoms in the future would beat only for Kaiser and Reich but no longer for a degenerate like me.<sup>16</sup>

Theodore Heuß, a south German liberal and co-editor of März, spoke on Hesse's behalf. In an article in the Neckar Zeitung on November 1, 1915, Heuß refuted the charges of the Kölner Tageblatt against Hesse. Comparing Hesse with d'Annunzio, Heuß felt was "as unfortunate as possible, for the Italian typified the over-excited, rhetorical chauvinism, and Hesse in attitude and disposition, the complete opposite."<sup>17</sup> Contrary to the opinion of the Kölner Tageblatt, Hesse did not stand aloof, as Heuß observed. In fact during the entire war he worked actively and intensely for German relief organizations

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<sup>16</sup>Hesse, Kurzgefaßter Lebenslauf (1926), GS, IV, S. 476-477.

<sup>17</sup>Theodore Heuß, "Hermann Hesse, der 'vaterlandslose Gesell!'" Neckar-Zeitung (Heilbronn), 1. November 1915, Nr. 225, Hesse Nachlaß.

(Deutsche Gefangenenfürsorge 1914-1919), edited a bi-weekly Sunday journal (Sonntagsboten für die deutschen Kriegsgefangenen 1916-1919), and a series of literary editions for German prisoners-of-war (Bücherei für deutsche Kriegsgefangene 1918-1919), as well as a newspaper for German internees in Switzerland (Deutsche Interierten-zeitung 1916-1917).

In 1916, under the auspices of the Prisoners of War Welfare Organization, Hesse, and a renowned zoology professor, by the name of Richard Woltereck, directed The Berne Book Center for German prisoners-of-war. Its function was to provide books and articles for the German prisoners interned in Switzerland and France. Since the official funds made available for this purpose were soon exhausted, the Center's performance depended largely on the activity of Hesse. In countless letters, Hesse begged books from libraries, publishers, colleagues, and friends. As Hesse wrote to a friend on June 30, 1916, "it's not a question of humanitarianism alone, but a political and education<sup>al</sup> one, for the moral dangers of imprisonment are considerable."<sup>18</sup> Thousands of books were amassed and dispatched to the German prisoners.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Hesse an Schmidtbonn, 30. Juli 1916, unpublished letter Hesse Nachlaß.

<sup>19</sup> Bernhard Zeller, Hermann Hesse: In Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten (Hamburg, 1963), S. 75.

Since many of them were unsuitable for prisoners, being of a highly literate nature, Hesse began to edit a paper for war prisoners under the auspices of the neutral Berne office Pro captivis. It was called "The Sunday Messenger for German War Prisoners," and was published bi-weekly for three years (1916-1919); thousands of copies of this paper were dispatched to France, England, Russia and Italy.<sup>20</sup>

In his desire to aid the prisoners of war, Hesse also edited the "German Internees' Newspaper," and issued his own series of twenty-two books, presenting the prisoners of war with stories by Emil Strauß, the Mann brothers, by Gottfried Keller, and by himself. Gottfried Keller's Don Correa, Thomas Mann's Tonio Kröger and Das Eisenbahnunglück, as well as other short stories by Stifter, Arnold Zweig, and Paquet soon appeared. Hesse's project in editing and packing Liebesgaben also resulted in thousands of copies of an anthology of poetry from Novalis to Ernst Stadler, a volume entitled Dichtergedanken from Herder to Stifter, and a collection of anecdotes and witticisms entitled Schüler und Studenten.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Bernhard Zeller, Hermann Hesse, op. cit. S. 75.

<sup>21</sup>Hesse, Gesammelte Briefe 1895-1921 (Frankfurt, 1973), S. 366.

Hesse was tireless indeed in his work for the prisoners of war. He viewed this service as one he was morally obliged to do.

Every life stands beneath its own star, but mine was not of the heroic, patriotic, or military type; it was not required of me to worship and fight for that star, but rather the opposite: my task was to defend the private and individual life threatened by mechanization, by war, by the State, by the ideals of the masses . . . The misery that now calls to one from every corner of the world is so terrible that I want to do everything I can to help from my humble position.<sup>21</sup>

In 1917, Hesse's appeals to humanity for humaneness continued. They now focused sharply on the politician and his rhetoric. In an article entitled "An einen Staatsminister", published in the Neue Zürcher Zeitung on August 12, Hesse called for an immediate end of the war. He told the cabinet ministers, directing his comments specifically to Alfred von Tirpitz, war-time propagandist and state secretary for naval affairs (1849-1930), that if they would so their duty to mankind, they would sacrifice a trifling bit of prestige, and if need be, their minister's portfolio as well, to condemn this wretched war, which costs more than anything it can ever achieve is worth. But instead of doing so, the ministers like Tirpitz continued to make diffuse

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<sup>21</sup>Hesse an Schmidtbonn, 30. Juni 1916, unpublished letter Hesse Nachlaß.



speeches, which for Hesse only lacked what makes human words valuable and important: they lacked love and humanity. "Your speeches show a profound feeling of concern and responsibility for your people, its army, and its honor. But they show no feeling for mankind. And, to put it frankly, they imply hundreds of thousands of more human sacrifices."<sup>23</sup> On December 30, in another article in the Neue Zürcher Zeitung, "Soll Friede werden?", Hesse attacked the politicians of the Reichstag for living by false, high-sounding phrases.

Why do parliaments and cabinets content themselves with the same dreary gossip and chatter, the same everyday trivialities, why do they not rise up to champion a great idea, the only idea that really matters today? Why do they support national self-determination only when they themselves hope to profit? Why do people still believe in the false idealism of official phrasemongers?<sup>24</sup>

In both these newspaper articles Hesse's devotion to humanity clearly opposed the politics of German nationalism.

Hesse's concern for the individual and for the moral responsibility of mankind was sharply distinguished from the politics of the so-called German revolution of 1918. As for the German decision to overthrow the

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<sup>23</sup>Hesse, "An einen Staatsminister" (August, 1917), Politische Betrachtungen (Frankfurt, 1970), S. 15.

<sup>24</sup>Hesse, "Soll Friede Werden?" (Dezember, 1917), Politische Betrachtungen, op. cit., S. 21-22.

Kaiser in 1918, this decision Hesse described in an essay entitled Der Weg der Liebe (December, 1918), as

an authentic action which welled from the fertile depths of the unconscious. It was the appearance of an awakening from profound illusions. It was a breach with a fossilized and sclerotic tradition. It was the first appearance of an insight: since the national ideals of our leaders were a fraud, were not humanity, reason and good will the better way? . . . This magnificent, involuntary, ungewollte, sudden and powerful movement did not arise from shrewdness and calculation, it came from the heart, from millions of hearts. And so let what came from the heart be carried on with a forthright heart!<sup>25</sup>

At first Hesse thus hailed and expected much of the revolution. In a letter to Thomas Mann, Hesse wrote: "I greeted the revolution of 1918, with great sympathy."<sup>26</sup> To a friend in Zürich, he observed that "with November of 1918, I was without any reservations on the side of the revolution. Moreover, I had friends everywhere in the Left, and more particularly, close friends in the German Left."<sup>27</sup> Commenting on the Spartacists in Berlin, Hesse noted, that of all those in the fatherland trying to usher in a better future, it was those rebellious slaves he liked best.<sup>28</sup> What he admired was their inner

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<sup>25</sup>Hesse, "Der Weg der Liebe" (Dezember, 1918), Politische Betrachtungen (Frankfurt, 1970), S. 40, 42.

<sup>26</sup>Hesse an Thomas Mann, Anfang Dezember 1931, Briefe (Frankfurt, 1965), S. 57.

<sup>27</sup>Hesse an R. Jacob Humm, Mitte März 1933, Briefe, op. cit., S. 100.

<sup>28</sup>Hesse, Politische Betrachtungen, op. cit., S. 74.

strength, their resoluteness, and their straightforwardness.

But when senseless violence and bloodshed became rampant, Hesse's enthusiasm became restrained. Even though he hailed the revolution, and greeted it as one possibility of overcoming the antiquated and the reactionary, Hesse was not morally capable of direct participation in its violence and bloodshed.

Will I approve of revolution? Can I say yes to the killing of men, so that others will perhaps have it better? Herein lies the intellectual problem. For me, who has been conscious of the war, and who has suffered intellectual desperation, the question is once and for all solved. I do not confess the right to revolution and manslaughter. Nothing is hindered, if I consider the crowd as not guilty, which kills and explodes into rage and distress. But I myself would not be innocent, if I were to be an accomplice, for I would be renouncing some of the few absolute spiritual principles which I have.<sup>29</sup>

Hesse's ultimate concern was the individual conscience and the moral and sacred principles of the individual.

With the determination worthy of an Erasmus, Hesse refused to admit that an appeal to violence and force was legitimate, declaring himself ready to continue to serve his "spiritual principles" of non-violence, to play the part of onlooker, of spectator, rather than resorting to violence and

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<sup>29</sup>Hesse, Politische Betrachtungen (Frankfurt, 1970), S. 106.

bloodshed. Amid the exacerbations of the politics of the revolution, Hesse set himself the task of incorporating the spirit of humanity, of enlightened reason, to defend the unity of Europe and the unity of mankind. The politicization of the poet was not Hesse's ideal, but service in the name of humanity.

I have always had indeed the understanding that our politics are conducted by people who do not understand politics. But I myself understand just as little. My duty and divine profession is that of humanity. But humanity and politics, after all, always exclude one another. Both are necessary, but to serve both at the same time is hardly possible. Politics requires parties, humanity prohibits them.<sup>30</sup>

After the war Hesse's message for Germany, written in an essay entitled Das Reich, published in the Neue Zürcher Zeitung on December 8, 1918, was not to return to the idyllic ways of poets and thinkers, to writing poems and playing sonatas in peaceful serenity. But rather to take

the path which an individual must take when his life has led him into error and deep torment. It can recollect its past, its origin and childhood, its greatness, its glory and its defeat, and through this recollection find the strength which is inherent in it and can never be lost. As the pious say, it must "look within." And deep within itself it will find intact its own inner-most being, which will not try to evade its destiny but

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<sup>30</sup> Hesse an Emil Molt, 18. November, 1918, Gesammelte Briefe 1885-1921 (Frankfurt, 1973), S. 382.

embrace it and, building on what is best and most essential in itself, make a fresh start.<sup>31</sup>

The goal for Germany as Hesse perceived it was not "to grow great and rich and powerful again, to have ships and armies again as quickly as possible. Our goal cannot be a childish delusion—have we not seen the results of ships and armies, of power and money? Have we already forgotten?"<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Hesse, "The Reich: December 1918," If the War Goes On (New York, 1971), p. 72.

<sup>32</sup>Hesse, "Zarathustras Wiederkehr," Politische Betrachtungen (Frankfurt, 1970), S. 76.

III / KULTURKRITIK: THE INTELLECTUAL AS ESSAYIST, 1918

This request, asking the German people to "look within" to confront their own inner-most being, resulted for Hesse himself in an intensive undertaking of psychoanalysis. For as early as 1916, Hesse had found himself so disturbed in body and mind, so spiritually depressed as a result of the war, that he had to interrupt his work for the German prisoners of war. Gaining little from a rest in Lucarno and Brunnen, Hesse underwent a sequence of some seventy psychoanalytic sessions (May 1916-November 1917), with Dr. Josef Bernhard Lang (1883-1945), a disciple of C. G. Jung, in the Sonnmatt clinic in Lucerne. These psychoanalytic sessions were the result, as Hesse put it,

of the world war . . . of the destruction of my freedom and independence . . . of the great moral crisis caused by the war, which forced me to find a new foundation for my entire thought and work . . . of the severe illness of our third and youngest son which went on for years . . . and of the first premonitions of my wife's mental illness.<sup>1</sup>

These sessions, it seems, were not so much formal psychoanalytic consultations in the strictest sense, but rather intimate conversations between a disturbed poet and a personal friend and psychoanalyst, who later sporadically appears in Hesse's writings under various

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<sup>1</sup>Hesse, Beim Einzug in ein neues Haus (1931), GS, IV, S. 629.

pseudonyms.<sup>2</sup> Whatever the nature of the treatment, which seems to have been rather unorthodox, Hesse, with the advice of J. B. Lang, undertook an intensive study of the writings of Freud, Jung, and Wilhelm Stekel, a student of Freud, and thus opened an entirely new world for himself.

Hesse, it must be said, was singularly well equipped for the revolutionary findings of this new world of psychoanalysis by his intimate acquaintance with the German Romantics (Novalis, Jean Paul and Nietzsche), who were after all, the first to realize the importance of dreams, and to try to integrate them into a total picture of human culture. Among the great German poets, Hesse singled out Jean Paul, "whose concept of emotional processes stands closest to those of today, and who typifies the artist whose permanent, intimate contact with his own unconscious, emerging from profound, living presentiments, becomes an infinitely productive well-spring."<sup>3</sup> But among the writers of the past, who according to Hesse, came closest to understanding the essential tenets of analytic psychology, was Dostoyevsky, who not only intuited the paths which Freud and his students were

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<sup>2</sup>Hugo Ball, Hermann Hesse: Sein Leben und Werk (Berlin, 1933), S. 137-142.

<sup>3</sup>Hesse, Künstler und Psychoanalyse (1918), GS, VII, S. 142.



to travel long before them, but who also possessed a true practice and technique of this kind of psychology.

Psychoanalysis confirmed Hesse in his feeling that the evil and the ugliness of the world could not be avoided, and lay deep in man's soul.

With the end of the war . . . I found reflected in myself all the world's lust for war and murder, all its irresponsibility, all its gross self-indulgence, all its cowardice; I had to lose first my self-respect and then my self-contempt; I had no less a task than to carry through to the end my scrutiny of chaos, with the now soaring, now sinking hope of rediscovering beyond chaos, nature and innocence. Every human being who has been awakened and really has achieved consciousness has on one or more occasions walked this narrow path through the wilderness.<sup>4</sup>

After taking the path of psychoanalysis, Hesse in 1918, analyzed and critiqued the still controversial discipline in an essay entitled Künstler und Psychoanalyse, published in the Frankfurter Zeitung on July 16, 1918. This essay is remarkable both for its time and in itself on the relationship between the cultural creativity of the artist, and the then very new analytic depth psychology. This relationship Hesse insists, could only be of value if the analysis itself was "not merely an intellectual affair, but rather a real living experience."<sup>5</sup> Through

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<sup>4</sup>Hesse, "Life Story Briefly Told," Autobiographical Writings (New York, 1972), pp. 53-54.

<sup>5</sup>Hesse, Künstler und Psychoanalyse (1918), GS, VII, S. 140.

his own personal contact with analysis Hesse felt he was in a position to apply psychoanalytic theories with more justification than the salon psychiatrists and the coffee house intellectuals.

The initial knowledge and observation of the unconscious, of the meaning of psychic mechanisms such as repression, sublimation and regression, had yielded a clear schema which was immediately enlightening, and easily accessible to everybody. But the utility of psychoanalysis for the artist remained, according to Hesse, rather doubtful. The relationship between the artist and the psychoanalyst was, at best, a symbiotic one. For the poet showed himself as the epitome of a particular way of thinking which was, in fact, the complete contrary of the psychoanalytic way. "The poet was the dreamer, the analyst was the interpreter of his dreams. Could anything else remain for the poet, even granting all his interest in this new psychology, other than to continue dreaming and to follow the call and the dictates of his own unconscious?"<sup>6</sup> Hesse's answer was negative: no, nothing else could remain for him. All of analysis could not essentially enhance his powers. The poetic grasp of emotional powers, Hesse insisted, remains after all a

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<sup>6</sup>Hesse, Künstler und Psychoanalyse (1918), GS, VII, S. 139.

thing of intuitive, not analytic talents.

However, the relationship between artist and psychoanalyst was not thereby settled. The path of psychoanalysis could be of advantage to the artist. In Hesse's view, psychoanalysis provided the artist with "three confirmations." The first is the profound confirmation given to the value and importance of phantasy or fiction. For the artist always suffered from a mistrust of his calling, from a doubt of phantasy. But psychoanalysis, in Hesse's view, established for the poet an objective value for his apparently dubious games and fancies (dubious at least in the opinion of the bourgeois attitude and education).

Psychoanalysis impressively teaches every artist that it is precisely what he could sometimes assess as "only" a fiction which is of the highest value, and it emphatically reminds him of the existence of fundamental emotional demands as well as of the relativity of all authoritarian measurements and valuations. Psychoanalysis offers him a free region of pure intellectual activity.<sup>7</sup>

The other two confirmations offer themselves only to those artists who are willing to undergo depth analysis themselves. In Hesse's view, the artist who earnestly undergoes analysis through memory, dreams and associations retains the enduring benefit of being on "more intimate

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<sup>7</sup>Hesse, Künstler und Psychoanalyse (1918), GS, VII, S. 139-140.

terms with his own unconscious." And thirdly, psychoanalysis teaches the artist to confront his repressed self with honest impartiality. This third confirmation, Hesse insisted, was intimately related to the significance of psychoanalysis for morality, for ethics, and for personal conscience. For it demands a sincerity towards oneself to which we are not genuinely accustomed.

In concluding his essay, Künstler und Psychoanalyse, Hesse quotes an unusually perceptive passage from one of Schiller's letters. This passage Hesse considered as one of the most fantastic pre-modern confirmations of the psychology of the unconscious. Schiller wrote to Theodor Körner (1791-1813), a poet of the German War of Liberation, who had complained of having trouble with his creativity and productiveness, that

the reason for your complaint lies in the coercion imposed upon your imagination by your intellect, Verstand. It does not seem good, and it is detrimental to the creative work of the soul when the intellect passes review too sharply over the stream of ideas, like a watch-man. Considered in isolation, an idea can be very insignificant and very adventurous, but can perhaps become significant through one which follows it; it can form a very important member in a certain connection with others. It seems to me that intellect, in a creative mind, has withdrawn its sentinel from the gates. The ideas stream in *pêle-mêle*, and only then will the intellect look them over and examine the great quantity.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Hesse, Künstler und Psychoanalyse (1918), GS, VII, S. 142.

Within this passage lay the classical expression for Hesse of the ideal relationship between the intellectual critic and the unconscious. Neither the repression of the material which emerges from the unconscious, from uncontrolled ideas, dreams, playful phantasies, nor continued surrender to the shapeless eternality of the unconscious, "but rather the loving listening to the hidden springs and only then criticism and selection from the chaos—this is the way all great artists have worked. If any technique can aid in fulfilling this demand, then it is psychoanalysis."<sup>9</sup>

Friendliness to Freud is prominent in Hesse's essay. Not a trace of Jung appears in these pages. Instead of such concepts as archetypes and collective unconscious, we find the familiar Freudian notions of regression, sublimation and repression. Freud, according to his biographer, Ernest Jones, read this essay with great delight.<sup>10</sup> In a letter to Sigmund Freud on September 9, 1918, Hesse thanked Freud for giving prominent reference to his essay, and acknowledged that the artist is always unconsciously the ally of the psychoanalyst, since he is ever striving for a heightened state of

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<sup>9</sup>Hesse, Künstler und Psychoanalyse (1918), GS, VII, S. 142-143.

<sup>10</sup>Ernest Jones, The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud (New York, 1957), III, p. 521-522.

consciousness.<sup>11</sup> Hesse, it should be noted, had applauded Freud and his psychoanalysis as early as 1914. In a book review of Kurt Wolff's Nervöse Leute, published in Die Propyläen (1914), Hesse wrote that, "Freud and his psychoanalysis have embittered adversaries, and Freud's method is certainly burdened with subjective prejudices, but the path to recognition and cure of nervousness, Nervosität, has been demonstrated by him, and in regard to it hardly any more can be doubted."<sup>12</sup> Yet despite his early enthusiasm for Freud and the new science of psychoanalysis, Hesse also had words of admonition and criticism.

Psychoanalysis, Hesse came to think, could be highly destructive of the artistic personality. At an early stage he became aware that it presented special problems to the creative artist, and indeed to the literary critic, who wished to employ its methods. Hesse directed his criticism in this regard against the misapplication of Freudianism by incompetent dilettantes who were neither psychoanalysts nor literary critics. In a direct reference to Freud, Hesse outlined in a sharp and biting tone the evils of the Dilettantenanalyse which

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<sup>11</sup>Hesse an Sigmund Freud, 9. September 1918, Gesammelte Briefe 1895-1921 (Frankfurt, 1973), S. 378.

<sup>12</sup>Hesse, "Kurt Wolffs Nervöse Leute," Die Propyläen (Beilage z. Münchener Zeitung), 12(1914), S. 186. Hesse Nachlaß.

had found its way into the field of literary criticism, that is, the tendency to explain away masterpieces in terms of psychic disturbances. Basically depreciatory in nature, that type of analysis, according to Hesse, could reveal no light on the aesthetic value of a work of art, nor could it in its indirectness, contribute much even in understanding the artist. In his attack on the exaggerations of the psychoanalytical approach to literary criticism, Hesse castigated "the abuse of the basic Freudian concepts by witless critics and renegade literary scholars," that attitude which misconstrues the whole meaning of the concept of sublimation, that illiterate attitude which denigrates literature to symptoms of psychic condition.<sup>13</sup>

After attacking the exaggerations of the psychoanalytical approach to literature, Hesse also criticized the new Expressionistic trend in German literature, which according to him also denigrated works of literature to psychoanalytic conditions. In June, 1918, Hesse published in Die Neue Rundschau an essay entitled Zu "Expressionismus in der Dichtung." This essay was an answer to an important programmatic manifesto, also published in Die Neue Rundschau in March 1918, written by Kasimir Edschmid,

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<sup>13</sup>Hesse, Über gute und schlechte Kritiker: Notizen zum Thema Dichtung und Kritik, GS, VII, S. 366-367.

a German author and minor Expressionistic novelist, although Expressionism's main propagandist. Edschmid, in his manifesto of Expressionism, defined the Expressionists in the following manner:

They did not look.  
They envisioned.  
They did not photograph.  
They had visions.  
Instead of the rocket they produced the perpetual  
state of excitement.<sup>14</sup>

In adopting a reserved attitude toward such categorical and absolute Expressionistic utterances, Hesse turned upon Edschmid a phrase the latter had used himself to scorn Impressionism: "With all the good will in the world I simply cannot find that the feeling of the cosmos among Expressionists (one may think of J. R. Becher), is expressed in any other way than in ecstatic babbling."<sup>15</sup> Hesse rejected indeed the extreme demands of the Expressionists who like Edschmid wished to throw out the old. Whoever up to now has loved Keller or Fontane, Storm or Ibsen, Hesse insists, is not going to throw them away. The main difference between Impressionists and Expressionists in literature, according to Hesse, was that the Impressionists received their reputations from the impressions of others, while the

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<sup>14</sup>Kasimir Edschmid, Über den Expressionismus in der Literatur und die neue Dichtung (Berlin, 1919), S. 52.

<sup>15</sup>Hesse, Zu "Expressionismus in der Dichtung," Schriften zur Literatur I (Frankfurt, 1972), S. 204.



Expressionists chose their good names for themselves. From the attitude of Edschmid's article and other programmatic utterances of the Expressionists which many engaged in, Hesse perceived a certain ill-feeling, a kind of fear and discontent. This attitude, Hesse insisted, influenced the polemics in the behavior of the young and the unconcerned, "the disparaging, the despising, and the unknowing," of works and values which he was accustomed to love and protect. Yet despite his criticism of the Expressionists, Hesse made a statement in this essay of his own personal stand which shows considerable sympathy with some Expressionistic tendencies.

In my most private theology and mythology I call Expressionism the resounding of the cosmos, the reminder of the primordial homeland of humanity, Urheimat, the timeless realm of the spirit, the lyrical talking of the individual with the world, confession and avowal of self, the experience of self in random images and metaphors.<sup>16</sup>

To formulate some idea of the intellectual standing of young Germany in 1918, Hesse read and studied a large number of books written by young German poets. The results of his study, Jüngste deutsche Dichtung (1918), indicates that two principal themes are everywhere predominant:

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<sup>16</sup>Hesse, Zu "Expressionismus in der Dichtung" (1918), op. cit., S. 206.

Rebellion against authority and against the culture of that authority in the process of downfall, and eroticism. The father thrust against the wall and condemned by his son, and the youngster, hungry for love, who endeavours to manifest his sexual passion in new, free, lovelier and truer forms: these are the two figures that are everywhere to be found.<sup>17</sup>

The experience and impetus behind these revolutions and innovations were, Hesse insists, clearly discernable in the two powerful forces of the world war, and the analytical psychology of the unconscious founded by Sigmund Freud. These two factors in the spiritual life of the young German poets—the break with traditional culture and the knowledge that it was possible to investigate analytically the unconscious—governed all recent German literature. These two forces formed the foundations on which the young German poets were beginning to build. But so far as Hesse could judge, nothing had yet been achieved. The prevailing mood was more concerned with making noise and the assertion of self-importance, than with cultural progress and the future. The two revolutionary experiences of the young German poets, Hesse insisted, had not produced their full effect:

The war and psychoanalysis, as experiences, have hitherto produced no other effect than a kind of half-crapulous, halb katzenjämmerlichen,

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<sup>17</sup> Hesse, Jüngste deutsche Dichtung (1918), Schriften zur Literatur I (Frankfurt, 1972), S. 218.

half-frenzied outburst of puberty . . . The war has not brought home to those who have returned from it the lesson that nothing is done by violence and gunplay, that war and violence are attempts to solve complicated and delicate problems in far too savage, far too stupid, and far too brutal a fashion. The new psychology . . . must teach these young men that the emancipation of the personality, the canonization of the natural instincts, are only the first steps on the way, and that this personal freedom is a poor thing and of no account in comparison with that highest of all freedoms of the individual: the freedom to regard one self consciously and joyously as a part of humanity, and to serve it with liberated powers.<sup>18</sup>

The war and its cruel techniques of mass murder suggested for Hesse regression, and indeed mocked the whole idea of progress and culture. In his essay Krieg und Frieden, published in the Neue Zürcher Zeitung on October 6, 1918, Hesse observed one opinion that had been frequently expressed during the course of the war to be absolutely false:

The opinion that through its sheer magnitude and the gigantic mechanism of horror it created, this war would frighten future generations out of ever waging war again. Fear teaches men nothing. If men enjoy killing, no memory of war will ever deter them. Nor will the knowledge of the material damage produced by the war.<sup>19</sup>

The celebrations at the end of the war, Hesse observed,

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<sup>18</sup>Hesse, Jüngste deutsche Dichtung (1918), op. cit., S. 221.

<sup>19</sup>Hesse, "Krieg und Frieden" (1918), Politische Betrachtungen (Frankfurt, 1970), S. 32.

had been on the one side for the end of despotism, and on the other for victory. "But no one seemed greatly excited over the fact that after four years of terror the senseless shooting stopped. Strange world! Over what trifles, by comparison, have people again started to thrash windowpanes and one another's skulls."<sup>20</sup>

Good ideas were in the air, Hesse noted, the brotherhood of man, the League of Nations, friendly cooperation among all peoples, and disarmament. But Hesse had no illusions. He likened the situation of Germany in December of 1918, to that of France in 1870. The same inferences were already tragically being drawn: "Grit your teeth, endure what must be endured, but in your hearts nurture the vengeance which at some later day will vindicate the disaster!"<sup>21</sup>

In his essay Phantasien, written in 1918, Hesse closely examines the "intellectual" on the question of the Politisierung des Geistes. This concept had become familiar in the various books and articles Hesse had been reading, and Hesse's state of mind concerning it had been deeply unsympathetic. The intellectuals, according to Hesse, who thought it necessary to politicize

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<sup>20</sup>Hesse, "Weltgeschichte," (1918), Politische Betrachtungen, (Frankfurt, 1970), S. 38.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., S. 39.

themselves, deeply misunderstood and misconstrued their task. The intellectuals, according to Hesse, should have been sensitive to their complicity and their share of guilt for the war and the suffering of the world. "Indeed they were accessories to this crime, they were radically guilty, these Herren Intellektuellen."<sup>22</sup> They were no longer artists, in Hesse's view, but had become "journalists, makers of business, and clever orators." Now, Hesse insists, they came forth after the war and again demanded the Politisierung des Dichters! These people, Hesse observed, who acted publicly and jointly were no longer artists, and chided them for thinking that if enough of them would assemble in a Verein, if the spirit, if Geist, would be established against industry and the economy, than a great deal would be improved. The function of the artist for Hesse was not to meddle with the handiwork of the practical man, but to be the guardian and critic of the cultural estate.

To remain on the side of the Ideal, to have presentiments, to create ideals, to have dreams. . . The artist can never believe in that unutterably important world of business, parties, elections, rates of exchange, honorary titles, metals, rules of the house, etc. When the artist politicizes himself, he turns away from his human duty

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<sup>22</sup>Hesse, Phantasien (1918), GS, VII, S. 151.

of Vorausträumens and from his service to the Ideal, and bungles the handiwork of the practical man . . .<sup>23</sup>

In his cultural criticism, Hesse had singled out militarism and nationalism as the two greatest sicknesses of our era, and called resistance to these "megalomaniacs" the most important task and justification of the artist and intellectual.<sup>24</sup> But in Hesse's idea of Kulturkritik, culture was defined not only as the critic of the state castigating its two megalomaniacs, militarism and nationalism, but Kulturkritik also meant essay writing, criticizing cultural movements and problems. In 1918, Hesse had castigated literary critics for their abuse of Freudian notions, had criticized the extreme demands of young Expressionists, had admonished young German writers for being more concerned with self-importance than with cultural progress, and had above all chided the intellectuals for trying to unite Geist and industry, culture and politics. These essays of 1918, again epitomize Hesse's willingness to dialectically separate culture and politics. Culture defined in terms of individualism and humanitarian ideas was clearly distinguished from the militarism and nationalism of the time.

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<sup>23</sup>Hesse, Phantasien (1918), GS, VII, S. 153-154.

<sup>24</sup>Hesse, Danksagung und moralisierende Betrachtung (1946), GS, VII, S. 457.

#### IV / INDIVIDUALISM AND POLITICS (1919-1923)

To champion humanitarian ideas, Hesse founded a new periodical in October of 1919. Its title, Vivos Voco, was taken from a Latin inscription on the bell which Friedrich Schiller had described in his Lay of the Bell: "I am calling the living." Its message was plain: to summon the living to construct a better world. "Our appeal to the living, particularly to the young, is an appeal for help and for comrades in arms against the dangers of our times . . . In these immediate post-war years, there is no political, economic, scientific, or artistic question more urgent than that of caring for the young and the weak."<sup>1</sup> Vivos Voco heralded a new Germany and a better world. To prepare the way for this better tomorrow, this bi-weekly began to champion the cause of the needy, to focus attention upon children, particularly their education, to denounce anti-Semitism, and to acclaim the ideals of pacifism and internationalism.<sup>2</sup> As a contributor to Vivos Voco, Ernst Robert Curtius notes that "it bore witness to a new spirit, a spirit striving to overcome the evil forces of national hatred."<sup>3</sup> The net income of the

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<sup>1</sup>Hesse, Vivos Voco, (1919-1920), S. 1-2. Hesse Nachlaß.

<sup>2</sup>Joseph Mileck, "Hermann Hesse as an Editor," in German Literature of the Nineteenth & Twentieth Centuries, edited by Siegfried Mews (North Carolina, 1970), p. 220.

<sup>3</sup>Ernst Robert Curtius, "Hermann Hesse," Hesse: A Collection of Critical Essays (New York, 1973), p. 34.



periodical was assigned to the relief work for German children, who still suffered from food shortages as a result of the allied blockade. As an editor of this periodical (1919-1923), Hesse entered the fray as writer engagé for a rebirth of the German nation on a solid humanistic basis.

By 1919, the most sacred of Hesse's humanistic principles was that of self-will. What Hesse meant by self-will was made clear in an essay entitled Eigensinn, published in Vivos Voco in 1919. Self-will was, according to Hesse, the only virtue that did not take into account man-made laws. The self-willed individual like Socrates, Jesus or Giordano Bruno, obeyed a different law, the one law Hesse held absolutely sacred—the law in himself, his own will. Taken literally, self-will meant having a will of one's own. But Eigensinn also meant at the same time confidence in oneself and consciousness of oneself.

Those few, Hesse observed, who have elected to disregard man's arbitrary laws, to follow instead their own natural laws have come to be revered as the heroes and liberators—though most of their lifetime they were persecuted. Repeatedly, self-willed individuals have shown the millions of the herd, that disobedience to the decrees of man were not a gross irresponsibility but fidelity to a far higher sacred law.

For the individual there is only one natural standpoint, only one natural criterion. That is self-will. The destiny of the self-willed individual can be neither capitalism nor socialism . . . his only living destiny is the silent, unquestioning law in his own heart, which comfortable habit make it so hard to obey, but which to the self-willed individual is destiny and godhead.<sup>1</sup>

Andr  Gide commenting on Hesse's idea of Eigensinn writes that "while all the other virtues, the most preached and the most beloved, go back or refer to laws that men have invented, this supreme virtue alone heeds and respects only itself. That this virtue isolates you goes without saying; and opposes you to the masses, and points you out to the fury of the chiefs and directors of the herd. Hesse paid with exile; and others with imprisonment and death."<sup>2</sup>

Hesse's appeal to the self-willed individual was directed primarily toward German youth. In Zarathustras Wiederkehr: Ein Wort an die deutsche Jugend, published in Simplizissimus in January 1919, Hesse rebuked German youth for their expectation of outside help and advice, and urged them to "look inwardly," to realize themselves and to accept their destiny. With the collapse of Wilhelminian Germany, Hesse implored German youth to

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<sup>1</sup>Hesse, "Eigensinn," Eigensinn: Autobiographische Schriften (Frankfurt, 1972), S. 108.

<sup>2</sup>Andr  Gide, "Preface to Journey to the East," Hesse: A Collection of Critical Essays (New York, 1973), p. 24.

accept the defeat of the Reich, to shake off not only the despair and recrimination but also the "false gods" of nationalism and militarism which had led the nation into the abyss, and to build a new democratic Germany for the future. He told them that rather than try to improve the world (Weltverbesserung), they should try to realize and improve themselves (Selbstverbesserung).

Few people perceive their destiny. Few people live their lives. Learn to live your lives! Learn to perceive your destiny! . . . You must learn to be yourselves . . . You should forget how to be others, to imitate foreign voices and to take foreign faces for your own . . . Don't stand around begging for the mercy of world history, you who have so recently sung Germany's praises for the good of the world; don't stand in the road like punished school children whining for the sympathy of passers by! If you can't bear poverty, then die! If you can't govern yourselves without an emperor and victorious generals, then subject yourselves to foreign rule! But, I implore you, don't lose all sense of shame!<sup>3</sup>

In this essay, the sovereignty of the free individual is pitted against the masses. Making the individual ego an absolute had its dangers, Hesse was well aware, but at a time when individual and personal dignity had disappeared, he considered it necessary to appeal to the moral autonomy of the individual.

This address to German youth has been called the most

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<sup>3</sup>Hesse, Zarathustras Wiederkehr: Ein Wort an die deutsche Jugend (1919), GS, VII, S. 200-221.

laudable political achievement of any literary figure of the time.<sup>4</sup> Yet in Hesse's own words, "the spirit of this essay did not serve any party or political programme! It called upon youth to consider contemporary events as personal problems to be spiritually mastered."<sup>5</sup> In the Foreword to the second edition (1919), Hesse briefly summarized its contents: "We must not begin at the end with forms of government and political methods, but we must begin with the building of the personality, if we again want to have men and intellectuals who can safely guard the future. This is the concern of my essay."<sup>6</sup> Although the essay reached ten editions by 1920,<sup>7</sup> and was published in the Wandervögelmonatshefte, the official periodical of the German Youth Movement, only a few of the young idealists heeded its warning. Hesse increasingly became a lone voice in the wilderness. In a commentary on this Nietzschean essay/<sup>in</sup> Vivos Voco (1919), Hesse noted that the misunderstood Nietzsche was "the last solitary representative of the German spirit . . . who had become anti-German in opposition to the cultural crudity of

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<sup>4</sup>Franz Bauer, Hermann Hesse (New York, 1969), p. 66.

<sup>5</sup>Hesse, quoted in Hesse: Eine Chronik in Bildern, Hrg. von Berthard Zeller (Frankfurt, 1960), S. 87.

<sup>6</sup>Hesse, "Nachwort," Gesammelte Briefe 1895-1921 (Frankfurt, 1973), S. 590.

<sup>7</sup>Deutsches Bücherverzeichnis (Leipzig, 1922), Vol. 1915-1920, S. 1172.

the Wilhelmian era."<sup>8</sup> These words apply most aptly to Hesse himself.

In an open letter to a young German, Brief an einen jungen Deutschen, published in the Neue Zürcher Zeitung on November 21, 1919, Hesse implored German youth, who were so devoted to Nietzsche, to re-read the last chapter of the "untimely meditation" on the advantages and disadvantages of studying history (Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben, 1874).

Read word for word the passages concerning the younger generation fated to demolish a collapsing pseudo-culture (Scheinkultur) and to begin anew! How hard, how bitter is the lot of such a generation. How great, how holy! You are such a generation—you young people in the defeated Germany of today! Upon your shoulders lies this burden, upon your hearts this task.<sup>9</sup>

Like Nietzsche, Hesse saw this task as a further step toward true culture, where the Delphian god cries, "Know thyself." The task of youth was to organize the chaos within themselves by thinking back to their true needs. Their mission was to shake the foundations of the present conceptions of culture, and to look within. "You can find consolation only in yourselves. There

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<sup>8</sup>Hesse, "Zu Zarathustras Wiederkehr," Vivos Voco, I (1919-1920), S. 72-73. Hesse Nachlaß.

<sup>9</sup>Hesse, "Brief an einen jungen Deutschen," Politische Betrachtungen (Frankfurt, 1970), S. 56.

dwells the God who is higher and more selfless than the patriots' God of 1914 . . . He dwells in your hearts, and it is there that you must seek him out and speak with him."<sup>10</sup>

Hesse's concern for the individual and for humanitarian values found its literary expression in his anti-war novel, Demian: The Story of Emil Sinclair's Youth. Published in 1919, Demian became a major literary event. In its first year, it underwent seventy-five editions, and sold over 300,000 copies—a vast number for a novel in those days.<sup>11</sup> The novel was written during a few months of 1917, under the direct impact of the psychotherapy of Dr. J. B. Lang. Demian was the product of that crisis, a crisis of Hesse's own alienation from his native country, from his family associations, and from the whole society that produced him.

Thomas Mann, in his introduction to the first American edition of the novel, has written that "the electrifying influence exercised on a whole generation just after the First World War by Demian . . . is unforgettable. With uncanny accuracy this poetic work struck the nerve of the times and called forth grateful rapture from a

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<sup>10</sup>Hesse, "Brief an einen jungen Deutschen," op. cit., S. 55-56.

<sup>11</sup>Deutsches Bücherverzeichnis (Leipzig, 1927), Achter Band (1921-1925), S. 229. This figure represents my own calculation based on the number of editions.

whole youthful generation who believed that an interpreter of their innermost life had risen from their midst . . ."<sup>12</sup> This novel writes Ernst Robert Curtius, "spoke directly to the students in fieldgray. Here were the sufferings of school; the perplexities of sex; the experience of myths and mysteries; the war, felt as a premonition, endured, paid for in death."<sup>13</sup> The youth movement of the early Twenties, in its quest for a new meaning of life, was to take Hesse's motto to heart:

Every man is more than just himself; but also represents the unique, the very special and always significant and remarkable point at which the world's phenomena intersect, only once in this way and never again. That is why every man's story is important, eternal, sacred; that is why every man as long as he lives and fulfills the will of Nature, is wondrous, and worthy of every consideration . . . Each man's life represents a road, the intimation of a path . . . Each of us—experiments of the depths—strives toward his own destiny. We can understand one another; but each of us is able to interpret himself to himself alone . . . We represent the will of Nature to something new, to the individualism of the future.<sup>14</sup>

But the youth movement could not accept the implied isolation and passivity of the individual. Youth were soon to forget this motto and their ideological hero

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<sup>12</sup>Thomas Mann, "Introduction" to Hesse's Demian: The Story of Emil Sinclair's Youth (New York, 1968), p. ix.

<sup>13</sup>Ernst Robert Curtius, "Hermann Hesse," Hesse: A Collection of Critical Essays (New York, 1973), p. 35.

<sup>14</sup>Hesse, Demian (New York, 1968), pp. 3-4, 122.

in a renewed enthusiasm of nationalism and militarism.

Stefan Zweig has written that although Demian "is the chronicle of the youth of a certain Emil Sinclair (a name borrowed from the Hölderlin circle), and of his friend Max Demian, in reality it is scarcely concerned with external incidents and events; it undertakes primarily to describe the psychic life of its hero, his battles with himself and his struggles for self-realization, his determined but often futile endeavors to understand the changes within himself and to effect a readjustment between the world of his past and of his future."<sup>15</sup>

These two opposing universes, as it were, the old and the new occurring simultaneously, confront the reader throughout the novel. The novel ends with the world war, marking an end to the old, and a new beginning. Toward the end of the novel (the time is 1914), Demian says to a friend: "There will be war . . . But you will see that this is only the beginning. Perhaps it will be a very big war, a war on a gigantic scale. But that, too, will only be the beginning. The new world has begun and the new world will be terrible for those clinging to the old. What will you do?"<sup>16</sup> In

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<sup>15</sup>Stefan Zweig, "Demian," The New York Times Book Review, April 8, 1923, p. 14.

<sup>16</sup>Hesse, Demian (New York, 1968), p. 135.



his Introduction to Demian, Thomas Mann gives the answer in the name of Hermann Hesse. "The right answer would be to assist the new without sacrificing the old. The best servitor of the new—Hesse is an example—may be those who know and love the old and can carry it over into the new."<sup>17</sup> This basic idea is epitomized in Demian, written by a man who has carefully read his Hegel, and speaks here as a student of the great Swabian dialectician, and not only as a thankful "Zögling des Paters Jacobus Burckhardt."<sup>18</sup>

Two aspects of Demian in particular, appealed to the youth who had just emerged from the chaos of the war. In the first place, the novel recorded a struggle toward ethical integrity, toward a life more in harmony with individual nature. Hesse stated this theme at the outset: "I wanted only to try to live in accord with the promptings which came from my true self. Why was that so very difficult?"<sup>19</sup> But more than just a "simple ethical pronouncement," Demian called for an entire moral purification of the German nation. This idea was made clear in a letter written one year before Hitler came to power:

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<sup>17</sup>Thomas Mann, "Introduction," to Demian, op. cit., p. xi.

<sup>18</sup>Hans Mayer, Ansichten: Zur Literatur der Zeit (Hamburg, 1962), S. 53.

<sup>19</sup>Hesse, Demian (New York, 1968), p. 1.

Germany after the First World War had completely neglected to understand her appalling share of responsibility for the War . . . She should have acknowledged it (without however denying that her enemies too bore a heavy share of responsibility), and undertaken a moral purification, eine moralische Reinigung, like France did during the Dreyfus Affair . . . Instead of understanding her own errors and sins, and correcting them, Germany reproached others, sometimes the French, sometimes the Communists, and sometimes the Jews, with the responsibility for every evil.<sup>20</sup>

The second aspect of its particular appeal, and that which differentiates Demian from other post-war novels of protest was its emphasis upon the individual and upon humanitarian values. What Hesse sought, was a new order of humanity.

For us, humanity was a distant goal toward which all men were moving, whose image no one knew, whose laws were nowhere written down. . . . However single-mindedly the world concentrated on war and heroism, on honor and other old ideals, the more remote and improbable any whisper of genuine humanity sounded . . . Yet deep down, underneath, something was taking shape. Something akin to a new humanity.<sup>21</sup>

That Hesse only hints at, and does not venture to show the way to the new order of humanity is rather regrettable.

The picture Hesse gives us in Demian, is of Western civilization sick with repression and frustration. In

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<sup>20</sup>Hesse an Frau E. L., 1932, Briefe (Frankfurt, 1965), S. 85.

<sup>21</sup>Hesse, Demian (New York, 1968), pp. 122, 138.

describing the spirit of Europe, Hesse writes in 1919, that "everywhere we could observe the reign of the herd instinct, nowhere freedom and love. All this false communion — from the fraternities to the choral societies and the nations themselves — was an inevitable development, was a community born of fear and dread, out of embarrassment, but inwardly, rotten, outworn, close to collapsing."<sup>22</sup> Hesse had hard words of criticism indeed for a Europe grown old and rigid. "For a hundred years or more Europe has done nothing . . . but build factories. They know exactly how many ounces of powder it takes to kill a man but they don't know how to pray to God, they don't even know how to be happy for a single contented hour . . . With prodigious efforts mighty new weapons have been created for mankind but the end is flagrant, deep desolation of the spirit. Europe has conquered the whole world only to lose her own soul."<sup>23</sup>

The resolution of this crisis was for Hesse a gnosis, a secret wisdom of an élite. Like Stefan Zweig, Hesse dreamed of an elect circle of higher beings. What Nature wills, Demian tells Sinclair, "is written in the individual few, in you and in me. It is found in Jesus, in

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<sup>22</sup>Hesse, Demian (New York, 1968), p. 115.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., pp. 115, 123.

Nietzsche."<sup>24</sup> The crisis then leads to an assent into an élite, a Nietzschean élite where only the heroes, Sinclair and Demian are aware of the impending change in human affairs. Only awakened individuals like themselves become conscious as the will of humanity. Like Nietzsche, Hesse came to believe in an élite of higher beings, but they were all individual beings suspended in a void. Hesse's individualism, like Nietzsche's meant complete alienation from the masses. Hesse portrayed man determined to convert the world to liberal and humanistic ideas, but he failed to influence the common people, and in the end, went into the world alone.

In the Prologue to Demian, Hesse sharply defines his own nonviolent humanism. If men truly knew the value of a living human being, he wrote, they would not shoot one another wholesale. "What a real living human being is made of seems to be less understood today than at any time before, and men — each one of whom represents a unique and valuable experiment on the part of nature — are therefore shot wholesale nowadays."<sup>25</sup> Hesse's protest against war and killing is continued in a short story entitled Merkwürdige Nachricht von einem andern

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<sup>24</sup>Hesse, Demian (New York, 1968), pp. 115, 123.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

Stern, (Strange News from Another Star, 1919), where Hesse ironically observes:

. . . that killing is not rare among us, but we consider it the worst of crimes. Only in war is it allowed because in war no one kills for his own benefit, out of hatred or envy, but all do only what society demands of them . . . War is no one's fault, it occurs of itself, like storm and lightning, and all of us who have to fight war, we are not their authors, we are only their victims.<sup>26</sup>

By 1919, Hesse seems to have reached the conclusion that man was incapable of progress. During the horrible war, he had seen his humanitarian ideas negated by the "atavistic gnashing of teeth." In an essay published in 1919, Du sollst nicht töten, Hesse, in assuming that humanity's goals were the imperatives put forth by the spiritual leaders of mankind from Zoroaster and Lao-Tzu, was compelled to say, "that present-day mankind is far closer to the gorilla than to man. We are not yet human, we are only on the way to humanity."<sup>27</sup> Anyone, according to Hesse, who disposed of humanitarian ideas as Humanitätsduselei, was still a gorilla and had a long way to go before becoming a man.

Hesse's concern for the individual man was to such

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<sup>26</sup> Hesse, Strange News from Another Star (New York, 1972), pp. 64-65.

<sup>27</sup> Hesse, "Du sollst nicht töten," Politische Betrachtungen (Frankfurt, 1970), S. 43.

an extent a basic presupposition of all of his essays and letters (1914-1933), that individualism had to emerge as a fundamental concept in his thinking. In fact, individualism provides the key to the writer in his entirety. By the term "individualism", Hesse meant a refusal to join the "herd," and a desire to remain at a distance from the irrational movements of the masses.

For some time now, I certainly no longer worry about German politics. During the First World War, I experienced the "awakening" (Wachwerden, being jolted awake by the gruesome reality of the war and horrified at the ease with which my colleagues and friends had enlisted in the service of Moloch), and drew the consequences from thence. Since then I have only wanted to examine German destiny as a neutral Ausländer.<sup>28</sup>

But more than a desire to merely remain at a distance as a neutral Ausländer, individualism for Hesse meant a refusal to adjust oneself to any restraint, to escape conformity, and to avoid being regulated or brought into line by political parties which, according to Hesse, suffocate the personality, and which pour all individuals into the same mold. Hesse respected every individual soul and considered it a crime to subject it to any theory, any dogma, any ideal or doctrine that the individual did not spontaneously choose.

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<sup>28</sup> Hesse an Herrn Dr. E. F., Anfang September 1950, Briefe (Frankfurt, 1965), S. 350.

What Hesse teaches us is to beware of the constraints and "forced unity" brought about through ideology. The humanely minded, according to Hesse, should never pledge themselves unreservedly to any kind of ideology, nor bind themselves to any party, since all members of parties must of necessity be partisan and think of themselves as adhering to that party. Man must guard his freedom of thought and action at all costs. The more fanatical the ideology and the epoch, the more "above the party," stands the true humanist, acting always as the incorruptible champion of intellectual freedom and excellence. Intellectual excellence in Hesse's estimation meant holding aloof from the masses, reading praiseworthy books within the confines of one's own chambers, writing works of creative invention, and being subservient to no one, beholding to none.

In a letter to André Gide, whom Hesse believed he was closer to than any of his contemporaries, Hesse commented on the nature of individualism.

People like us have become, so it seems, quite rare . . . I count it a blessing and a consolation to realize that you are an obstinate man, dedicated to individual responsibility, a defender above all of the liberty of the individual to express himself. Most of our younger colleagues, and unfortunately a great many of our own generation, are moving in a different direction—they are being politically coordinated, nach Gleichschaltung, and are ending up as Catholics, Lutherans, Communists, or some other special interest group. In fact, countless colleagues have been brought

so far into line that they can no longer call their souls their own. Every time that one of our comrades returns to some church or other, or joins some collectivist organization, every time a colleague falls by the wayside, having become too tired or too despairing to stand up for the right to be an individual, the world becomes that much more miserable for people like ourselves, and living that much more tiresome. I think you will probably agree with me about this. I must congratulate you once again, old individualist, old individualist, that I am, for I have no intention of ever being assimilated.<sup>29</sup>

The individual for Hesse was never to be assimilated into any collectivist organization. The individual stood in antithetical opposition to nationality and partisan politics. Typically enough, there developed in Hesse's writings a dichotomy between the individual and the nation, between humanity and nationality, between the intellectual and the political life of the nation.

After attending a lecture by Rudolf Steiner, the noted anthroposophist (1861-1925), Hesse observed in a letter written on February 10, 1919, that two ideas fascinated and pleased him: that economics, politics, and culture, Geistleben, were relatively independent of one another, and that the right of the individual, das Privatrecht, was not a matter of political systems, but rather a spiritual matter, as well as a matter of education.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Hesse an André Gide, Januar 1951, Briefe (Frankfurt, 1965), S. 365-366.

<sup>30</sup>Hesse an Hans Reinhart, 10. Februar 1919, Gesammelte Briefe 1885-1921 (Frankfurt, 1973), S. 388.



My duty, writes Hesse on June 19, 1919, lies on the side of culture, Geist, not Praxis; and therefore not politics.<sup>31</sup>

Like Novalis, Hesse believed that politics and the German mind did not go together. In Klingsors letzter Sommer, a novella published in 1920 (the title taken from the figure of Klingsor in Novalis' Heinrich von Ofterdingen which Hesse admired immensely), Hesse defined the nature of the German mind, as he understood it:

This is man ecce homo, here is the weary, greedy, wild, childlike, and sophisticated man of our late age, dying European man who wants to die, overstrung by every longing, sick from every vice, enraptured by knowledge of his doom, ready for any kind of progress, ripe for any kind of retrogression, submitting to fate and pain like the drug addict to his poison, lonely, hollowed-out, age-old, at once Faust and Karamazov, beast and sage, wholly exposed, wholly without ambition, wholly naked, filled with childish dread of death and filled with weary readiness to die . . . We are immersed in doom, all of us, we must die, we must be born again. The great turning point has come for us. It is the same everywhere: the great war, the great change in art, the great collapse in the governments of the West. For us in old Europe everything we had that was good and our own has already died. Our fine-feathered Reason has become madness, our money is paper, our machines can do nothing but shoot and explode, our art is suicide. We are going under, friends; that is our destiny. Music in the Tsing Tse key has begun.<sup>32</sup>

The German mind for Hesse had an affinity with the daemonic,

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<sup>31</sup>Hesse an Emil Molt, 19. Juni 1919, Gesammelte Briefe, op. cit., S. 403.

<sup>32</sup>Hesse, Klingsor's Last Summer (New York, 1970), pp. 213, 190.

and the German was to pay dearly for his "musicality of the soul." For Hesse this musicality of the soul takes the form of a logical separation of intellect from reality.

I had reflected upon the significance of my relation to music, and not for the first time recognized this appealing and fatal relation as the destiny of the entire German spirit. In the German spirit the matriarchal link with nature rules in the form of the hegemony of music to an extent unknown in any other people. We intellectuals, instead of fighting against this tendency like men, and rendering obedience to the spirit, the Logos, the Word, and gaining a hearing for it, are all dreaming of a speech without words that utters the inexpressible and gives form to the formless. Instead of playing his part as truly and honestly as he could, the German intellectual has constantly rebelled against the word and against reason and courted music. And so the German spirit, carousing in music, in beauties of feeling and mood that were never pressed home to reality, has left the greater part of its practical gifts to decay. None of us intellectuals is at home in reality. We are strange to it and hostile. That is why the part played by intellect even in our own German reality, in our history and politics and public opinion, has been so lamentable a one . . . The generals and the captains of industry were quite right. There was nothing to be made of us intellectuals. We were a superfluous, irresponsible lot of talented chatterboxes for whom reality had no meaning.<sup>33</sup>

For Hesse the relationship of the German soul to politics and reality was indeed a non-relationship; politics and the subterranean, chaotic forces of the German soul could not coexist without disaster.

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<sup>33</sup>Hesse, Steppenwolf (New York, 1963), pp. 135-136.

Hesse's essay Die Brüder Karamasoff oder der Untergang Europas, revealed the subterranean chaotic forces and the disaster that were to surface in the coming era. This essay on Dostoevsky and Europe's decline was published in a volume of essays entitled Blick ins Chaos, in 1920. It is a fact of literary history, that T. S. Eliot tried to spread the reputation of Hesse's book of essays, by citing it in his Notes to the poem The Waste Land.<sup>34</sup> Yet Eliot's effort obviously failed, for even though Hesse's Blick ins Chaos had reached twenty editions,<sup>35</sup> fifty years later, Hesse the essayist, still remains unknown in English.

In this essay on Dostoevsky, West and East are contrasted as epitomizing order and chaos, authority and anarchy, stability and revolution, disciplined rationalism and unbridled mysticism. Post-war Europe under the influence of Russian literature is emphatically warned that with its cult of Dostoevsky and its Karamazovism it is on its way to chaos. In Dostoevsky's The Brothers Karamazov, Hesse saw indeed a prophecy of the collapse of Europe and of the arrival in the West of a totally amoral way of thought and perception:

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<sup>34</sup>T. S. Eliot, "The Waste Land," Selected Poems (London, 1962), p. 73.

<sup>35</sup>Deutsches Bücherverzeichnis (Leipzig, 1927), Achter Band 1921-1925, S. 229.

The ideal of the Karamasoff, primeval, Asiatic, and occult, is already beginning to consume the European soul. That is what I mean by the downfall of Europe. This downfall is a . . . rejection of every strongly held Ethic and Morality . . . The "New Ideal" by which the roots of the European spirit is being sapped, is an entirely amoral concept, a faculty to feel the God like, the significant, the fatalistic, in the wickedest and in the ugliest, and even to accord them veneration and worship . . . The Russian man, the Karamasoff, is at once a murderer and a judge, at once most brutal and most tender, he is the most consistent egotist to the same degree as he is a hero of the most abject self-sacrifice. He cannot be understood from an avowedly European moral and ethical point of view. In this man's soul good and bad, God and Satan dwell next to each other . . . Already half of Europe, at least half of Eastern Europe, is on its way to Chaos, is skirting the Abyss in a holy, intoxicated frenzy, and is singing drunken paeans like Dmitri Karamasoff. These songs are insulting the bourgeois whom they move to painful laughter. The saint and the seer are moved to tears.<sup>36</sup>

For Hesse the highest reality in the sense of human culture was the division of the world into Light and Dark, Good and Evil, Allowed and Forbidden. The taking up of such a dialectic attitude of mind from which to view and order the world, was the first stage in the foundation of every culture, of every society and morality. But whenever the Spirit and Nature, the Spirit and Freedom, Good and Evil were seen as interchangeable, as in the Karamazovism of Dostoevsky, if only for a brief moment, there was the deadliest foe of every order of

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<sup>36</sup>Hesse, Die Brüder Karamasoff oder der Untergang Europas (1920), GS, VII, S. 161-178.

civilization. For there, according to Hesse, begins the contrary of order; there begins Chaos. In his essay on Dostoevsky, Hesse perceived the cruelties of the Brothers Karamazov as a radical expression of a general European phenomenon; an amoral phenomenon which underscored Hesse's belief that politics and the subconscious chaotic forces of the mind could not coexist without disaster.

Hesse could never conceive of politics in cultural terms, as had been done in the nineteenth century with the so-called Kulturstaat, even though he was a direct descendant of the Lutheran parsonage<sup>37</sup> with its tradition of doing just that. Germany for Hesse was not to be equated with Idealism; Mind itself was not to serve politics or the military.

. . . during the wars and revolutions of so-called periods of "grandeur," intellectuals were frequently urged to throw themselves into politics. This was particularly the case during the late Feuilletonistic Age. That age (the Twentieth Century) went even further in its demands, for it insisted that Mind itself must serve politics or the military. Just as the church bells were being melted down for cannons, as immature schoolboys were being drawn on to fill the ranks of the decimated troops, so Mind itself was to be harnessed and consumed as one of the materials of war. Naturally we intellectuals could not accept this demand.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Robert Minder, "Das Bild des Pfarrhauses in der deutschen Literatur von Jean Paul bis Gottfried Benn," Kultur und Literatur in Deutschland und Frankreich: Fünf Essays (Im Insel-Verlag, Frankfurt, 1962), S. 56

<sup>38</sup>Hesse, Das Glasperlenspiel (1943), GS, VI, S. 466.

For Hesse the old dichotomy between culture and politics, Geist und Politik, was to remain: the politician and the guardian of cultural values were in Hesse's eyes never the same man. The Politisierung des Geistes was for Hesse to be avoided. There was no point in trying to make practical men out of poets, calculators and organizers out of dreamers. During the war, artists, writers, and intellectuals were transformed into soldiers and farmers. But trying to "politicize" them, turning them into organs of material change, was like trying to drive in a nail with a barometer. "The world will not progress any faster if you transform poets into national orators and philosophers into cabinet ministers. It will progress only where men do what they were made for, what their nature demands of them, what they consequently do willingly and well."<sup>39</sup> Historically, Hesse upheld Kultur against the quest for power and the demeaning struggles of politics. A reverence for culture, for the diverse creations of the spirit and the mystery of the arts became in time the weapon with which Hesse belabored the crass civilization of the West.

Hesse's opposition to the demeaning struggles of politics, to the violent forms of nationalism manifested itself in 1922. With the murder of Walter Rathenau, a wealthy

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<sup>39</sup>Hesse, "Du sollst nicht töten," Politische Betrachtungen (Frankfurt, 1970), S. 45.

Jewish industrialist and Foreign Minister of the Republic, by a band of young German nationalists on June 24, Hesse unequivocally condemned German anti-Semitism. Hatred of other nations and races Hesse deplored as inferior signs of primitive man. In a book review written in Vivos Voco in 1922, Hesse denounced anti-Semitism, or as he called it, the most ugly and repulsive form of nationalism demonstrated by young Germans.

I refer to the idiotic and pathological baiting of Jews indulged in by the swastika bards and their numerous, primarily student, followers. We have had anti-Semitism before and on that occasion it was repulsive and ugly, like all such movements, but it didn't do much harm. But the form of it with us now among misled German youth does a great deal of harm, because it prevents these young people from perceiving the world as it is, and because it disastrously encourages the tendency to seek out a scapegoat on which to blame everything that goes wrong. Whether one loves the Jews or not, they ~~are~~ men, frequently much more clever, more active, and better men than their fanatical opponents. If they do wrong, then we can fight them just as we confront any other evil. . . . But to make a whole race the scapegoat for the evil in the world and for the thousand serious faults of the German people is such a vile exhibition of decadence that the damage it does outweighs tenfold such damage as might ever have been done by the Jews themselves.<sup>40</sup>

In the eyes of the nationalists, Hesse became a Judenfreund. It was true, that Hesse was married to a Jew, the Austrian art historian, Ninon Dolbin, née Ausländer, and passionately

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<sup>40</sup>Hesse, "Rezension über Wilhelm Michel: Verrat am Deutschtum," Vivos Voco (1922), S. 62-63. Hesse Nachlaß.

sympathized with the plight of the Jew.

The result of Hesse's attitude toward the Jews together with his pacifist ideas again produced a renewed outbreak of personal abuse by the young nationalists. In February 1922, the journal Ober-Deutschland in an article entitled "Ein Enttäuschter" branded Vivos Voco an international pacifists' journal and said: "Our youth and our students care nothing for the pacifism propagated by this journal and its contributor Hermann Hesse."<sup>41</sup> Hesse also received a considerable number of threatening and vituperative letters from reactionary, nationalistic students. One such letter by a young German student, said that the youth of Germany despised Hesse as one of the poets who wanted to internationalize them, to pacify and level them intellectually. The young nationalist from Halle went on to say that as far as the youth of Germany was concerned, Hesse was dead, and they only laughed at him.

We are Germans and wish to remain eternally so. We are the disciples of Schiller, Fichte, Kant, and Richard Wagner - yes indeed of Richard Wagner, whose thunderous fervour we shall love in all eternity. We have the right to demand that our German poets shake up our slumbering nation. That they once again lead it into the spiritual garden of German idealism, of German belief, and of German loyalty.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>(anonym). "Ein Enttäuschter," Ober-Deutschland (Stuttgart, Februar, 1922), Jahrgang 3, Heft 5, S. 370-371. Hesse Nachlaß.

<sup>42</sup>Hesse, "Haßbriefe," Vivos Voco, Jahrgang 2, Heft 4/5, 1921/1922. S. 235-236.



Responding to letters of this kind, Hesse, in an essay entitled Haßbriefe published in Vivos Voco 1921/22, commented that in the opinion of the nationalistic students, the poet, referring specifically to the phrase, "we have the right to demand," was already a functionary who was to obey the teutsche Bursch, when he was clanked with the sword. Hesse feared that this young letter writer had not been entirely fair, and had the feeling that the student stood, after all, more in the name of Scharnhorst, Blücher, Bismarck and Roon, etc. Hesse also felt that the student knew more about the decorative side than the revolutionary side of Schiller, and that he read less attentively Kant's Critique of Pure Reason, than Kant's Critique of Practical Reason.<sup>43</sup>

With the rise of the Right, Hesse's determination to continue his appeals to the German people began to weaken. By 1923, Hesse was convinced that further direct appeals to the German nation could serve little purpose. His admonitions and exhortations had fallen on deaf ears. He had attacked generals and politicians for their militarism and narrow-minded nationalism, and had berated fellow artists and intellectuals for their anti-Semitism. His essays (1914-1923) were termed Humanitätsduselei

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<sup>43</sup>Hesse, "Haßbriefe," Vivos Voco, op. cit.

and he a Vaterlandsfeind.

We writers and intellectuals . . . we men of religious mind, who warned our fellow citizens of the insane arrogance and terrifying insouciance of our leaders, were no longer harmless poets, objects of ridicule—but had become anti-patriots, defeatists, and bellyachers, to cite only a few of the lovely new terms. We were denounced, we were black-listed, we were deluged with venomous articles in the right-wing press.<sup>44</sup>

After the war Hesse had called upon Germany to accept her defeat, and as Professor George Mosse observes, "thought Germany needed a moral purification and a new attachment to liberal ideals."<sup>45</sup> When the German Right eschewed Hesse's moral appeals, when the Germans refused to acknowledge their guilt, when they experienced no moral regeneration, and when their Politik continued its corrupt and infantile course, the rift between Hesse and Germany became irreparable. For Hesse Germany by 1923, had become a "mendacious Republic which could no longer be mended,"<sup>46</sup> and for Germany, Hesse, to use the words of a staunch militarist and monarchist, had become a "contamination of the German name."<sup>47</sup> In a letter to Romain Rolland on August 10, 1922, Hesse

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<sup>44</sup>Hesse, "Weltgeschichte: November 1918," Politische Betrachtungen (Frankfurt, 1970), S. 36.

<sup>45</sup>George L. Mosse, The Culture of Western Europe (Chicago, 1961), p. 325.

<sup>46</sup>Hesse an Herrn H. Sch., Ende Januar 1933, Briefe (Frankfurt, 1965), S. 91.

<sup>47</sup>Gustav Zeller, "Offener Brief an Hermann Hesse," Psychische Studien, 47(1920), S. 627.

described the spiritual atmosphere of Germany as anarchistic and as religiously fantatical. The atmosphere was likened to Weltuntergang and the coming of the thousand year Reich.<sup>48</sup>

The Right was not interested in moral appeals to the individual conscience, nor in individual freedom defined in terms of rationalism and liberalism but rather in a militant conservatism which was to do much marching and drumming. This new conservative trend between the wars Hesse observed with considerable misgivings. In realizing that Weimar was denounced by most of his fellow intellectuals, and in realizing that the lesson of the war was lost, it became possible for Hesse in 1923, to renounce his German citizenship. In 1945, in a letter to a friend in Stuttgart Hesse explains:

When I realized during the post-war years how Germany was sabotaging the Republic, that it had learned nothing from its previous mistakes, it became easy for me to assume Swiss nationality, something I would not have been able to do during the war, despite the condemnation of me by the German Macht-politik.<sup>49</sup>

Well before Hindenburg, whom Hesse called a "seniler Kriegsmann," was elected president of the Republic, Hesse

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<sup>48</sup>Hesse an Romain Rolland, 10. August 1922, Hesse / Rolland Briefe (Zürich, 1954), S. 41.

<sup>49</sup>Hesse an Landesbischof Th. Wurm, 3. November 1945, Briefe (Frankfurt, 1965), S. 217.

had turned in disgust from the land of his birth.

V / HESSE AND THE POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES

After his break with Germany, Hesse continued to write and speak on political matters as a liberal humanist. The phrase "liberal humanism" signified for Hesse not being politically disinterested, but rather politically thoughtful in a manner essentially intellectual and metaphysical, ethical and personal. Politics was for Hesse an affair of conscience. Referring to his political essays in the Foreward to the 1946 Swiss edition of Krieg und Frieden: Betrachtungen zu Krieg und Politik seit dem Jahr 1914, Hesse writes:

When I call my articles "political," it is always in quotation marks, for there is nothing political about them except the atmosphere in which they arose. In all other respects they are the opposite of political, since in each of these essays I strive to guide the reader not into the world theater with its political problems and conflicts, but into his innermost being, before the judgment seat of his own personal conscience.<sup>1</sup>

This description of the political activity recalls the "poetic politics" of Novalis, where one always returns to one's most inner~~x~~being. Political activity, for Hesse who always returns to man's innermost being, remains an activity in quotation marks, from which one dissociates oneself in one's heart and thus, if external circumstances demand it, in fact as well.

Hesse's political writings were not intended to constitute

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<sup>1</sup>Hesse, Krieg und Frieden: Betrachtungen zu Krieg und Politik seit dem Jahr 1914 (Zürich, 1946), S. 13.

a contribution to political ideology. He wrote as an intellectual suffering under the events of the day. His reaction to politics took the form of liberal humanism rather than partisanship. Hesse stood indeed outside all political groupings and parties. Participation in a political party was blocked for Hesse—as for many left-wing intellectuals of Weimar<sup>2</sup>—by the very nature of his definition of the rôle of the intellectual as cultural "custodian" standing above the masses. Artists and intellectuals for Hesse were not meant to govern, but to be the conscience of their age, to treasure lofty ideals, and to perpetuate a love of knowledge and of truth.

It is not our business to rule nor to engage in politics. We are specialists in examining, analyzing, and measuring. We are the guardians and constant verifiers of all alphabets, multiplication tables and methods. We are the bureaus of standards for cultural weights and measures. . . . But our first and most important function, the reason the people need us and keep us, is to preserve the purity of all sources of knowledge.<sup>3</sup>

It was by virtue of this definition of the rôle of the intellectual that Hesse never joined a political party. For Hesse politics required party affiliations, to be sure, but the humanitarian cause prohibited them:

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<sup>2</sup>George L. Mosse, "The Heritage of Socialist Humanism," in Robert Boyers (editor) The Legacy of the German Refugee Intellectuals (New York, 1972), p. 127.

<sup>3</sup>Hesse, Das Glasperlenspiel (1943), GS, VI, S. 466.

"Politik fordert Partei, Menschlichkeit verbietet Partei."  
Menschlichkeit, according to Hesse, remained more important than politics. In a letter to Romain Rolland on August 4, 1917, Hesse wrote: "I am completely apolitical and profess to an Asian passivity. Europe itself is for me not the ideal . . . I do not believe only in Europe, but rather only and alone in humanity, in the Reich of the Soul."<sup>4</sup>

Hesse could then not identify himself with any existing party. In an unpublished letter written in 1919, he observed that "we must indulge ourselves in the needs and problems of the day, when we are willing to take hold of, and to stand up for a political party. Since I do not know of a party whose goals I can affirm, this way for me is not possible."<sup>5</sup> This letter makes it clear that Hesse's disengagement from partisan politics stems from his conviction that the intellectual must commit himself fully or not at all.

Never an ideologist, never wishing to adhere to any strict doctrine, discipline or dogma, Hesse could not commit himself to Social Democracy. In a letter to his son, Heiner Hesse, in January 1930, Hesse admitted that

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<sup>4</sup>Hesse an Romain Rolland, 4. August 1917, Hesse/Rolland Briefe (Zürich, 1954), S. 28.

<sup>5</sup>Hesse, unpublished letter, 1919. Hesse Nachlaß.



even though he considered socialism to be one of the only respectable ways of thinking, he could not join the Social Democratic Party. "I myself am not a Socialist, and consider this Weltanschauung as contestable as any other. However, by the present condition of things today, Socialism is still the only theory that at least exercises a serious critique of the foundations of our artificial society and way of life."<sup>6</sup> Yet the intellectual foundations of socialism (the teachings of Marx), Hesse considered in no way entirely genuine or irreproachable. Social Democracies in the world, Hesse charged, had been for a long time unfaithful to their best principles. What disappointed Hesse with the German Democratic Socialists was their enthusiastic participation in the Kriegsgeheul of 1914, and their betrayal of the so-called German revolution of 1918. Hesse's contempt and disdain toward the SPD culminates in a letter written in 1929, to Heinrich Wiegand (1895-1934), a Social Democrat, writer and free-lance journalist for the Leipziger Vorwärts.<sup>7</sup>

I have pointed out to you on several occasions my profound aversion to the Realschullehrer-cleverness and the megalomania (the shallow, swelled headedness, den flachen Größenwahn

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<sup>6</sup>Hesse an seinen Sohn Heiner Hesse, Januar 1930, Politische Betrachtungen (Frankfurt, 1970), S.94.

<sup>7</sup>Sd, "Der flache Größenwahn der Marxisten - Wie Hermann Hesse vor mehr als 40 Jahren mit den deutschen Sozialdemokraten haderte," Neue Presse, Frankfurt, Nr. 165 v. 20. Juli 1972.

der Marxisten), of the Marxists, especially the Germans. But since you are a member of the party, and are in their service, I do not wish to say too much. Yet one cannot, unfortunately, remain silent on important matters with friends. Thus let it be said, with more sorrow and grief than with momentary and personal disillusionment that every dirty bourgeois press has more spirit (Geist) and more will-to-the-spirit than the press of the Majority Socialists. I consider it the worst enemy of the spirit and personality, of the true and productive powers of our nation, which you do not understand, nor love or help. When a poet belongs to the party like so many fifth-form boys do, you publicize him passionately; when he does not belong to the party, he does not exist and is fundamentally referred to only with negative judgments . . . In your profound need of knowledge and culture (Bildung), you are completely without judgment and respect for cultural matters. You speak of Beethoven, Hölderlin and Goethe only with obeisance, as if they were laud bourgeois artists. I can say nothing at all concerning how all evil qualities of the Germans are embodied and caricatured in the attitude of official Socialism: intellectual hatred, lack of intellectual interests, lack of every feeling for one's own nationality, for one's own language, dullest ignorance, profoundest lack of culture, and with it a chatter and a disgraceful better knowledge (Besserwissen) . . . German Social Democracy has done nothing at all for the occurrence of the revolution, and stands as a ridiculous successor to the corpses of Liebknecht's, Landauer's etc., whose personalities you all fought, hated and sabotaged, as you do all true spirits. . . I am in my thought more a Socialist than the entire staff of Vorwärts (which I have called since 1914, Rückwärts). I am a Socialist in the sense of a man like Landauer. I am more intimately acquainted with my Volk and love and have done more for it than any party politician of the entire Reich.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Hesse an Heinrich Wiegand, unpublished letter, 19. April 1929, Hesse Nachlaß.

If there is no identification of Hesse with German Social Democracy, neither is there any identification of Hesse with fascism or communism. However, when confronted with fascism and communism, Hesse chose to be somewhat sympathetic toward communism. Fascism, Hesse defined as a retrogressive, vain, foolish and vulgar experiment. Communism, on the other hand, despite its wretched breakdown into the inhuman and barbarious, was described as an attempt which humanity must make again and again, not in order to achieve the deplorable dictatorship of the proletariat, but rather to realize its higher aspirations: justice and brotherhood between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.<sup>9</sup> That communism resolved itself into an inane and inhumane dictatorship of the proletariat, Hesse considered a deplorable deviation. In his letters Hesse constantly reminds us that one too easily forgets the similarity of methods employed by both fascism and communism.

In analyzing Hesse's attitude toward communism, one cannot fail to discern that he refused to place communism on a par with fascism or Hitler's National Socialism. While his repudiation of fascism in 1930, was sharp and unequivocal, he carefully qualified his rejection of

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<sup>9</sup>Hesse an Herrn R. H., 3. Februar 1950, Briefe (Frankfurt, 1965), S. 299.

Russian Communism. Stalin's methods were indeed comparable in their cruelty to Hitler's, but Hesse believed the former's policies were at least more nobly motivated. In contrast to reactionary and retrogressive fascism, communism, according to Hesse, looked to the future, to a just distribution of worldly goods, and to a more harmoniously integrated society.<sup>10</sup> There is little doubt that Hesse found the principle of a communist state "good" and "human". He believed indeed that communism would eventually shift the emphasis in men's mind from power and ambition to humanity and social good, from politics as an instrument of force to politics as an instrument of morality.

Yet Hesse was never a supporter of communism, much less a member of the Communist Party. For while he sympathized with the principal ideas of communism, he also had harsh words of criticism. In 1930, he wrote: 'I do not believe in any way that communism has any better answers for life's pressing problems than earlier forms of knowledge . . . nor that communism will accomplish any more easily what the religions, legislations (Gesetzgebunden), and philosophies of the early millennium have not been able to do . . . Communism is in no way

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<sup>10</sup>Hesse, Briefe (Frankfurt, 1965), S. 299, 348.

more objective or unbiased than any other way of thinking. In fact, it is extraordinarily one-sided and inflexible (unelastisch). Its originality and justification does not lay in its high degree of intellect, but rather in its determination for action.<sup>11</sup>

For Hesse, unlike Marx, the solution to man's problems must first be individual and only then social. "Marx wishes to change the world, but I, the individual man. He turns to the masses, I turn to the individual."<sup>12</sup> According to Hesse, as long as communism did not formulate the goal of humanity as the distribution of power and property for all individuals, but rather for the dictatorship of the proletariat, it was to be compared with Marx as a retrogression. And as long as the Volk was not the beneficiary but a clique of party bosses, there was nothing more to be said about it.<sup>13</sup> On March 19, 1933, Hesse formulated an answer to the question why he did not stand on the side of communism:

Lieber von den Fascisten erschlagen werden  
Als selber Fascist zu sein!  
Lieber von den Kommunist **enschlagen** werden  
Als selbst Kommunist zu sein!

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<sup>11</sup>Hesse, Meine persönliche Stellung zum Kommunismus (1930, mineographed MS), Hesse Nachlaß.

<sup>12</sup>Hesse, Lektüre für Minuten (Frankfurt, 1972), S. 23.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., S. 24.

Wir haben den Krieg nicht vergessen. Wir wissen,  
 Wie das berauscht, wenn man Trommel und Pauke rührt.  
 Wir sind taub, wir werden nicht mitgerissen,  
 Wenn ihr Volk mit dem alten Rauschgift verführt.  
 Wir sind weder Soldaten noch Weltverbesserer mehr,  
 Wir glauben nicht, daß "an unserem Wesen  
 Die Welt müsse genesen".  
 Wir sind arm, wir haben Schiffbruch gelitten,  
 Wir glauben alle die hübschen Phrasen nicht mehr,  
 Mit denen man uns in den Krieg gepeitscht und geritten -  
 Auch die Euren, rote Brüder, sind Zauber und führen zu Krieg  
 Auch Eure Führer sind Generäle, und Gas!  
 Kommandieren, schreien und organisieren.  
 Wir aber, wir hassen das,  
 Wir trinken den Fusel nicht mehr,  
 Wir wollen Herz und Vernunft nicht verlieren,  
 Nicht unter roten noch weißen Fahnen marschieren.  
 Lieber wollen wir einsam als "Träumer" Verderben  
 Oder unter Euren blutigen Bruderhänden sterben,  
 Als irgend ein Partei- und Machtglück genießen  
 Und im Namen der Menschheit auf unsre Brüder schießen!<sup>14</sup>

Like many other intellectuals of Weimar, Hesse in the last analysis returned to "reason" and "the heart" in his refusal to join the Communist Party, and acquiesce to its demands of discipline and "narcotic phraseology".

Praising Hesse as a great bourgeois humanist, Hans Mayer, a Marxist critic and literary historian, rightly concludes that Hesse's attitude has never been one of flight from reality and contempt for his fellow man, but represents the two possible attitudes of an artist toward reality: withdrawal or communion. Those who have considered Hesse as an advocate of apolitical Innerlichkeit have failed, Mayer argues, to observe that he has always

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<sup>14</sup> Hesse quoted in Volker Michels, Der distanzierte Deutsche: Hermann Hesse und das Vaterland (Mineographed MS, West-deutscher Rundfunk, Samstag, den 3. April 1972), S. 35-36. Hesse Nachlaß.

preoccupied himself with the prospect of a new humanistic society, and that he removed himself from the battle of 1914-1918 only because the interests on both sides were imperialistic. In Mayer's opinion,

Hesse was not one of the bards of unleashed chauvinism and composed no war songs. On the contrary, during those years he discovered a friend and companion whose name and efforts in those days were virtually synonymous with cosmopolitanism and pacifism: Romain Rolland. Hesse's writings and proclamations in the years 1914-1918, with their dignity and decency, are the documents of a genuine humanist, whose goal is to save the great heritage of human culture from the fray, to maintain a distinction between politics and culture. (Here we note many points in common with Thomas Mann's Reflections of a Non-Political Man of 1918). Hesse wanted to urge the artists, the creators of culture, not to take sides with either of the battling fronts; but he was not heard; the separation of politics and culture could not be accomplished. But it should not be forgotten that Hesse proclaimed his message during an imperialistic war in which imperialistic interests were opposed on every side. And the great bourgeois humanists that Hesse represents could not possibly identify themselves with any of these embattled interest groups.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Hans Mayer, "Hermann Hesse and the Age of the *Peuilletom*," Hesse: A Collection of Critical Essays (New York, 1973), p. 79. Today Hesse's work is being read with growing interest in both the Soviet Union and East Germany, and Marxist critics seem eager to claim Hesse as one of their own. In a recent article from the DDR, Hans Joachim Bernhard praises Hesse as a great humanist whose works belong to socialist culture. 'Hesse is for us a bourgeois author of deep and profound humanistic persuasion, whose works of artistic individuality and accomplishment we wish to cultivate, whose works have influenced us in various ways, and whose ideas of limitation and restraint in criticizing bourgeois culture we can understand.' Hans Joachim Bernhard, "Hesse-Pflege und Hesse-Kult," Neue Deutsche Literatur, 21. Jahrgang, 1. Heft, Januar 1973, S. 128.

For Hesse it was necessary for the intellectual to remain true to his profession of ideas, to guard the cultural estate, to remain detached from political movements, and to remain true to what Julien Benda, the French novelist and critic, has called the "conscience of humanity." Unlike his friend and colleague, Romain Rolland, who turned to a political party even "after despising politics, theories and doctrines, (even) after displaying excessive trust in the power of the spirit alone,"<sup>16</sup> Hesse remained aloof from all political parties, believing that political measures, accommodations and compromises would lead in the end to the inevitable defeat of the spirit. Hesse knew well that artists and intellectuals could have little hope of influencing men of power. In a letter to Max Brod on May 25, 1948, Hesse observed

. . . that the power of ministers and policy-makers is not based on the heart or the mind, but on the masses whose "representatives" they are. They operate with something that we guardians of the spiritual substance neither can nor should operate with, with number, with quantity; that is a field we must leave to them.<sup>17</sup>

Hesse saw the preoccupations of artist and poet as something more "perfect and complete" than political interests.

The poet is neither something better nor

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<sup>16</sup> Maurice Nadeau, "Romain Rolland," Literature and Politics in the Twentieth Century edited by George L. Mosse & Walter Laqueur (New York, 1967), p. 209.

<sup>17</sup> Max Brod, "Briefwechsel mit Hermann Hesse: Zum jüdisch-arabischen Krieg," Literarische Revue (München), Jahrgang 4, Heft 3, 1949, S. 189.



something more trifling than the minister, the engineer, or the national orator, but he is rather something more perfect and complete. A hatchet is a hatchet, and with it man can split wood or also heads. But a clock or a barometer have other purposes, and when man wishes to split wood or heads with them, they are destroyed so that no one can obtain any use from them.<sup>18</sup>

For Hesse the politician was assigned a place far below artist and thinker. Politicians, according to Hesse, think that electoral reforms and the like are the makers of progress. In reality, they lag centuries behind, and merely attempt to put into practice on a small scale the thoughts of the intellectuals.<sup>19</sup>

Hesse thus emphasized the doctrine of Epicurus, the Greek moral philosopher, that the wise man should not practice politics. By accepting a government office the intellectual, Hesse would argue, abrogates his objectivity, loses his freedom of action, and abandons his true function of passing judgments on events. For Hesse the intellectual should avoid active participation in power politics. But this did not mean that he should stay away from politics all together. On the contrary, it was Hesse's contention that the intellectual should participate in politics—but indirectly as critic, not directly, and with the means

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<sup>18</sup>Hesse, Lektüre für Minuten (Frankfurt, 1972), S. 36.

<sup>19</sup>Hesse, Betrachtungen (1928), GS, VII, S. 154.

appropriate to him. The situation of today's Establishment Intellectuals (the intellectuals-in-residence, the Henry Kissingers), Hesse would understand as an ignoble form of trahison, a deception and perversion of the intellect, of reason and understanding. He would certainly agree with the conclusion of one modern sociologist, that "each successive time of troubles in modern history has begun with a manifesto calling upon the intellectuals to exercise their leadership and has ended in the phrase of Julien Benda, with La Trahison des Clercs."<sup>20</sup>

Hesse's political writings were not those of a zealous reformer of political and social institutions, but those of a contrite humanitarian. They were moral appeals to the individual conscience. This emphasis upon the individual epitomizes Hesse's determination to deal with causes and not to linger over symptoms, and gives evidence of Hesse's growing faith in the intrinsic goodness of man and the autonomy of human reason. In the final analysis the crises of politics were for Hesse, and always remained, only pointers to the ultimate issues in the inner world of man. Hesse felt that he could not really be engaged in any political cause, at best in a moral one; poets and artists were always in his view essentially Aussenwelter

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<sup>20</sup>Lewis S. Feuer, "The Élite of the Alienated," The New York Times Magazine, March 26, 1967, p. 77.

(outsiders). Littérature engagée distorted their nature, it was like using a barometer to hammer in nails. Hesse's revolt was that of a moral, not a political conscience. It was this determination and faith which conditioned Hesse's approach to war and politics, which persuaded him against Weltverbesserung, and permitted him to advocate Selbstverbesserung. He championed a spiritual reform and the individual was his starting point. Individual freedom to decide one's own fate and work out one's life remained basic to his concept of politics; it was the beginning and foundation of his liberal humanism which characterized him as a political man.

VI / LETTERS, ESSAYS, AND THE SEKTION  
FÜR DICHTKUNST (1926-1933)

As a liberal humanist, Hesse's willingness to distinguish the realm of culture from the world of politics is best exemplified in his co-option and withdrawal from the Prussian Academy of Arts (1926-1930).

The idea of an academy of arts in which the writers could find a respectable place to watch over the Sprachgeist of the nation, and in which the dichterischer Geist could present itself, was an idea intensively discussed in Germany around the turn of the century. From such an academy it was hoped that the lack of resolution and the vacillation of the German writers against their political community could be ended. The idea was first realized in the Weimar Republic when Karl Becker, the Prussian Minister for Wissenschaft, Kunst, and Volksbildung, attached a section for Dichtkunst to the Berlin Academy of Arts in 1926.

Writers between the Left and the Right—Heinrich and Thomas Mann, Alfred Döblin, René Schickele, Hermann Hesse, and others, on the one side, Wilhelm Schäfer, Erwin Guido Kolbenheyer, Josef Ponten, on the other, Wilhelm von Scholz, Ricarda Huch, and Gerhart Hauptmann in the middle—were called upon to represent the German Parnaß. However, with the very words Dichter, Dichtung and Literatur, quarrels were kindled, quarrels which divided the Sektion, like the politically divided nation.

It appeared that the basic conflict was of a political nature: poetical work from landscape, from blood and soil, opposed Asphaltliteratur, the poet as the manifestation of higher truth, against the individuality of engaged Literaten. Upon this conflict were cast the shadows of the flight of the Germans into a new political Romanticism and a new cultural barbarism.

On October 27, 1926, after the first meeting of the newly formed Sektion für Dichtkunst of the Prussian Academy of Arts, Hesse, together with the Berlin writers, Wilhelm Schäfer and Erwin Guido Kolbenheyer, were elected to its membership. Not wishing to subscribe to the dictates of any national organization, Hesse immediately refused his co-option. He based his "Nein!" on the false proposition that as a Swiss citizen his membership would not be allowed. Max Liebermann, President of the Academy of Arts, clarified the misunderstanding: "Our Academy embraces . . . in all its sections . . . great artists of all cultural nations. So also the newly formed Sektion für Dichtkunst will unite members from all foreign countries in its circle."<sup>1</sup> On November 9, Hesse replied: "As a result of this explanation, together with the honour and joy of my election, I can accept and become

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<sup>1</sup>Inge Jens, Dichter zwischen rechts und links: Die Geschichte der Sektion für Dichtkunst der Preußischen Akademie der Künste (München, 1971), S. 64.

a member of your venerable academy."<sup>2</sup>

Yet one cannot fail to discern Hesse's aversion and reluctance to entering the Academy. In an unpublished letter to the political journalist, Heinrich Wiegand, written in January 1927, Hesse announced that the election into the Sektion für Dichtkunst was something he merely endured politely.<sup>3</sup> In a letter on March 9, 1927, to Oskar Loerke (1884-1941), a Berlin poet, writer, and Secretary of the Sektion, Hesse referred to his membership as an affair which tormented him at the time.

I would be very happy, if I were already out. Already the questionnaire, (dealing with the proper name for the Sektion), which I sent on, like a candidate for a position in the Prussian Eisenbahndienst, was hideous, and the demonstration of the Sektion thus far seems to me sorrowful and ridiculous. After being informed of my election, I believed I could escape in a courteous manner and without scandal. I informed the Academy that I was not a German citizen, but a Schweizer, and that the election could not be accepted. When this reason proved invalid, I accepted simply out of politeness, not wishing to be discourteous. Should you somehow have the occasion to have the proper form come to mind, in which I could accomplish a withdrawal, please give me your suggestion.<sup>4</sup>

By 1929, an occasion for withdrawal seemed to be

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<sup>2</sup>Inge Jens, Dichter zwischen rechts und links, op. cit., S. 64.

<sup>3</sup>Hesse an Heinrich Wiegand, unpublished letter, Januar 1927, Hesse Nachlaß.

<sup>4</sup>Hesse, Briefe (Frankfurt, 1965), S. 16-17.

at hand. It centered on the controversy over the proper designation for the Sektion. Thomas Mann had suggested Sektion für Literatur, Ludwig Fulda, Sektion für Dichtung, and Heinrich Mann proposed Literarische Kunst. Erwin Kolbenheyer, a Berlin writer and essayist, radically opposed these new suggestions, because the essayist, according to him, considered before as Schriftsteller, would not be regarded as Dichter. The dispute, according to Kolbenheyer was not merely a matter of literary designation, but involved a change in the inner attitude of the Sektion. In an open letter to the membership of the Sektion written on December 24, 1929, Kolbenheyer made the following proposal:

The collective concept of the Prussian Academy, to which the Sektion belongs, is called the Academy of Arts. The concept Literatur includes all possible schriftstellerische und wissenschaftliche activity which one may no longer call art. As long as our Sektion, comprising the Prussian Academy of Arts, is not to render its name as laughable and anachronistic, does not the Sektion für Dichtkunst have the right to embrace a collective concept designating in a preponderate way (überwiegender Weise), the inartistic, Unkünstlerische.<sup>5</sup>

Hesse's attitude toward this Dichter-Schriftsteller problem epitomizes his willingness to distinguish the artist and poet from the engaged Literaten. Hesse felt that

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<sup>5</sup>Inge Jens, Dichter zwischen rechts und links (München, 1971), S. 106.



Kolbenheyer was right, but did not wish to maintain the pretense that the Sektion was even in fact concerned with the concept of the poetical, das Dichterische.

Since I have read the reports of the Sektion, I have continually had the impression that the Sektion really has little to do with Dichtkunst, and that Dichtkunst, in fact, has become an obsolete and ridiculous concept for the majority of the members. My wish would be that the Sektion, in selecting a new name, first, admit its real trends, and secondly, give those members who do not subscribe to these trends the opportunity to withdraw without scandal.<sup>6</sup>

Hesse's withdrawal came as a result of an open letter to the Sektion written by Wilhelm Schäfer on November 4, 1930. In this letter Schäfer hinted at the desirable withdrawal of a few of the passive members, those members not subscribing to the dictates of German nationalism.

We must not fail to recognize that a section of the membership has from the very beginning until today remained passive. It must be said against their compelling wishes that this attitude must not persist. Gladly do we accept the fact that it is not indifference which determines their attitude, but little can we regard this attitude of non-existence as a sufficient condition for membership in the Academy . . . Whose name stands on our list, must be in our rank and file. Because we profess to all spheres of the German language in our Academy, we stand up for the general movement of German nationalism (die allgemeine Bewegung des Deutschen Volkstums),<sup>7</sup> in order to win over separatism and Absplitterung.

In responding Hesse on November 10, made no secret of

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<sup>6</sup>Inge Jens, Dichter zwischen rechts und links (München, 1971), S. 115.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., S. 123.

how painfully he considered Academy membership, and that Schäfer's letter afforded him the argument he longed for.

In your letter of November 4, stand two propositions concerning members who have until today remained passive, and whose restraint does not suffice to justify membership. I greet these propositions, since they give me the opportunity to request my dismissal from the membership, which I myself did not choose, and which I accepted at the time merely out of politeness and certainly not without resistance.<sup>8</sup>

At the request of Oskar Loerke, Secretary of the Academy, Schäfer wrote to Hesse on November 19, asking him if he would not reconsider his withdrawal. "I cannot refuse Loerke's request, since it was obviously my propositions which gave you your longed for motive. There are not many names in Germany, on which such a firm confidence is attached, as yours. When you withdraw, it is not only an omission . . . , but rather a damage, eine Schädigung."<sup>9</sup> Schäfer received this answer:

I will speak briefly concerning the reasons which make my stay in the Academy impossible. . . . Wicked air can suffice to drive one away. I have listened to the chatter of this debating club now for a year. Too few of its suggestions have pleased me. I have, moreover, laughed that the President of the Academy of

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<sup>8</sup>Inge Jens, Dichter zwischen rechts und links (München, 1971), S. 123.

<sup>9</sup>Wilhelm Schäfer an Hesse, unpublished letter, 19. November 1930, Hesse Nachlaß.

German Poets was von Molo, a man who has never written a German sentence . . . I must ask you to re-read your official propositions concerning the passive members once more, in light of what you write today. There you say mere taciturn passivity invalidates membership, and in your letter you write that my withdrawal (the withdrawal of exactly one representing such passivism and indifference) will "strike to pieces" the entire thing . . . Above all I have the feeling that by the next war as many as 90 to 100 leading figures of the Academy will contribute to the troops. And the nation in Staatsauftrag will again as in 1914, deceive the people on all vital questions by lying. I measure myself in these political-moral matters as no sort of authority, but indeed require and need freedom for myself, my own way and law to follow . . . That my withdrawal from the Sektion could ever mean more than an unpleasant moment you yourself cannot seriously believe. One will simply say: "Hesse has always been a confounded, touchy, asocial fellow", and the matter will be left at that.<sup>10</sup>

Shortly after Hesse's withdrawal Schäfer together with Kolbenheyer also departed. In a letter to Hesse in December 1930, Schäfer admitted "that a Dichter-Akademie was nonsense, a sorrowful attempt at an impossible structure. With the Presidency of von Molo it has been ridiculous."<sup>11</sup> In an unpublished letter to Oskar Loerke in December, Hesse wrote that "when one can simply tread under foot the state, the society, and the general preparation for the next war, so also the

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<sup>10</sup> Hesse an Wilhelm Schäfer, unpublished letter, ca. 29. November 1930, Hesse Nachlaß.

<sup>11</sup> Wilhelm Schäfer an Hesse, unpublished letter, ca. December 1930, Hesse Nachlaß.

Academy!"<sup>12</sup>

At the end of January 1931, Heinrich Mann replaced von Molo as President of the Sektion. In an article published in the Frankfurter Zeitung on February 15, 1931, Mann took the opportunity to comment on the withdrawal of these members. "Those who withdraw are at once against the Dichterakademie, because they are also against the State, and here connections present themselves. These members have had the unmistakable intention of using their withdrawal as an instrument against the State."<sup>13</sup> That Hesse considered his decision of withdrawal, however, as completely independent of any combined effort, is evident in a letter to Heinrich Wiegand in January-February 1931: "I withdrew for myself alone, without any connection with the withdrawal of the others, who seriously followed me."<sup>14</sup>

Commenting on Heinrich Mann's article in a letter to Thomas Mann on February 20, 1931, Hesse's unwillingness to recognize the Prussian State and its behavior in governing matters of the spirit underscores his separation

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<sup>12</sup>Hesse an Oskar Loerke, unpublished letter, ca. December 1930, Hesse Nachlaß.

<sup>13</sup>Heinrich Mann quoted in the "Nachwort," Hermann Hesse/Thomas Mann Briefwechsel (Frankfurt, 1968), S. 210.

<sup>14</sup>Hesse an Heinrich Wiegand, unpublished letter, January/February 1931, Hesse Nachlaß.

of culture from politics and his withdrawal from the Academy.

I am not suspicious of the present State because it is new or republican, but rather because it is too little of both. I can never entirely forget, that the Prussian State and its Cultural Ministry, the patrons of the Academy, are at the same time the responsible court for the universities and their fatal Ungeist. And I see in the attempt to combine the "free spirits" in an Academy as a little like the attempt to keep a tight rein on the often disagreeable critics of officialdom. Moreover, since I am a Swiss citizen, I am certainly not in a position to be active. When I am a member of the Academy, I thus recognize the Prussian State and its behavior in governing the spirit without being related to the Reich or Prussia. This discord has greatly disturbed me, and its elimination in my withdrawal was most important for me.<sup>15</sup>

Refusing to recognize Hesse's withdrawal, Thomas Mann argued that even though "we are all basically disinclined to being bound to an academy, we follow such a call merely as a social mode of behavior and a cultivated feeling of duty required of the time,"<sup>16</sup> and urged Hesse to reconsider his membership. Hesse's answer was an unconditional "Nein"!

The final reason for my inability to be classified in an official German Corporation is my deep mistrust against the German Republic. This unprincipled and spiritless State originated from a vacuum, from exhaustion after the war.

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<sup>15</sup>Hermann Hesse/Thomas Mann Briefwechsel (Frankfurt, 1968), S. 12-13.

<sup>16</sup>Thomas Mann an Hesse, 27. November 1931, ibid., S. 15.

The few respectable spirits of the Revolution, . . . were murdered with the sanction of 99 percent of the nation. The judges are unjust, the civil servants indifferent, the nation completely infantile. I greeted the Revolution with great sympathy, but my hopes for a seriously appropriated German Republic have for a long time been destroyed. Germany missed making its own Revolution, and finding its own form. Her future is a collectivism which I find disagreeable, for it means a great escape into a singular national potentiality which shall, without doubt, lead to a bloody surge of white terror . . . Of 1000 Germans there are still 999, who still do not know anything of war guilt, who have neither waged war nor lost war, nor signed the Versailles Treaty, who experience these things like a perfiden Blitz from a higher heaven. In short, I find the mentality which now governs Germany as far out as in the years 1914-1918. I watch these events which I perceive as senseless, and have been driven since 1914 and 1918, instead of a tiny step to the Left, which the attitude of the nation has taken, many miles to the Left. I am no longer able to read any more German newspapers.<sup>17</sup>

The extraordinary consistency of Hesse's opposition to the political course of Germany from 1914 to 1933—in which the total attitude is not gradually evolved but stands there clear and whole from the outset—is an impressive and rare enough phenomenon in German cultural history of this period. Commenting on Hesse's unique opposition to the political course of German history, H. Stuart Hughes notes that "two decades before most intellectuals awoke to their peril, he had sensed the

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<sup>17</sup>Hesse an Thomas Mann, beginning of December 1931, Hesse/Mann Briefwechsel (Frankfurt, 1968), S. 17-18.

radical evil in German life that in the 1930's was to drive thousands of them into headlong flight . . . In this sense Hesse became one of the first conscious Europeans among the twentieth-century writers: his example was to serve as an inspiration to other Germans who were driven on the road of exile in the years after 1933."<sup>18</sup>

Hesse's opposition to German politics must be understood in light of the liberal humanist's separation of Geist and Politik. In an essay entitled Dank an Goethe published in the periodical Europe in 1932, Hesse held this "spiritual and moral conflict" responsible for making his life both a torment and a struggle. The bridges between Geist and Volk, culture and love for the Fatherland, in this seemingly insoluble problem were broken.

If one were to believe the official voice of the great scholars to the newspaper chatterboxes, Geist (i.e., truth and service therein), is the direct deadly enemy of patriotism. If one were a patriot, one would have nothing to do with the public opinion of truth . . . which is trifle and chimera. Moreover, if the spirit is even allowed within patriotism, it is misused to aid the cannons. Truth has become a luxury, and lies allowed and praised in the name of service to the Fatherland. As much as I love Germany, I cannot accept the morality of the patriots. For I do not see in the spirit any instruments and materials of war. I am not a general or chancellor,

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<sup>18</sup>H. Stuart Hughes, Consciousness and Society: The Re-orientation of European Social Thought 1890-1930 (New York, 1958), pp. 51, 384.

but rather stand in the service of the spirit,  
im Dienst des Geistes.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Hesse, Dank an Goethe (1932), GS, VII, S. 380.



VII / CONCLUSION: CULTURE AND POLITICS

In this essay I have tried to argue that for Hesse culture and politics were sharply distinguished from one another. For Hesse the higher realm of Bildung, the achievement of Kultur for its own sake, was clearly distinguished from the lower realm of politics, of human affairs, sordid with practical matters and compromises. Hesse's veneration of culture over politics, his belief in the perfectibility of the aesthetic and rational faculties of the individual ~~was~~ based on his reading and understanding of Goethe, Nietzsche, and Burckhardt. Within this tradition, culture was sharply antithetical to civilization and politics. Culture referred to the "higher" realms of art, literature, and philosophy, and thus stood above politics. Hesse, in this writer's opinion, must be seen as the classic example of the liberal humanist who was never able to rid himself of the distinction between culture and politics.

It was Hesse's belief that the German mind, by nature and tradition, was inclined to culture and metaphysics, and was not properly equipped for politics. Goethe became Hesse's ideal, and any active involvement in politics was avoided. Political commitment Hesse understood not as an allegiance to a political party, but as involvement in political life as an issue of morality and humanity. To the party of humanity Hesse belonged indeed. His idea of humanity, Menschlichkeit, was not an empty

abstract theory, but a moral imperative, directed at each individual, for the reconstruction of his own personal life. This imperative, the essence of which Hesse called individualism, could best be followed by pursuing culture, by the pursuit of literary and aesthetic education. This individualism embodied an extraordinary veneration for learning, for the cultivation of the self. This emphasis on culture, on the cultivation of Innerlichkeit did not, typically enough, encourage or foster political participation.

Hesse's attitude of retreat from any contact with politics, his flight inward, into Innerlichkeit, is a typical motif of his essays and letters. This escape into a private inner life must be seen as an expression of his separation of culture from politics. For Hesse there was no synthesis between culture and politics, between Geist and Politik. On the contrary, Hesse perceived an opposition between things of the spirit and politics, an opposition which Germany's unhappy history had burned into the souls of liberal middle-class intellectuals like Hesse. Culture for Hesse meant music, metaphysics and morality. From it Hesse contemptuously excluded everything political. Hesse came to see a dividing line between the intellectual and the political, and believed that the man of culture could remain above the battle. Although he would criticize society—Germany's middle-class intellectuals frequently sublimated their social

frustration into cultural criticism—Hesse would not mix into the affairs of those whose task it was to govern. As a liberal, Hesse was to remain politically passive or neutral, that is, belonging to no political party.

I feel a certain kind of obligation to be in the opposition, but I can realize this in no other way than by neutralizing myself and my work more intensively. I see no way to active opposition, since fundamentally I do not believe in socialism. Against the Third Reich, against any State or exercise of force, I have only the resistance of the individual to the masses, quality against quantity, soul against matter.<sup>1</sup>

Hesse subscribed indeed to the basic tenet of European liberalism: that the strength of the liberal should and must consist in quality rather than quantity.<sup>2</sup> Another basic and simple maxim of traditional European liberalism greatly influenced Hesse's thinking on war and politics: "That what governments need most consists ultimately in a profound conviction that reasonableness in the long run always defeats its enemies; that in the conflict of opinions and tendencies, the most rational are the fittest to survive; that fictions and falsehoods live no longer than they deserve to live."<sup>3</sup> Hesse hoped

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<sup>1</sup>Hesse, "Aus einem Tagebuch vom Juli 1933," Politische Betrachtungen (Frankfurt, 1970), S. 92.

<sup>2</sup>Guido de Ruggiero, The History of European Liberalism (Boston, 1967), p. 439.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 441.

indeed to confront the raw power of mass politics with morality and rational intelligence. Whatever was based on human reason, and regulated by moral imperatives would necessarily serve the best interests of humanity. But was this emphasis, one must ask, on human reason and this extreme individualism a practical answer to the world's ills, or merely an abstract philosophy divorced from objective reality?

Hesse's political writings remain in my opinion highly abstract. His emphasis upon the individual, upon man's moral responsibility, his appeal to humanity for love and international brotherhood, and his lack of concern for immediate political problems and theories was hardly a practical answer to the world's ills. "Viewed against the background of post war Europe," as Professor George Mosse has observed, "liberal humanists (like Hesse) seem curiously detached from the world's problems."<sup>4</sup> One wonders indeed how Hesse was able to preserve any hope that the nations of the world would ever share his political humanitarianism?

One cannot fail to note the lack of concreteness of Hesse's ideas: at times "reason" and "justice" appear as the goal. At other times it is "the well-being of man,"

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<sup>4</sup>George L. Mosse, The Culture of Western Europe (Chicago, 1961), p. 325.

the "moral conscience of humanity," and "freedom of intellect" which are regarded as worth striving for. These goals were worthy, to be sure, but they offered a description and understanding of politics which was inadequate; no particular style of politics arises from the great and simple fact of individual uniqueness and self-identity.

Ultimately Hesse never really solved the problem posed by the ~~did~~hotomy of culture and politics: the problem of the masses. His failure in this respect reduced his influence upon the German people. His failure was that his liberal and humanistic formulations of social problems were always on a level of subjective and mystic idealism which showed little or no understanding of actual social forces. His idealistic complaints seemed almost irrelevant to the needs of ordinary men. Nor did Hesse, the liberal humanist, understand the historical significance of power and naked violence. He over-estimated indeed the power of reason, and under-estimated the force of political passions. Unrealistically confident in reason and with little understanding of the irrational motivations of political drives, Hesse was helpless in resisting a dynamic mass movement like National Socialism. Although Hesse tried to be objective, his final ignorance of the realities of the masses imparts a pathetic quality to much of his thought. The failure of liberal humanism, of which Hesse was a classic example, was not its advocacy of freedom,

rationalism, and humanity, but its lofty detachment from the masses. Mass man simply cannot be ignored. Hesse's liberal ideas failed in the end because they chose to ignore him. Such deliberate ignorance of the masses rendered it impossible for Hesse to give his liberal ideas durability. The fundamental mistake was that he wished to educate the people from the heights of idealism, instead of going down and endeavouring to understand them.

Inherent in Hesse's liberal humanism with its notion of a "conscience of humanity" and a cultural custodianship, is the basic idea of an élite, distinguished not by any sort of material privileges, but exclusively by its higher intellectual and moral standards. What develops throughout Hesse's writing is a self-conscious but politically impotent cultural élite (The Kastalien of The Glass Bead), which is far more concerned with establishing and reinforcing its own status than with contributing in any way to social change. Its language of "idealism" and of "cultivation," its traditional emphasis upon moral questions and abstract cultural values becomes gradually channeled into a defense against any form of social change. The danger inherent in such an attitude, an attitude which establishes the detached intellect as the conscience of humanity, is that the intellect becomes so problematic to itself, that it perceives all other problems only in relationship to itself; in the last analysis the only

theme of the Littérature engagée becomes itself and the engagement ends in solipsism.<sup>5</sup>

Later in life, Hesse became aware of this danger, and gradually rejected the idea of the detached intellectual. His last work, Das Glasperlenspiel (The Glass Bead Game, 1943), which he began to write in 1932, represents typologically, as Hesse-scholar Theodore Ziolkowski notes, "the radicalization of the intellectual, who moves from the vita contemplativa not to the opposite extreme of vita activa, but to an intermediate position of responsible action controlled by dispassionate reflection . . . The Glass Bead Game, finally, makes it clear that Hesse advocates thoughtful commitment over self-indulgent solipsism, responsible action over mindless revolt . . . and suggests that revolt need not be irrational and violent, that indeed it is more effective when it is rational and ironic."<sup>6</sup> During the war and the immediate post-war years, Hesse had cherished the ideal of remaining detached, isolated and not being used as an instrument of any progressive ideology. But after 1933, with the rise of National Socialism, Hesse gradually began to concentrate on the connection and association between these two realms.

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<sup>5</sup>Herbert Lüthy, Nach dem Untergang des Abendlandes (Köln, 1965), S. 31.

<sup>6</sup>Theodore Ziolkowski, "Foreword" to Hermann Hesse's The Glass Bead Game (New York, 1969), p. xvi-xviii.



For the separation of culture and politics could not be accomplished. The conclusion to be drawn was that Hesse's liberal humanism with its Romantic inwardness and veneration of culture enriched the human experience, but was inadequate as a guide to responsible and intelligent social and political attitudes.

In the last analysis, the fundamental target of Hesse's writings on war and politics, as revealed in his essays and letters, remains the state and ultimately any authority except those freely chosen by the individual himself. The state and its authority come in for unrelenting criticism: nationalism, militarism, and war are unremittingly rejected. Hesse refused indeed to recognize any limitations upon the free and autonomous individual, upon the potency of pure individualism. What one becomes when insisting on such an extreme attitude of individualism while simultaneously rejecting the state, is to use the words of one Germanist, "a left-wing, anarchistic Romantic."<sup>7</sup> For those unfamiliar with German intellectual history, it should be noted that a left-wing Romantic coming out of that heritage is a strange creature indeed. For traditionally German Romantics have tended to be politically conservative. What is paradoxical and unique is Hesse's

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<sup>7</sup>Egon Schwarz, "Hermann Hesse, die amerikanische Jugendbewegung und Probleme der literarischen Wertung," Basis: Jahrbuch für deutsche Gegenwartsliteratur, Hrg. Reinhold Grimm & Jost Hermand (Frankfurt, 1970), S. 127.

sympathetic orientation toward the Left, his emphasis upon the ideas of the Enlightenment, on rationalism, freedom, and morality, yet at the same time the Romantic tradition of inwardness, mysticism, and nature worship—all elements of right-wing ideology—imbedded in his fiction. His accomplishment in the opinion of this writer is one of trying to harmonize two complexes that do not easily go together: the old Romantic traditions of Germany and the ideas of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment.

Paradoxically, Hesse called upon the apolitical attitude of Goethe, the "poetic politics" of Novalis, as well as other Romantics like Nietzsche for support, while at the same time glorifying the ideas of the Enlightenment. Mixing these two complexes of ideas, represents the basic ambiguity and dilemma of Hesse's political position. For no intellectual synthesis or symbiosis of these two traditions is possible. As Hans Mayer puts it, "one cannot take a strong stand for Enlightenment and at the same time time for the countermovement, for resistance and an escape into subjectivism."<sup>8</sup>

Yet between these two traditions Hesse was to vacillate for most of his life:

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<sup>8</sup>Hans Mayer, Steppenwolf and Everyman (New York, 1971), p. 318.

For me, life consists simply in this, in the fluctuation between two poles, in the hither and thither between the two foundation pillars of the world. . . . This is my dilemma and problem. Much can be said about it, but it cannot be solved. To force the two poles of life together, to transcribe the dual voices in life's melody will never be possible for me. And yet I will follow the dark command within me and will be compelled again and again to make the attempt. This is the mainspring that drives my little clock.<sup>9</sup>

In 1957, Martin Buber, teacher and leader of the Jewish intellectual élite, whom Hesse admired for many years as one of the most valuable personalities of contemporary literature, came from Israel to give the main address in Stuttgart on the celebration of Hesse's eightieth birthday. In his title the eminent German Jewish scholar and author paid tribute to Hesse's service to a struggling humanity and to the highest ideals and achievements of culture, art, and learning: HERMANN HESSE - DIENST AM GEIST. In this address, Buber made reference to the great dialectic relationship between the poles of man's existence, between Natur (life in the living) and Geist (life in the cultivation of the mind), and Hesse's great contribution in giving this conflict of the spirit corporeal form.

As a writer Hermann Hesse has served the spirit both in terms of the dialectical tension between Geist and Natur, as well as the struggle of the spirit itself. In doing so Hesse has

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<sup>9</sup>Hesse, Autobiographical Writings (New York, 1972), pp. 167-169.

rendered the difficult path (den hindernisreichen Weg) towards a new unity and a new totality more visible. As a humanist he has served the same spirit, and continually stands for the unity and harmony of mankind.<sup>10</sup>

Hesse saw his ideal of a higher synthesis between life in the living and life in the cultivation of the mind as an unattainable Holy Grail, towards which man must ever strive, but which constantly recedes his grasp. His unsuccessful attempts, let it be added, were not without a core of value and meaning. For like Goethe, Hesse felt man could only find redemption in the journey toward the ideal, not in the arrival.

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<sup>10</sup> Martin Buber, "Hermann Hesse - Dienst am Geist," Neue Deutsche Hefte, 4. Jahrgang 1957, S. 393.

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