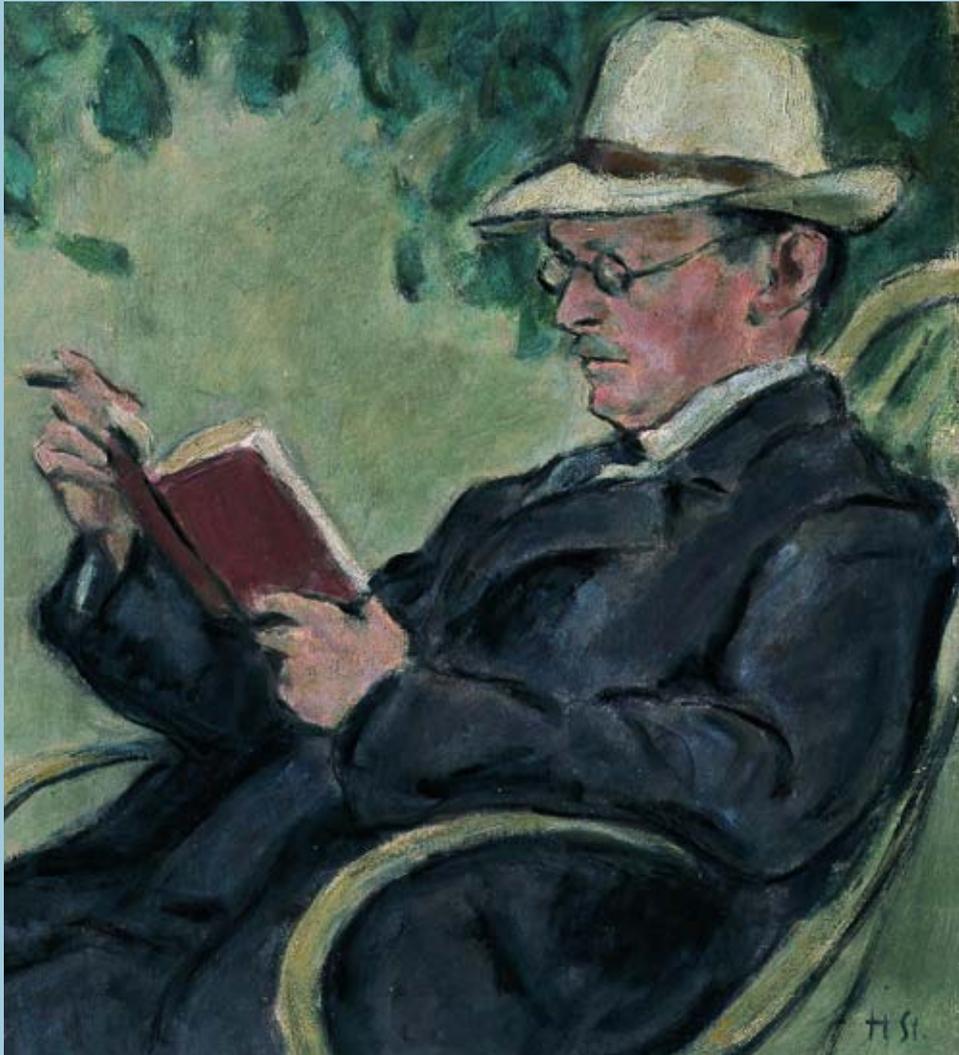

Hermann Hesse *“Beyond pictures and stories”*

introduction and coordination by Pier Carlo Della Ferrera
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Au Hb in Boven

(Dez 1932)



Lieberes Gänner

Ich will deine spanische Oberoffen
 nicht fassen aber sehr gerne Gänner
 sie findet. Ich bin die für den
 Anzeigenbestand ungefähr 150 fr

The novel of the life of Hermann Hesse

I was born in the early hours of the evening on a warm day in July, and it is the warmth of that hour that I have unconsciously loved and sought all my life.

I am the son of God-fearing parents whom I loved dearly and would have loved even more had they not taught me the fourth commandment at a very early age.¹

Hermann Hesse was born in Calw, a little town in Wuerttemberg not far from Stuttgart, on the 2nd of July 1877, the second-born of Johannes and Marie Gundert. His father, a Russian citizen of Baltic origin, who had previously served in a Pietist mission, worked for a publishing house which produced religious texts. His maternal grandfather, for many years a missionary in India, possessed a thorough and vast knowledge of the Oriental world.

From 1881 to 1886 Hesse lived in Basel, where his father had been appointed as editor of the missions' magazine. After returning to Calw with his family, in 1888 he began attending the Lateinschule in Goepfingen and in 1891 passed the difficult State examination (*Landexamen*), which enabled him to enter the prestigious Evangelical seminary in Maulbronn the following Autumn.

Just hearing “You must” was enough to churn me up inside and make me obstinate. It goes without saying that this characteristic had an enormous damaging effect on my school years.

All attempts at turning me into a useful man ended in failure, or rather dishonour and scandal, and in my running away or my expulsion.

In March 1892, unable to bear the strict discipline imposed by the way of life in the seminary, the young Hermann ran away from boarding school. He was found half frozen in the surrounding countryside and immediately expelled from the institute. There then followed a period of restlessness, of anxious search for identity and conflict with his family and religion. Several times he tried to take up his studies again, but to no avail. He even went so far as to threaten suicide and for this reason was admitted to a nursing home for mental patients and epileptics.

At fifteen years of age, when at school I had got nowhere, I started to tutor myself on my own, conscientiously and with determination. To my great pleasure, as luck would have it, in my father's house there happened to be a huge library that had belonged to my grandfather: an enormous room full of old books, which among other things contained all the German literature and philosophy of the eighteenth century.

After his first unsuccessful attempt at working as a sales assistant in a bookshop in Esslingen, in June 1894 Hesse embarked upon a difficult apprenticeship in a church tower clock factory. He managed to combine manual effort with the tenacious intellectual commitment of a self-taught man and, thanks



mainly to his grandfather's library, he acquired a solid cultural education, which had its strong point in reading religious texts, oriental philosophy and Goethe.

After moving to Tübingen in 1895, he found employment in the Heckenhauer library and attended bookkeeping courses. Although he continued to loathe school, his love for

Previous page:
Hans Sturzenegger
(1875-1943),
Hesse reading,
oil on canvas, 1912

Left:
Letter with water-
colour by Hermann
Hesse to his son
Heiner, December
1932

Right:
Hesse with his family in
1889, at 12 years of age;
from left to right: the
author, his father,
his sister Marulla, his
mother, his sister Adele
and his brother Hans

¹ This and the subsequent autobiographical quotations by Hesse are taken from: H. HESSE, *Kurzgefasstes Lebenslauf* (Autobiographical outline), in “Neue Rundschau”, issue 8, 1925. Translated from the Italian (*Scritti autobiografici*, Milano, Mondadori, 1961) by Barbara Ferrett Rogers.

culture grew steadily, and in the charm-packed atmosphere of the little university town he furthered his knowledge of philosophy by reading Nietzsche, and above all his literary preparation by studying the authors of German Romanticism including Novalis and Brentano. He also devoted himself to

spirit possible. In fact, after having quenched that initial thirst, there was a need for me to return from the sea of new things to the old. And so I did, by going from selling new books to antiques.

Hesse returned to live in Basel from 1899



studying languages and the history of art. At the end of 1898, he published his first work consisting of six hundred copies of a collection of poems bearing the significant title: *Romantic Songs (Romantische Lieder)*, with the publisher Pierson in Dresden. The following year he tried his hand at a similar genre, short prose, in the anthology of tales *One Hour after Midnight (Eine Stunde hinter Mitternacht)*, which was published in Leipzig by the publisher Eugen Diederichs and found favour with the critics. He was thus on his way to solving his first serious existential crisis, thanks to the successful conclusion of his apprenticeship as a bookseller and the promising start of a true literary activity.

In the field of culture, living in the pure present, in the new and brand-new, is senseless and unbearable. Only a continual relationship with what has been, with history, with the old and the very old, makes the life of the

to 1903. He worked as a bookshop assistant, first for Reich and later for the antique dealer Wattenwyl. His activity as a freelance political journalist and critic earned him a certain amount of fame, which enabled him to come into contact with the cultural sphere of the city, which still echoed loudly with the philosophy of Jakob Burckhardt, who had died a few years earlier; the historical pessimism of this Swiss intellectual was to have a decisive influence on his work.

In 1901 Hesse made his first journey to Italy, where he returned two years later. The visit to Genoa, Venice, Ravenna, and above all Tuscany and Umbria aroused in him a veneration for beauty imbued with moral participation, a source of intense emotions which inspired him to write a short biographical sketch of St. Francis of Assisi, which was published in 1904. In 1901 he also made his debut as a novelist in *The Posthumous Papers and Poems of Hermann*

Illustration from the book *Calwer historisches Bilderbuch der Welt* (Calw, 1883; Stuttgart, 1987) which was in the library of Hermann Gundert, Hesse's grandfather, whom he spoke about in the story *The Childhood of the Magician*

Lauscher (Hinterlassene Schriften und Gedichte von Hermann Lauscher), enlarged upon and represented in 1907 with the title *Hermann Lauscher*. After the death of his mother, to whom he dedicated the collection of poems *Poems (Gedichte)*, between 1903 and 1904 he published *Peter Camenzind* in instalments in the "Neue Rundschau" and in book form with the influential Fischer publishing house in Berlin. Autobiographical, and centred on the subject of self-realisation and self-education, which can only be attained at the cost of breaking off and detachment from the community, the novel was Hesse's first great literary success, which enabled him to leave his job as a bookseller.

In 1904 he married Maria Bernoulli, a descendent of the famous family of scientists of Basel, and a photographer and pianist of outstanding sensitivity. He settled down with her in Gaienhofen, a quiet little village on Lake Constance where their three children, Bruno (1905), Heiner (1909) and Martin (1911) were born. Hesse decided to devote himself to literature in propitious isolation. He first lived in a house belonging to farmers, and then in one of his own, with a garden, an orchard and a breathtaking view of the lake and mountains.

This was the beginning of an intense period of activity for Hesse: in 1906 he published *Beneath the Wheel (Unterm Rad)*, placated reminiscences of his traumatic school experiences; between 1907 and 1912 the volumes of stories *This Side (Diesseits)*, *Neighbours (Nachbarn)* and *Umwege* and the collection of poems *On the Way (Unterwegs)*; in 1910 the novel *Gertrude (Gertrud)*, which highlighted the problem of the frail, precarious equilibrium between artistic vocation and everyday life. He supplemented his strictly literary work with his activity as a journalist: he wrote for various periodicals, ("Neue Rundschau", "Simplicissimus", "Die Propyläen", "Die Rheinlande") and was one of the founders, together with Ludwig Thoma, of the Liberal review "März", an instrument of opposition to the authoritarian regime of William II and to the lower middle-class taste which was spreading throughout literature. He came into contact with prominent intellectuals and artists, such as Thomas Mann and Stefan Zweig. However, the season of calm and peaceful sedentary life was coming to a close, due

also to the growing difficulties he was coming up against in his marital relationship. Disturbed by deep anxiety, fascinated by the vastness of the world, Hesse felt a deep-seated need for different experiences. So he decided to leave for the East, to become acquainted with the places where his mother was born and which he had heard people talk about so much: from September to December 1911, together with his painter friend Hans Sturzenegger, he made a long journey, stopping off in Malaysia, Ceylon, Singapore and Sumatra. He recorded his impressions and remarks in the miscellany of notes, poems and stories entitled *From India. Notes of an Indian Journey (Aus Indien. Aufzeichnungen von einer indischen Reise)*, which he sent to press in 1913. In the meantime, after having returned from Asia, complying with his wife's wishes, he left Gaienhofen and moved with the family to the outskirts of Berne, in the house formerly lived in by another painter friend, Albert Welti. But not even the beauty and comforts of the Swiss capital were able to save his marriage with Maria, who had now grown cold and insensitive; the themes of the autobiographical events during this period converged in 1914 into a new novel, *Rosshalde*.

Meanwhile, as confirmation of a presentiment that the writer had had many years earlier, and to worsen the state of profound moral, personal and universal crisis, war broke out.



No, I could not share the enthusiasm for the beauty of the period, and so I suffered pitifully for the war, from the beginning to the end, and for years I fought desperately against that misfortune that had apparently arrived from abroad out of the blue, while all around me everybody appeared to be extremely enthusiastic about it.

Le "petit cénacle", the circle of friends in Tubinga, in a photograph taken in 1899; Hermann Hesse is at the centre, between O.E. Faber and L. Finckh (on the left) and C. Hammelehle and O. Rupp (on the right)

In an impassioned article which appeared in the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" on the 3rd of November 1914 – *O Friends, not these tones* (*O Freunde, nicht diese Töne*) – Hesse denounced the massacre, referring to the teachings of Goethe and appealing to reason against all fanatic Nationalism. The German press reacted by accusing him of defeatism, but it was not long before vast consent also began to arrive from all corners. Among those who expressed their solidarity with his courageous stand was the French writer Romain Rolland, the most illustrious representative of the pacifist movement of the time, with whom Hesse struck up a relationship of profound mutual respect and whom he was to meet in Lugano in 1920. Declared unfit for military service for which he reported as a volunteer, throughout the entire world war he worked in support of the German soldiers held prisoner

ries, already outlined before the war, on the impossible, tragic escape of a social outcast.

The first [great change in my life] occurred the moment I consciously decided to become a poet. The same thing was happening now during the period of the war. I found myself once again in conflict with a world I had lived with in peace up till then. Again, everything fell through, I was alone and miserable, everything I said and thought was hostilely misunderstood by others. So there must have been something amiss with me, if I was so much at loggerheads with the rest of the world. [...] and so I learned better and better to let the conflicts of the universe take their course, and I was able to shoulder my part of the blame in the general confusion. This was part of the changed outline of my life, such as the loss of my house, my family, and other chattels and comforts.



Certificate of Hermann Hesse's third marriage with Ninon Dolbin in Montagnola on the 14th of November 1931

in Italy, France, Russia and England, for whom he founded a newspaper (1916) and a publishing house. His activities as a freelance political journalist and editor formed the predominant part of his intellectual commitments during this period, while his most important literary work, *Knulp* (1915), was limited to resuming three sto-

Bereavement and distressing events followed one another in swift succession: in 1916 his father died and his son Martin contracted meningitis; in 1918 his wife suffered the first signs of severe mental illness and was admitted to a nursing home one year later. The writer, overcome by a nervous breakdown, approached psychoanalysis and underwent treatment with a pupil of Jung, Doctor Joseph Bernhard Lang, with whom he struck up a friendship. It was Lang who advised Hesse to make a note of and try to interpret and depict his dreams. This gave origin to Hesse's first pictorial experiences. In 1917 he outlined a few sketches in a notebook during a stay in St. Moritz and one year later illustrated a series of twelve poems in watercolour which he exhibited in December 1919 in Davos in his first one-man show.

As soon as the war was finally over for me as well, in the spring of 1919 I retired to an out-of-the-way corner of Switzerland and became a hermit.

Hesse left the family for good and, towards the middle of May 1919, he moved to Montagnola, near Lugano. For twelve years he lived in Casa Camuzzi which his writings

and his watercolours were to make famous. In precarious financial circumstances due to the devaluation of the German Mark, he managed to keep going thanks to the support of several friends. Despite the fact that he was in a grievous situation, also psychologically, he recovered his creative ability threatened by exhaustion.

In fact, these were the years of the novel *Demian*, which reveals the more immediate echoes of the recent crisis and the attempts to overcome it by means of psychoanalysis, *Klingsor's Last Summer (Klingsors letzter Sommer)*, a painter's relationship with a nature refractory to the effort of expressing it, *Klein and Wagner*, the collection *Fairy Tales (Märchen)* and Hesse's most famous novel, *Siddhartha*, which he wrote in 1922 inspired by a mystic outburst tempered by vigilant rationality. Cultural and human synthesis between East and West, this new work is a sort of apologue on the renunciation of reality understood as a means for acquiring a more authentic individuality. In 1924 Hesse obtained a divorce from his first wife and Swiss citizenship. He married the opera singer Ruth Wenger, but their marriage, immediately marked by difficulties and incomprehension, was short-lived. The new crisis culminated in 1927, the year of his second divorce and the publication of one of his most emblematic and tormented works, *Steppenwolf (Der Steppenwolf)*. An anguished warning against the impending war, the novel describes the neurosis of a generation and the disease of an era reflected in the profound contrasts which are embedded in the soul of the protagonist. Meanwhile, in 1928, after having published the collection of poems *Krisis*, the writer was attending to another ambitious novel which was to be published in 1930, *Narcissus and Goldmund (Narziß und Goldmund)*, the story of a friendship set in an imaginary medieval period whose protagonists represent the poles of an unsolved dualism between an ascetic life and openness to the world.

Despite the impending catastrophe of the Second World War, Hesse now appeared to have left his most tormented and difficult years behind him, thanks to his acquired maturity and his happy marriage with Ninon Dolbin, a young Viennese woman



devoted to studying classical archaeology, whom the writer married in 1931. Together with her, his faithful companion for the rest of his life, he went to live in the Red House in Montagnola placed at his disposal by his friend Hans C. Bodmer. The following year he synthesised his religious interests and mythicizing of the East in the short but delightful story *The Journey to the East (Die Morgenlandfahrt)*, the prelude to his great final achievement *The Glass Bead Game (Das Glasperlenspiel)*. Presented partially in instalments from 1934 to 1940 and published in book form in 1943 in Zurich, this novel represents the height of Hesse's narrative work and is strongly influenced by the political climate of the time. The proposition he arrives at, although in an extreme utopianism of an ideal homeland of scholars and artists, is an act of faith in the possible re-evaluation of civilisation, that all intellectuals should believe in and in some way cooperate.

Hitler's rise to power marked a period of difficult relations between Hesse and the German publishers. The regime treated him like an "unwelcome" author: of all his numerous works, only the collections *New Poems (Neue Gedichte)* and *Commemorative Pages (Gedenkblätter)* were published in Germany during the Nazi period. He responded by leaving the Prussian Academy of Art and devoting himself in favour of writers in exile: he gave hospitality, among others, to Thomas Mann and Bertolt Brecht.

He inaugurated the post-war period with a



miscellany of political essays, *War and Peace (Krieg und Frieden)* in 1946, which was followed, in 1951 and in 1955 by *Late Prose (Späte Prosa)* and *Evocations (Beschwörungen)*. In 1946 Hesse was awarded the Goethe Prize and the Nobel Prize for literature. He did not go to Frankfurt, or to Sweden, where he sent his wife. In 1955 the German Booksellers' Association awarded him the Peace Prize.

Even though fragmentarily, he continued to write to the very end. He gave up painting and devoted himself to gardening in the peaceful atmosphere of Montagnola. He collected letters and prose into volumes, edited his works and limited himself to printing pamphlets and isolated sheets for friends and acquaintances in exchange for or in reply to messages from well-wishers which poured in from all over the world.

Since so-called reality does not play a very important part for me, because the past often fills me with itself as though it were the present and the present appears to me to be infinitely far away, I am also unable to separate the future so well from the past as one usually does. I live very much in the future, and therefore I do not need to end my biography with today, but can quite confidently make it proceed.

I should like to briefly relate how my life covers its span to the end.

At over seventy years of age, immediately after two universities had awarded me an honorary degree, I was dragged to Court for having seduced a young girl by witchcraft. In prison I asked permission to take up painting. I was allowed to. Some friends brought me paints and brushes, and I painted a small landscape on the wall of my cell.

It contained almost everything that had given me joy in my life, rivers and mountains, sea and clouds, peasants at harvest-time, and a host of other lovely things to satisfy me. But in the middle of the landscape passed a tiny train with at its head the locomotive which, like a maggot in an apple, had already entered a small tunnel and from whose dark entrance billowed puffs of smoke.

I was standing before that picture one day in my prison, when the guards burst in and wanted to tear me away from my pleasant work. Then I felt a tiredness, like a nausea

for the whole affair and for the situation as a whole, brutal and trivial. I now felt as though I was putting an end to the torment. If I were not going to be allowed to play my innocent game as an artist undisturbed, then I would have had to make use of those other more serious arts to which I had devoted so many years of my life: without magic that world was unbearable.

I remembered the Chinese precept: I held my breathe for one minute, freeing myself from the illusion of reality. I courteously asked the guards to be patient for one more moment because I had to board the train in my picture to see something. They laughed as usual, believing me to be touched in the head.

Then I made myself very tiny and entered my picture, boarded the little train and penetrated the small black tunnel on it. For an instant the fleecy smoke could still be seen coming out of the round aperture, then the smoke withdrew and disappeared, and with it the whole picture together with me.

Hesse suffered a brain haemorrhage and died on the 9th of August 1962 at his home in Montagnola. He is buried there in the cemetery of Sant'Abbondio.



"Beyond pictures and stories"

Hermann Hesse, the Eastern Wayfarer

by Alessandro Melazzini*





In the early days following the death of the writer, very few German publishers would have given much for Hermann Hesse's (1877–1962) posthumous fame. Despite the fact that during his lifetime he enjoyed considerable success, which reached its height in 1946 when he was awarded the Nobel Prize, the fame of their fellow-countryman appeared to be on the decline: his readership began to dwindle and the sales of his books languished.

But they were wrong, as was Timothy Leary when he published an essay in America in 1963 which was to pave the way for an incredible "Hesse-Boom", elevating the Swabian writer to the role of prophet of that "psychedelic generation" which viewed the consumption of hallucinogens as the highway to the state of Nirvana.¹

In fact, if Leary had dwelled a little more in depth upon the writings of Hermann Hesse, he would have been more wary about interpreting his novels as descriptions of a lysergic "trip".²

However, it was also thanks to that mistaken conception that thousands of young enthusiasts, attracted by the exoticism of *Siddhartha* and by an interpretation of *Steppenwolf* as a handbook of "sex, drugs & jazz", helped to once again draw public attention to Hesse, later raising him to the rank of a true classical modern writer, capable of crossing the geographic and cultural boundaries in which his works were conceived to become a heritage of world literature.

And it is precisely on a worldwide scale that the 125th anniversary of Hesse's birth and the 40th anniversary of his death is celebrated this year. This double anniversary has provided the occasion for a close-packed series of events co-ordinated in various countries: Germany, Italy, Switzerland and even India.³

Hesse, who believed that there was "nothing more obnoxious [...], nothing more stupid than boundaries",⁴ would have undoubtedly been delighted with such a "global" celebration, even though, known as he was for his shy, reserved disposition, the magnificence that such events bring with them would have probably left him bewildered.

Hesse's deep-rooted internationalism which throughout his life rendered him totally

alien to any concept of Nation, should be understood more as the outcome of his youthful and spontaneous assimilation of the "Christian and almost totally nationless"⁵ spirit of his father's house, rather than as a well-pondered choice made later on in life. His father, in fact, was a Russian citizen of Baltic origin, and his mother was German, with French-Swiss ancestors. Both his parents were staunch, strict observers of the Pietist faith. In former years they had served in India as missionaries before moving to Calw, a small Swabian town in the South of Germany. Hermann Gundert, his grandfather on his mother's side, was a famous orientalist philologist who possessed a well-stocked library where Hesse assimilated his first spiritual nourishment and breathed that charm of the East which was to hold him spell-bound throughout the course of his long life.

His childhood and adolescence, "happy and enjoyed to the full, but not easy",⁶ reverberate throughout all Hesse's works. In his novels he often narrated, in a more or less altered form, biographic events which harkened back to those early years of fundamental importance for his artistic sensitivity, full of "the sweetest and intense sensations, of deeply-felt, instinctive passions",⁷ from which he was to incessantly draw his melancholy. That sublime "poetry of wandering"⁸ which constitutes the leitmotiv of all Hesse's works is tethered to the innocent years of childhood, the assiduous pursuit of free and direct contact with nature.

From his fourth to his ninth year of age, Hesse's parents moved temporarily to Basel where the "stateless" Hermann, who until then had travelled on a Russian passport, obtained Swiss citizenship. After the family returned to Germany, he became a German citizen, and later reacquired Swiss citizenship when, as an adult, he took up permanent residence in Montagnola, in the Canton of Ticino.

We can surmise, also from this bureaucratic whirligig, that Hesse travelled a great deal. In fact, during the first half of his life he often set out on journeys capable of relieving the peaceful monotony of his life, seeking food for his restless soul in far off lands. Hesse the traveller shunned the hackneyed tourist resorts, admiring more the natural

Hesse and his friend Othmar Schoeck on the way to Castiglione del Lago during the journey to Italy in April 1911



enchantment of the reflections in the lagoon rather than the splendour of the Doge's Palace, conversing with a simple peasant family rather than talking at length in the Uffizi Gallery, filling pages and pages of his notebooks and often translating the impressions he got, not only in travel diaries such as *From India* (1913) or *Journey to Nuremberg* (1927), but also in numerous stories and poems.

So many of his journeys lead southward that, Volker Michels, the curator of Hesse's work recalls, with Teutonic precision, that throughout his whole life the writer had never spent a single month above 50° latitude, nor had he ever ventured further north than Bremen.⁹

Hesse's favourite destination was Italy, where he went into raptures over that "gen-

uineness of life, under the ennobling tradition of a history and a classical civilisation"¹⁰ which incited him to return frequently to the peninsular.

From his real journeys and from those taken by his literary characters, Hesse also succeeded so well in singing the praises – if we may be allowed this little parochialism – of the "majestic, deeply undulating terraced hills scattered with vineyards"¹¹ of the Valtellina and its products, that, to soothe the afflictions of the soul, *Peter Camenzind* (1904), the "son of the mountain" of the novel of the same name which made Hesse famous and economically independent, indulged with perturbing frequency in the "sharp and exhilarating taste" of the red wine of Valtellina, believing this beverage to be capable – who needs L.S.D.! – of making

him work magic, create and compose poetry. This does not mean that Camenzind should be written off as a simple drunkard, although even he considers himself such during moments of discouragement. On the contrary, the book refers to the noble tradition of the "Bildungsroman", the psychological novel in German – which includes such masterpieces as *Wilhelm Meister* by Goethe, *Henry Von Ofterdingen* by Novalis and *Green Henry* by Keller – which narrates the progress of self-education of a young man who leaves his village to venture out in the world, impelled by restlessness and a craving to fulfil his artistic aspirations and in so doing, through the various experiences of life, builds his own personality, animated and possessed by "Streben", the romantic yearning for reconciliation between individual poetry and "prose of the world".¹⁴ This gives us an insight into how the theme of Travel should be construed in Hesse's work not only in the geographical sense, but also and primarily as a metaphor of the necessary and painful inner path towards achieving "Heimat", the spiritual homeland, one's point of equilibrium and stable harmony.

Hesse's wayfarer is the one who, like Emil Sinclair in *Demian* (1919), bears impressed upon him "the brand of Cain",¹⁵ the brand of the searcher and of he who is inwardly grieved by the clash between his own individuality and the civilian world, the one who, delving restlessly into his own unconscious, yearns to attain that real life, that authentic life which lies concealed behind the curtain of illusions, behind the incessant flow of appearances and which alone can hearten those painfully aware of the tragic sentiment of human frailty.

On a journey is the highly-cultured vagrant *Hermann Lauscher* (1901), a novel still somewhat immature and at times marked by a certain mannered aestheticism, which nonetheless already expresses Hesse's typical themes. Also journeying, or rather fleeing, is the dishonest clerical worker of the short story *Klein and Wagner* (1920), or the tormented Harry Haller in *Steppenwolf* (1927), as well as the fascinating Goldmund in *Narcissus and Goldmund* (1930), the elder brother of that likeable vagabond *Knulp* (1915) who apparently roams around "free, happy and good for nothing"¹⁶ like the

layabout of Eichendorff, but who in the end mournfully senses the frailty of life.

Journeying towards themselves are also those characters inhabiting Hesse's world who preferred a "contemplative life" rather than an "active life". We recall the moody musician Kuhn in *Gertrude* (1910) – the novel less loved by Hesse – and the painter Veraguth in *Rosshalde* (1914), who are more or less resignedly aware of the contrast between their personal artistic ambitions and the unimaginative world in which they live. Two novels which, together, form the outcome of Hesse's reflections on the role of the artist and his family conflicts during the period he spent in Gaienhofen on the shores of Lake Constance (1901 – 1912) when, prompted by a desire to flee the city, which at that time was quite popular in Germany and already discernible in *Peter Camenzind*, he fooled himself into believing he could lead a sedentary rustic life with his first wife and their three children, but experienced only repulsion for what was substantially a life characterised by oppressing middle-class tranquillity.

Also on a journey is Josef Knecht, the legendary "Magister Ludi" of *The Glass Bead Game* (1943), not so much for his numerous excursions in and outside of the pedagogical province of Castalia, the utopian state mod-

Title-page and flyleaf of the first Italian edition of *Il giuoco delle perle di vetro* (The Glass Bead Game) (Milan, Mondadori, 1955), with dedication in Hesse's own handwriting to his neighbour Celestina Daccò (Montagnola, Hermann Hesse Museum)



elled on the surroundings of Ticino in which the novel is set, but for the spiritual path which leads him to perform his last and most sublime deed as a servant¹⁷ and educator, not in the palaces of a noble but arid Order of the Spirit, but outside of it and out there in the world. In his Panic immersion in an Alpine lake and his self-sacrifice, he thus brings to completion – the Hegelian citation of the famous paradox of the Servant, who in the sacrifice of work becomes Master of his own Master, is clear – the education of the young Tito Designori.¹⁸ And above all, on a journey is *Siddhartha* (1922), the son of a Brahman who abandons his father's house to join the penitent hermits, and later experiences the erotic joys of the courtesan Kamala and finally finds peace spending his old age next to the enlightened Vasuveda. "I am going nowhere. I am only on a journey. I am wandering"¹⁹ is Siddhartha's reply to Govinda, the friend who asks him where he is heading, without understanding that the final destination of Siddhartha's long search is "nothing more than a state of mind, an ability, a secret art of thinking at

follow his own individual path in solitude, adverse to all authority, first and foremost that of the school vehemently criticised in *Beneath the Wheel* (1906) which, together with *The Confusions of Young Torless* by Robert Musil published the same year, constitutes a harsh attack on the oppressive conformism of the collegial institution. This early novel by Hesse – the fruits of the literary elaboration of his scholastic experience and that of his brother Hans – starts from the incidental vicissitudes of the seminarian Hans Giebenrath and his friend Heilner (the symbolic recurrence of names beginning with H.H. is typical of Hesse's works), and ends up in a general accusation against school education as such which, consecrated to the motto of "breaking the spirit" of the pupil, aims at turning the future adult into a tractable mechanism of the social machine. Many years later, with the character of the "Magister Ludi" Josef Knecht, Hesse created that ideal of an enlightened teacher, who alone could have saved little Hans from the state of despair which consumes and annihilates him.

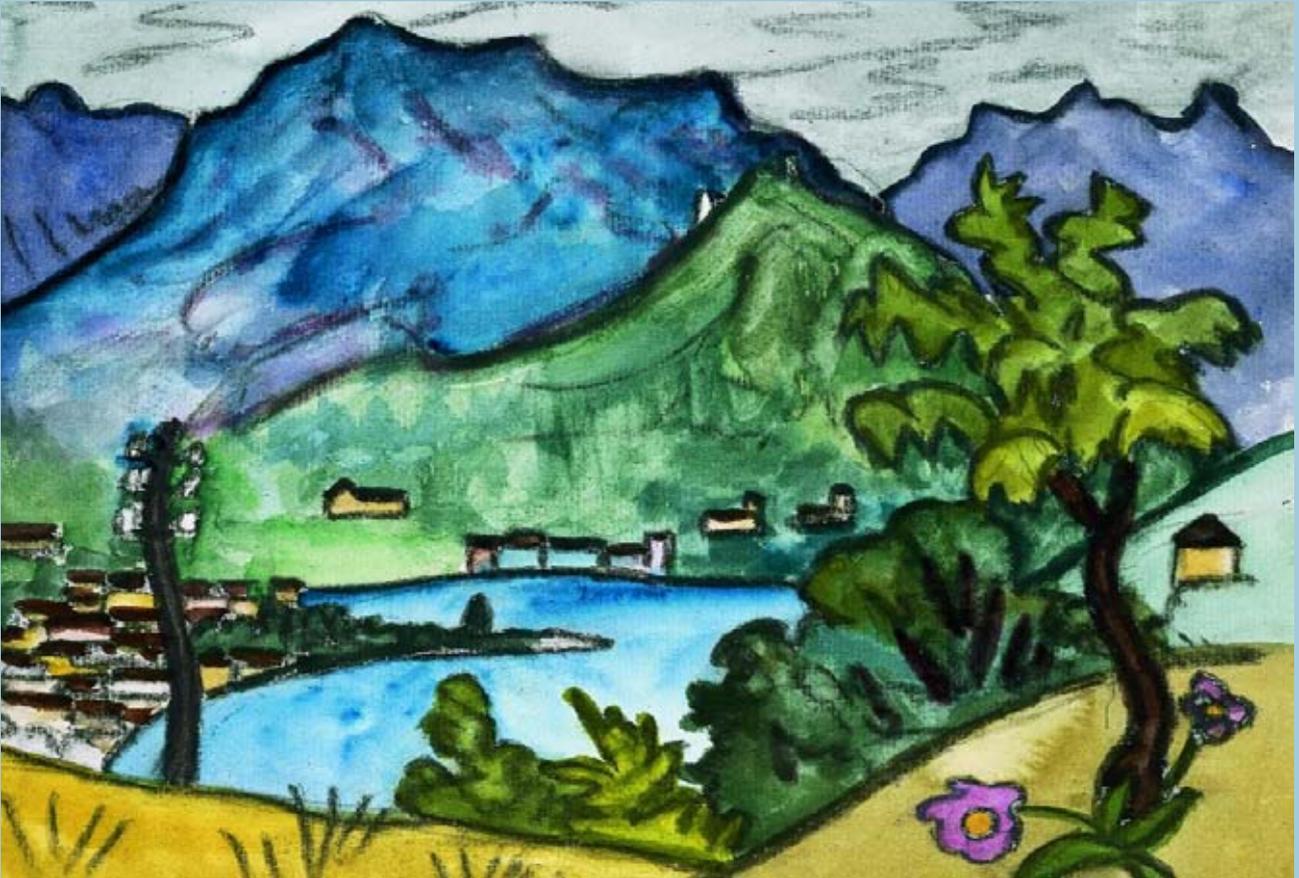


Staging of *Siddhartha* at the Piccolo Teatro in Milan during the season 1999-2000 under the direction of Lamberto Puggelli, with Massimo Foschi in the role of Siddhartha and Claudia Carlone in the role of Kamala

any instant, right in the middle of life, the thought of unity, of feeling unity and, so to speak, of breathing it".²⁰

The Vagabond, or better still, the Seeker, as Hesse defines himself²¹, is the one who, feeling himself alien to the civilian world and not understood by it, decides to relegate himself to its furthest boundaries and

The myth of the Wayfarer reaches its climax in *The Journey to the East* (1932), the fascinating story of that ideal "communion of souls" already touched upon in *Demian* and later mentioned by Hesse in his speech after being awarded the Nobel Prize. This ideal was constantly cherished also by Friedrich Nietzsche: an academy of the free spirits of



Hermann Hesse,
**View over Lake
Ceresio**,
1924

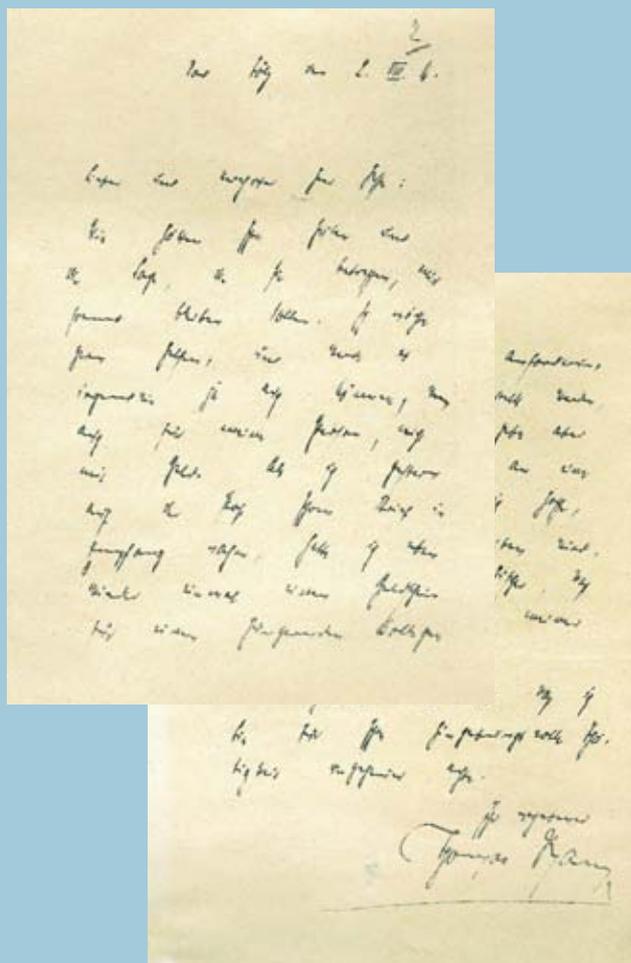
all times and all latitudes on the move through space and through the centuries at the service – let us remember Knecht – of peace and human harmony whose final destination, as related by the violinist H.H., the central character of the Pilgrimage, “was not merely a geographical entity but the homeland and the youth of the soul. It was the Everywhere and the Nowhere, the unification of all times”.²² Xenophon, Plato, Lao-tse, Novalis and all the other great artists and men of thought, past, present and future, all the great writers of the “Weltliteratur” together with their characters, are those pilgrims to whose memory Hesse was to dedicate – in a refined self-referring game – *The Glass Bead Game*, the great senile work devoted to the noble spiritual order of Castalia, understood by the writer as a utopian contrast to the barbarous reality of the Nazi Reich.²³

The motive of the spiritual journey was enhanced in particular with mythological and psychoanalytical themes in the works following the profound crisis that Hesse suffered during the years of the First World War,²⁴ from which he recovered thanks to his interest in the Jungian theories on the

collective unconscious and numerous sessions of psychoanalysis.

In fact, many of Hesse’s characters live constantly in unstable equilibrium in the borderland between the conscious and the unconscious, between the two worlds in which little Emil Sinclair grows up and in the bottomless pit in which Klein flounders, constantly on the brink of insanity. Another example is *Klingsor* (1920), whose surrealistic painting enables the artist to go back through all the stages of the depths and above all the crushing into a thousand “multiplicities of psychic nuclei”²⁵ of the “crazy” Harry Haller, who struggles continuously lacerated in an impossible existence, simultaneously within and outside of middle-class society, courteous and educated, intellectual but also a ferocious nocturnal beast.²⁶

With *Steppenwolf* Hesse takes up a critical stance against his previous novels such as *Peter Camenzind* and *Gertrude*, in which, in spite of everything, he now perceives a hint of insincerity. While Camenzind and Kuhn, aware of their status of misfits in life, timorously shut themselves off in noble silence, Harry Haller on the contrary leaps into the abyss and looks the depths of his soul straight



in the eyes. But this “dialogue with the unconscious”,²⁷ *A Glimpse into Chaos* (1920) which reveals the futility of all order and the interchangeableness of all the adversities which destroy life, is the bringer of a cathartic effect capable of revealing that the conflicts of life, the division between Spirit and Nature, between Good and Evil, between Yin and Yang are nothing more than a veil of Maya concealing the unity of Everything.

In fact, only through a glimpse into the abyss is it possible to reach that “Primigenial Mother” towards whom all Hesse’s characters tend, whether they are conscious of it or not: that original womb in which all individual identities cease to ache, and return to merge in an undifferentiated common origin.²⁸

The “brand of Cain” that Emil Sinclair and his friend and alter-ego Demian bear impressed upon them is nothing other than the mark of Chaos (from the Greek χάος, or also chasm, or yawning abyss), the brand of the chosen ones who have glimpsed into the abyss of human existence and managed to discern its indescribable harmony.

Here then is the meaning of so many recurring symbols and themes in Hesse’s prose. Another example is the metaphor of the dream, together with the lucid awareness of the limits of speech. Powerful though it may be, language can do nothing more than deduce from the use of concepts, definitions which mark out the boundaries of thought but which are inevitably forced to limit it. Dreams, on the contrary, are capable of giving “freedom to contemporaneously experience all imaginable things, to exchange for fun the inside and the outside, to make time and space roll by like moving scenes”.²⁹ Through their magic, reality is transformed, grows hazy, loses the rigidity of dialogical thought and acquires that multiplicity and mystery capable of turning an omega into a snake, as happens to the young Goldmund when he drowsily studies Greek, thinking that it would please his studious friend Narcissus who, on the contrary, understands his friend’s need to follow his destiny by leaving the monastery of Mariabronn – a variation of Maulbronn, the college where Hermann Hesse and Hans Giebenrath studied – to throw himself into the arms of life, women and nature.

Yet another example is music and water, vital presences in Hesse’s works, perfect symbols of serene harmony and of being in becoming.

In almost all Hesse’s novels we find the water of a river flowing free and impetuous, or the stretch of water of an uncontaminated Alpine lake lying deep and still. Very often we also perceive, riding and hovering poised between heaven and earth, one or many clouds, “eternal symbol of travel, pursuit, desire and nostalgia”,³⁰ as Camenzind remarks in his beautiful poem to nature, confident that there is no other man in the world who loves clouds more than he.

Feminine and maternal, water encompasses the opposites like the original womb of the Mother,³¹ and it is to her that not only the clerk Klein or the probable suicide Hans Giebenrath, but also the legendary Knecht who, in another life, was also the Rain Magician, commit themselves, ending their worldly life.

He who, like the boatman Vasuveda of *Siddhartha*, is able to hear the music of the river, is the one who has perceived the Being

Autograph letter from
Thomas Mann to
Hermann Hesse dated
2nd August 1916

behind the eternal and ever-changing flowing of the waves and possesses the smile of one enlightened.

And a smile is also on the lips of his musician friend Pablo, who is really the immortal Mozart, who, together with his sensual and mysterious girlfriends Maria and Erminia, sets the Wolf of the Steppe on the road to recovery, by making him recognise, behind the crackling of an old radio, his immortal music, that "wordless language that expresses the inexpressible and represents the unrepresentable".³³

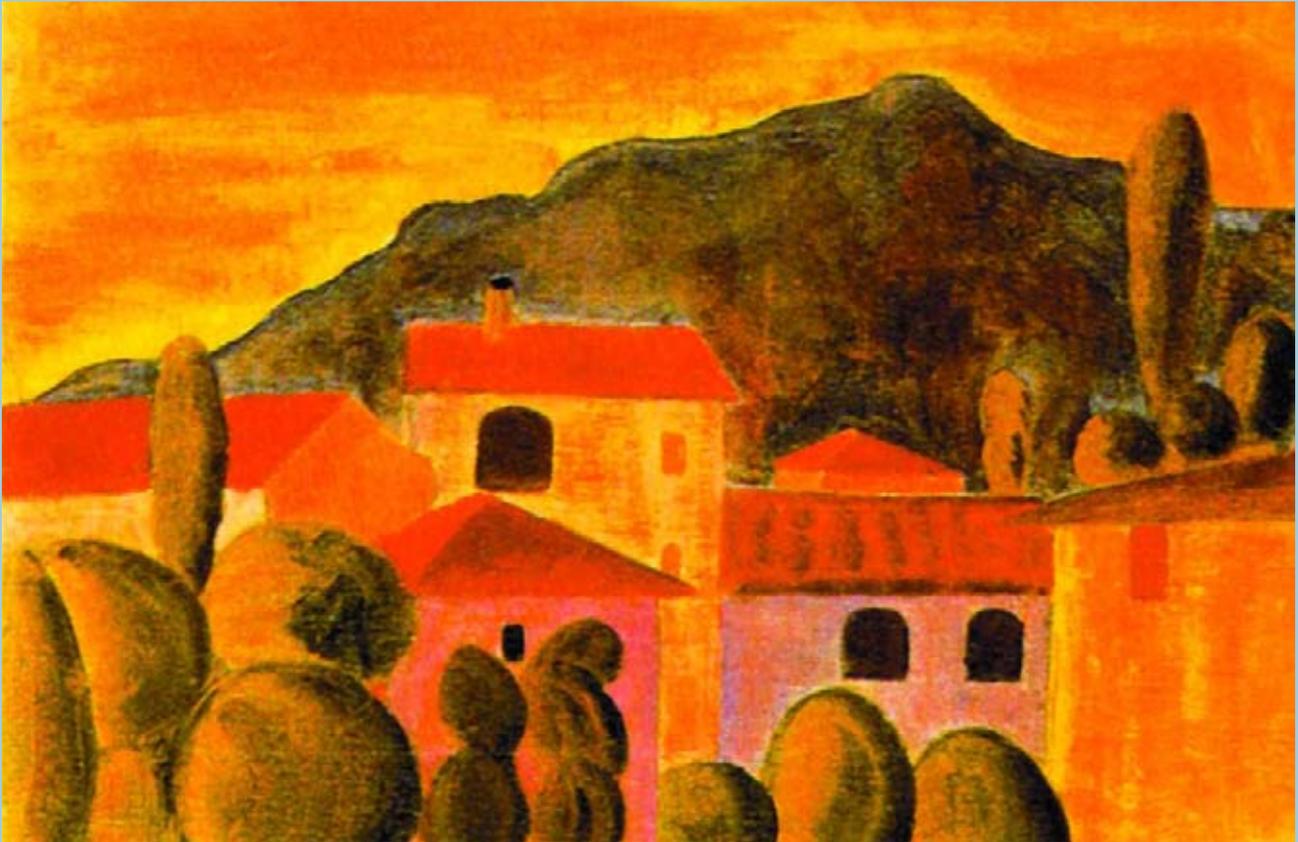
Music is the absolute art which fascinates and deeply moves Emil Sinclair, Hermann Lauscher and Josef Knecht, who, in the unfinished project of his fourth life, finds in her what his Pietist upbringing had never been able to give him. Music "universe of all expression of the soul, supreme language of the divine nature",³⁴ as

remarks Father David Maria Turoldo, is for Hesse and his characters the highest expression of contact with universal harmony. Hence, the sublime *The Glass Bead Game*, noble capacity to combine into a single melody the vastest spheres of truth, justice and beauty, cannot fail to rest upon and draw its origins precisely from this art. And where music is reduced to the strident and ungracious scraping of a violin, it means that no harmony reigns, as was the case in the gloomy seminary of Maulbronn in *Beneath the Wheel*, where an incompetent boarding school pupil stubbornly insists upon scraping the poor instrument, merely making an idiot of himself.

The finest description of Hesse's prose, compared precisely to a musical composition, was left to us by Hesse himself, in the ironic and



Fountain in the courtyard of the monastery at Maulbronn, where Hesse studied for seven months between 1891 and 1892



acute story – adored by his friend Thomas Mann³⁵ - with the curious title *A Guest at the Spa* (1925): “If I were a musician – imagines the writer – I could without any difficulty write a melody for two voices, a melody composed of two lines, of two sets of tones and notes, which are in harmony, complete each other, struggle with each other, and condition each other [...] and anyone who knew how to read a music score could read my double melody, would see and hear, the opposing note, the sister note or hostile or antithetical note of each note. Well, it is precisely this, this double vocality, this antithesis in eternal motion, this double line that I would like to express with the material I have at my disposal, namely with words, and I am desperately working on it, and I am unable to do so”.³⁶

In fact, all the couples depicted by the writer, such as Narcissus and Goldmund, Veraguth and Burkhardt, Muoth and Kuhn, Siddhartha and Govinda, Sinclair and Demian, Knecht and Designori form a melody for two voices played in the attempt to represent the mythical ideal man who finally manages to unite the two poles of existence, living in harmony between Eros and Logos, between the Apollonian and Dionysian spirit, beyond all separation, in the primordial divine unity.³⁷

But, even though a note rather than the opposite sounds within them, the fate of all these wayfarers is unique and different for each of them. While Narcissus has chosen the path of contemplation, Goldmund follows the path of art and sensual love. While the wolf Harry Haller roams wild and anarchic on the Steppes, the “Magister Ludi” Josef Knecht accomplishes the action with the intention of serving and preserving the Castalian Order, even when he abandons his position as teacher of the Game leaving the splendid pedagogic province.

Hesse never tires in showing us that to reach “Heimat” the only road to take is the spiritual path of our own conscience. This is why, when Siddhartha meets Buddha, he admires and respects Gotama exceedingly, but does not become his disciple, as does his friend Govinda, but continues to go his own way, aware that only in this way can he be close to the Venerable One.

That of Hermann Hesse is a lesson on freedom and responsibility, simple and touching as are all the great truths of human wisdom: be yourself, go your own way, because “a father can give his son a nose and eyes, and perhaps intelligence, but not a soul. This is new in every man”.

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¹ Cf. G. DECKER, *Hesse-ABC*, Leipzig, Reclam, 2002, p. 187.

² Phenomena such as these are known as "creative misunderstandings" and are the delight of scholars of comparative literature.

³ Cf. www.hesse2002.de.

⁴ H. HESSE, *Wanderung*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1975, p. 9. Translated from the Italian by Barbara Ferrett Rogers.

⁵ B. ZELLER, *Hermann Hesse*, Hamburg, Rowohlt, 2001, p. 40.

⁶ H. HESSE, *Hermann Lauscher*, trad. di E. BANCHELLI, Milano, SugarCo, 1991, p. 20. Translated from the Italian by Barbara Ferrett Rogers.

⁷ E. BANCHELLI, in H. HESSE, *Hermann Lauscher*, cit., p. 8.

⁸ C. MAGRIS, Preface to *Romanzi*, Milano, Mondadori, 1977, p. XXV.

⁹ Cf. V. MICHELS, Preface to H. HESSE, *Il Viandante* (the journeyer), trad. di F. SOLINAS, Milano, Mondadori, 1993, p. 6.

¹⁰ H. HESSE, *Peter Camenzind*, trad. di E. POCAR, Milano, Mondadori, 1980, p. 66. Translated from the Italian by Barbara Ferrett Rogers.

¹¹ H. HESSE, *Esperienze in Engadina* (experiences in Engadine), in *Il Viandante*, cit., p. 308. Translated from the Italian by Barbara Ferrett Rogers.

¹² H. HESSE, *Peter Camenzind*, cit., p. 43. Translated from the Italian by Barbara Ferrett Rogers.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 56.

¹⁴ C. MAGRIS, *Fra il Danubio e il mare*, Milano, Garzanti, 2001, p. 15.

¹⁵ H. HESSE, *Demian*, trad. di E. POCAR, in *Romanzi*, cit., p. 433. Translated from the Italian by Barbara Ferrett Rogers.

¹⁶ C. MAGRIS, Preface, cit., p. XXV.

¹⁷ Knecht in German means servant.

¹⁸ Cf. H. HESSE, letter to Rolf v. Hoerschelmann dated 22nd February 1944 in *Ausgewählte Briefe*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1974, p. 208. Translated from the Italian by Barbara Ferrett Rogers.

¹⁹ H. HESSE, *Siddharta (Siddhartha)*, trad. di M. MILA, Milano, Adelphi, 1994, p. 131. Translated from the Italian by Barbara Ferrett Rogers.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 175.

²¹ Cf. H. HESSE, letter to Vasant Ghaneker dated April 1953 in *Ausgewählte Briefe*, cit., p. 405. Translated from the Italian by Barbara Ferrett Rogers.

²² H. HESSE, *Il Pellegrinaggio in Oriente (The Journey to the East)*, trad. di E. POCAR, Milano, Adelphi, 2002, p. 25. Translated from the Italian by Barbara Ferrett Rogers.

²³ Cf. H. HESSE, letter to Thomas Mann dated 23rd October 1946 in H. HESSE e T. MANN, *Carteggio* (correspondence), trad. di R. RONCARATI, Milano, SE, 2001, p. 197. Translated from the Italian by Barbara Ferrett Rogers.

²⁴ In addition to being appalled at Europe torn to pieces by the Nationalists, in the "annus horribilis" 1916 Hesse loses his father, his first wife is admitted to a nursing home for mental disorders and his son Martin falls seriously ill.

²⁵ C. MAGRIS, Preface, cit., p. XXXIII.

²⁶ M.P. CRISANAZ PALIN, Introductory note to H. HESSE, *Demian*, in *Romanzi*, cit., p. 301.

²⁷ H. HESSE, *Blick ins Chaos*, Berlin, Seldwyla, 1920, p. 13. Translated from the Italian by Barbara Ferrett Rogers.

²⁸ B. BIANCHI, Introduction to H. HESSE, *Sull'amore (About Love)*, Milano, Mondadori, 1988, p. 6.

²⁹ H. HESSE, *Il Pellegrinaggio in Oriente*, cit., p. 26. Translated from the Italian by Barbara Ferrett Rogers.

³⁰ H. HESSE, *Peter Camenzind*, cit., p. 13. Translated from the Italian by Barbara Ferrett Rogers.

³¹ Cf. B. BIANCHI, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

³² Note how the verb listen – a listening obviously of the soul and not of the senses – already appears in the title of Hesse's first novel, the previously mentioned *Hermann Lauscher*, since Lauscher in German means "the listener".

³³ H. HESSE, *Il lupo della steppa (Steppenwolf)*, trad. di E. POCAR, Milano, Mondadori, 1996, p. 127. Translated from the Italian by Barbara Ferrett Rogers.

³⁴ D.M. TUROLO in G. RAVASI, *Il Canto della Rana*, Casale Monferrato, Piemme 1990, p. 13.

³⁵ T. MANN, in H. HESSE e T. MANN, *op.cit.*, p. 153. Translated from the Italian by Barbara Ferrett Rogers.

³⁶ H. HESSE, *Psicologia Baleara (A Guest at the Spa)*, trad. di I.A. CHIUSANO, in *Altri Romanzi e Poesie*, Milano, Mondadori, 1996, p. 481. Translated from the Italian by Barbara Ferrett Rogers.

³⁷ Cf. H. HESSE, *Der Ideale Mensch*, in *Eigensinn macht Spaß*, Ebner Ulm, Insel, 2002, p. 105 s. Translated from the Italian by Barbara Ferrett Rogers.

³⁸ H. HESSE, *Knulp*, trad. di E. POCAR, in *Romanzi*, cit., p. 257. Translated from the Italian by Barbara Ferrett Rogers.



"Beyond pictures and stories"

Hermann Hesse, Switzerland, Italy and Ticino

by Giuseppe Curonici*



Hermann Hesse,
Lake and hills (details),
watercolour, 1924

Hermann Hesse is one of the most internationally translated writers, and the most widely read among his contemporaries. After the normal or condensed editions at the beginning of his career, he won immense acknowledgement during the second half of the Twentieth century.

Many of the subjects dealt with by Hesse can be easily interpreted in a universal sense, and the reader is able to identify with them. One of these is truly fundamental: seeking and building one's own personality. The second is nonetheless important: the ability to see all the evil possible, to feel it on oneself in one's own life, and at the same time the need or the strength not to give way to panic, to the temptations of nihilism, or to the loss of values. These are also a few of the reasons why Hesse's work aroused particular attention among young people. His portrait of the man in a state of crisis, *Steppenwolf*, represents the conflicts and the decline in values of Western civilisation in the first half of the Twentieth century. This could hold good for anybody, also in other times and places. Another remarkable aspect is his international approach. Although Hesse is undoubtedly a German author, the reference to different cultures emerges continuously in his works. Aspiration after inner peace and harmony with others and with the world – aspiration, and not the foolish presumption that it can be easily possessed – is the theme of *Siddhartha*, *The Journey to the East*, and *The Glass Bead Game*, and it is developed in a sort of non-dogmatic religiousness in which Christian spirituality, love and worship of nature, Indian traditions, and Chinese traditions converge. Hesse emerged whole and unscathed from the Nazi period. He preached peace, accepting to live through many years of hardship rather than submit. He had become a symbol of the German culture elected upon the rebirth of European civil life after the scorching ashes of the war. Besides for his merits as a writer, it is most likely also for this political-historical-ethical reason that he was awarded the Nobel Prize, precisely in 1946, the period of the rebuilding.

An international horizon and a coming and going around Basel

Hesse's relations with Italy and Canton Ticino are not merely geographical anec-

dotes, but concern some of the most intense inspiring forces at work in the soul of the author. To understand their significance, it is necessary to insert the image that Hesse had of Italy and Ticino into the whole of his production throughout his entire life; in addition it is necessary to consider other references which, however far away they may be (how far away is India?) emerge from the same insuppressible requirement of the soul: the search for the spiritual homeland. We have to bring this idea of spirituality and internationality clearly into focus together. Let us say first of all what it is not. It is not equalisation, it is not cosmopolitanism, it is not cultural tourism like a generic practice of switching from one place to another and from one philosophy to another out of fatuous curiosity or due to the inability to stay put in one place; it is not the non-committal attitude of those who deny faith or the truth. Vice versa, Hesse's attitude is tolerance or rather brotherhood. He respected differences, other people's thoughts and conscience, acknowledged that what is missing in one civilisation can be learned or, we could even go so far as to say, imported from different cultures. A European author comes to the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland to write an Indian story in German, *Siddhartha*, which dates back to 1922 and seems as though it was written yesterday. A special kind of joy unfolds when we discover that from thousands of kilometres away and thousands of years ago similar callings arose, as in the figures of Buddha and St. Francis.

Hesse's cultural geography

We are faced with a question mark: how did Hesse come to incorporate these prospects of cultural pluralism into his personality and into his production? Where and when did Hesse begin to concentrate on unifying so many directions?

The historical answer can be found at number 21 Missionstrasse, in Basel. This city was important for Hesse, because it was the gateway to intercontinental culture, and the occasion of his entry into Switzerland.

The Pietist religious movements which branched out over the centuries between Germany and Switzerland, were reformed in 1815 in Basel to form a missionary society: the



Hesse and his first wife
Maria Bernoulli in
Gaienhofen on Lake
Constance

Evangelische Missionsgesellschaft, referred to more briefly as Basler Mission, which is still in full operation today. The celebrated Indologist Doctor Hermann Gundert, director of the mission in India, at Malabar, was Hermann Hesse's maternal grandfather. He was an important cultural mediator, the author of translations of parts of the Bible, and of an English-Malayalam vocabulary. After returning to Europe, in 1860 he became director of the missionary publishing house in Calw, linked to Basel. Later on, Gundert's daughter Marie returned from India. The Calw editions were entrusted to the young Protestant minister Johannes Hesse, who had also been a missionary in India. Johannes was German-speaking but of Russian nationality, because he came from Estonia, one of the German-speaking Baltic provinces belonging to the Empire of the Tsars. Johannes Hesse married Marie Gundert; Hermann Hesse was born in Calw in 1877, and was a Russian citizen.

In 1881 the family moved to Basel, because Johannes Hesse had been appointed professor at the Basler Mission school, where he

remained for five years. The family acquired Swiss citizenship in 1883, but in 1886 returned to Calw. However, in 1890 the young Hermann Hesse, who was born Russian and became Swiss, was granted German citizenship, more precisely citizenship of Wuerttemberg, to be able to sit for the State examination and continue his studies in theology in Tubingen. The following year he entered boarding-school in Maulbronn. After seven months he ran away, then staged an attempted suicide. He worked as an apprentice clockmaker, then thought of running away again, but further afield. He was thinking of Brazil.

At this point we can understand the great significance that all that complicated coming and going around Basel had for Hesse: a multivalent and profound encounter. The Pietism, which presented Christianity primarily as a spiritual experience; the spiritual uprightness of the missionaries; the contact with India and in general a far-reaching sense of intercultural relations and tolerance; his entry into Switzerland, the intermediate stage



before settling in Ticino.

In Basel, he began to publish poetry and worked as a bookseller. In 1901 he left for Italy. He reappeared three months later. In 1903, he went on his second journey to Italy, with Maria Bernoulli whom he married the following year. They went to live in Gaienhofen, on the shores of Lake Constance where their three children were born. In 1911, together with his painter friend Hans Sturzenegger, he left for the Indies, on a journey of acquaintance and culture. In 1912 Hesse moved to Berne, and from that moment until the end he remained domiciled in Switzerland. In 1919 he settled permanently in Ticino.

Where is Eden?

For some very respectable reason, Eden is in India, or in the Lake District, or in Italy. It's exactly the same thing. In 1927, for Hesse's fiftieth birthday, his writer friend Hugo Ball (who was the cultural moving spirit of Dadaism) published the first biographical-critical monograph on Hesse, and in that excellent book he affirmed that Montagnola

is Honolulu. We have nothing to object, as long as he explains something.

Between the nineteenth and twentieth century, Western civilisation was shaken, or rather, overwhelmed by new events of enormous significance. Industry became mass industrialised civilisation. Living conditions changed. Economic growth and social conflicts became more intense. Nationalistic rivalries were paving the way for the First World War. Colonialism was spreading throughout the world and laying the foundations for the present-day globalisation. Cultural and psychological hardship became more acute: the changeover from a simple rural life to a technological civilisation, amidst enthusiasm and suffering, conformism and rebellion, prompted a radical change of lifestyle. For some, it even meant bringing back ethnic traditions. To others, it appeared to be the target of the social revolution. For quite a substantial number of intellectuals and artists, an almost individual, deeply-felt aspiration was the search for pure, uncontaminated places, where they could live an authentic

life, amidst the unsullied forces of nature, which is greater and more profound than the cities of men.

In substance, it means setting out on a journey and seeking elsewhere a possible Earthly Paradise, which resembles the inexpressible and indescribable spiritual homeland. The English writer Stevenson moved to the South Sea Islands. The painter Gauguin went to Brittany and then to Tahiti and the Marquesan Islands. Nietzsche went up to Engadine. Giovanni Segantini went from the Brera Academy of Art to the farmsteads of Maloja. Van Gogh went to Provence. Cézanne had already taken refuge at his home, also in Provence. Others went to the fishing villages on the Côte d'Azur, whose features had not yet been changed by the tourist industry. One group of philosophers and artists went up to the mountain of Ascona, and the mountain of the philosophers was Monte Verità. After the First World War, a new influx arrived in Ascona – now they were painters and writers. These are just a few famous examples: in fact, the movement was scattered throughout various parts of Europe.

At that time, Ticino, one of the poorest territories in Switzerland, was still almost completely at a stage of pre-industrial civilisation. Its assimilation to a Utopian land, to an Eden, was possible. For Hesse, it also took on the value of a need and a remedy, mainly due to the accumulation of distressing circumstances, which we will mention shortly.

In reality, to Hesse's eyes, India, Italy and Ticino had one feature in common: the place of primordial values, the religious sense of nature, the spontaneous way of life, the harmony between man and nature, at least as a Utopian Edenic image. However, once we have ascertained the common core, we have to consider the differential elements.

India. In the case of India, Hesse was influenced by his childhood acquisitions, the household tradition, the presence of widespread spiritual cultural systems, alternative to the European system and especially to materialistic conformism.

Italy. For the image of Italy, another tradition is at work, that of the man of German culture who tends towards the country of classical antiquity and art. An impulse to move towards the south, a south which is nature and culture. This also applies precisely in the

case of Hesse, who nevertheless did not give much thought to classical antiquity and not even to Christian antiquity (in fact, he never ever went to Rome); on the contrary, what he was keenly interested in was the country, the people, and art from the end of the Middle Ages up to his day and age.

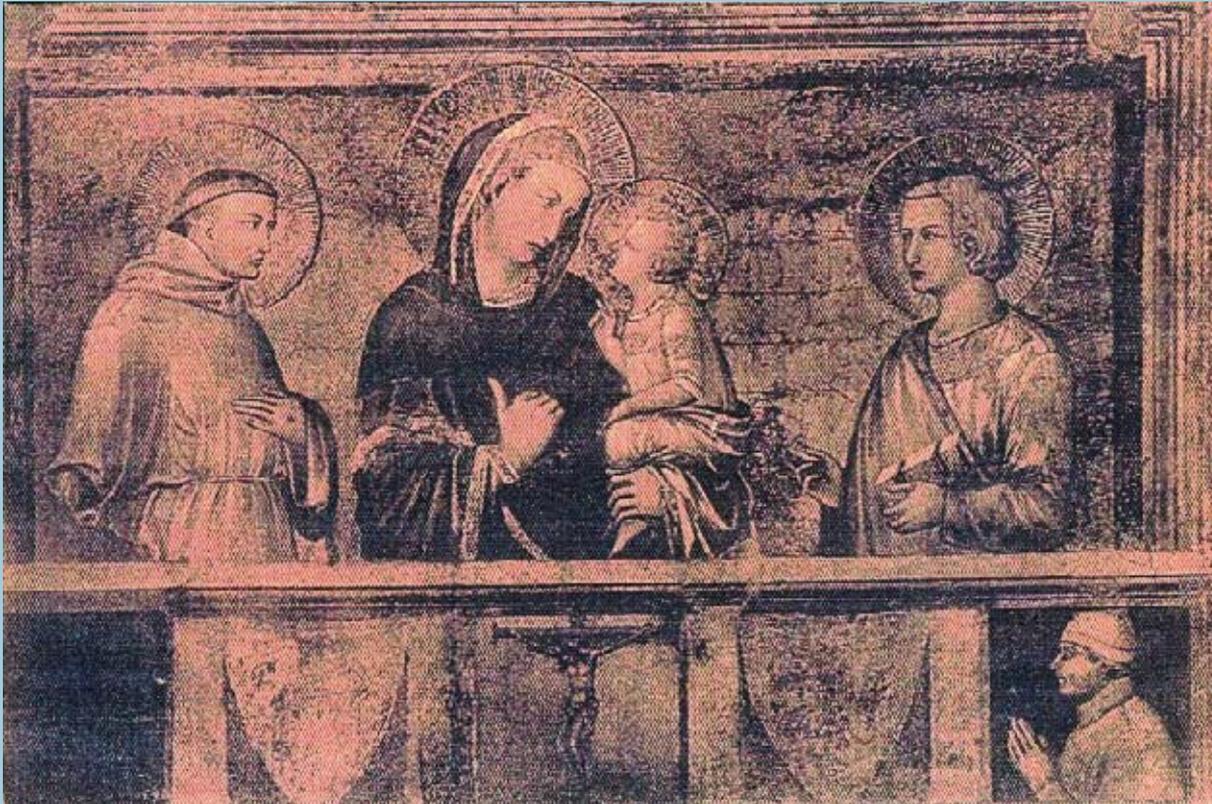
Ticino. Hill of Montagnola overlooking Lake Lugano, is the synthesis of an imaginary Eden with an actual village. It offers the dual advantage of being at one and the same time close to Central Europe and still close to rustic nature. This is the place where Hesse accomplished the culminating part of his work, at a ripe old age and until the end of his days.

Journeys to Italy

Discovering Italy was a wonderful existential, not only cultural, experience enjoyed by Hesse at the beginning of the 20th century. His first journey to Italy is documented by a *Diary* and other texts of a descriptive or autobiographical nature. Hesse's works *Aus Italien*, collected by Volker Michels (Frankfurt a.M., 1983), were published under the

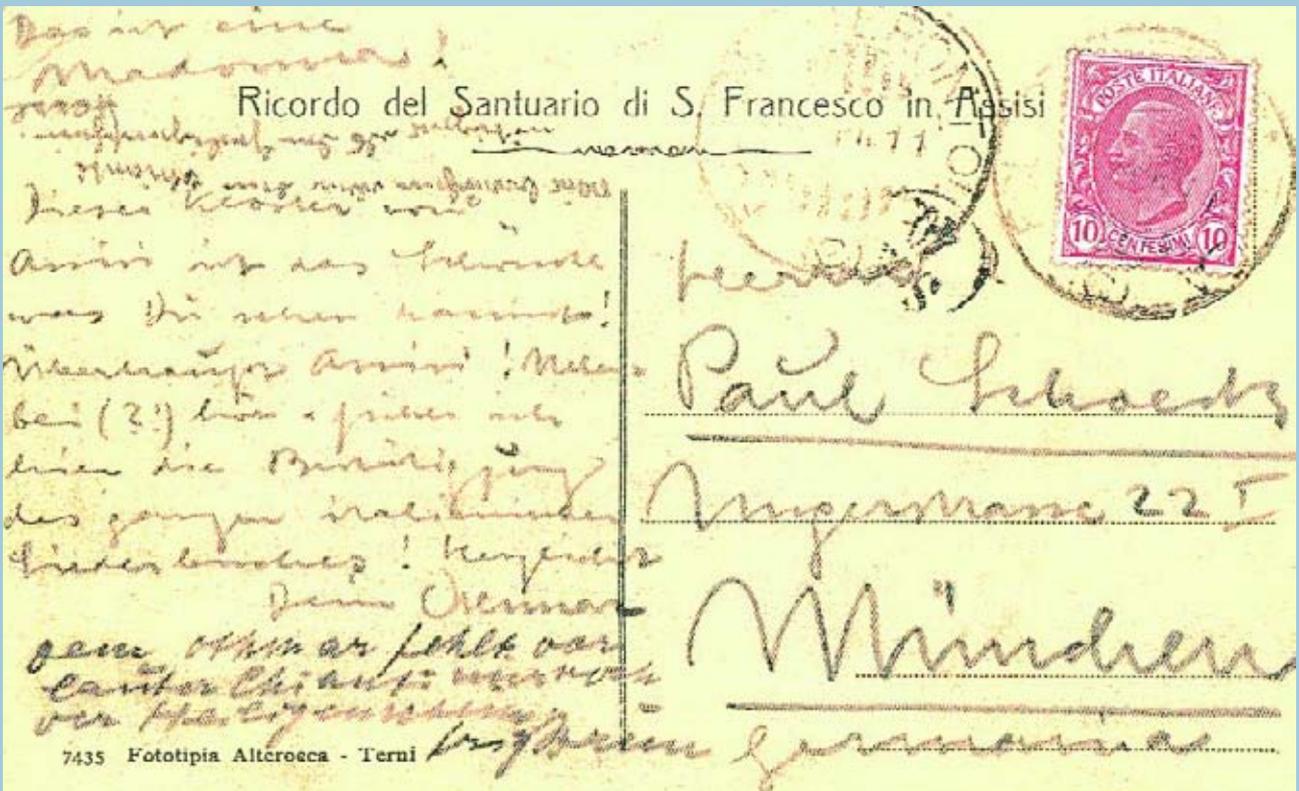


Postcard from Hermann Hesse to his father, dated Venice 2nd May 1901: "Fondest regards to you and to everybody! I am staying at the house of Miss Hüller in Venice: Fondamenta Fenice 2551. I am well, despite a cold and I am content. Letters etc. here, please. Yours affectionately, Hermann" (Marbach, Deutsches Literaturarchiv)



Santuario di S. Francesco (Chiesa inferiore)
Lorenzetti - La Vergine, S. Francesco e S. Giovanni

Assisi



title *From Italy*, by Eva Banchelli (Milan, 1990). He departed from Calw in the evening of Monday the 25th of March 1901 and arrived in Milan on Tuesday at half past eleven in the evening. He visited Pavia, Genoa, Florence, Pisa, Pistoia, Prato, Leghorn and other places, returned to Florence and remained there until the 28th of April. Then he went to Ravenna, Padua, Venice, the Lagoon, the Lido. He took leave of Venice on the 17th of May, and stopped one day in Milan to see Brera. Saturday evening "at half past ten I boarded the St. Gotthard train". The customs procedures in Chiasso annoyed him. Near Lugano he fell asleep. The afternoon of Sunday the 19th of May he arrived back in Calw.

He had conscientiously prepared himself before the journey. He had studied the Italian language and the history of art.

The entire diary is crammed with works and artists. Architecture, sculpture, and antiquity take a slightly secondary place compared to the space occupied by paintings. Here the young writer's interest was extremely accentuated, and his sensitivity keen and sharp. He dwelled continuously upon the richness of the colour, not only for the effects of perception, but for the closely connected cultural significance. 10th of April, Pitti Palace. "I again sit at length in front of Titian's *Caterina*. The truly exceptional thing about the painting is the total unity of the shades, which is for the most part missing in Tuscan paintings, a unity in which the light, figures, landscape, etc. are chords of equal intensity". His flair for feeling pictorially is exceptional, and so much so that we find it also when, instead of describing paintings, he describes real landscapes. 23rd of April: "From the Bridge of Graces, a wonderful view over the River Arno which, from a clear dark green at the top, after passing under the bridges further down, mirrored all the colours of the evening".

An enormous cultural revolution took place in Tuscany, the transition from the Mediaeval to the Modern Age. Hesse paid little attention to this historical event, even though his preparation contained a masterpiece of historical research, the very famous book on the Renaissance by Jakob Burckhardt. Instead, Hesse concentrated mainly, from time to time, on the individual paint-

ing. However, at least once he spoke clearly about the historical change, towards the end of his work on St. Francis and Franciscanism, in 1904, when he mentioned Giotto, acknowledging him as an extraordinary innovator: "Giotto in particular, the first great painter of the modern age, was impelled to such depth precisely by his gratitude and by his deep love for Francis and his spirituality". After the two fundamental journeys of discovery, in 1901 and 1903, attested by his diaries, Hesse came down from the North to Italy several times, preferably in the company of a friend. However, the accumulation of museum and historical information, subtly and little by little began to interest him less. He appreciated people, the population, the environment, the way of life which appeared to him to be less strenuous and artificial than in his own country. A rhythm of life closer to natural spontaneity. The text *A Day's Journey in Italy*, written in 1913, gives a conclusive judgement. "Apart from the differences and fascinating contrasts between peoples and countries, I will always, and with ever-increasing clarity, be met by a unitary feeling of humanity".

Italian language and literature

Italian was apparently the only foreign language that Hesse knew well, and his second language after his mother tongue. Today, the proprietor of the bookshop Fuchs and Reposo, the Wega bookshop, in via Nassa in Lugano, recalls that as a young girl she often saw that tall, thin, extremely courteous gentleman, who spoke German or sometimes Italian with a German accent, enter the shop. There are also people in Montagnola who still remember him. When one of his German friends went to visit him, Hesse acted as his guide. At the Cavicc tavern or the Bellavista restaurant, he acted as interpreter between Thomas Mann and the owner's wife. We should bear in mind that Hesse learned Italian, not after settling in the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland, but many years earlier. In fact, he had started studying it even before the journey in 1901. At the beginning he obviously spoke Italian with a barbarous accent. His *Diary* of those event-filled months gives us various bits of information.

Milan, Wednesday 27th March: "Dinner in a

Postcard to Paul Schoeck from Assisi, spring 1911; Hesse was travelling with the musician Othmar Schoeck and the composer Fritz Brun. "This convent in Assisi is the most beautiful thing one could ever see! Ah Assisi! Strolling through the streets (!) I hear + find here everything there is to be found in the Italian song book [by H. Wolf]! Fondest wishes from your Othmar. After having drunk so much Chianti all Othmar needs is a halo. Fritz Brun But we need Chianti more than we need a halo. Hesse"

little trattoria (*macheroni con sugo*)". All those maccheroni needed was a "c". "The whole family, cat included, sat at the table with me and laughed at my Italian". Thursday 28th, in Pavia, a stop at a country tavern: "simple, easy-going people who were very kind to me and laughed at my Italian". He arrived in Florence and was given hospitality at the home of Professor Thurnheer. Easter, 7th April: Professor Thurnheer "has kindly provided me with literature on Florence", but on Friday Hesse had already purchased a classic of Italian Renaissance literature, *Vite* by Vasari. Three weeks later, Sunday 28th April, he was lunching with the Thurnheers, and wrote: "With them I only speak Italian". On the 17th of May, on his way

Italian authors directly, wrote articles in German on their work, and published translations-revisions. Several of his German versions of pages from *Little Flowers of St. Francis* were referred to by Eva Banchelli as translation and adaptation, or free adaptation. The reason why Hesse admired St. Francis is clear: he corresponded very closely to the model of Christian spirituality that he had contemplated and interiorised from early childhood through the intense devoutness of his parents and famous grandfather Gundert. A young man from a rich and honoured family, after having tasted the spices of life, gives up everything, chooses poverty, inner spirituality, and becomes a monk. Who does this biographical profile repre-



back home, he conversed on the train from Milan to Venice with an Englishman. "We spoke half in Italian and half in German. Then we were joined by a lady from Venice with a pretty daughter and we all chatted together in Italian".

The second important journey to Italy was in 1903. He travelled in the company of Maria Bernouilli and her friend, the painter Gudrun, who was waiting for them at the station in Milan. In Florence he was given a room by the Thurnheers, and the two girls found accommodation nearby. On Tuesday 7th April he gave a display of his linguistic knowledge. He chatted with the Thurnheers for an hour, and concluded: "I was delighted that my rusty Italian had begun to flow so well again".

Hesse read some of the most important

sent? The son of the middle-class family of Assisi, Francis? Or the son of the rich man of Kapilavastu, Buddha? Or an abstract model of conversion? In 1904 Hesse published two biographical works, one on Boccaccio, and one on St. Francis. To be quite truthful, they are two very different characters, placed side by side or in opposition with each other. In the novel he wrote in 1930, *Narcissus and Goldmund*, the two protagonists are an ascetic monk and a sensual artist. Similar pairs of opposites emerge insistently in the works of the mature Hesse. The polarity, the contradiction of human life is one of the themes that attracted him most.

Hesse produced numerous articles for newspapers and magazines, which ranged from stories to short essays and reviews of books.

Hesse as he paints in the neighbourhood of Montagnola in a photograph taken during the late Twenties

We see him pass, with a free itinerary, through many Italian names and authors: Leonardo, Machiavelli, Pascoli (for whom he remarked on the 5th of June 1914 in the "Münchner Zeitung": "Many of his delicate *Poemetti* are so full of musical resonance as to make them seem impossible to translate").

In Ticino

Perhaps what Ticino was for Hermann Hesse indeed resembles the most attainable part of the Utopia of Eden. The writer settled there permanently in 1919, but he had begun to get to know it, little by little, from as early as the start of the century. The most fleeting glimpse he got of it was when he crossed it on the train at full speed, on his journeys to Italy. In 1905 he made an excursion on foot between Lake Como and Lake Lugano. Two years later he went to Ascona, on Monte Verità, for physiotherapeutic treatment. From 1916 he made frequent visits to the region of Locarno for short holidays, sometimes to the lake and sometimes to the mountains, either alone or with friends.

The years coinciding with the First World War, and immediately after, were extremely difficult for Hesse. During the conflict, he devoted himself to charity work for German prisoners of war. He suffered repeated violent attacks in the newspapers, because he had

choanalysis with Doctor Lang, the disciple of C.G. Jung. The initial and unexpected consequence was the start of a new creative activity. Doctor Lang advised his patient to take up drawing and painting, for therapeutic purposes. Hesse produced self portraits in black and white, and innumerable landscapes, which rose to as many as three thousand water colours in the space of ten or fifteen years. They are almost all landscapes of Ticino. His painting activity was at one and the same time physical and mental; his anxiety melted into pictures. And the subject he painted was, in a certain sense, the one most full of life, peace and majesty: the sky, lakes, a few villages, trees, forests. Nature.

Germany's defeat was a psychological, moral and also financial catastrophe for him, due to the inflation which wiped out his savings. The partially mastered crisis did not come to an end; Hesse found a suitable arrangement for his three children, and decided to leave Berne, tear himself away from everything and start life anew, perhaps between Ascona, Arcegno and Ronco. But there was one amazing drawback! His wife, who had been temporarily discharged from the mental home, had decided to come to Ticino and buy herself a house precisely in Ascona. Alarmed at the news, Hermann Hesse changed his plans. He had to shift further south, on the shores of another lake, Lake Lugano. He stayed at a hotel in Sorengo, and after a few days discovered a home which fascinated him in the village of Montagnola. The architect Camuzzi, who had worked during the middle of the nineteenth century in St. Petersburg, upon returning to his homeland, had restructured a large farmstead for himself, turning it into an eclectic-baroque-oriental palace. Here Hesse rented four rooms without heating. There was a fireplace, and a balcony. He set to work. His output during the first few years was frenzied, then slowed down to a more relaxed pace. In 1931 Hesse, who still had some financial difficulties, was helped enormously by the patron Hans C. Bodmer, who had Casa Rossa built for him. It was here that the writer lived and worked until his death. Montagnola was the cradle of his most famous works. One of them, *Klingsor's Last Summer*, is a story set in Casa Camuzzi: the garden, the balcony and the landscape are



voiced his opinion against Pan-Germanic militarism. One of his children fell ill, his father died suddenly, and his wife had to be admitted to a nursing home for a very serious psychiatric disorder. Since he himself was in danger of losing his balance, and was aware of it, in 1916 Hesse underwent psy-

Hesse at work in the garden of Casa Rossa around 1935

easily recognisable. The names of the places are anagrams of actual names: Manuzzo is Muzzano, Laguno is Lugano, Caruno means Carona. We feel we should point out something very much alive: they are all places that can be reached from Montagnola on foot, there and back at the most in one day. This means that they are places felt directly by Hesse with his bodily presence. Hesse dedicated innumerable descriptive and autobiographical pages to Ticino, the landscape, the people, the festivities, the churches and the villages. He was grateful to the land that had given him hospitality.

But what about the notice? One day a strict sign appeared on the gate post at the entrance to Casa Rossa: visitors are not welcome. At that time, Hesse was the most famous writer in the world. He was seventy, eighty years old, and he was always being visited by young people with sleeping-bags and guitars, and strangers from all corners of the world. What was he supposed to do, pay attention to dozens of visitors every day? At eighty? He closed the gate, out of self defence. But he didn't let the conversation drop. He answered anyone who wrote to him. He wrote thirty-five thousand letters. In 1923 he had wanted to abandon his German citizenship, out of love for the German people and culture and out of contempt for the new black political factions which were about to plunge his country into a worse upheaval than the previous one. He wanted to become Swiss, Ticinese, he who had desired to learn Italian. The town council granted him honorary citizenship. He is buried in the cemetery of Gentilino.

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"Beyond pictures and stories"

The Hermann Hesse Museum in Montagnola, a rendezvous

by Regina Bucher*





The Hermann Hesse Museum was inaugurated on the 2nd of July 1997, to celebrate the 120th anniversary of the artist's birth, Nobel Prize for literature in 1946, in the old Camuzzi Tower, located in the heart of the village of Montagnola and forming part of the group of buildings of Casa Camuzzi.

The Museum is directed by the Hermann Hesse Foundation, and has become a place which enables visitors to wander, in a stimulating atmosphere, along the creative path trodden by Hesse, to immerse themselves in the realm of his literary work and to savour the beauty of his watercolours. The layout of the Museum allows contact and intercommunication between the visitors. The seating accommodation at the entrance, in the garden and in the book-shop where Hesse's works are available in four languages, invites visitors to rest and exchange views.

By virtue of its extensive design, in addition to the permanent exhibition of manuscripts, letters, book editions, watercolours, photographs and personal objects – including his desk and typewriter –, the Museum offers the visitor different possibilities of approaching Hesse.

Each year, three separate temporary exhibitions contemplate and feature a particular aspect of themes and personalities linked to Hesse, giving the public access to very often unpublished works and texts. Exhibitions featuring the sculptor Hermann Hubacher, the carpet-weaver Maria Geroe-Tobler and an

exhibition on the inhabitants of Montagnola and their relations with Hermann Hesse are scheduled for 2003.

Audio-equipped areas are provided in the Museum, whereby it is possible to hear Hesse's voice as he reads his texts or to listen to his favourite pieces of music. A small cinema features a documentary film in Italian, German and English, on the artist's life in Ticino. The weekly lectures in Italian and German, followed by a discussion with the audience, as well as the walks through the places cherished by Hesse, the conferences, concerts and various recitatives, help to make the visit to the Museum precious and enjoyable.

The main purpose of the Foundation is to keep Hesse's work alive, to promote awareness of the topicality of his literary works and characterise the spirit of the artist as transcending all boundaries.

The Museum welcomes 20,000 visitors each year, and is thus an important cultural centre of attraction in Ticino, frequented by an



international public.

Translated into 60 languages and with over 100 million books sold, Hermann Hesse is the German-language author of the twentieth century most widely read throughout the world. For this reason the Hermann Hesse Foundation in Montagnola has frequently organised projects and exhibitions outside the borders of Canton Ticino, for example in Winterthur, Zurich, Berlin, Milan, Venice and Brussels.

* *Director of the Fondazione Hermann Hesse Montagnola*

The Hermann Hesse Museum in the tower of Casa Camuzzi in Montagnola

Right:
The Painter's Treasure:
Hesse's paints and palette
(Montagnola, Hermann Hesse Museum)

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