

READING UNDER THE INFLUENCE: (RE)VIEWING HERMANN HESSE'S
STEPPENWOLF THROUGH A KAFKAESQUE LENS

Kristopher D. Asher

A Thesis Submitted to the
University of North Carolina Wilmington in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

Department of English
University of North Carolina Wilmington

2010

Approved by

Advisory Committee

Michael Wentworth

Keith Newlin

Paula Kamenish
Chair

Accepted by

Dean, Graduate School

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Literary Links	1
II. First Encounter with <i>Steppenwolf</i>	8
III. The Tumultuous World of Hesse and Kafka	13
IV. Diving into the Kafkaesque	24
V. (Re)viewing <i>Steppenwolf</i> through a Kafkaesque Lens	37
VI. Kafka and Hesse Within the Literary Spectrum	52
VII. Works Cited	56

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the connections between Hermann Hesse's *Steppenwolf* and Franz Kafka's *The Trial* and *The Castle*. By examining the intertextual links of the novels, a clearer picture arises of how both authors utilize similar techniques to express their concerns over the arrival of the twentieth century and its perceived horrors, literal and figurative. Both Hesse and Kafka thought the individual was becoming more depersonalized and sought ways to describe this increasing isolation.

They achieve this goal by employing certain characteristics in their writings that have now come to be described as Kafkaesque. These Kafkaesque traits include surreal, absurd events accepted as normal, distortions and transformations, and an unavoidable sense of foreboding.

Looking at Hesse's and Kafka's biographical backgrounds allows one to discern the similar worlds in which the two lived and how closely each of their lives resembled the other. One must be cautious not to mistake biography for textual criticism, but the shared *Zeitgeist* in which they both existed plays a large part in how Hesse and Kafka developed their styles and literary techniques.

And finally, no writer can, nor should, be pigeon-holed into any one category, but the three novels by Hesse and Kafka discussed herein can be positioned within both a general category of fantastical literature and a slightly more specific Expressionist movement.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Kamenish for helping me throughout the entire thesis experience. Her assistance has been invaluable and, without her knowledge on the topic, the thesis would not have gotten as far as it did. And thanks also to her for pointing out to me the overall direction of German literature, as well as Hesse's and Kafka's place within it. Thanks Dr. K.

I would also like to thank Dr. Wentworth, who started out as a reader, but was willing to increase his responsibility if and when needed. Thanks also to Dr. Newlin for agreeing to be a reader at a late notice when it would have been so easy to say no.

And last, but definitely not least, I would like to thank my wife Candace, and my daughter Eden, for putting up with me being away from home so much. If it were not for their patience, understanding and motivation, I would probably not have even been able to start this thesis, much less finish it.

Chapter 1 – Literary Links

Reading has been and forever will be a solitary and personal activity. Not only do we isolate ourselves from others in order to read, but we also bring our own various interpretive approaches to a work. Just as the author does not create in a vacuum, neither does the audience read in one. Nevertheless, each time we approach a text, we act as though we have become a *tabula rasa*, or a blank slate. We think we are reading a particular work on its own terms, meeting it on its own ground. However, we all have our preconceived ideas, whether related to age, culture, gender, or even one's own past literary involvement. Whether aware of it or not, we constantly make our own connections to what we confront, even in literature. The cultural notions, for example, of a twenty-five-year-old Asian male will bring a different perspective to a novel from that of a forty-seven-year-old European female.

The study of the effect of the reader's experience on the interpretation of a text is a relatively new idea in the history of literary criticism. This critical approach, known as Reader-Response theory, began in earnest in the early 1970s and describes "the reading process as a dynamic interaction between text and reader" (Iser 107). It resulted as a reaction against New Criticism, which states that texts hold certain ingrained meanings that readers can discover through an objective close reading of the text itself. While no one can deny the effectiveness of close reading, New Criticism ignores the role of the reader within the interpretive puzzle. After all, as Terry Eagleton points out, "the reader makes implicit connections, fills in gaps, draws inferences and tests out hunches; and to do this means drawing on a tacit knowledge of the world in general and of literary conventions in particular" (66). Readers bring their own interests, assumptions and

prejudices with them when reading a text, and that knowledge helps influence what they might learn from within the text itself. Written works, whether novels, short stories or poems, contain elements that invite readers to tease out their own interpretive meaning, sometimes to the exclusion of other, more popular, understandings.

One novel read by fifty different people can receive fifty different interpretations. According to Harold Bloom, by nature, every interpretive reading becomes a misreading of the text, although some misreadings are stronger than others. These “stronger” readings may uncover more insights than others, but readers create what is important to them at the time. After all, as readers become more experienced and mature, they expand their perspectives and gain more insights into the text, thereby illuminating elements (and perhaps meanings) they may have previously missed.

For example, it may be almost too obvious to state that after re-reading Hermann Hesse’s *Steppenwolf*, my perceptions as a thirty-six year old are far different from when I read it the first time as a youthful, idealistic seventeen year old. More specifically, my understanding of the ordeals of Harry Haller, the novel’s protagonist, has developed dramatically. My exposure to world literature has increased significantly since high school, allowing me to leave behind a naïve, unsophisticated reader. As a result, my interpretation of the novel was also transformed on a second, more mature reading.

However, I do not want to give the impression that interpretations rely solely on the reader. While the text itself ties into the reader’s background, other texts also play an enormous part in how we interpret what we read. Each text, in a way, relies upon the world of texts that surrounds it. When one notices an allusion, for example, one builds meaning from past references found in other texts. In that way, the current text being read

has crafted its meaning from the material of another text. The idea that texts interconnect with one another is known as intertextuality, which challenges the notion of an all-encompassing, centralized mode of thought. According to Julia Kristeva (who popularized the concept), intertextuality shows how “every text builds itself as a mosaic of quotations [and how] every text is absorption and transformation of another text” (qtd. in Plottel xiv). Many poststructuralist critics, such as Leon Roudiez in his “Introduction” to Kristeva’s *Desire in Language*, claim that intertextuality gets mistaken merely as a concept of examining how one writer influences another, or even as a way of exploring the sources of a particular work. While intertextuality does perform those tasks, it should also be utilized as a way of looking at how various texts can refer to other texts and build upon those textual foundations, such as through the use of allusions, or by sharing stylistic characteristics. As Graham Allen states in his book-length examination of intertextuality, “every text has its meaning [...] in relation to other texts” (6). Therefore, it is only fitting to make use of intertextuality as a means of interpreting aspects of a novel.

So, while I do not propose that Hesse and Kafka directly influenced one another, the two did share intertextual links – stylistic similarities that have come to be known as elements of the Kafkaesque – that enable me to view each writer within the light of the other. In *Ways of Reading*, David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky point out that strong readers can make connections that occur between two writers and their works, revealing “how the work of one author can be used as a frame for reading and interpreting the work of another” (17). These other texts help readers draw connections and uncover ideas that might not have been discovered otherwise, which is exactly what

happened to me when I kept thinking of Kafka's works while re-reading *Steppenwolf*. This is not to say that *Steppenwolf* was imitative of Kafka's writing, but simply that I could draw more conclusions from one with the assistance of the other. As Kristeva herself states, a text is "a permutation of texts, an intertextuality: in the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another" (36). The utterances do not have to refer to specific phrases that are merely rehashed or even to direct correlations between authors or texts, but more to the idea that writers can only create from the discourse, or knowledge, with which they are familiar. Kafka and Hesse, as I illustrate later, shared very similar discursive systems, and as a result, absorbed similar literary qualities.

If a semi-casual reader could come to some new conclusions about *Steppenwolf* with the aid of Kafka's writings, then what about the interpretations of a literary critic deeply immersed in Hesse's works and its ensuing scholarship? Additionally, how likely would it be that a critic's views and subsequent readings of Hesse had changed since starting out as a casual reader?

Dr. Theodore Ziolkowski immediately came to mind as that type of critic, as he has contributed to Hesse scholarship since his dissertation in 1957 and remains an integral figure within Hesse research. So, I sent him an email:

[...] the thesis will look at how the works of one author (Kafka) can influence how we read the works of another author (Hesse). My question [...] is if you also found this to be true for you? If you can remember the first time you read *Steppenwolf* (or any other Hesse work for that matter)

and how (or if) it was different after immersing yourself within another author's works? [...] (Email interview)

After revealing a disinterest in reading an author through the lens of another, as though committing a sort of infidelity, Dr. Ziolkowski answered that his method “has been rather, to study the target author's reception of other (and usually earlier) writers and thinkers” (ibid). As it turns out, it appears that Dr. Ziolkowski analyzes things through the theoretical lens of Influence Studies, in which critics examine how one author adopts (and perhaps even adapts) similar elements of subject and style from an earlier author. Furthermore, in his reply to my email, he insists that he “can't honestly say that [his] subsequent readings of Kafka (about whom [he's] also written extensively) or any other contemporary author consciously affected [his] reading of Hesse” (ibid).

At first, I admittedly felt a bit distressed that his response did not line up exactly with mine. However, a critic working within the realm of Influence Studies would look at two texts and imagine how one influenced the other, while intertextuality observes how someone can read one text through the frame of another text, regardless of any influence. After all, what else does this thesis attempt to do but reveal connections which a reader makes between two contemporary writers such as Hesse and Kafka and their texts?

The intertextual links between Hesse and Kafka, such as shared themes of disorientation and personal despair, become clearer to me each time I read their works. What I failed to notice the first time I read *Steppenwolf* all those years ago, nearly knocked me over when I read the novel a second time, just after immersing myself in Kafka's oeuvre. As almost any veteran reader knows, the first reading of a text is concerned with understanding the basic information of a book: plot, characters, major

themes. The second, or even third reading, serves the fuller purpose of discovering meaning. In the essay “Vom Bucherlesen,” Hesse defines three different levels of readers: “the one who takes a work literally, the one who follows its symbolic overtones, and the one who uses it as a starting point for his own ideas and mental flow” (qtd. in Stewart 94).

As Hesse seems to indicate in his 1961 preface to *Steppenwolf*, he might have hoped for the last group of readers, but was exasperated to find that many readers fall into the first category, those who “strangely enough perceived only half of what [he] intended” (v). Matthew Spano describes the third group when he writes that “many who first encountered Hesse in the 1970’s are now middle aged [...] and were they to return to his works today they would surely find as much insight into his mid-life crisis as they did into the adolescent crisis decades ago” (4). While these readers are the ones Hesse hoped for, one can see how meanings within a text constantly shift to fit the reader’s own discourse. Many readers whose perspectives change over time also seem to change their interpretations.

While such a claim may lead one to bemoan a lack of a fixed meaning, that is exactly the point for many poststructuralists. Roland Barthes, for one, writes that “to interpret a text is not to give it a [singular] meaning, but on the contrary to appreciate what plural constitutes it” (5). He goes on to say that “it is not a question of conceding some meanings [...but] of asserting the very existence of plurality [...]” (6). Therefore, the novel simply cannot, and should not, be pigeonholed into one exclusionary interpretation. After all, as Allen describes it, a “textual analysis [...] is not an exhaustive interpretation, but is one reader’s analysis, which is necessarily, given the nature of

intertextuality, incomplete” (86). Wolfgang Iser notes that a critic should not try “to explain a work, but to reveal the conditions that bring about its various possible effects. If he clarifies the potential of a text, he will no longer fall into the fatal trap of trying to impose one meaning on his reader, as if that were the right, or at least the best, interpretation” (18). So, rather than attempting to expose some final, definitive interpretation of *Steppenwolf*, I am simply revealing another productive interpretive lens through which readers, if they choose to look, may gain a richer understanding of the novel.

Before going any further though, it is necessary to briefly consider the problem of translation, since both Hesse and Kafka wrote in German rather than English. The two authors’ novels present themselves as difficult enough texts to decipher in the original language, so to attempt to parse words or phrases in an English translation is a further complicating factor. As a premiere Kafka translator put it, regardless of how much one attends “to a stylistic and linguistic analysis of any writer, at least twice as much would be required for investigating a translation: along with the discussion of the original text and the English text, we would have to delve into the actual migration from one language and culture into another” (Neugroschel xvi). Therefore, any interpretation I attempt of *Steppenwolf*, as well as Kafka’s works, is geared more toward their overall ideas and artistic scope rather than to any specific word groupings or formalist analysis of sentence structure.

Chapter 2 - First Encounter with *Steppenwolf*

Nineteen years ago, as an uninformed seventeen-year-old reader, much of the significance I now find in *Steppenwolf* was lost upon me. Since I had not yet studied Franz Kafka at that time, I obviously could not have noticed similarities between him and Hermann Hesse, and definitely did not see how Kafka's writings could open up new interpretive possibilities for me. As I saw it at the time, Hesse's novel was, at its heart, about a man struggling through a desperate, suicidal period of his life and how the protagonist, Harry Haller, attempts to unify his fractured self.

The novel's narrative describes this effort at self-unification through Haller's own written record, which is embedded in a larger structure beginning with a preface penned by the nephew of Haller's landlady. This curious, sometimes hostile witness provides the first impression of Harry to the reader as well as details of Haller's behavior and attitude.

The novel then shifts to Haller's own written account, in which he describes his despair during the time he lived at the woman's house. Harry writes about how he feels isolated from the majority of people, those he deems the bourgeoisie, while still being admittedly attracted to their worldly attachments. Haller then goes on to tell how, at his lowest moment, when he decides to kill himself, he comes across a woman named Hermine who begins to show him that life is truly worth living. She pulls him out of his malaise and forces him to realize he has been taking himself far too seriously, that he needs to drop his intellectual affectations and learn to experience life through its countless enjoyments.

Up to this point, after all, Haller has only lived the life of a cultured gentleman, and the fact that he thinks he cannot reconcile his more refined tastes with his disdain for

anything less cultured has led him to view himself as a man split in two. According to Harry's Cartesian mind, one side, his human side, appreciates the finer things in life: fine art, literature and the music of Mozart. Meanwhile, his other side, his "wolf side" (hence the name Steppenwolf, literally "wolf of the steppes"), savages civilized society and all of its formal airs.

Hermine integrates his dual, warring sides by showing him that life can be enjoyed through "coarser" things, such as dancing, drinking, and even casual sex. She also introduces him to the musician Pablo who, in addition to illustrating the similarities between Mozart and the latest jazz number, supplies Haller with mind-altering drugs and helps him on his way towards self-discovery.

The novel also contains a few so-called narrative digressions, namely a "Treatise on the Steppenwolf" and The Magic Theater. The former provides a third-person account of Harry, his tribulations, and how he may overcome them, while the latter details Harry's efforts to unify his fractured self. These two sections are vital to the story, but to an uninformed reader like I was all those many years ago, they can almost become a distraction. For example, as Lewis Tusken states, "if [the Treatise is] read cursorily, it leaves an impression of redundancy, repeating ad nauseam Harry's problems" (114). And the Magic Theater becomes a confusing mixture of reality and fantasy through which the naïve reader spends more time trying to stay afloat than comprehending Hesse's implications.

At the time of my first reading, I took most of the narrative at its word, but have since become aware of the problems with that type of blind acceptance. For instance, I now see the preface as being related by a narrator barely even connected to Haller. As the

nephew of the woman who rents out a room to Harry, he remains largely outside of Haller's world. Yet this man makes judgments about Haller and his characteristics, such as "his shy loneliness, his savagery, his restlessness, his homesickness, his homelessness" (19), and the uninitiated reader, such as myself, accepts these statements as true. For, as I reasoned, why else would Hesse bother to include these observations if he did not intend for me to believe them?

Beyond the concept of truth though, I also had a tendency to read the novel simply for the ideas it espouses, which I saw as an exploration of a man detached from conventional society's mores and how he becomes slowly engrossed within society's underbelly. And while I still agree with some of those earlier interpretations, originally I looked at the novel more from the point-of-view of a teenager with my own distrust of authority and power.

It comes as no surprise to anyone slightly conversant with Hesse that *Steppenwolf* and its author received an unexpected boost in popularity in America during the late 1960s. The counterculture related to Hesse because his books deal with young people (or in the case of a book such as *Steppenwolf* where the protagonist is an older man, with rejuvenation, or a second youth), outsiders who rebel against institutions such as the state and its schools, modern industrialism with all of its attachments (nationalism, militarism, capitalism), and bourgeois complacency. Beyond this, *Steppenwolf* would seem to advocate guiltless sex, drugs and alcohol as aids in expanding self-perception and striving towards a metaphysical awakening. However, as Egon Schwarz notes, several facets of *Steppenwolf* went largely ignored by the American youth of the late 1960s: "What about the [...] Immortals Hesse apostrophized? What about Mozart? On the whole, they seem

pretty impervious to the whole canon of lofty music that Hesse revered. At any rate, his worship of the past, of traditional culture, his vast reading and learning escape most members” of that age group (983). While I like to think I was fairly immersed at the time in some of Harry’s more sophisticated tastes, I have to admit I was more attracted to the seamier side of the novel and congratulated myself for even delving into such a challenging text at all.

This early, naïve reading illustrates the idea that people pay attention to elements of a work that concern them at the time; conversely, the level of meaning derived from the text depends on the level of the reader. Reader-response theory and intertextuality are two tools critics use in order to dig deeper at potential meanings that may be within a text. While reader-response theory focuses on how the reader interacts with the text, intertextuality focuses on how a text interacts with other texts. Reader-response theory reasons that the text and the reader interact with each other and that “apprehension of a literary work comes about [...] between the reader’s presence in the text and his habitual experiences” (Iser 133). As a younger, less experienced reader within my own isolated bubble, I concerned myself mostly with surface details. But now, as someone more practiced, I am aware of possible intertextual connections and can perceive levels of connotations and nuances I had not noticed earlier. Reader-response criticism also exemplifies how important it is to re-read a work of significant depth such as *Steppenwolf*. I know from my own experience that had I not re-read Hesse’s most experimental novel, I would have missed out on reaching a more significant understanding of the relativity and tenuousness of truth. I would have instead been left

simply with memories of a highly intriguing book that merely reinforced my attitudes at the time.

Chapter 3 – The Tumultuous World of Hesse and Kafka

In an attempt to further understand *Steppenwolf*, it would be appropriate to look at Hesse's life, since he structured elements of the novel to mirror aspects of his own life. Of course, anyone who attempts to parallel an author's life with what he or she writes should be cautious, as the text and life never quite mirror one another, even in autobiographical fiction such as Hesse's. However, keeping that caution in mind, I knew it would be worth digging into Hesse's life, as well as Kafka's, in order to glean some perspective about what motivated their desire to write and what informed their texts.

To get at the heart of some of the intertextual links between Hesse's *Steppenwolf* and Kafka's works, it would be best to look at the similar family and cultural backgrounds and experiences of the two authors. While an author's life is not necessarily transposed to his writing, the fact that the two writers shared so many similar qualities makes it hard to ignore their biographical backgrounds. So before addressing the Kafkaesque and its resonance in *Steppenwolf*, a moment should be spent examining the world in which the two writers lived.

No one could truly foresee how drastically the new century would alter the very fabric of existence, from the largest aspects of industry and warfare to the smallest concerns of the individual. And though it cannot be said that Kafka and Hesse were dreading the arrival of the twentieth century, what resulted certainly did make them despondent. Hesse's writing, as well as Kafka's, shows a disillusionment with the coming modern age, with its technology, warfare, and increasing isolation. *Steppenwolf*, written in 1927, reveals this unease when the nephew states in the preface that Harry's suffering is typical of "the neurosis of that generation to which he belongs" (25). Marga Lange

goes so far as to claim that “the early Haller, the intellectual Outsider, is ‘Zeitgeist’ for a neurotic generation” (54). The neurosis that came to this generation resulted from unease and confusion over unprecedented, impending change, where the only certainty was uncertainty.

After all, the First World War showed that battles were no longer a matter of chivalric forces on horseback (even if that image itself had its own fictive elements), but consisted of carnage on a mass scale resulting from mechanized warfare. The introduction of machine guns, tanks, mustard gas and other impersonal instruments of death assured as high a body count as possible. Moreover, the advent of the Industrial Revolution in the latter half of the nineteenth century further assured that whole populations were reduced to anonymous soldiers and automated workers, disposable to those in power. As Ernst Rose puts it, “machinery was rapidly replacing hand crafts, [...] the army of industrial workers was multiplying daily, the cities were expanding, and the population curve was soaring” (3). All of these elements combined to create an era unlike any before it, and very few people really knew how to grasp its implications or its consequences.

Kafka and Hesse tried to make sense of the drastic technological changes occurring around them and, perhaps ironically, this attempt at making sense of their world ended up defining their art. As Jack Zipes notes in his introduction to a 1995 edition of Hesse’s collected fairy tales, Hesse’s writings reveal

the trauma, doubts, and dreams of the artist as a young man in Germany at the beginning of a tumultuous century. Like many other European writers, Hesse perceived the events around him [...] as indicative of the decline of Western

civilization. It was through art [...] that Hesse sought to contend with what he perceived to be the sinister threat of science and commercialism. (ix-x)

Like many of their peers (and not unlike each successive generation), Kafka and Hesse saw deterioration in the world. So, with pen in hand, they delineated wholly different worlds in which they could examine the misfortunes of their very real world.

Both Kafka and Hesse arrived in the world during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, with Hesse born in 1877 and Kafka just six years later in 1883. And although Kafka lived in the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Hesse in Germany, their homelands shared a long (almost tragic) political and cultural history.

As Mary Stewart makes clear, the period during which Hesse wrote *Steppenwolf* was “a time when political and economic life in Germany was in a state of turbulence, when national identity was a major and highly problematic issue, and the novel’s core concerns precisely a sense of loss – loss of trust in inherited values and social structures, in concepts of progress, in any secure sense of personal and national identity” (80). Hesse published *Steppenwolf* between the two world wars, both of which Germany was the aggressive, initiating force. As such, it reflects the anxieties of a defeated Germany looking for its way out of economic despondency and nationalistic despair, yet heading to an even worse fate. While Hesse may not have known what was going to happen in Germany’s future, he did recognize the danger that arose from the country’s growing nationalism and war-mongering.

For Kafka, born into the Dual Monarchy of Austria and Hungary, political and national identity was rarely a constant. When Germany united to become a country, it

excluded many regional Germans, as well as a dozen other nationalities, all struggling to find a national identity. The result became the Austro-Hungarian Empire, two monarchies with separate constitutions and parliaments, but with the stipulation that the same ruler would always be emperor in Austria and king in Hungary. In effect, the emperor/ king ruled the two through the ministries of each state, while in foreign and military affairs, he had little restraint. In other words, Kafka grew up in a land ruled both locally and by a foreign power, in a country with numerous ethnic groups. This blurred political identity extended to a more personal level as well. Kafka's ancestry was Jewish, but his parents were both secular Jews, and his primary language was German (spoken and written), but of a Prague German dialect that "differed crucially from what was spoken in the 'German lands'" (Neugroschel xi). Not surprisingly, coming of age in this cultural and political schizophrenia isolated Kafka from any real sense of belonging.

It was in these climates that the two authors wrote out their concerns, fears, and desires. They both had their first works published in 1904 and knew of one another through literary reputation. Friedrich Karl writes in Kafka's biography that Kafka had read Hesse (251). And Hesse, in turn, had written in 1956 that he thought Kafka portrayed "the dreams and visions of his lonely, difficult life... and it is these dreams and visions alone that should preoccupy us, and not the interpretations that sharp-witted interpreters can give these writings [...] because they stand at the gate fumbling with their hundred keys, blind to the fact that the gate is really not locked" (qtd. in Mileck ix). As a veiled warning against attempts at interpretation, one is not sure where the comments concerning Kafka stop and those concerning Hesse begin. Like most writers, neither thought that interpretations of their works ever got to the heart of the matter,

which only managed to alienate them even more from the public around them. Hesse's assessment of Kafka also makes a clear allusion to Kafka's parable "Before the Law," included in his novel *The Trial*. Hesse's allusion to Kafka's writing echoes the intertextual argument that writers often absorb images and contexts from other works of literature.

Those connections also exist on a more personal level, with both writers suffering from their own forms of anguish as they tried to adapt their sensitive natures to the growing depersonalization around them. They both considered suicide on at least one occasion and spent time in sanatoriums and other institutions as a result of parental clashes, nervous breakdowns, and even tuberculosis in Kafka's case (Karl, Mileck). And perhaps most importantly, both had similar relationships with their parents, in which they viewed their mothers as kind but distant, while their fathers embodied every authoritative form of establishment they had to rebel against.

Kafka wrote his famous (never-delivered) "Letter to his Father" in 1919, in which he summed up his parental interactions: "I am sure that Mother spoiled me [...], but this sense of nothingness that often dominates me [...] comes largely from your influence" (15). His father had a special ability to make Kafka feel separate from his family. His father "insisted on his own rules, broke them in front of his son and became [...] like a] representative of the 'system' that excludes the protagonist" (Karl 7). Rather than point out the obviously similar subjects and images between Kafka's life and his works, the letter serves more to illustrate how Kafka's life of emotional self-exile directly influenced primary thematic and structural aspects of his work.

Hesse also wrote (and delivered) a letter to his father during a stay at a mental hospital. The letter shows the young Hesse in emotional turmoil, insecure in the world, yet attempting to place himself squarely in opposition to his father. Although fairly lengthy, the letter's importance requires a somewhat extended account:

Since you're so conspicuously eager to make sacrifices, may I ask you for 7 marks or a revolver right away? You have caused me such despair that you should now be prepared to help me dispose of it [...]. "Father" is such a strange word, which I cannot quite fathom. It ought to mean a person one can love with all one's heart. How I yearn for that kind of person! [...] If I could turn all my attributes and inclinations into their exact opposite, then I might coexist harmoniously with you. But I cannot and shall not live like that [...]. (11-12)

So, rather than looking at Hesse as someone directly influenced by Kafka, one begins to take note of their parallel life experiences. By extension, due to the autobiographical nature of the two writers' works, many of the same thoughts and concerns would also naturally appear in the pages of their fiction. As a result, as Oskar Seidlin notes, "with the single exception of Franz Kafka, there is in contemporary German literature hardly anyone who has so valiantly and incessantly struggled with the angel as Hermann Hesse" (75). These two writers came to inhabit a shared perspective, coexisting within similar cultural and personal worlds that required them to tackle nearly the same issues head on, even while coming up with slightly different results.

This biographical material shows that Kafka and Hesse shared similar spheres of influence, and so, as literary contemporaries, it should come as no surprise that they

shared similar concerns and expressed them in comparable ways. Embedded within this cultural and literary *Zeitgeist*, the two writers could simultaneously explore their concerns with the individual's increasing isolation from the world by using many of the same thematic and stylistic elements, among them isolated protagonists, abnormal situations treated normally, physical and psychological transformations, and the depersonalization of the self.

The isolated protagonist reveals Kafka's and Hesse's own feelings toward that disconnection from the world which they sensed washing over everyone. Even though Hesse believed the modern world no longer allowed people a direct path to true understanding, he still offered a glimmer of hope. Hesse's protagonists only achieve awareness after rejecting modern materialist concepts in favor of the universal and timeless mystic tradition. By the end of *Steppenwolf*, even though Haller has not achieved the perfect state, Hesse does write that Haller "made sundry holes in the web of time and rents in reality's disguise" (208). This method of discarding what passes for reality in order to confront your own personal reality proved to be Hesse's path towards understanding both the world and his place within it.

On the other hand, Kafka never provides his central characters with a means of attaining any sense of awareness. For example, in *The Castle*, the main character spends the entire novel trying to gain access into the Castle, but is thwarted at every turn. When, at last, the secret is told to him about how best to get in, he has, at that very moment, fallen asleep. As Lange states, "in the main works of Kafka there is also a search, a quest. But his protagonists simply get nowhere, unlike Hesse's Harry Haller. In Kafka, there are no solutions, and even the problems are left as a largely mysterious, terrifying and

grotesque unknown” (79). Kafka’s works express the individual’s inability to reach the point of personal revelation seemingly offered by symbols as concrete as a looming castle or as abstract as truth and justice.

The mastery of Hesse’s and Kafka’s writings lies in their ability to cloak their protagonists’ quests (both conscious and not) with supernatural and unusual events that become accepted as perfectly normal or, at the very least, as inevitable facts. They achieve this illusion by first grounding the supernatural in some basis of reality. However, events soon go beyond the ordinary, without the slightest acknowledgment from the characters. It has then become natural for the reader to view the ensuing events as perfectly normal, though they have become far removed from any real sense of normalcy. In *Steppenwolf*, for example, Harry looks for a neon sign he had seen before but finds the spot has actually become a blank brick wall. He then notices a man carrying a sign with an advertisement that reads “Magic Theater Entrance Not For Everybody” (39). This man proceeds to give Harry a pamphlet, which happens to be addressed directly to Harry. As each successive step gets increasingly stranger, the reader has already accepted as normal those events that have just occurred. Whether physical transformations or temporal and spatial distortions, these elements become integrated into the story’s realities. As Mileck explains, “the commonplace visible world and a wondrous fairy-tale realm are not merely juxtaposed but adroitly fused” by Hesse (29). This concept of characters accepting non-realistic occurrences as everyday realities causes the reader to re-evaluate the material as well as his or her own perceptions of that material.

Kafka's fiction consists of nightmarish dreamscapes, endless bureaucracies, dark humor, and distortions of time, space and size. Living in a world where the First World War started over the murder of an imperial successor (Archduke Ferdinand) and an invisible tangle of political alliances, Kafka could hardly have been expected to write about the normalcy of life. Instead, he describes places in which the individual falls beneath the weight of an all-consuming power. Though his situation may sound hopeless, Kafka's creativity seems to revel in the atmosphere of despair.

In contrast, Hesse's narrative worlds are far less bleak, with a persistent belief that one should attempt to move beyond the confines of worldly concerns in order to achieve some sort of spiritual enlightenment. Many of Germany's citizens demonized Hesse due to his opposition to the First World War, but rather than push that antagonism back on the public, he "found himself forced to seek the blame for his suffering and despair not outside himself but within himself" (Baumer 54). This perspective allows one to see just how important the post-war novel *Steppenwolf*, above all his other works, was to Hesse. He wrote it to "demonstrate to anyone whose soul has fallen to pieces that he can rearrange these pieces of a previous self in what order he pleases, and so attain to an endless multiplicity of moves in the game of life" (*Steppenwolf* 192). Hesse sees the text as a man's inner discovery of himself and, by extension, the inner discovery of a generation, and hopes the novel may act as a guide by which post-war Germans may be able to re-locate their cultural selves and not blunder into another nationalistic calamity.

Both Kafka and Hesse objected to the depersonalization of the self in a world in which the industrial age began to challenge the worth of the individual. For example, in *Steppenwolf*, Harry Haller (during one of his inner explorations within the Magic

Theater) comes across a long lost friend who was once a theology professor but has now declared war on all machinery. His friend soon decries that although he would rather have stayed a theology professor, he was soon made “a soldier and went through the war. What seemed to [him] to be duty and what the authorities and [his] superior officers from time to time enjoined upon [him] was not by any means good. [He] would rather have done the opposite. [... But he is] obliged to belong to a state, to serve as a soldier, to kill and pay taxes for armaments” (186). And now Haller finds his friend in the very Kafkaesque situation of hunting down and killing automobiles and other forms of machinery.

But while both protested against man’s increasing isolation, each had his own way of expressing the best possible escape from that sense of loneliness. Through Kafka’s writings, we get a sense that he felt that while one could never escape from the clutches of the world, he should still fight against the assault. To surrender would be worse than being crushed beneath the weight of oppression. Conversely, Hesse believed some level of enlightenment and, by extension, escape from the system was possible, but only on an individual basis, and then only if followed through regardless of the consequences.

Despite these differences, though, each writer’s works illustrate shared concerns about the direction in which they saw their world heading, and they attempted to make sense of it the best way they knew how. Though commenting on Hesse’s short stories, Zipes’ comment could easily apply to the works of both writers: Hesse’s stories “are filled with the inner turmoil of a writer desperately and seriously playing with aspects of a literary genre to find some semblance of peace and harmony” (ix). Only by putting their

thoughts on paper did Hesse and Kafka feel as though they could achieve their own little piece of calm in a world of chaos.

Chapter 4 – Diving into the Kafkaesque

During my tenure as a graduate student, I took a course focused solely on Franz Kafka. During this course, the class examined the entirety of Kafka's oeuvre, revealing many things to me about the enigmatic writer, but most importantly, enabling me to get a sense of the Kafkaesque. It was my insight into the much misused literary term which opened me up to a new way to receive Hesse's works. The term Kafkaesque encompasses such ambiguity that many uninformed readers have overused and misconstrued the entire concept. I know because I used to be one of them.

Some readers approach Kafka and his works with preconceived ideas of what the Kafkaesque means. The reader might perceive the Kafkaesque as a way to represent a mundane world as an overly complex, impersonal, seemingly pointless, and often disturbing place. One can also, as I mistakenly did, focus almost entirely on Kafka's portrayal of bureaucracy and think of the Kafkaesque as dealing primarily with the behemoth monstrosity of red-tape and triplicate. My misconception can actually be attributed to an example of intertextuality gone wrong, as most of my early Kafka connections came from other sources referencing the bureaucratic element of the Kafkaesque. These outside influences ranged from novels like *1984*, *Brave New World* and *Catch-22* to movies such as Terry Gilliam's *Brazil* and Steven Soderbergh's *Kafka*, in which the Kafka character says, "So, that's who the enemy is. Policemen and file clerks. Law and order, you might say?" All of these examples portray oppressive, stifling bureaucratic worlds, where absurd logic reigns supreme, and the heroes often find themselves in a tangled web of jargon and paperwork. While these elements are part of the Kafkaesque, they are merely pieces of a larger puzzle.

Now, after having spent an entire semester devoted to Kafka, I feel intimately familiar with his works, and the term Kafkaesque signifies to me a reality in which the term “real” has no true meaning. In a foreword to Kafka’s *The Castle*, German author Thomas Mann (who, incidentally, also wrote an introduction to Hesse’s novel *Demian*) notes that Kafka’s works are as “oppressive, illogical, and absurd as dreams, [...] an ironic, satiric, desperately reasoned morality, struggling with all its might toward justice, goodness, and the will of God” (xiv). The comparison is apt, since the Kafkaesque denotes a dream-like quality that infiltrates nearly everything in Kafka’s stories. If one were to stop and think about what constitutes a dream – surreal, absurd events; distortions and transformations; a sense of foreboding – then one would also be describing the Kafkaesque. Without these fantastical elements, Kafka’s stories would not exist. To say his stories are merely inexplicable and otherworldly is to miss the point though, as they must, first and foremost, be grounded in some kind of reality. But after Kafka initially establishes real, concrete matters that the reader can recognize and hold on to, he immediately envelops the story within the surreal. It is this combination of the real with the unreal that defines the Kafkaesque, a state of being which can thus be viewed as either a dream stuck within reality or reality afloat within a dream.

Although dreams include numerous qualities, Kafka’s stories, and therefore the Kafkaesque, exhibit primarily three broad characteristics: surreal events accepted as real, a distortion of space and time, and an unavoidable sense of foreboding. These three elements combine to create the Kafkaesque dreamscape, most notably in *The Trial* and *The Castle*, two novels that provide revealing articulations of the Kafkaesque.

The first Kafkaesque element, the surreal and absurd being accepted as real and normal, may well be the most important, because without it, the story would crumble under the weight of implausibility. Kafka's characters come upon odd situations that do not quite seem to fit within a rational framework, and this presents a potential problem for the reader. The reader must confront the scenario just as does the character, but the character simply accepts what is before him and moves forward, only to come upon an even more irrational scenario. The reader is then forced to accept the irrational as normal in order to move ahead in the narrative. However, the next situation has become even more irrational, but since the character has already accepted the previous situation as normal, this next, bigger leap into the absurd must continue. And the reader has no choice but to follow.

Within *The Trial*, this confrontation with the surreal meets the reader head on within the very first sentence. We are introduced to Joseph K. waking up in the midst of chaos, disorienting both himself and the reader. Part of Kafka's genius is to throw the reader into the whirl of confusion along with his protagonist. He begins the novel with a sentence as ominous as it is mundane: "Someone must have [slandered] Joseph K., for without having done anything wrong he was arrested one fine morning" (1). Unlike a normal arrest though, Joseph K. is met by two warders who stand guard at his bedroom while they wait for an Inspector to arrive. Meanwhile, he asks them how he could be under arrest, and "in such a ridiculous fashion" (5). The warders reply that they do not answer those kinds of questions and tell him to wait in his room. Then, despite the fact that Joseph K. realizes he has done nothing wrong and that the warders are not acting within the limits of the law, he readily obeys them and retreats to await his fate.

Events slowly spiral out of control, but Joseph K. becomes highly tolerant of the numerous absurd and surreal circumstances surrounding him. For example, after Joseph K. has become embroiled with the court that ordered his arrest, he begins to leave work one day only to hear strange sounds coming from a supply room. He opens the door to see that “in the room itself stood three men, stooping because of the low ceiling, by the light of a candle stuck on a shelf” (83). As it turns out, two of the men are the warders who watched over Joseph K. and the third man is the Whipper, an official position whose main task is to whip those workers who have received a complaint against them. After learning that the warders are being whipped because Joseph K. lodged a complaint, he quickly looks past the absurd notion of three men in a supply closet, two of them actually being whipped by a birch rod, and merely asks if he can remove the complaint, thereby stopping the punishment. After the Whipper informs Joseph K. there is nothing he can do, the official proceeds to order the warders to take off their clothes in order to beat them more effectively.

Since we are far within the realm of the Kafkaesque, Joseph K., of course, takes all of this bizarre behavior in stride. In fact, he even becomes an accomplice when he hears two office clerks heading towards the supply room and slams the door shut so that the clerks do not see what is happening within. The reader wonders why Joseph K. would go through the trouble, and implicate himself, by covering up the situation. It becomes apparent, though, that logic does not rule anyone’s actions within the novel. The reader soon learns that Joseph K. feels he “was deeply disappointed that he had not been able to prevent the whipping, but it was not his fault that he had not succeeded; if Franz had not shrieked – it must have been very painful certainly, but in a crisis one must control

oneself [...]” (88). He even comes to the illogical conclusion that rather than have anyone come upon the scene, “it would have almost been simpler to take off his own clothes and offer himself to the Whipper as a substitute for the warders” (88). Joseph K. then goes home for the night, leaving the warders on their own.

Upon arriving at work the next day though, Joseph K. goes back to the supply room, opens the door, and shows no surprise to find the three still there, with the same burning candle. The warders see him and cry out to him for help, but all Joseph K. can do is to slam “the door shut and beat on it with his fists, as if that would shut it more securely” (89). Instead of recognizing the absurdity of the whole situation he has witnessed, all Joseph K. can muster is annoyance. The Whipper scene, which takes up an entire chapter within the novel, illustrates how Joseph K. has succumbed to the Kafkaesque acceptance of abnormal circumstances. They quickly acclimate themselves to the illogical behavior and move on to the next set of unusual circumstances, just as one would do within a dream.

The Castle also includes this irrational acceptance of the absurd. It demonstrates how Kafka’s characters can become so convinced of the normalcy of the truly bizarre events around them that they actually begin to mimic the same strange logic. The main character, K., spends the entire novel trying to gain access to the mysterious Castle, access that eludes him at every turn. K. eventually learns, though, about “the futility of all his endeavors [and how] the orders, the unfavorable and the favorable, disregarded him [...]” (355). From there, his quest would seem hopeless to most people, yet K. perceives that futility as a normal step on his path and still goes on, until he has resorted to sneaking behind clerks, looking for clues and seeing conspiracies in the smallest of acts.

For example, K. notices the clerks distributing files to some of the castle secretaries, until “only one single file, actually only a little piece of paper, a leaf from a note-pad, was left” (362), and he has fallen so far into the absurd, accepted so much of it as normal, that he illogically reasons the scrap paper might be his own file. After encountering irrational behavior throughout the entire novel, K. has crossed over so many lines beyond reality that he begins to conform his own behavior to the situation.

Kafka’s works are filled with this type of blind acceptance for whatever abnormality occurs, such as when K. has a conversation with his fiancée’s mother in her bedroom, which is attached to the inn’s kitchen so that she can supervise the kitchen work. They discuss her decades-old affair with Klamm, one of the Castle’s highest officials, while she lies in bed, covered only by a shawl. After each explains in-depth how both of their lives are intertwined with Klamm, they agree to disagree about how to deal with the official. The mother tells K. that he can do what he wants and then asks him to hand her skirt to her, and then, “without paying any regard to K.’s presence [,] she pulled on her skirt and hurried into the kitchen” (113). K., for his part, does not pause to question the absurdity of what has just transpired. It is important to remember that Kafka’s characters, as if within a dream, come to terms with these absurd moments more out of choice than some kind of coercion. This method of accepting the absurd as normal is an important element of the Kafkaesque, since without it, the story would come to an abrupt end.

Of course, in discussing his characters’ willing suspension of disbelief, one must discuss Kafka’s use of distortion. This second element of the Kafkaesque, where a street in which someone is walking has suddenly become longer, or day and night have become

interchangeable, fits in perfectly with Kafka's dream motif. After all, his stories contain numerous examples of events becoming distorted with apparent randomness. Again, the characters take all of these distortions as par for the course, but the transformations leave the reader with an overwhelming sense of being stuck in a dream and, therefore, not sure of just where the next turn of the page might lead.

We see these distortions occur within *The Trial* when Joseph K. first arrives at the Court. The Court resides within a random room in an anonymous apartment building, but rather than a suite large enough to hold a Court of Inquiry, "K. felt as though he were entering a meeting-hall. A crowd of the most variegated people [...] filled a medium-sized two-windowed room, which just below the roof was surrounded by a gallery, also quite packed, where the people were able to stand only in a bent posture with their heads and backs knocking against the ceiling" (37). He asks if the tiny room is indeed the room he should to enter, as he notes that "the room is surely too full already" (37), but is able to make his way through it since "it seemed that in the confused, swarming crowd a slender path was kept free after all" (38). Once again, we are reminded of a dream where the size of the surroundings adjusts to fit the dreamer's needs.

Kafka distorts the physical element in *The Castle* as well. K, who wants nothing more than to gain access to the castle, discovers the task to be harder than he had ever imagined. Early on, K. can "see the Castle above him, clearly defined in the glittering air [...]" (11), but finds that as he walks to the castle, anticipating admission, "the way proved long. For the street he was in [...] did not lead up to the Castle hill; it only made it toward it and then, as if deliberately, turned aside, and though it did not lead away from the Castle, it led no nearer to it either" (14). Perhaps nothing could be more common in a

dream than the feeling of trying to get somewhere, only to find you really have gotten nowhere. Just like those dreams, Kafkaesque distortions emerge to affect the very destiny of the main character.

Kafka's distortions also apply to time as well as space. In *The Castle* for instance, K. experiences this time warp firsthand. While being transported to an inn on the other side of the village, K. "was greatly surprised to see that darkness had already set in. [...] And it had been morning when he left [...] and now the darkness of night was upon them" (23). Kafka has distorted an entire day so that it passes by within an extremely short period, as though time had collapsed upon itself. Referring back to that first quality of the Kafkaesque -- the acceptance of the surreal -- K. quickly chalks up this inexplicable phenomenon to shortened winter days.

All of these events might just be odd, eccentric quirks of reality if it were not for the third quality of the Kafkaesque: a sense of foreboding that pervades Kafka's stories. After all, writers describe weird events that turn out to be benign all the time. What makes all of these events in Kafka's stories so powerful is the sense of foreboding that hangs over the novels. With a sinister feeling behind everything, the dream slowly begins to turn into a nightmare. Impotence of action is one of the most fearful qualities within a dream: knowing you need to do something, but being powerless to accomplish it, and ending up no closer to your goal by the end than you were at the beginning. Once you are put into a situation in which you have no control, you begin to feel isolated from your surroundings and from others. You have now fully entered the Kafkaesque nightmare.

In *The Trial*, for example, Joseph K. encounters different characters who each tell him different ways to approach the Court, and he follows each bit of advice as though it

were the most important. Late in the novel though, a priest tells Joseph K. he is “misinterpreting the facts of the case” (211) and implies he has gotten everything wrong. Everything Joseph K. has done has been for nothing. Perhaps this is because within Kafka’s world, action leads to inaction; the more the characters struggle, the more powerless they become, an irony firmly entrenched within the Kafkaesque.

K. experiences the same thing while observing the castle. He notes that he feels as though “he were observing someone who sat quietly there gazing in front of him, [... but] the longer he looked, the less he could make out and the deeper everything was lost in the twilight” (128). The harder K. tries to grasp what is right in front of him, the more it eludes him. The only thing he wants, from the beginning of the novel all the way through the end, is access to the Castle, yet as close as it is to him, he can never get in. It is almost as if the Castle knows that, and it taunts him for it.

Kafka has also made sure that K. is doomed from the beginning of the story never to find any true companions. He writes that K. “felt irresistibly drawn to seek out new acquaintances, but each new acquaintance only seemed to increase his weariness” (14). Once again, Kafka has placed a character so close to an achievable goal, only to throw up yet another obstacle. Therefore, K. becomes isolated, forcing him into despair and preventing him from identifying with either the village or the castle. Though it may not seem like an obvious aspect of foreboding, K.’s dislocation keeps him from connecting with anyone, even his fiancée, and ensures that he will never reach his goal of the Castle. The reader, in turn, also becomes dislocated because there is no choice but to connect to K.’s own isolation. Kafka has now managed to drag the reader into the increasing dread.

In *The Trial*, Joseph K. finally decides he must determine his own reality and concludes that the court's existence is a feeble one and that the trial is "a trial only if [he] recognize[s] it as such" (40). However, by the end of the novel, the trial has crushed his spirit, causing him to meet his demise in the last chapter, simply and ominously titled "The End." It starts out by relating that two men show up at Joseph K.'s apartment the night before his thirty-first birthday "in frock coats, pallid and plump" while Joseph K., "without having been informed of their visit, [...] was sitting also dressed in black [...] slowly pulling on a pair of new gloves that fitted tightly over the fingers" (223). He almost seems to know the reason for the men's appearance. He looks out of his window at the darkness outside, but all he can see are dark windows with their curtains drawn. It is as if all of his neighbors have shut him out of their lives, blocking any access into theirs. Kafka notes that Joseph K. can see one lone window lit, but all it reveals are babies "playing behind bars, reaching with their little hands toward each other although not able to move themselves from the spot" (224). In other words, the only action he witnesses is the inability to act.

The men take Joseph K. out of his apartment and into the street, obviously taking him somewhere, though it soon becomes apparent that Joseph K. is leading them just as much as they are him. Once outside, the men walk on either side of Joseph K. with their arms wound around his in a vice-like grip, so that "the three of them were interlocked in a unity [...] such as can hardly be formed except by lifeless matter" (224). And when Joseph K. walks faster, they walk faster; when he stops, they also stop. He soon realizes, though, "the futility of resistance. There would be nothing heroic in it were he to resist, to make difficulties for his companions" (225). Any reader coming to this ending wants to

shout at Joseph K. that he should fight with all of his strength, regretting that Joseph K. has finally given up so easily, concerned more with the convenience of his captors than his own life.

However, the reader knows that Joseph K.'s actions are those of a man trapped within a feverish, Kafkaesque nightmare, unable to achieve any sort of autonomy, forced to blindly accept the events around him and to simply go through the sinister motions. So all the reader can do is sit idly by and watch as the characters continue on with the death march. Even when the three happen to come near a policeman, the two men stop, but Joseph K. pulls them along, helping them to avoid the officer. It has now become obvious that he has given up all hope, even aiding in his own demise. They finally come to a desolate stone quarry, and one of the men approaches Joseph K. and undresses him from the waist up. K. shivers in the chilly air and the man gives "him a light, reassuring pat on the back," even walking him back and forth to warm him up slightly (227). While this seemingly thoughtful action may seem to conflict with their intent, it serves to further alienate the reader from the situation, making the entire scene even more ominous than it would be if they simply killed him.

Soon enough, however, the two anonymous men position Joseph K. on the ground, propping him up against a boulder. Then one of the men opens his coat and, "out of a sheath that hung from a belt girt round his waistcoat [, draws] a long, thin, double-edged butcher's knife, [holds] it up, and test[s] the cutting edges in the moonlight" (228). While the men then pass the knife back and forth to one another, Joseph K. notices a light appear in a distant window. He can barely make out "a human figure, faint and insubstantial at that distance and that height lean[ing] abruptly far forward" with both

arms outstretched (228). He wonders who the figure could be, but “the hands of one of the partners [are] already at [his] throat, while the other thrust[s] the knife deep into his heart and turn[s] it there twice” (229). As he lies there dying, Joseph K. can see the two men watch over him “like a dog [... and] it was as if the shame of it must outlive him” (229). Joseph K.’s murder is worth the extended description, as it reflects the tone of the entire novel. Joseph K. spends the entirety of *The Trial* attempting to clear his name of a crime he never committed, fighting against a system he never encounters. Finally, at the novel’s end, he has given up, exhausted and beaten. The nightmare has defeated him because, within the confines of the Kafkaesque, when someone attempts to stand up against the nightmare, there can be no outcome other than defeat.

Joseph K. reflects the typical Kafka character, in that he comes to the end of the novel unable to find answers to his dilemma or achieve self-discovery. Rather than gaining some control and transforming himself into something more than he has been forced to be, Joseph K. surrenders under the weight of the journey. Kafka saw the battle against imposing odds as a heroic act, or as heroic an act as could be performed in the twentieth-century. So, to give up and succumb to those powers beyond one’s control, just as Joseph K. finally did when he reasoned that “there would be nothing heroic in it were he to resist,” (225) would result in a shame that would far outweigh any life. The sense of dread and despair that results from having to make the horrible choice between either a hopeless, endless struggle or immediate defeat turns the dream into a nightmare, a nightmare from which there is no escape.

Kafka never allows his protagonists any sort of closure, even in defeat. He saw no real means of salvation from the real world, so he saw no need to incorporate salvation

into those he invented. Karl indicates the level of confusion inherent in the Kafkaesque when he writes that

Kafkaesque at its most meaningful and exalted denotes a world that has its own rules, its own guidelines, its own forms of behavior that cannot be amenable to human will. [It] seems to denote a will of its own, and it is, apparently, destructive of human endeavors. Clearly, it runs counter to human directions or goals or aims, and it serves as a form of bedevilment. (757).

The reader is nothing if not bedeviled when reading Kafka. His stories rarely follow the rules of narrative logic, leaving characters and readers in an unsettled, unstable world. Through the absurd situations treated normally, the distortions of reality, and a sense of foreboding, Kafka takes the reader on a ride as confusing and desperate as a waking dream turned into a nightmare, matching his own view of the world. To Kafka, the modern age had become a cold, impersonal place with no room in it for people like him, and what better way to illustrate that than to make his characters, and his readers, suffer the same fate.

Chapter 5 – (Re)viewing *Steppenwolf* through a Kafkaesque Lens

With my first reading of *Steppenwolf* as a seventeen-year-old high school student, I focused mainly on the thematic elements important to me at the time. As I saw it, Hesse had written a book devoted to rebellion: against school, against materialism, against mundane middle-class values, and against a society in general in which the norm was not only expected but also encouraged. While the element of rebellion might exist within the novel, I had not gotten the full value out of the text, as it is obvious to me now that rebellion is not the point of the novel. But, when I read the novel those many years ago, I was still able to pull something out of it that proved worthwhile to me at the time. Ironically, even a “misreading” (to use Bloom’s term) can be a fruitful reading. And apparently I was not the only one who had that type of misreading.

In a 1961 author’s note to the novel, for example, Hesse writes that out of all his books, *Steppenwolf* “was more often and more violently misunderstood than any other [...] by reason of the fact that this book, written when [he] was fifty years old and dealing, as it does, with the problems of that age, often fell into the hands of very young readers” (v). Hesse’s novel had been championed by the youth in Germany ever since it was published in 1927. It then exploded, in translation, worldwide in the 1960s with the counterculture generation, but the youth read with their own concerns in mind. Hesse’s objection was due in large part to the fact that perhaps younger readers focused exclusively on the ideas that had preoccupied me; namely, those championed by the youth-dominated counterculture. Reading *Steppenwolf* now as a thirty-five year old, I can relate more to the anxieties of middle-age stressed by Hesse in his prefaced complaint. However, while authors have the right to hope for readers to obtain a particular meaning

from the text, it should be up to readers to draw their own desired meaning from the text, even if it is a conspicuous misreading, as it can still possibly lead to a productive reading, just as mine had during my initial encounter.

At that same time, however, I was still missing the bigger picture: the idea that Hesse aimed for something more than a superficial story about Harry's life and the methods by which he comes to experience life more fully. But now, at this point in my life, I am able to read *Steppenwolf* as something more than a simple fictional retelling of Hesse's dissatisfaction with society. While I focused on the rebellion that attracted me as a youth, I was missing Hesse's attempt to depict man's isolation from the world and his ability to illustrate that through his literary techniques. Just as Kafka pulls the reader, half-blind, through his dreamlike works, Hesse also purposely mixes reality with the surreal. This allows him to take his character through situations hardly possible if grounded completely in reality, thereby providing Hesse the chance for his protagonist to explore his subconscious.

Under the influence of the Kafkaesque, the whole concept of *Steppenwolf* taking place within a dreamlike setting where reality has a tenuous grasp began to take shape in my mind, and I began to notice that Hesse utilizes dreamlike qualities like Kafka in order to establish that surreal mood within the text. And in *Steppenwolf*, Hesse uses the same Kafkaesque elements found within *The Trial* and *The Castle*: the main character accepts increasingly absurd situations as normal, distortions of every kind abound, and a sense of foreboding shrouds the story. By examining these three elements, each of which intermingles with one another, a picture begins to emerge of just how pervasive those characteristics that literary critics now identify as Kafkaesque have become.

The first Kafkaesque element I noticed within *Steppenwolf* is how Hesse's characters encounter the absurd, accepting those encounters as normal. Of course, just like Kafka, Hesse then introduces the characters to even more absurd scenarios, which they must then accept as normal as well, with the ante being raised with each successive situation. For example, on one of his many walks, Harry finds himself at a place where he notices an old wall that brought him serenity from time to time. While looking at the wall during one stroll, he notices a door, and on it words begin to appear and disappear, flickering in and out, until Harry can finally make out "MAGIC THEATER ENTRANCE NOT FOR EVERYBODY FOR MADMEN ONLY" (32). Rather than wonder how the door and words came to appear, he simply assumes they came from a cheap electric sign, even though it is obvious a sign is nowhere around. And, like K. and Joseph K., Harry quickly succumbs to the first Kafkaesque quality and accepts this surreal moment as actually quite normal. But then, like Kafka's characters, he finds himself coming across something even more absurd, and we realize that Harry has begun to stumble down the Kafkaesque path. Now that he has taken the first step, he has nowhere to go but deeper into absurdity.

Harry goes back later and looks for the door, but finds it has disappeared. Instead, "from the black mouth of an alley a man appeared with startling suddenness" beside him, carrying a placard (39). The sign's "dancing reeling" letters coincide with the vanished door in the wall, advertising "ANARCHIST EVENING ENTERTAINMENT MAGIC THEATER ENTRANCE NOT FOR EVERYBODY" (39). The man hands Harry "one of those little books wretchedly printed on wretched paper that are sold at fairs" and leaves (40). He soon discovers that the cheap little book, entitled "Treatise on the

Steppenwolf. Not for Everybody,” actually contains detailed, specific insights about Harry and his current predicament. Up to this point, the novel’s protagonist has accepted the presence of things (and people) appearing out of nowhere and the phenomenal coincidence of two different signs on different days saying the same thing, but the reader must come to an abrupt halt when the treatise begins openly discussing Haller’s predicament, even calling him by name, which the treatise’s subject takes for granted. Meanwhile, the reader has gone along for the ride this far and is complicit in the acceptance of unusual behavior.

Harry’s almost blind acceptance of the surreal also occurs within *The Magic Theater*. In this section of the novel, Harry attempts to dismantle his personality so that he may build himself back up again into a new, more unified self. Because of this, the Magic Theater is fertile ground for the bizarre, and Hesse readily sows the seeds of absurdity. Limitless doors that open onto limitless scenarios fill the theater, and Haller enters several of them: a door that opens onto an automobile hunting scene; a door where his numerous selves have become chess pieces to be played on a board, scattered, and reassembled into something new; a door that leads Harry back through his past where he is reintroduced to all his past loves, actual and possible. Beyond each door, the protagonist experiences an entirely new, self-contained reality, living within the moment as though nothing else exists. Yet, when the time comes for him to leave the room and move on to the next, Harry does not miss a beat. At the end of the automobile killing scene, for example, Harry grabs the woman he has rescued and kisses her. As he says, “she laughed aloud, and then the planks gave way and we both fell into vacancy—”

(190), only to be immediately transported back into the main corridor, looking upon countless more doors.

Like Joseph K. in *The Trial*, Harry does not stop to contemplate what has just occurred, but merely accepts it, learns what he can from it, and moves on to the next situation. Here the reader must remember that the entire novel may be read as simply playing out in Harry's own mind, so that bizarre situations like these would be perceived as perfectly ordinary events, just as in one's imagination or dream. As Mark Boulby affirms, "there are several levels of reality in *The Steppenwolf*" (173) and, even more disconcerting to the reader, he goes on to note that even "the whole world in which Harry Haller moves may be interpreted as merely the reflection of his own mind" (186). With this revelation, all bets are off and anything can happen. After all, if the entire novel takes place within Harry's own mind, then it does not have to follow the rules of logic any more than a dream.

Just like within dreams, distortions abound throughout *Steppenwolf*, further establishing how distant the novel's setting may be from reality. Hesse uses the second Kafkaesque characteristic of distortion most obviously within the Magic Theater, such as in the creation of the numerous rooms that distort both time and space, but instances can also be found throughout the rest of the book. For example, on a day that Harry searches for the missing door with the mysteriously vanishing words, he comes upon a funeral and notices a man who looks familiar. He believes it is the man who was previously carrying the sign and who had given him the treatise. As Haller notes, "at the moment when I thought I recognized him, [...] I overtook him and gave him a nod, [but] he did not appear to recognize me" (73). Harry is certain it is the same man, so he asks him if there

is a show that night. The man at the funeral, however, looks at him as though he had never seen Harry before and growls, “show tonight? [...] Go to the Black Eagle, man, if that’s what you want” (73-74). In other words, Haller’s perception distorts just enough to impose a specific meaning to suit his situation. At this particular point in the story, where he has been wandering the streets in search of something (even though he may not know what that something is), Harry’s distorted perception kicks in to convince him he has seen the same man when, in the reader’s estimation, the man has turned out to be someone completely different. As Homer Finger notes, “Haller has transformed external fact, enhanced its significance, and adjusted its meaning until it corresponds perfectly with his personal needs” (73). Finger’s assessment perfectly matches the logic of a dream, which takes certain facts and twists them to suit the needs of the dreamer.

Later that night, Haller finds himself “in a distant and unfamiliar part of town” (85) and goes into a bar where lively dance music is playing. Of course, since this is a Kafkaesque world of distorted reality – similar to when Joseph K. from *The Trial* just happened to stumble upon the Court – the random bar Harry walks into happens to be the Black Eagle. Just like Harry’s perception at the funeral, Hesse distorts the situation to bring Haller to that particular bar, making sure to imply it was no accident for him to show up there. Instead, the reader becomes aware that Haller was meant to be at that bar, as though Harry is being pulled along a path not entirely of his own making. The same feeling often accompanies dreams, in which the dreamer becomes more of a passive, rather than an active, participant. In those dreams, the dreamer gets pulled from one event to the next, never sure where he may end up, but subtly aware there is always a reason for arriving at that point.

In fact, the reason for Harry arriving at the Black Eagle appears to be to meet Hermine, the woman who seems designed to show Harry how to live life to its fullest. Hesse uses Hermine to illustrate the tenuous grasp Harry has on reality by distorting her very identity over and over again. The second time Harry and Hermine get together, they meet for dinner and she asks him to guess her name. With nothing on which to base a guess, she tells him to look at her and, as he does, she asks, “hasn’t it ever occurred to you that sometimes my face is just like a boy’s? Now, for example” (107). As he “looked at her face carefully, [he] had to admit she was right. It was a boy’s face” (107). It is important to note that Harry does not think she looks *like* a boy, but that it *is* a boy’s face. From there, he realizes she looks like his old boyhood friend Herman and concludes that her name must be Hermine. She yields to these alterations in the same way that transformations occur within dreams. Harry follows the same path as K. in *The Castle* when he mistook his new assistants for his old, familiar ones. Hermine seems to morph according to Harry’s own needs, not only shifting easily between genders, but also transforming into other distinctly different characters.

Later, at a ball that occurs before the Magic Theater scene, Hermine dresses up in men’s clothing, and when Harry sees her, he mistakes her for Herman, his childhood friend. The distortion continues long enough so that when Harry is dancing with others, he says, “every now and then *Herman* was near me, and gave me a nod and a smile as *he* disappeared in the throng” (168, my emphasis). While it can be debated as to whether Hermine is responsible for these perceived transformations through costume or make-up, or whether the changes are all just a part of Harry’s imagination, the fact remains that Hesse has made sure to show Harry’s sense of reality beginning to dissolve. And

regardless of who is responsible for the physical transformations, the outcome remains the same: shifting identities have become normal to the point where the reader is no longer sure of what is meant to be stable anymore. This sense of an identity yielding to the needs of the protagonist is the perfect preparation for the upcoming Magic Theater, because once nothing is solid or certain, anything can happen, and that uncertainty creates a foreboding mood.

It is within the Magic Theater where the reader directly confronts the third Kafkaesque element of foreboding. But before delving into the theater, it is also important to mention that while the Magic Theater contains the most obviously nightmarish qualities, a sense of dread hangs over most of the novel. Harry brings the sense of impending doom down upon himself, as befitting a dream teetering on the edge of a nightmare.

For the better part of the narrative, Haller contemplates killing himself and ending the misery in which he wallows. He frequently becomes overwhelmed with “depression and despair” and experiences “a dread and suffocating foreboding [...] that a danger stalked [him] from behind” (80). To Harry, there is “no way out from this hell of silence except the razor” (104). While the reader could relate the protagonist’s feelings of hopelessness to the despondency of a man defeated by life, even during his happiest times, Harry thinks about how his “fate raced on at breakneck speed, racing and chasing like a frightened horse, straight for the precipitous abyss, spurred on by dread and longing to the consummation of death” (157). Harry’s obsession with suicide plagues him throughout the novel, and just as those thoughts haunt him, they also create an ominous tone for the reader. Since Harry is prepared to end his life so readily, his tale becomes

one of despondency, and, as the story is told through his eyes, the reader sees nothing but the deterioration of society and the hopelessness of the novel's protagonist.

However, by the time Harry arrives at the Magic Theater, the reader notices that Harry has become much happier with the help of Hermine. As it turns out, Harry will need this bit of happiness since it is within the Magic Theater that the foreboding leaps to the foreground. One must keep in mind that the theater is meant as an aid for Harry in his journey of demolishing his dual personality in order to re-envision it as multi-faceted. Nonetheless, Haller has held onto his sense of self so strongly that he "found this disintegration of the personality by no means a pleasant and amusing adventure. On the contrary, it was often exceedingly painful, often almost intolerable" (129). This inability to let go of his own ego foreshadows failure for Haller, as a successful disintegration depends on his willingness to give in and go along with the experience. If he cannot, or will not, let go of his preconceived dualistic notions, Harry will never be able to psychologically survive the Magic Theater.

Of course, it does not help Haller's mental stability when every "advertisement" for the theater comes with the caveat that it is for madmen only. Because of this constant warning, when Harry travels further into the unknown, he becomes complicit in acknowledging his own loosening grip on sanity. To go even further than that, after Harry loses his coat check ticket during the ball, a random person hands him another one, but instead of a number, it contains an ominous message: "Tonight at the Magic Theater For Madmen Only Price of Admittance Your Mind" (164). Just like Kafka's doomed characters, Hesse's character knows the risks involved, yet he continues into the nightmarish world, believing himself prepared for anything, even surrendering his own

sanity. He is willing to do just that, though, since Harry feels that the loss of his mind is a fair price to pay for the bliss that Hermine has promised him.

However, the reader begins to understand that Haller has merely become a passive participant in the proceedings, pulled from one moment to the next, as though propelled by some unknown force. His passivity is especially apparent when one considers that Harry does not even know exactly what it is that Hermine expects from him. He lacks control over himself and his actions; Harry has voluntarily surrendered all of his control to Hermine and her charms. He knows that she wants him to open himself up to new possibilities, but other than that, he merely follows her from one new entertainment to another, thinking himself prepared for any possibility.

But nothing has prepared Harry for the unknown horrors he experiences within the Magic Theater. While Harry is entertained by several of the encounters, such as the automobile hunt and the past lovers, others fill him with dread and revulsion. The door marked “Marvelous Taming of the Steppenwolf,” for example, delivers a macabre scene that Harry can barely handle. In the room, Harry sees an animal tamer, who looks like a more malicious version of himself, dressed like an absurd circus ringleader. The man has a large, but emaciated, wolf on a leash and has forced the wolf into such subservience that the intimidated animal follows the man’s every command. With every crack of the man’s whip, the wolf kneels, plays dead, and even looks on as a rabbit and a lamb are placed in front of it. Even though “saliva drop[s] from his mouth while he tremble[s] with desire,” the wolf acts against its very nature by lying in between the two animals and eating a bar of chocolate from the man’s hand (195). This level of submission not only reflects Harry’s fear of cowering and submitting, but also a general fear experienced by

many in the midst of a nightmare. After all, nothing could be more frightening than giving over control of your own self and your freedom and being forced to perform acts contrary to your very own nature. This loss of control violates human nature itself and results in a feeling of foreboding that is not easily shaken by Harry, or, for that matter, by anyone who experiences such manipulation within their dreams.

The scene plays out to the wolf's benefit, though, as the animal and the man switch roles. The man hands the whip to the wolf and begins to shrink and cringe as the wolf "lick[s] his chops with a grin, his constraint [...] erased" (195). The wolf begins commanding the man, who sinks to his knees, tears off his clothes with his own teeth, and performs the same humiliating tricks the wolf went through just moments earlier. When the wolf brings out the rabbit and lamb once again, the man, true to the distorted horror of the moment, plays against his very nature and "seize[s] the shrieking creatures in his fingers and teeth, [tears] them limb from limb, grinningly chew[s] the living flesh and rapturously [drinks] their warm blood while his eyes close in a dreamy delight" (196). This scene becomes one of the rare times in the novel where both the reader and Harry agree on the nightmarish abnormality of the situation.

The dread that Harry feels from this nightmarish scene is palpable. He has fully entered the Kafkaesque world where nothing is safe anymore, least of all himself. After all, once one becomes trapped within a nightmare, escape rarely comes easily. As Harry remarks, he "made for the door in horror and dashed out. This Magic Theater was clearly no paradise. All hell lay beneath its charming surface" (196). Clearly, like any Kafkaesque situation where the dream has turned into a nightmare, Harry never knows what to expect around the corner: delight or terrible dread. Since he cannot fully fathom

the nightmarish qualities of his own subconscious, he is not fully prepared to come to terms with what the Magic Theater has to offer. As Hesse would have it, one must be ready to confront the full onslaught of every aspect of one's humanity, even its dark side.

That dark side comes to full fruition with a scene that encompasses each of the aforementioned Kafkaesque traits. In only their second meeting, when Harry guesses Hermine's name, she informs him that he had already agreed, during their first time together, to follow her every command. She tells him that while most of those commands will be enjoyable, her final command will be for him to kill her. And even though Harry had actually guessed what the command might be before Hermine even mentioned it, he "accepted it without protest. And yet in spite of the terrifying seriousness with which she had spoken [he] did not take it all as fully serious and real" (111). Of course, he never even wonders how he is able to guess what her command might be, just as he had not wondered how he had been able to guess her name. Harry has accepted these strange deductions as a given.

By the time the reader encounters the Magic Theater within the text, Harry finds himself in the exact dreadful scenario Hermine had commanded. After getting near the end of his numerous experiences within the Magic Theater, Harry realizes that "something, though, was still to be done. Hermine awaited" him (209). He stops at the last door, opens it and finds Hermine and Pablo lying together, naked, on a rug. It is then that he notices a small round love bite left by Pablo, and there he "plunged in [his] knife to the hilt. The blood welled out over her white and delicate skin. [Harry] would have kissed away the blood if everything had happened a little differently. [Instead, he] only watched how the blood flowed and watched her eyes open for a little moment in pain and

deep wonder” (209). Pablo then awakens, but instead of reacting in a normal, horrified way as would fit the moment, he merely smiles and accepts what has happened. He rolls up the dead body in the rug and leaves the room, leaving Harry to ponder the fact that he “had done the unthinkable, and now [he] kneeled and stared and did not know at all what this deed meant, whether it was good and right or the opposite” (210). While Harry contemplates the dreadful act he has just committed, Mozart walks into the room, assembles a record player and plays classical music through it. The record player produces a sound which Harry cannot stand, as he equates the sound with that of a cheap imitation of life. With this admission, Harry reveals a feeling of superiority over the commonplace. He believes that the concerto by Handel being played through the record player is too high of an art form to be reduced through a mechanical device. However, this goes counter to everything Haller has been taught and shown by Hermine and Pablo; that life knows no such distinctions. There is no superior and inferior. There is only living. By showing his distaste for the recording, he has instinctively rejected all he has gained throughout the novel, even if he is unaware of the meaning of his action. Mozart, though, lectures him on life’s illusions and how Haller has come to take life too seriously.

He then takes Harry to another room which holds a courtroom presided over by a dozen men. Harry is sure his penalty will be death and actually welcomes it as a fitting punishment. However, the court’s punishment is to “condemn Haller to eternal life ... [and] the penalty also of being laughed out of court may not be remitted ...” (215). Mozart informs Harry that he should laugh at life more, thereby shaking himself free of its shackles. The famed composer then transforms into Pablo, which does not shock Harry in the least, grabs up “Hermine who at once shrank in his fingers to the dimensions

of a toy figure and put[s] her in ... [his] pocket” (217). And it is within this one scene which encompasses all three Kafkaesque elements – acceptance of the surreal as normal, distortions, and foreboding – that Harry has come to realize the error of his suicidal ways.

Harry now knows the path he must walk in order to become one with his self. With Hesse though, just as with Kafka, it is never that simple. In *The Trial*, for example, Joseph K. finally realizes that once he has no reason for the Court, it will no longer exist. But he also learns too late that he cannot exist without the Court.

So it is the same with Harry who, beginning to understand the new course his life must take, knows he would have to “sample its tortures once more and shudder again at its senselessness. [He] would traverse not once more, but often, the hell of [his] inner being” (217-218). Even though Haller has accepted life for what it is and learned to revel in it, Hesse still does not allow him an escape, at least not yet; he must make another attempt at life, hopefully with more success than before. The same fate befalls K. in *The Castle* when, after following one labyrinthine lead after another on how to get into the Castle, he finally “let himself be led through the darkness” (416). Just as in a dream, the protagonist can never truly free himself. Both Hesse and Kafka push their characters to the edge of self-awareness, only to pull them away at the last moment, aware themselves that the truth, whether of the inner or of the outer world, is far too elusive to grasp with one attempt. Instead, it is a life-long pursuit, and one must never give up on it, but continually chase it until the very end of one’s life.

The endless pursuit becomes a prominent aspect of *Steppenwolf*, just as it is in Kafka’s novels, and it displays itself most visibly through the dreamlike characteristics of the Kafkaesque. Just as Kafka’s fictional worlds resemble nightmares in which characters

are unable to emerge victorious from their torments, so too does Hesse ensure that Haller has to repeat his search over and over again, though hopefully learning something each time. Hesse, at least, holds out some shred of hope for his protagonist by allowing Harry to see the mistakes he has made throughout his life and by providing him with the ability to correct his behavior in the hope that he may one day live a more satisfying life. And after the bleak hopelessness depicted by Kafka, I thank Hesse for that one small concession.

Neither author held out much hope for society though, as they both saw it quickly deteriorating in the burgeoning chaos of the twentieth century. Hesse and Kafka lived through the same things other European writers experienced and saw how the modern condition had been slowly alienating man from the world. As a result, they relate historically to the many early twentieth-century writers who, according to Ernst Schurer, wrote “about the fragmentation and alienation of the modern individual, his total loss of all transcendental values, and his existence in a meaningless world” (xii). This loss of self led to a neurosis that affected a generation and, through their neurosis, affected a generation of literature as well.

Chapter 6 – Kafka and Hesse Within the Literary Spectrum

Although Kafka's lack of hope in man's quest for truth contrasts with Hesse's slightly more optimistic outlook, their themes and narrative techniques still relate to one another within the broader spectrum of literature, particularly as it concerns the journey of the individual and one's place in the world. Writing within the first half of the twentieth century, they both felt that humanity had become increasingly isolated and disoriented as a result of the onslaught of industrialization and mechanization, the horrors of World War I, and the escalating materialism of modern society. Hesse writes in *Steppenwolf* numerous times about Harry being alienated from a world no longer recognizable, explaining that "there are times when a whole generation is caught [...] between two ages, two modes of life, with the consequence that it loses all power to understand itself and has no standard, no security, no simple acquiescence" (22). Both writers depict these ideas and anxieties within their novels through misinformed characters and distorted perspectives. Hesse and Kafka achieve these fantastical characteristics by employing a dreamlike atmosphere throughout their works that reaches beyond the confines of reality. In introducing a short story by Hesse, Alberto Manguel writes that "fantastic literature pulls down the barriers we set up to feel at ease in our place in the universe. It makes us insecure about the laws of time and space, [...] it denies death as an end, it demands that we reconsider who we really are" (435). As it turns out, the main effect of the Kafkaesque is making the reader insecure about everything, but most especially about the laws of time and space. Rereading *Steppenwolf*, after my in-depth examination of Kafka, has revealed to me the intertextual connection between these two authors, and how they borrow from the traditions of fantastical literature.

Hesse and Kafka discontentedly dealt with realism, unable to express their discontent in a realist's format. In order for them to explain the problems of modern man, they would need to employ more modern techniques, just as many other writers of the time did. Hesse and Kafka were part of a literary tradition that moved from Realism and Naturalism on to the Expressionist movement, which blossomed from about 1910 to 1920, and defied the objective recording of everyday life. Expressionism exists as one of those thorns in the side of literary scholars. Roy Allen writes that "repeated reference is made to the failure of literary scholars both to develop a precise and widely accepted definition of the essence of Expressionism" (1). Therefore, rather than try to invent some overarching definition, it has proven easier to describe the qualities that mark the movement. For the Expressionist writers, as Schurer puts it, "intuition, imagination, and dreams inspired [their] vision, which to them was more meaningful than experience and reality" (viii). Just like Hesse and Kafka, Expressionist writers were also concerned with the way society was being led into the twentieth century, for, "following the perceived loss of all transcendental values in the wake of modern [life], the Expressionist artists were searching for a new meaning in life" (viii). They attacked bourgeois society, extolled pacifism and humanitarianism, and experimented in the arts.

Expressionists also used the figurative material of dreams and daydreams as their canvas, rather than the literal transcription of dreams that occupied the Surrealists, a movement which developed in France only a few years after Expressionism. As Ralph Freedman notes, the Expressionists denied an objective view of reality and "may indeed distort any situation, even a landscape, to bare its hidden, essential significance" (65–66). For example, Hesse's "work of his so-called 'expressionistic period' of the mid-nineteen-

twenties [... such as *Steppenwolf*] matches the violent reality of the urban and mechanized present with a hallucinatory eternity produced by a heightened consciousness that telescopes both in a single image” (70). While Hesse dipped into Expressionist waters, Kafka dove right in. Freedman remarks that “Expressionism could, as could no other style, develop a metaphysical level of existence without abandoning the physical level. [...] It is in this sense that in the narratives of Kafka, expressionistic prose achieved its most refined and impressive dimensions” (70–71). Kafka’s subject matter can be viewed as both metaphysical (the Castle standing in for man’s tenuous relationship with God, or Joseph K.’s trial representing an eternal search for a higher truth of one’s self) and as an attempt to merely get through the mundane task of living. His writing excels in that it straddles the line and represents both simultaneously.

Of course, all of this comes with a caveat, as no writer fits so easily within one classification. For example, Hesse’s early works tie in more closely with Romanticism, while some critics have situated Kafka’s within the Absurdist movement. But it would not be much of a stretch to place the three novels of Kafka and Hesse discussed herein within both the Expressionist and fantastical traditions. As Manguel states, fantastical literature “makes use of our everyday world as a façade through which the undefinable appears, hinting at the half-forgotten dreams of our imagination [...] and can best be defined as the impossible seeping into the possible” (xvii). He even goes so far as to declare that “Kafka is one of the great masters of fantastic literature: he makes the fantastic seem horribly real and thereby become more effective” (748). The subject of whether Hesse and Kafka, through their use of fantastic elements, helped to influence Expressionism, or whether the movement influenced them, invites consideration. What

cannot be disputed, though, is that literature has been forever changed because of Hesse and Kafka, their literary innovations, and their influence on future writers.

And while the theory of intertextuality enabled me to see the links between Hesse and Kafka, it has also allowed me to view *Steppenwolf* (and Hesse's other writings) within a new light. Hesse wanted his readers to understand his novel in a particular way, and many readers will read *Steppenwolf* with the author's intent in mind. After all, for the past century (and longer) people have been scouring letters, diaries, early drafts and any other form of correspondence that may give them a hint of an author's intent. That intent helps readers and critics gain a better understanding of what direction and meaning authors want for their texts. However, one must keep in mind that the author's intent should serve as a springboard for readers to also come to their own conclusions and interpretations. After all, if I had re-read *Steppenwolf* with only Hesse's authorial intent in mind, I would have failed to notice any links to the Kafkaesque. And if that had happened, I would not have seen how *Steppenwolf* explores Expressionistic themes and how the text fits within the Expressionist and fantastical traditions. Perhaps if more people would read Hesse with an eye to these intertextual links to Kafka, he may one day get the lasting critical recognition he truly deserves.

Works Cited

- Allen, Graham. Intertextuality. New York: Routledge, 2000.
- Allen, Roy F. Literary Life in German Expressionism and the Berlin Circles. Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research P, 1983.
- Barthes, Roland. S/Z. Trans. Richard Miller. New York: Hill and Wang, 1999.
- Bartholomae, David & Anthony Petrosky, eds. Ways of Reading. 4th ed. Boston: Bedford, 1996.
- Baumer, Franz. Herman Hesse. Trans. John Conway. New York: Ungar, 1969.
- Bloom, Harold. Anxiety of Influence. New York: Oxford UP, 1973.
- Boulby, Mark. Hermann Hesse: His Mind and Art. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1967.
- Eagleton, Terry. Literary Theory: An Introduction. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1996.
- Finger, Homer. "The Function of Music in Two Novels by Hermann Hesse: Gertrud and Steppenwolf." Diss. Duke U, 1968.
- Freedman, Ralph. "Refractory Visions: The Contours of Literary Expressionism." Contemporary Literature. 10, no. 1 (winter 1969): 54-74.
- Hesse, Hermann. The Fairy Tales of Hermann Hesse. Trans. Jack Zipes. New York: Bantam, 1995.
- . Soul of the Age: Selected Letters of Hermann Hesse 1891-1962. Trans. Mark Harman. Ed. Theodore Ziolkowski. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1991.
- . Steppenwolf. Trans. Basil Creighton. Updated by Joseph Mileck. New York: Bantam, 1963.
- Iser, Wolfgang. The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1978.

- Kafka, Franz. The Castle. Trans. Willa Muir and Edwin Muir. New York: Modern Library, 1969.
- . Letter to His Father. Trans. Ernst Kaiser and Eithne Wilkins. New York: Schocken, 1966.
- . The Trial. Trans. Willa Muir and Edna Muir. New York: Schocken, 1970.
- Karl, Friedrich. Franz Kafka, Representative Man: Prague, Germans, Jews, and the Crisis of Modernism. New York: Fromm International Publishing, 1991.
- Kristeva, Julia. Desire In Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art. Ed. Leon S. Roudiez. Trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine and Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia UP, 1980.
- Lange, Marga. “‘Daseinsproblematik’ in Hermann Hesse’s Steppenwolf; An Existential Interpretation.” Queensland Studies in German Language and Literature. Ed. Manfred Jurgenson. Vol. 1. Brisbane: U of Queensland, 1970.
- Manguel, Alberto, ed. Black Water: The Book of Fantastic Literature. Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys Ltd, 1983.
- Mann, Thomas. Homage. The Castle. By Franz Kafka. Trans. Willa Muir and Edwin Muir. New York: Modern Library, 1969. ix-xvii.
- Mileck, Joseph. Hermann Hesse: Life and Art. Berkeley: U of California P, 1978.
- Neugroschel, Joachim. Introduction. The Metamorphosis, In the Penal Colony, and Other Stories. By Franz Kafka. Trans. Joachim Neugroschel. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995.
- Plottel, Jeanine Parisier. Introduction. Intertextuality: New Perspectives in Criticism. Eds. Jeanine Parisier Plottel and Hannah Charney. New York: New York Literary

- Forum, 1978. xi-xx.
- Rose, Ernst. Faith from the Abyss: Hermann Hesse's Way from Romanticism to Modernity. New York: New York UP, 1965.
- Roudiez, Leon S. Introduction. Desire In Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art. By Julia Kristeva. Ed. Leon S. Roudiez. Trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine and Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia UP, 1980. 1 – 22.
- Schurer, Ernst. Introduction. German Expressionist Plays. Ed. Ernst Schurer. New York: Continuum, 1997. vii – xxi.
- Schwarz, Egon. "Hermann Hesse, The American Youth Movement, and Problems of Literary Evaluation." PMLA. 85.5 (Oct 1970): 977-987.
- Seidlin, Oskar. "Hermann Hesse's Glasperlenspiel." The Novels of Hermann Hesse: A Study in Theme and Structure. Ed. Theodore Ziolkowski. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1965.
- Soderbergh, Steven. dir. Kafka. Miramax, 1991.
- Spano, Mathew V. "Hermann Hesse's Use of German Romanticism and Indian Spirituality in the Resolution of His Mid-life Crisis: A Jungian Approach to Demian, Siddhartha, and Steppenwolf." Diss. Rutgers U, 2002. DAI 63 (2003): 3545A.
- Stewart, Mary E. "The Refracted Self: Hermann Hesse, *Der Steppenwolf*." The German Novel in the Twentieth Century. Ed. David Midgley. New York: St. Martin's, 1993.
- Tusken, Lewis. "A Mixing of Metaphors: Masculine-Feminine Interplay in the Novels of Hermann Hesse." Modern Language Review 87 (1992): 626-35.

Ziolkowski, Theodore. ed. The Novels of Hermann Hesse: A Study in Theme and Structure. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1974.

---. Email interview. 12 Oct 2008.

Zipes, Jack. Introduction. The Fairy Tales of Hermann Hesse. By Hermann Hesse. Trans. Jack Zipes. New York: Bantam, 1995. ix-xxvii

Steppenwolf is thought to be one of Hesse's most autobiographical novels—he left his wife, just like Harry, and was plagued by thoughts of suicide, just like Harry. Hesse wrote it, in part, because he himself was turning fifty and trying to deal with his changing life. Steppenwolf's internationalist, pacifist ideas got some patriots riled up when this novel was published. That, along with the steamy sex and recreational drug use combined to get the book banned by the Nazis. Lucky you—you only have to read the book to get the same triptastic effects. Harry learns to get away from the boring old black/white thinking and opens his mind to a whole new spectrum of personal possibilities: magenta! Tangerine! —Steppenwolf is a novel by Hermann Hesse, a German author, which was published in 1927. The author writes about a lonely, dissatisfied intellectual Harry Haller and he described his mental state through a battle between his human and wolf side. The novel wasn't accepted in the beginning and was even banned in the USA because of detailed descriptions of drug usage and obscene situations. Hesse wrote the novel while he was going through depression and felt lonely and alienated from the world. He wasn't satisfied with the society and he even thought about suicide. Harry began describing endless walks through town, books reading and his time spent in bars. During a walk he saw a commercial about a door that said "Magic Theatre" only crazy can enter. Penguin modern classics. Steppenwolf. Hermann Hesse was born in southern Germany in 1877. Hesse concentrated on writing poetry as a young man, but his first successful book was a novel, Peter Camenzind (1904). During the war, Hesse was actively involved in relief efforts. Depression, criticism for his pacifist views, and a series of personal crises led Hesse to undergo psychoanalysis with J. B. Lang. Before the two rooms had been viewed and the other arrangements completed my lunch break had come to an end and I had to go back to work. Taking my leave, I left the stranger in the hands of my aunt. When I came back in the evening she told me he had rented the rooms and would be moving in any day now.