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The Internal Conflict between the Body and the Soul in

Hermann Hesse's the *Steppenwolf*

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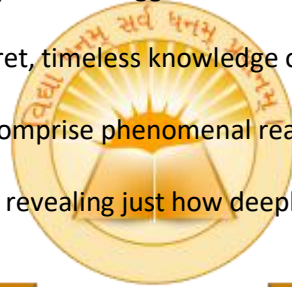
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Hermann Hesse (2 July 1877-9 August 1962) was a German born Swiss poet, novelist and Painter. Hermann Hesse 's The Steppenwolf addresses division within the self and society , and the effects such divisions can have on an individual, such as loneliness, self-mutilation, and possible suicide. As the great deciding crisis of our civilization continues to explode, the wisdom of voices like Hermann Hesse's wisdom like a dry but rich old red wine becomes ever rarer and ever more important. Hermann Hesse's voice is particularly necessary because it speaks with deep sincerity of one of the key spiritual adventures of last hundred years, that of fusing together the best of the Western philosophical and mystery traditions with the highest understanding of unity and divine identity of the East.

The problems and opportunities such as fusion of East and West arouses are explored with complex and laconic elegance in Hermann Hesse's great novel especially The Steppenwolf. In Hesse's novels, we meet Hermann Hesse the man in all his emotional intensity, fierce spiritual struggle and so experience most completely the inner turmoil. Hesse's novel The Steppenwolf radiates a secret, timeless knowledge of the mystery of cyclic change, the interconnection of the thousand things that comprise phenomenal reality, and the profound empty peace that bathes and underlines all life's fervid dramad, revealing just how deeply the discoveries of spirituality penetrated his soul.



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Colin Wilson states, "What Hesse expresses, with extraordinary clarity, is the feelings of every intelligent young person confroting life, wondering how far he is going to have to compromise, to file off his corners to make a square peg fit a round hole."

Hesse was food for heart, balm for the soul and light for the spirit. A young generation was rebelling against authoritarian structures and the destruction of ideals by unlimited greed, political power plays, and bourgeois complacency. Hesse served as a beacon of authenticity, a trustworthy guide, and a fearless explorer on the pennial paths taken by pilgrims of inner journey.



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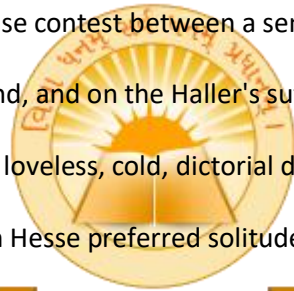
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Hassan M. Malik in his article "Steppenwolf: The Genius of Suffering" states, "Like Goethe, Hesse novel is an integral part of a broader paradigm, which reflects the author's maturing thought, morals and ideas at that particular point in his life."

Hermann Hesse's *The Steppenwolf* gives message from a wise, old soul to every soul in search of wisdom. Hesse wrote to strengthen the will and the value of the individual, not toward selfish ego gratification, but toward a greater understanding of life. Hermann Hesse teaches from experience, from wisdom acquired through many trials and tribulations, many great adventures, and deep, inner explorations. The soul, love, inspiration, the mysteries of nature, the knowable divine I, time and the stages of life are the major agents in Hermann Hesse's world. Hesse retained individual integrity while acting with social consciousness toward the pressing issues of society.

The novel *Steppenwolf* describes an intense contest between a sensitive soul trying to unfold and brings its message into the world on the one hand, and on the other hand, the suffering from the oppressive, authoritarian discipline which Harry Haller experiences as a loveless, cold, dictatorial despotic code of control that came very close to breaking his spirit and will to live. Hermann Hesse preferred solitude and privacy, a life closer to nature in a contemplative atmosphere.



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According to Hermann Hesse, even where we feel broken, wounded or injured, our connectedness to the tree of life cannot be destroyed. The journey to the self, and marriage of the timeless self to the surrendered ego, what Jung called "know thyself" was Hermann Hesse's concern. The internal conflict in life of Harry Haller is the major theme in *Steppenwolf*. The two characters Harry Haller and Hermine illustrate this conflict. Harry Haller illustrates the duality through an inner conflict and an outer conflict. Harry Haller, who feel battle within him between his two selves, a man and a wolf, a high and low, spirit and animal. While he longs to live as a wolf free of social convention, he lives as a bourgeois bachelor, but Harry Haller's wolfish nature isolates him from others until he meets Hermine.



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Hermine represents the duality of human nature through an outer conflict Hermine is a socialite, a foil to the isolated bachelor, and she forces Harry to agree to subject himself to society, learning from her, in exchange for her murder. As Harry struggles through social interaction his isolation diminishes and He and Hermine grow closer to one another as the moment of her death approaches. The climax of the dualistic struggle culminates in the Magic Theatre where Harry, seeing himself as a wolf, murders Hermine the socialite.

"Steppenwolf is a poetical self-portrait of a man who felt himself to be half-human and half-wolf. This fault like and magical story is evidence of Hesse's searching philosophy and extraordinary sense of humanity as he tells of the humanization of a middle aged misanthrope. Yet this novel can be seen as a plea for rigorous self-examination and an indictment of intellectual hypocrisy of the period."

The nephew describes Steppenwolf as a loof, intellectual and ailing because Steppenwolf does not easily associate with others. His reclusion is due to his strong dislike of bourgeois society. He cannot continue having dual life day to day.



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Irina Von Karstein writes in review, "The Steppenwolf, a bona fide genius, though long under continual torment of personality, is endowed with the gift to perceive reality and live in a way which an average person would not understand, however, because of his torment, the Steppenwolf often ends up hating himself. On the other hand, the Steppenwolf feels superior to others because other people are sheep like and bourgeouise."

Steppenwolf believes that he is an individual divided against himself and society. He has determined to end his life, he must disassociated himself from society. Steppenwolf was content to separate himaelf from others and live quietly in isolation. Steppenwolf is offended by the pompous, noble and respectable portrayal of Goethe. Hermine changes Harry's views regarding his conflict between his soul and body. She advises him that the best thing to do in the silly mediocrities of the world is merely to laugh. Hermine succeeds in motivating Harry to get in touch with and take pleasure in exeeting his more sensuous side.



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After the Black Eagle through the Tea Dance:

"Oh! How stiff you are! Just go straight ahead as if you were walking.... Dancing, don't you see, is every bit as easy as thinking, when you can do it, and much easier to learn. Now you can understand why people won't get the habit of thinking..." (29)

Hermine speaks these lines to Harry at their first dance lesson. Harry has never bothered to learn how to dance and is utter beginner, while Hermine a frequenter of restaurants and night clubs is well versed in all the newest steps. Below the surface however dance is a stand for the compability between the life of body and the life of the spirit. By ancing, Harry is tuning his physical actions to the promptings of the divine, which are symbolized by music. All his life Harry, has focused on the life of the mind to the egregious neglect of his body. Alluding to a coversation they have just had, in which Harry has complained about people who do not bother themselves to think, Hermine accuses Harry of being just as lazy and bullheaded as those people he disdains. Hermine succeeds in motivating Harry to get in touch with and take pleasure in exerting his more sensuous side. Infact, Hermine can be seen as a reflection of his lost repressed part within Harry.

Hermine teaches him to dance and Maria teaches him to love, Harry develops the various personalities that lie latent within each person. He himself begins to see his so called soul as an ever growing collection of the souls. Maria is total incarnation of the Physical aspects of human life. Harry has made up his mind, the only two options for people like him are a life of beautiful suffering or a noble, paradoxically immortal death. He believes that suicide is the only solution to his fractured nature, because the wolf and the human cannot coexist peacefully.

The beast and the man are in continuous struggle and as the tract puts it, "one exists simply and solely to harm the other, and when there are two in one blood and one in soul who are at deadly enmity, then the life fears ill." "Harry consists of a hundred or a thousand selves, not two" human nature is too complex to be viewed between only two extremes Harry's life oscillates, as everyone does, not merely between two poles, such as the body and spirit,



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the saint and the sinner, but between thousands and thousands."

Eventually, Steppenwolf discovers that suicide is not the answer to his problem, because it will only deny existence to all other selves that are part of him. Steppenwolf must accept the fact that he is internally divided and he must incorporate humour so that all selves can coexist peacefully.

For romantics self was unique and absolute. Not so was the case with Thomas Hardy and D. H. Lawrence. Hardy was the first to tell us about the dichotomy between body and soul. He said that there are voices of the body and voices of the soul. One has to satisfy the demands of both. Both Hardy and Lawrence were children of industrial revolution. In a mad chase of materialistic life, man forgot the nature of his true nature. Man forgot the spiritual dimension of human life. Both Hardy and Lawrence talk about internal conflict of body and soul in their novels. Lawrence talks about body as flesh and he seems to say flesh is a dark, satanic force of human life. One has to come to terms with it. Hermann Hesse is almost the contemporary of Hardy and Lawrence. He wrote in the first two decades of the 20th century and deplores the fact regarding the loss of the spiritual self of man.

In Steppenwolf Hermann Hesse talks about internal conflict between soul and body. For him the question is highly intricate one. He seems to be saying that without satisfying the demands of the body, one cannot talk about soul. His sole interest is in the search for self. His preoccupation is with who am I? What am I? His quite existential stance or his problems are rather ontological and not epistemological questions.

Hermann Hesse's novels are centered around a character and centered on internal conflict between the body and the soul. It is about the adventure or journey of a man, where at some point man starts asking himself pertinent questions regarding life and self. In Steppenwolf, Hesse perceives that man has more than one self. One human and other animalistic. He has a model of immortals before him that of Goethe and Mozart. But ultimately Hermine, Maria and Pablo teach Harry important lessons regarding physical bodily life. That bodily life can be transcended only through thoroughly satisfying the bodily demands.



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The novel closes with the with the optimistic words. "I understood it all. I understood Pablo. I understood Mozart, and somewhere behind me, I heard his ghastly laughter. I knew that all the hundred thousand pieces of life's game were in my pocket...! I would traverse not once more, but often, the hell of my inner being. One day I would be better hand at the game. One day I would learn how to laugh. Pablo was waiting for me, and Mozart too. "

Thus through this novel Steppenwolf Hermann Hesse talks about internal conflict between body and soul thereby illuminates the point the self is not something given or self evident. Here Steppenwolf comes to terms with question of self after a life long struggle. He realizes that body is not something to be abused or punished. It should be loved and respected and should be given a place of pride in the man's universe.



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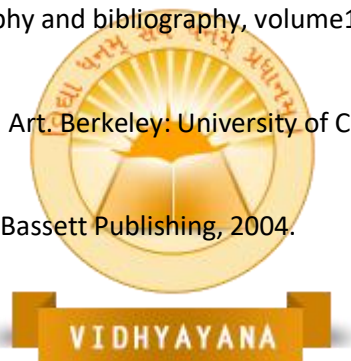
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