

ISSN 0976-8165

*The Criterion*



# The Criterion

An International Journal in English

Bi-Monthly Refereed & Indexed Open Access eJournal

October 2013 Vol. 4 Issue-V

Editor-in-Chief

Dr. Vishwanath Bite

Managing Editor

Madhuri Bite

[www.the-criterion.com](http://www.the-criterion.com)  
[criterionejournal@gmail.com](mailto:criterionejournal@gmail.com)

## Hermann Hesse and His Pedagogical Pattern

**Ajay Kumar**

Assistant Professor  
Deptt. of English  
Motilal Nehru College  
University of Delhi  
New Delhi-21

Hesse's relentless indictment of the education system of the Germany of his times is Dickensian in many respects. Guardians were not so much concerned about the happiness of their children as they were about their educational success in theoretical terms. The educational system that Charles Dickens criticises in his *Hard Times* is equally factual and monotonous. Thomas Gradgrind's motto that children are like pitchers to be filled up to the brim reminds one of the Germans of the bourgeois class too. Hesse was very much concerned about the education system of his times as he says: "School is the only question of modern culture that I take seriously and that occasionally upsets me" (Wahlbusch 24).

Hesse's second novel, *The Prodigy* is bitterly critical of the education system in which he was educated. Such education system did not take into account the development of personality or the self of children. Rather it focused on the bleak tenet of abstract success in terms of external achievements and mediocrity. No deviation of interest or thinking was recognised as a development. Such a callous and mechanised orientation to education was relentless to man's humanitarian development.

Hans Giebenrath, the protagonist of the novel, is a very talented boy who is sent to a seminary in Maulbronn. In the seminary, he develops friendship with Hermann Heilner, who is less diligent and more liberal than he is. Heilner soothes Hans in periods of depression, but, as he is not laborious, he is expelled from the seminary and Hans thus feels loneliness. After sometime, Hans, too, is sent home owing to his poor performance and mental illness. But Hans's homecoming does not solve his problems. He remains alone and depressed and cannot make friendship with anyone as he has never looked beyond books. All his childhood, he remained glued to books and thus lost the blissful lure of childhood. In the village, he is finally apprenticed as a blacksmith and he seemingly enjoys the work as it has not much to do with the mind. This work, unlike the intellectual abstraction of the academy, is concrete and practical.

Hermann Heilner is Hans Giebenrath's friend and comfort. Heilner is less hardworking and very liberal in his studies whereas Hans is very rational, logical and focused on his studies and success. In other words, the former represents Dionysiac qualities and the later Apolline qualities. The very first impression of Heilner one has at a glance can be seen in the following words:

It was obvious from the first day that he was a poet and scholar; the legend ran that he had written his composition in the *Landexamen* in hexameters. He was an energetic and eloquent talker, possessed a beautiful violin and gave one the impression that one could read his character which consisted chiefly of a youthfully immature mixture of sentimentality and light-heartedness like an open book. (Hesse, *The Prodigy* 67-68).

Hans's reputation as the most diligent boy gets established as soon as he enters the academy. The oldest boy in Hellas, as the academy was popularly known, was Emil Lucius, who was hard-working and as dry as an old grey peasant. He had no look of a boy; so bored and monotonous he had become. Hans worked as hard as Lucius and enjoyed the respect of all other students except Heilner "who had gained a reputation for ingenious levity and jeered at him for being a 'swot'" (Hesse, *The Prodigy* 72).

The novel presents a bookish atmosphere in which all children develop a frenzy of systematic seriousness at the cost of natural boyishness. Artificiality develops in their relationships as they grow up. But Heilner, the Dionysiac, is quite untouched by such feverish frenzy of monotonous academic seriousness:

The romantic Hermann Heilner who had tried in vain to find a congenial companion now strode daily by himself through the woods in his free time and was particularly attracted by the forest-lake, a brown, melancholy stretch of water surrounded by reeds and overhung with the fading foliage of ancient trees. The sad beauty of this corner of the woods made an irresistible appeal to the sensitive boy. Here he could dreamily draw rings in the still water with a twig, recite Lenau's "Reed-songs" and as he lay among the rushes reflect on the autumnal theme of the dying year while a shower of leaves came down and the leafless tree-tops sighed in melancholic harmony. (Hesse, *The Prodigy* 74).

While other students are busy with their books, Heilner looks outside the window through which the world of nature is visible. He is an enthusiast who does precious little work and dislikes workaholics. He practises the secretive and unusual art of expressing his feelings in verse and creating his own world of emotions and imagination. He is unruly and "appeared to luxuriate in his melancholy as if it was some strange and precious possession" (Hesse, *The Prodigy* 78). In fact, he is a master of imagination and there is rarely anything that he cannot transform to this faculty. He can apply it even to mathematics.

Heilner's utterly Dionysiac spirit cannot let him remain a disciplined boy of the seminary. One day the principle finds him accompanying the so-called bright and arduous Hans and reproaches him for this act. On this Heilner gives the principal a good retort explaining the intimacy of his friendship with Hans and the impropriety of anyone's intervention. He is strictly asked not to go out with Hans because Hans, too, can be disobedient in his company. But he does not obey the principal and bunks his classes a boy of instincts as he is. He does not attend his classes and:

lay only a few miles away in a wood. He was too chilled to sleep but he drew deep breaths enjoying his freedom and stretched his limbs . . . He had been on the go since midday, had bought a loaf of bread in Knittlingen and now and again took a bite from it as he gazed through the spring branches still only lightly clad with leaves at the darkness, the stars and chasing clouds. Where he would finally land up was a matter of indifference to him; at least he had escaped from the loathsome college and had shown the Principal that his will was stronger than all his orders and prohibitions. (Hesse, *The Prodigy* 119).

Heiner spends nights in woods, and heaps of straw in a field. When he comes back, he is not regretful at all and refuses to apologise and displays no sense of subordination to his teachers. Finally, he is expelled from the seminary in disgrace, which “—in his own mind at least—is a triumphant escape, a victory of will over the Ephorus, and Heilner’s resulting exultant mood finds expression in his poetic and pugnacious interior monologue” (Wahlbusch 21). Heilner is a precursor of Goldmund in *Narziss and Goldmund* that is Hesse’s complete paradigm of the Dionysian spirit.

Gradually, Hans’s learning capacity too deteriorates to the level that he is sent back home. He feels himself unloved and without any interest in anything. He sits in the small garden in the sun and lies down on the ground and gives himself to dreams and tormenting thoughts. Whenever he tries to read, he is haunted by the joyless and intimidating school days.

In *Peter Camenzind*, too, Hesse discusses the childhood of the protagonist, Peter Camenzind, that was full of mirth and ecstasy. Even when he did not know the names of the trees, the lakes, mountains and streams that he saw around his native place, he felt very deeply the smooth blue-green water, the snow-capped mountains, waterfalls, bright and sloping meadows. They are his teachers; they enhanced his understanding of the world as it is rather than as it is presented by people in general. In fact, Camenzind is a seeker of freedom, which he feels can be found absolutely in nature. Hesse has also said:

Peter Camenzind’s dissatisfaction and yearning are not directed at the political circumstances of the time, but rather, in part, at himself . . . in part at a society of which, in his youthful way, he is critical. He finds people in the world around him too contented, too self-satisfied, too polished and normal; he wishes to live more freely, more intensely, more aesthetically attuned, more nobly than they do. From the outset, he sees himself in opposition to them, without noticing, however, how much he really is attracted to their world. (Helt 123-124).

Though the process of Hesse’s exploration of the individual self begins right from the beginning, namely from *Peter Camenzind*, it is fully pronounced in *Narziss and Goldmund*. In *Camenzind*, the protagonist goes out to become a poet. He wanders and experiences the real world and comes back. He spends most of his time watching and enjoying natural beauties. Meadows, green fields, lakes and rivers attract him most—a characteristic of modernist fiction in which man is found seeking to take recourse to nature and romanticism. Recounting experiences of his childhood, Camenzind says:

At that time in my life I did not know the names of the lake, mountains and streams of my native place. But I saw the smooth blue-green water sparkling with tiny lights in the sunshine and, in a close girdle around it, the steep mountains whose gulleys were filled with glistening snow in their topmost heights, tiny waterfalls, and at the foot, the bright, sloping meadows, peopled with orchards and grey Alpine cattle. (Hesse, *Peter Camenzind* 5).

The novel starts from the child’s world, a description of Camenzind’s childhood experiences. The very second line talks of the naturalness of “the soul of every child” (Hesse, *Peter Camenzind* 5). Camenzind watches trees, mountains, gentle meadows and all other natural beauties: “The sight of the trees affected me more seriously and more deeply. I watched each

with its independent life, forming its own particular shape, casting its own individual shadow” (Hesse, *Peter Camenzind* 6-7). His village is situated by the side of a lake and there are other villages bordering the lake. He perceives the atmospheric beauty around him. This is how his cognition develops by observing natural objects peacefully, and he loves them throughout his life.

The journey to the exploration of the self is started right from the beginning, from *Peter Camenzind* itself. Camenzind acknowledges, “. . . I set forth on my journey into life . . . and have stood on my feet ever since . . .” (Hesse, *Peter Camenzind* 23). This quest is continued up to *The Glass Bead Game*, but not so clearly declared every time. Though the novelist shows the features of a novice by making such straightforward statements, the statement is quite meaningful. It reflects the very spirit of Hesse’s writing after *Camenzind*.

Initially, Hesse too, like Camenzind, was not interested in interacting with human beings. He was more interested in objects of nature. This is evident in what he says:

My early, single-minded contact with the earth, its flora and fauna, has allowed few social graces to blossom in me, and to this day my dreams are a remarkable proof of my tendency towards a purely animal existence. I frequently dream that I am a creature lying on the shore, usually a seal, and I am conscious of such an intense feeling of well-being that on waking, I return to human dignity, not with pride or rejoicing, but only with regret. (Hesse, *Peter Camenzind* 23).

Close relationship with nature since childhood had made Hesse grow up in complete empathy with trees, plants and animals. Such is his Camenzind—the boy who feels more comfortable with trees. In fact, as he says, he learns to feel men as taught by trees. It should not be taken literally, however. The gist is that nature has made an imprint on the boy’s mind, since he has remained in the company of nature since childhood. The boy Camenzind recollects his childhood and finds that in the store house of his memory, his unconscious, there are experiences and sense perceptions which tell much more. As a child, he was not able to understand the implications of such experiences. But the grown up Camenzind now understands their implications and recalls his empathy with the trees:

Our men and women resembled them; they were hard, close-knit, niggard of speech—the best of them, the more so. Hence I learned to look upon men as upon trees and rocks, to think about them, to honour and to love them just as I loved the quiet pines. (Hesse, *Peter Camenzind* 7).

Camenzind learns the lesson of freedom from natural objects rather than from society and its pre-established norms. The vagabond in Hesse to be developed fully in Narziss and Goldmund is prefigured in this hero of the mountains. This is more tangible from what Camenzind recollects: “O lovely, restless floating clouds! I was an ignorant child but I loved and contemplated them, little knowing that I too should go through life like a cloud, wandering, everywhere a stranger, floating between time and eternity” (Hesse, *Peter Camenzind* 17).

The process of individuation starts from Camenzind through wandering and flouting the established norms. The mode of individuation begins with the empirical senses. This pattern



of development of the protagonist continues in all the novels of Hesse. The mind of the child Camenzind reminds one of Locke's *tabula rasa*: "And as my poor little heart was so blank and quiet, full of expectancy, the spirits of the lake and mountains inscribed their fine and stirring deeds upon it" (Hesse, *Peter Camenzind* 5). The psychological and philosophical facts about Camenzind fascinated Sigmund Freud too, as Freedman says: "It is no wonder that no less an expert of unconscious longing than Sigmund Freud praised *Peter Camenzind* as one of his favourite readings" (117).

Friendship is essential for learning. A very common point, for instance, that we find in all Hesse's novels is that the protagonist is always accompanied by a friend who plays his counterpart, his other self, or his mentor. Starting with *Peter Camenzind* in with the friendship of Camenzind and Boppi, Hesse carries the same technique, the technique of parallelism, of friendship, in which the friends identify each other as their opposites, through *The Prodigy* to all his novels. Friendship is a pleasure, a luxury, a comfort, a mood for Heilner. It identifies his being, his sense of unity opposed to the Apolline individuality. Heilner, sometimes, snatches Hans's books as he is found reading every time. For Hans, friendship is sometimes a guarded treasure and sometimes an overwhelming burden. He develops inside himself an abstract world of intellectuality, which is an Apolline characteristic. Both the friends are a comfort to each other.

But their friendship always has two contrastive elements. While Heilner is frivolous and poetic, Hans is conscientiously ambitious. Although both are clever and exceptionally gifted, Heilner rejoices in the half derisive appellation of genius whereas Hans is attached the odium of being a model boy. But, as per the Dionysian and Apollonian model, "both boys were filled with a strangely happy feeling of harmony and silent and secret understanding" (Hesse, *The Prodigy* 100). Warmth, affection and enthusiasm characterise their friendship.

The duality of self occupies all the attention of Hans, for he constantly wrestles with the two opposite forces inside him. One of the forces prompts him to enjoy nature without any restraint; the other creates a thirst for the intellectual side of life and success. The former can be identified as his Dionysiac impulse for unity with nature, the latter his striving for Apolline individuality. Striving for individuality is, for the most part, a product of external social customs.

*The Prodigy* criticises the pedagogy that valued only the intellectual development of a student. Hesse goes back to the imagination of his school, childhood and adolescence. It turned the romantic perceptions of self and world into pictures of his region that were drawn minutely. Hesse's memories of his childhood were deeply rooted. Kurt J. Fickert says that this novel "depicts the making of the outsider, the development of his awareness of the social organism and his separation from it, his becoming an isolated cell" (172). Hans Giebenrath struggles with the world in which he lives:

It is his father's world, the world of middle-class society which respects money, respectability, and God (from a distance). Hans performs well in school and as a reward is going to be allowed to become, at state expense, a theologian. But Hans already has the mark of the outsider (the mark of Cain): the awareness that he is something other, something better than his well-fed, carefree friends (p. 18). However, Hans does not resist being led down the first few steps of the well-defined path which leads the brilliant offspring of

the middle class to a safe and respectable career in the church; he goes to the seminary at Maulbronn on a scholarship. Here he feels the full weight of the educational system, which, with regimentation as its goal, forces the plastic stuff of young lives into conventional molds. Here spirit and intelligence are oppressed . . . (Fickert 172).

A very important class of characters seems to belong to no social class at all. They have always been noticeable in German literature and continue to occupy the novels of writers like Hesse. This class is that of the outsider, the misfit who set the model for his age—the twentieth century. All of Hesse's characters are of this very class. The outsider motif is found in all the novels of Hesse, but it is only in *Demian* that this motif is well-pronounced for the first time. In *Peter Camenzind*, the protagonist shows this attitude very covertly. *Prodigy* is “more limited in its treatment of the outsider because in it Hesse is still concerned with the epic quality of the novel” (Fickert 177). In it Hesse has not been able to crystallize the outsider motif: “The very fact that the novel does not succeed, however, is due to the schism which results when Hesse abandons his epic presentation to make Hans Giebenrath a symbol of outsider-ness” (Fickert 177).

The process of self-exploration in *Camenzind* starts with nature, as in *Siddhartha* and others, and leads through world experiences to self-realization. Of all Hesse's protagonists, Goldmund is the best to exemplify the empirically individuated hero. In the process of self-realization, each protagonist has his guide or an opposite, who really do not guide him to follow any principle, but to follow the very way of his own nature. They follow their own experiences and, therefore, the process of their individuation and education is essentially empirical.

### Works Cited:

- Fickert, Kurt J. “The Development of the Outsider Concept in Hesse's Novels.” *Monatshefte* 52. 4 (Apr. - May, 1960): 171-178. *JSTOR*. Web. 11 May 2010.  
<<http://www.jstor.org/stable/30160467>>.
- Freedman, Ralph. *Hermann Hesse: Pilgrim of Crisis: A Biography*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1979. Print.
- Helt, Richard C. . . . *A Poet or Nothing at All*. Providence: Berghahn Books, 1996. Print.
- Hesse, Hermann. *Peter Camenzind*. Trans. W. J. Strachan. London: Peter Owen: Vision Press, 1961. Print.
- . *The Prodigy*. Trans. W. J. Strachan. London: Peter Owen, 1971. Print.
- . *Demian*. Trans. W. J. Strachan. London: Peter Owen, 1974. Print.
- . *Narziss and Goldmund*. Trans. Geoffrey Dunlop. London: Peter Owen, 1970. Print.
- Wahlbusch, Jefford. “Novel Ideas: Notes toward a New Reading of Hesse's *Unterm Rad*.” *A Companion to the Works of Hermann Hesse*. Ed. Ingo Cornils. Rochester: Camden House, 2009. Print.