

# Hesse's *Steppenwolf*: A Comic-Psychological Interpretation

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*The psychological character of Herman Hesse's Steppenwolf is explored by way of a detailed analysis of the novel's comic genre. This reading of Steppenwolf contextualizes its celebrated portrayal of the crisis of modern life within a story of "healing" (Hesse, 1974, p. viii) informed by the comic vision of "faith, hope, and love in a fallen world" (Cowan, 1984, p. 9). The novel's innovative sonata-like structure (Ziolkowski, 1965) and the extensive use of double perception, along with the employment of classic comic action, themes, and stock characters are discussed. In the work's comic vision, the dichotomies (flesh/spirit, subject/object, inner/outer) that plague the Steppenwolf give way to humor and imagination as preferred responses to the soul's alienation and homelessness.*

*Steppenwolf*, more than any other work of Nobel Prize winning author Herman Hesse, captured the restless imagination of American youth in the 1960s. The novel, written in 1927, endured through the seventies and on into the eighties as one of the counter-culture's most popular readings. A successful rock and roll band took its name from the novel's title. Bars, cafes, and bookstores followed suit. The very word "*Steppenwolf*" was appropriated by the counter-culture and integrated into its vocabulary of discontent (Ziolkowski, 1973).

Several factors account for the enormous popularity of Hesse's book. First, the alienation from the bourgeois world suffered by the novel's protagonist drew the identification of a generation itself at odds with the "Establishment." America's youth echoed the profound mistrust of modern technology and the nationalist state voiced by the character Harry Haller, the *Steppenwolf*. Further, the *Steppenwolf*'s stance as a pacifist was seen to accord with the protests mounted against the war in Vietnam. Add to this Haller's scorn for the false values of the middle class and at once you have an image of the heartstrings of the radical unrest that animated the counter-culture.

A second, but no less significant aspect of *Steppenwolf*'s popularity issues from its portrayal of music, sex, and drugs--a major portion of the counter-culture's culture. During the course of the novel, Haller is initiated into the exotic world of the 1920's jazz club. There he is introduced to the primitive rhythms of jazz, the forbidden pleasures of sexuality, and the mind-altering effects of opium. To many readers, Hesse appeared to be vindicating

the value of rock and roll, free love, and the use of marijuana and psychedelic drugs. Timothy Leary went so far as to recommend *Steppenwolf* as a guide to the use of LSD in inducing altered states of consciousness: "The last part of *Steppenwolf* is a priceless manual" (quoted in Ziolkowski, 1973, p. 12).

"Poetic writing," ventures Hesse in his 1961 preface to the novel's English translation, "can be understood and misunderstood in many ways. . . . Yet it seems to me that of all my books *Steppenwolf* is the one that was more often and more violently misunderstood . . ." (1974, p. vii). Hesse goes on to speculate that one reason for the misunderstanding may lie in the fact that many of the work's readers are young people while the problems that the book deals with are those of a fifty year old man. But then again, Hesse notes the numbers of his own generation who failed to grasp the work's significance. Certainly the book tells of grief and suffering, of the crisis of modern life; yet, writes Hesse, "still it is not a book of a man despairing, but of a man believing" (1974, p. viii). The story tells not only of the *Steppenwolf*'s "problematic life," but also of the "Indestructible . . . world of faith" (Hesse, 1974, p. viii). "I would be happy," Hesse concludes, "if many of them were to realize that the story of the *Steppenwolf* pictures a disease and crisis—but not one leading to death and destruction, on the contrary: to healing" (1974, p. viii).

"Faith, believing, healing"—with these words Hesse directs attention to the action which underlies his novel, the action missed by so many of its readers. The author asks that we recognize and appreciate the current of imagination which flows through the *Steppenwolf*'s story. This is no less than the perfectly valid request that our interpretation acknowledge the genre to which the work belongs.

"Literary genres," writes the philosopher Jose Ortega y Gasset, "are the poetic functions, the directions in which esthetic creation moves" (1963, p. 112). Genres are the grand metaphors, the archetypal patterns that vitalize literary works. The audience's awareness of the vista of imagination from which a particular poetic work issues makes a great deal of difference in how they will view that work. *Steppenwolf*'s vision is not one in which grief, suffering, and despair hold the dominant place in human existence. Its vision is not tragic, even in the most common use of the term. The action of the psyche, which *Steppenwolf* makes visible, moves in the opposite direction towards endurance and health; its genre is comedy. Comedy, according to the literary critic, Louise Cowan—to whose genre theory the present essay is greatly indebted—speaks of "faith, hope, and love in a fallen world" (1984,

p. 9). The comic vision embraces life through imagination and instills in us the belief that things can go well in this life. "The message of the book," Hesse wrote, "is how to endure life . . ." (quoted in Bolby, 1967, p. 202). Such a message is the heart of comedy. Comedy performs a recovery of life's vital rhythm that, when read carefully, is what *Steppenwolf* is meant to accomplish.

The task at hand, then, is to interpret *Steppenwolf*, Hesse's most popular and misunderstood novel, as a poetic work of the comic imagination. The motivation for such an undertaking is not to serve the author (although in the case of a writer so often wrongly praised--and equally unjustly maligned as Hesse--this service is honorable). Rather, the motivation reaches beyond the author to the facilitation of the reader's vision and so to the cultivation of the imagination of which *Steppenwolf* is a literary embodiment. Such a reading both clarifies the novel's genre, and, as we shall see, illuminates its psychological character.

### *The Story and Its Structure*

*Steppenwolf* is the story of Harry Haller recounted in the form of his own manuscripts. An ailing, alienated, and despondent intellectual, Haller, who is fast approaching his fiftieth year, despairs of life's meaning. Personal life and professional career have collapsed and he is adrift in a world that offers neither place nor peace. His wanderings bring him to an old city, familiar from his past, where he resides for a time under the pretext of using the renowned library. He takes a room in a sedate middle class home but proceeds to live a secluded and tortured existence apart from the house's ambience of bourgeois orderliness and self-satisfaction.

Steeped in the works of Novalis and Nietzsche, Haller indulges in relentless, venomous introspection finding that his sick and aging body is the abode of two souls: one a man, a burger, and the other a beast, a lone wolf of the Steppes. This duality between flesh and spirit rents his troubled existence and has plagued Haller for many years. He is attracted to the bourgeois world and yet at the same time repelled by it. The realm outside the bourgeois claims him, but he cannot endure it. The *Steppenwolf* is caught in a vicious duality in which the two sides of his soul make war on each other, leaving his life a bloodied field of self-hatred and recriminations. Under the savage attack of a divided will turned against life, Haller seeks escape in the timeless world of philosophy, art, and music. And failing that, in alcohol.

On one of his nocturnal prowls, the Steppenwolf encounters a mysterious sign on an ancient, barren wall: "Magic Theatre, For Madmen Only." Subsequently, he encounters an equally mysterious vendor who provides him with a nondescript pamphlet. Upon returning to his lair, Haller discovers that what he has obtained is none other than a "Treatise on the Steppenwolf." This tract, written from the perspective of the immortal world for which Haller longs, is a philosophical and psychological analysis of the Steppenwolf's dual existence. A solution is offered but in magical terms that Haller does not comprehend. However, the Treatise does make a profound impression, echoing as it does sentiments Haller has transcribed in poetry. But, it does not alter his conviction that the ultimate resolution of his dilemma rests on the edge of his razor; he has reserved suicide as his most viable alternative.

Several days later, a dinner engagement with a former colleague turns into a disaster. The Steppenwolf vehemently objects to his hostess' domesticated portrait of Haller's revered Goethe, while his host expresses no less virulent loathing for the traitorous political writings of the pacifist Haller. A deeply troubled Haller is left roaming the dark streets convinced that the razor which waits in his room is the tool of his fate. Quite drunk from visits to taverns on his path, and weary of trying to fend off the inevitable return to his lodgings, the Steppenwolf discovers himself below the sign of the Black Eagle--a nightclub/bordello mentioned to him earlier in the day by a man whom he had mistaken for the mysterious pamphlet vendor. Inside, the evening's festivities are in full swing. Haller feels himself very much out of place but cannot bring himself to leave. Pushed to the bar by the surges of the crowd, he is thrust into the company of a beautiful and fashionable prostitute. Hermine (as Haller later discovers is her name) exerts an uncanny charm over the Steppenwolf. Taking the situation in hand, Hermine orders food and drink for the desperate suicide. She chides him for his foolish despondence and at the same time initiates a pact of obedience in which the Steppenwolf is to submit to her tutelage in the art of life.

During the weeks which follow, Hermine teaches Haller to dance and introduces him to the popular culture of abandon of the twenties. She leads the skittish wolf into the risqué and heady world of the jazz nightclub. Haller behaves as a dutiful student but strains under the contradictions such a lifestyle presents to his ingrained rejection of the contemporary, the physical, and the spontaneous. Hermine sends her sister courtesan, Maria, to school the lonesome wolf in the subtle pleasures of the flesh. Moreover,

she introduces Haller to her friend Pablo, a jazz musician of singular detachment who possesses an alchemist's knowledge of narcotics and other exotic drugs.

Participation in a grand masked ball is the culmination of the Steppenwolf's apprenticeship. There Haller falls completely under Hermine's spell and celebrates his newly learned appreciation of life in a Dionysian revelry which lasts well into the night. When morning brings the ball to an exhausted close, Pablo guides Hermine and Haller through a drug induced finale to the Steppenwolf's re-education. Under the influence of opium, Haller enters the Magic Theatre--a series of fantasies revealing the multidimensional nature of the Steppenwolf's soul. Although Haller fails a final test of his renewed existence, he nonetheless emerges from the Theatre with a fuller acceptance of life's endless possibilities and with hope for their attainment.

Steppenwolf, for all of its popularity, is not an easy novel to read. This fact alone makes a comic interpretation difficult as readers expect a comedy to be more easily accessible than, for example, a tragedy. Yet Hesse, not unlike Shakespeare in *Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*, makes considerable demands on his audience's capacity for interpretive reading.

Hesse's friend Thomas Mann insists, "as an experimental novel, Steppenwolf is no less daring than *Ulysses* and *The Counterfeiters*" (1967, p. ix). Hesse himself, responding to criticisms that the novel lacked a coherent structure, contended that it is the most tightly constructed of his works and that it is "compositionally . . . like a sonata" (quoted in Ziolkowski, 1965, p. 192). In an effort to facilitate the proposed comic reading of Steppenwolf, Theodore Ziolkowski's (1965) authoritative elucidation of the novel's sonata structure will be utilized.

Steppenwolf is divided into three main sections or movements. The first movement, which Ziolkowski labels "preliminary material," (1965, p. 181) is in turn divided into three sub-sections. The novel begins with an introduction authored by the man in whose aunt's house Haller stayed and in whose possession the Steppenwolf's manuscript came to rest. This man is a self-proclaimed, typical bourgeois to whom Haller's experiences are an alien world. The introduction contains both this gentlemen's personal recollections of Haller and his own analysis of the Steppenwolf's character. Subsection two is the beginning of Haller's account proper. It contains some of the events related in the introduction as well as a more detailed picture of the Steppenwolf's existence given from his own perspective. The concluding subsection of the first movement comprises the "Treatise on the

Steppenwolf," a copy of which Haller has included in his manuscript. In Ziolkowski's analysis, these three subdivisions correspond to "the classical structure for the opening section of a sonata" (1965, p. 189). Two themes, that of the Steppenwolf and the burger--the two parts of Haller's soul--are introduced in the first division. In the following subsection these themes are developed and interpreted in terms of their significance in Haller's life. The third subsection recapitulates the two themes and proposes their resolution. Thus Steppenwolf's first movement follows sonata form: two themes are set forth, developed, and then restated.

The second movement contains the novel's action which takes place during a several week period leading up to and including the masked ball. This is the time during which Haller is instructed by Hermine. In this second movement the themes from the first division are further developed through what Ziolkowski describes as the literary equivalent of the musical device of counterpoint: double perception (1965, pp. 195-199). Double perception is a technique employed by Hesse in order to render the simultaneous existence of two levels of reality. Double perception, like counterpoint which, according to the *Howard Dictionary of Music* combines "into a single musical fabric" lines which have "distinctive melodic significance," (quoted in Ziolkowski, 1965, p. 198) brings the real and the imaginal into play at the same time. The net result of this double vision in *Steppenwolf* is the collapse of dichotomies: flesh/spirit, real/unreal, and subject/object. Double perception communicates Hesse's conception of magical thinking as the free exchange of inner and outer realities and the perception of their essential unity. The fantastic events around which all of the novel's action revolves--attaining the Treatise, the relationship with Hermine, the Magic Theatre, etc.--each rely in one way or another, on magical thinking.

The Magic Theatre is the *Steppenwolf* sonata's third and final movement. Ziolkowski refers to this movement as a "theme with variations," and as the work's "finale" (1965, pp. 216, 224). Here Hesse explores the multiplicity of personality, one of *Steppenwolf*'s central themes, by composing variations on motifs already present in the previous two sections. The succession of fantasies experienced by Haller in the Magic Theatre is episodic amplifications of chords struck during the course of Haller's re-education. The novel reaches its finale in a waking dream in which the Steppenwolf understands the significance of the initiation he has undergone.

*Comic Patterns, Themes, and Characters*

Ziolkowski's insightful analysis provides more than a valuable framework for discussion of the complex novel. It also reveals how Hesse's art has fashioned the *Steppenwolf's* intricate tale into a cohesive structure which reflects the novel's concern with the polyvalent existence of the real and the polymorphous nature of the human soul. While these two concerns accord with the comic tradition's preoccupation with imagination as the preferred response to life's difficulties, analysis of *Steppenwolf's* form also discloses its affinity with the structures of comedy. *Steppenwolf* follows the general comic pattern of resolving a conflict through a fortunate series of events that climax in a celebration. In addition, each of the novel's movements makes use of specific comic forms and devices.

The role of the Treatise in the first movement closely resembles that of the chorus in Attic Comedy. The Treatise makes its appearance in the story after a prologue in which the burger and the *Steppenwolf* each present their respective views of Haller's conflict. Like the chorus of Attic Comedy, the Treatise voices a perspective on the conflict which is detached from the distress of the characters. This perspective issues from a higher realm, another world which the chorus brings into the play. The chorus points to a resolution of the conflict, thus marking the direction which the rest of the story will take, that direction usually being one of imagination and fantasy, as is the case in *Steppenwolf*. And not unlike the authors of Attic Comedy who would address the audience directly by way of the chorus, Hesse presents his own psychology, his own personality theory, in the Treatise.

*Steppenwolf's* second movement, relying as it does on double perception, is full of the tricks, deceptions and chance encounters which typify comedy from Aristophanes to Shaw. Throughout the novel the operations of Fortune are elicited to reinstate Haller in the order of life. The comic devices employed all work toward the good, and have a didactic dimension. The *Steppenwolf's* apprenticeship to Hermine is symbolic of the novel's educational intent. *Steppenwolf* is about, as Hesse remarks, "enduring life" (quoted in Bolby, 1967, p. 202) specifically, life in the city. The story's urban setting (—another comic motif), while inspired by the actual cities of Basel and Zurich, is the early twentieth-century city in which the breakdown of culture is most acutely felt. Hesse gives us a city in which the memory of the old and the developments of modernity provide a workshop in which imaginative experiments in living can occur and lead to a new response to

the conflicts of the soul's life in the human community.

The Magic Theatre, Steppenwolf's finale, makes use of a wide range of comic episodes from the romantic interlude of *New Comedy* to the bizarre happenings of *Theatre of the Absurd*. The use of episodes which are not directly related to the main action is a time honored practice of the writers of comedy. Like a rhetorical digression, these episodes diverge from the storyline only to later return to the action, bringing a heightened awareness of the story or a twist of fate which ultimately bears on the story's outcome. The episodes of the Magic Theatre do both. They not only develop the multiplicity of Haller's personality, but they also set the stage for the novel's final scenes.

Despite the novel's comic structure, there can be no doubt but that Steppenwolf begins as tragedy, to use Ziolkowski's phrase, "the tragedy of intellect in despair" (1974, p. 179). Haller, as an intellectual--that is, as one who has cultivated the thoughts and sentiments of the past and who in turn thinks deeply about the present--is caught between two worlds, caught between the Old World of refinement and the brash new world of modernity. The Steppenwolf suffers the breakdown of the myths which have structured society. "Human life," observes Haller, "is reduced to real suffering, to hell, only when two ages, two cultures and religions overlap" (Hesse, 1974, p. 24).

Such an inferno is the Steppenwolf's hellish existence. Yet this fate is not the Steppenwolf's alone. "Haller's sickness of the soul," writes the author of the introduction, "as I now know, is not the eccentricity of a single individual but the sickness of the times themselves, the neurosis of the generation to which Haller belongs . . ." (Hesse, 1974, pp. 23-24). Unfortunately for the Steppenwolf, the prevalence of his affliction does not easily make for a community of the damned. Those who do endure, do so alone, in pain, without grace or freedom, alienated and betrayed by a world which grants no shelter . . . lone wolves living under the constant threat of the violence of taking their own lives.

Haller's end would be tragic if he were to succumb to an accident while shaving. As it is, a chance encounter turns the tide of fate when he acquires the *Treatise*. This first intercession of Fortune sets the precedent which will rule the subsequent events in the Steppenwolf's story. The *Treatise* offers a ray of hope which conspires with Haller's previous glimpses of another realm to move the action towards life and endurance, the direction of comedy. Northrop Frye (1957) makes note of the "ritual pattern" in comedy in which



the tragic hero is resurrected to a new life (p. 215). By itself, the appearance of the Treatise is not sufficient to work this transformation. However, it does offer the “bright idea” which traditionally initiates the action of comedy. Like its predecessor in Attic Comedy, the Treatise’s bright idea is an imaginative solution to the dilemma faced by the comic hero. Three options are put forth: Haller may find a mirror into the depths of his soul, he may encounter one of the Immortals—a being who abides in the other realm—or, he might find his way into a magic theatre. Not understanding these options, the Steppenwolf dwells on those passages in the Treatise which deal with suicide. The action, then, of the first movement is comic because the possibility of resurrection exists for the Steppenwolf, but the level of the comedy is, to borrow Cowan’s Dantean scheme (1984), infernal. It remains for the novel’s second movement to avert tragedy by bringing into the action a comic pattern familiar from so many of Shakespeare’s plays: the hero being saved against his will. And again as in Shakespeare, the vehicle of salvation is the feminine.

Hermine, who rescues Haller on that bleak night in the Black Eagle, is a cross between the courtesan of New Comedy and the wise and pure hearted heroine in Shakespeare. She has beauty and common sense, and is knowledgeable in the appreciation of both the physical—as befits a high class prostitute—and the spiritual. Hermine is akin in her spirituality to the prostitutes in Dostoyevsky. She reconnects the Steppenwolf with the flow of life, nudging him loose from his “stuckness”, to use Frye’s term, in the confines of abstract intellectualism. Hermine performs the comic function of bringing Haller back to his senses. She is, in a Shakespearean sense, the personification of the life force. Accordingly, her identity has a mystical dimension which Haller spies on their first encounter but that is fully revealed only at the end of the Masked Ball.

“You have always done the difficult and complicated things,” Hermine tells the Steppenwolf, “and the simple ones you haven’t learned” (Hesse, 1974, p. 101). It is in these simple things of life that Hermine instructs Haller. Her lessons focus on teaching the lone wolf to dance. Dancing is Steppenwolf’s central metaphor for living. It is the dance of life in which Haller requires instruction. Preoccupied by the airy world of ideas, Haller has lost touch with life’s vital rhythms. Much to his horror, Haller is forced to buy a gramophone to facilitate his dancing lessons. The gramophone is symbolic to the Steppenwolf of the gross and unrefined sensibilities of the modern world. His disdain for the products of the age prevents him from

having any appreciation for the variety among items, and bars him from the fun of buying anything. Yet under Hermine's direction, even the buying of the gramophone becomes a lesson in vitality and in the importance of things. Progress is slow, but Haller does finally learn to dance--not only the Fox Trot, which was the wolf's first assignment, but the Boston as well. "Dancing, don't you see," Hermine tells him, "is every bit as easy as thinking . . ." (Hesse, 1974, p. 136). Learning to dance is Haller's first step toward the reconciliation of his tortured duality.

Her profession notwithstanding, Hermine does not make love with Haller. Instead she sends her friend and lesbian lover, Maria, to instruct the Steppenwolf in the "charming play and delight of the senses" (Hesse, 1974, p. 158). Maria, with her erotic wisdom and untainted innocence, also continues Haller's education in the appreciation of the ways and things of what had been for him a decadent and superficial world. Haller "learned a great deal from Maria" (Hesse, 1974, p. 164).

Above all else I learned that these playthings were not mere idle trifles invented by manufacturers. . . . They were, on the contrary, a little or, rather a big world, authoritative and beautiful, many sided containing a multiplicity of things all of which had the one and only aim of serving love, refining the senses, giving life to a dead world around us, endowing it in a magical way with new instruments of love, from powder and scent to the dancing show. . . . All were the plastic material of love, of magic and delight. (Hesse, 1974, p. 164)

Maria is an extension of the feminine constellation introduced to the novel by Hermine. Maria comes to the old wolf as a gift from Hermine and continues the instructions begun by her sister courtesan. Haller's lessons in love, as Maria is well aware, will prepare him for a future, with a more complete union with Hermine. Hermine, Maria, and later Pablo form a triad who school the Steppenwolf in the arts of life and love, which he has forgotten. They reawaken and foster the Steppenwolf's dormant aesthetic sensitivity, his ability to feelingly perceive his embodied existence. Through this rekindled awareness, Haller is allowed entry into "the world of imagination." After a passionate rendezvous with Maria, the Steppenwolf recollects: "That night, however, gave me back my own life and made me recognize chance as destiny once more and see the ruins of my being as fragments of the divine" (Hesse, 1974, p. 162). "Destiny in the guise of Fortune," writes Susan Langer, "is the fabric of comedy" (1958, p. 458).

It was fortunate for Haller that he ended up in Hermine's company

and there was destiny at work in her recognition of Haller as a kindred soul. Hermine was able to recognize the Steppenwolf because, as she later tells him, "it is the same for me as for you, because I am alone exactly as you are" (Hesse, 1974, p. 143). What Haller and Hermine share is a longing for eternity, the Third Kingdom of the Spirit. "Whoever wants to live and enjoy his life today must not be like you and me," (Hesse, 1974, p. 172) Hermine tells the Steppenwolf.

Whoever wants music instead of noise, joy instead of pleasure, soul instead of gold, creative work instead of business, passion instead of foolery, finds no home in this trivial world of ours. . . . All we who ask too much and have a dimension too many could not contrive to live at all if there were not eternity at the back of time; and this is the kingdom of truth. . . . The music of Mozart belongs there and the poetry of your great poets. The saints, too . . . the image of every true act, the strength of every true feeling, belongs to eternity just as much. . . . It is the kingdom on the other side of time and appearances. It is where we belong. . . . And we have no one to guide us. Our only guide is our homesickness. (Hesse, 1974, p. 175)

Both Hermine and Haller are alone, but together they are a community, the community which the Steppenwolf had earlier been denied. Beyond the union of these two souls, Hermine has introduced Haller to the larger community of the jazz world. Hermine's lessons have been the Steppenwolf's initiation into the flair, the rhythm, the spontaneity, the style and taste of this world. In this qualitative appreciation of the artfulness appropriate to the mundane, there is a transformation of the mundane through a communal imagination. So it is that shared homesickness gains expression in an imaginative embrace of life.

Hermine tells Haller that she often thinks that Pablo may be a "saint in hiding," (Hesse, 1974, 175) one of those rare individuals who lives in the finite but breathes the air of the eternal. To Haller, Pablo appears as an enigmatic fellow with whom conversation is limited to a range of clichés. Pablo's sole domain is the jazz club; there he is a master. A consummate saxophonist, he is the heart of the bands with which he plays. His extensive knowledge and use of drugs only enhances the aura of the fantastic which exudes from his reticence. Both Hermine and Maria assure Haller of Pablo's fondness for him and Pablo's sympathy for the Steppenwolf's suffering. "Poor,

poor fellow. Look at his eyes," Pablo comments to Hermine. "Doesn't know how to laugh" (Hesse, 1974, p. 142).

Pablo is a fantastic, a variation in the tradition of stock comic characters which includes the minstrel, the fool, and the trickster. He does not occupy a set place in the order of the world, but is rather a mediator between different realms, possessing knowledge of rites of passage and hidden mysteries. Pablo, who is privy to secrets about which Haller can only guess, remains a hidden mover until the novel's finale in which he takes his place as an almost omnipotent master of ceremonies.

The period of Haller's apprenticeship expresses a shift in the workings of the comic imagination. Just as Haller is delivered up from the inferno of his tormented isolation through Hermine's intercession, the novel's vision progresses to the purgatorial level with the introduction of the feminine and the communal. The Steppenwolf has been befriended by the beautiful Hermine. Maria has brought gentleness and sensuality to his life. Even the distant Herr Pablo, eliciting Haller's assistance in caring for a sick friend, has brought the Steppenwolf into the circle of lives which transpire behind the gay abandon of the dance floor. Love, both physical and maternal, eases the pain, suffering, and alienation which dominated the novel's first movement. The weeks and days before the Masked Ball are a time of waiting, full of both anticipation and sadness. "Never," wrote Haller in this manuscript,

did I experience the feeling peculiar to these days, that strange, bittersweet alteration of mood, more powerfully than on that night before the Ball. It was happiness that I experienced. . . . Within all was significant tense with fate. . . . I was conscious all the while in my heart how 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. (Hesse, 1974, p. 179)

The approach of the Ball and the fantastic events which follow it signal yet again another shift in the level of the novel's comic action.

When the evening of the Ball finally does come, the Steppenwolf is filled with apprehension. Arriving late, he is at once taken aback by the festivities in progress. The wolf in him wants to flee but the commitment to Hermine forces Haller to stay and search the crowded rooms for a familiar face. Hermine not to be found, Haller succumbs to the wolf and returns to

the cloakroom to retrieve his coat. Not being able to find his check number, Haller is approached by a "small, red and yellow devil" (Hesse, 1974, p. 187) who gives him an alternate ticket. Once again, Fortune is at work. Instead of carrying a number, the ticket is a summons to the Magic Theatre, and to Hermine who is in Hell--the ball's basement bar. Immediately, the Steppenwolf is given a new lease on life.

As a marionette whose thread the operator has let go for a moment wakes to a new life after a brief paralysis of death and coma and once more plays the lively part, so did I at this jerk of the magic thread throw myself with the elasticity and eagerness of youth into the tumult. . . . (Hesse, 1974, p. 188)

The tragic hero has been resurrected and thrown head over heels into the comic rhythm of life.

Haller's entry into the night's entertainment inaugurates a new phase in the level of comedy. The Masked Ball of Steppenwolf belongs to the long tradition of celebrations that have occurred in comedy since the Greeks. Its predecessors include the Dionysian festivals of Old Comedy, medieval carnivals, and the wedding feasts in Shakespeare. With the Steppenwolf's participation in the festivities, the novel's comedy rises toward the paradisaical level in which joy and love are celebrated in a human community where flesh and spirit are no longer at war, and in which no one is worse off for the conviviality.

Madly "one-stepping" his way through the Ball's packed rooms, Haller makes his way to Hell. Enroute he pauses for a final farewell dance with the subtle and sensuous Maria who is dressed as a Spanish dancer. But he cannot linger long for he is in haste to be united with Hermine. Maria, the embodiment of the physical dimension of the feminine, gives way to the call of wholeness.

Hermine awaits Haller with the secret of the mysterious charm he had glimpsed on their first meeting. Dressed as a young man, Hermine is greeted by Haller as "Herman," the Steppenwolf's friend from youth. The spell she casts is that of a "hermaphrodite" (Hesse, 1974, p. 190) --the trickster, guide of souls wed to the lure of beauty. The understanding she provokes transcends the division between sexes. Together, the two "men" sip champagne and speak of their youth, both his and hers. Their conversation is an imaginal return to the Garden:

those years of childhood when the capacity for love, in its first youth, embraces not only both sexes, but all and everything, sensuous and spiritual, and endows all things with the spell of love and a fairy tale ease of transformation such as in later years comes again only to the chosen few and to poets, and to them rarely. (Hesse, 1974, p. 190)

Competing as friendly rivals, Herman and Haller take to the dance floor playfully courting and wooing unsuspecting ladies. Herr Haller has come to the Ball without a costume, but had hidden behind the snarls of the Steppenwolf for most of the evening. Now the magical events' twists and turns work to unmask the lone wolf. In the heat of Hell, Haller discards his persona--much to the surprise of one of his dancing partners: "One wouldn't know you. You were so dull and flat before.' Then I recognized the girl who had called me 'Old Growler' a few hours before" (Hesse, 1974, p. 192). Refigured, the Steppenwolf is momentarily released from the dichotomies which tore apart his soul. Hermine's dance lessons had well prepared Haller for the Ball but he outdoes himself performing new and unfamiliar dances with grace and ease.

His apprenticeship complete, the Steppenwolf is now ready to encounter the fullness of the feminine. Hermine has slipped away only to return in fresh costume. She reappears as a Pierrette, a fittingly comic character. And the stage upon which she gives herself to the Steppenwolf has too been transformed--through imagination. "Everything had a new dimension, a deeper meaning. Everything was fanciful and symbolic" (Hesse, 1974, p. 191). As Hermine and Haller dance, Hermine becomes the Feminine in a way that she had reserved for just this moment. "She knew that there was no more to do to make me fall in love with her. . . . All the women of this fevered night . . . had become one, the one whom I held in my arms. . . . On and on went this nuptial dance" (Hesse, 1974, p. 196).

Union with Hermine symbolizes the integration of the Steppenwolf's divided nature. Hermine is Haller's counterpart, his opposite and yet his completion. As a courtesan who has brought Haller back into the joys of physical existence and as Haller's spiritual companion, Hermine is a true descendent of the remarkable women in Shakespeare. Like Shakespeare's teaching women dressed as boys, Hermine sheds her disguise in favor of a wedding gown. The union of Hermine and Haller celebrates one of the highest goals in Shakespearean comedy: the merger of spiritual and romantic love, the union of matrimonial and sexual joining.

This union of kindred souls, which occurs during the ball's final hours, has been foreshadowed throughout the novel. "Doesn't your learning reveal to you that the reason why I please you and mean so much to you," Hermine had earlier told the Steppenwolf, "is because there's something in me that answers and understands you?" (Hesse, 1974, p. 123). In Hermine, Haller has discovered the mirror into his own soul spoken of earlier in the Treatise. In a pivotal example of the novel's technique of double perception, Haller had previously suspected that his beautiful and somewhat mystical friend was in fact a magical looking glass: "It seems to me," mused Haller, "that it was not, perhaps, her own thoughts but mine. She had read them like a clairvoyant, breathed them in and given them back, so that they had a form of their own and came to me as something new" (Hesse, 1974, p. 176). The Steppenwolf's apprenticeship to Hermine has been a working out of the bright idea of finding a magic mirror which set the comic action in movement.

As the fever pitch of the Masked Ball gives way to the novel's finale, the Magic Theatre, Steppenwolf makes a highly experimental departure from not only realistic fiction, but also from the traditional movement of comic action. The irony of paradisaal comedy transpiring in Hell opens the way for the novel's third movement. Haller had to descend to the most hellish reaches of his soul in order to encounter his whole self. In the discovering of that self, hell is transformed. However, the movement of imagination does not stop with that; the comic action reaches beyond the marriage of Hermine and Haller to the consummation of that union. The third movement leads from the integration of the self to the exploration of the self's potentialities in imagination.

As the morning sun creeps in upon the nocturnal revelries, the exhausted participants slowly disperse and the grand Masked Ball comes to an end. Pablo, attired in a "gorgeous silk smoking jacket," appears with a proposition for the Steppenwolf: "Brother Harry, I invite you to a little entertainment. For madmen only, and one price only--your mind. Are you ready?" (Hesse, 1974, p. 198). Together, Pablo, Haller, and Hermine ascend to one of the building's upper rooms. As a Hermes figure, Pablo is the guide who leads souls across the border between the mundane and the imaginal, but there is an additional dimension of Pablo's character which also shows itself. Previously, Haller had scarcely heard Pablo utter "two consecutive sentences," (Hesse, 1974, p. 199) yet in the "rare atmosphere" the small, round room, Pablo discusses at length the Steppenwolf's desire for the other

Kingdom. As Pablo speaks, a thought comes to Haller: "Was it not perhaps, I who made him talk, spoke, indeed with his voice? Was it not, too, my own soul that contemplated me out of his black eyes like a lost and frightened bird, just as it had out of Hermine's gray ones?" (Hesse, 1974, p. 198). The fantastic Pablo is the figure of the wisdom of Haller's own soul, just as much a magic mirror for the Steppenwolf as is the lovely Hermine.

In this already surreal setting, Pablo offers his guests strange cigarettes and an aromatic elixir. As the effects of the drugs begin to take hold, Pablo continues his discourse. "Only within yourself," he instructs the Steppenwolf, "exists the other reality for which you long. I can give you nothing that has not already its being within yourself. I can throw open to you no picture gallery but your own soul" (Hesse, 1974, p. 200). With that, Pablo holds up a small mirror in which are reflected the lone wolf and the suffering man who cohabitate in Haller's inner being.

Leading them out of the room and into the inner corridor of a theatre, Pablo motions to the many doors, each of which opens into a private theatre box. (It should be noted that the name of the building in which this transpires is the "Globe," the same as that of the theatre in which Shakespeare's magic was performed.) To enter the Magic Theatre, Haller must be relieved of his "so-called personality" (Hesse, 1974, p. 201); he must break loose from the tyranny of his ego. Pablo tells Haller that he must "introduce" himself "by means of a trifling suicide, since that is the custom" (Hesse, 1974, p. 202). Turning the Steppenwolf to face a wall-sized mirror, Pablo urges Haller to cast off the "spectacles" (Hesse, 1974, p. 201) of his personality. Enthralled, Haller looks on as one by one numerous images of himself--young, old, child, man, every age and style of appearance imaginable--appear and then shatter into bits and pieces.

Haller's desire for suicide, the telos which if it had been reached would have turned Steppenwolf to tragedy, has been de-literalized to reveal the psychological necessity of Haller's breaking free of the shackles of a stifling and rigidly divided ego. The "trifling suicide" (Hesse, 1974, p. 202) required to gain entrance to the Magic Theatre, the loss of one's mind as the price of admission are not a tragic ending of life, but rather a comic release into the fullness of life and its variety of possibilities. The de-structuring of the ego is the catharsis toward which Steppenwolf aims.

De-realizing of mundane reality and the realizing of metaphorical psychological reality are enacted again and again in the novel. Haller's suicide is the death of the duality which has caused him so much suffering. Released



from the literal division between man and wolf, Haller is freed to experience the multiplicity of the self--the multitude of varying personalities which constitute the human soul. This experience is facilitated by Herr Pablo's Magic Theatre in which imagination is let loose to perform the dance of life.

Pablo and Hermine have disappeared and so Haller proceeds to survey the Theatre's maze of doors, each entrance having transcribed on it a different alluring invitation: "Downfall of the West. Moderate Prices. Never Surpassed . . . Laughing Tears. Cabinet of Humor . . . All Girls Are Yours . . . Marvelous Taming of the Steppenwolf . . ." (Hesse, 1974, p. 205ff). In the course of his drug induced journey through the Theatre, Haller enters five of the rooms. Inside of each he lives a fantasy whose theme has already been either stated or implied earlier in the novel. The fantasies deal with the multiplicity of personality, the crisis of culture and technology in the modern world, the absurdity of Haller's man/wolf split, creativity and guilt, and the full appreciation of sexuality and the feminine. These comic episodes, which vary in both style and content, all serve to either compensate for some deficiency or dissolve a fixation in the Steppenwolf's psychological make-up.

At the close of the longest fantasy, that of the feminine, Haller goes in search of Hermine as he is now prepared to embrace her in the union celebrated by the nuptial dance. Entering the last booth on the corridor, Haller finds "a simple and beautiful picture. . . . On the rug on the floor lay two naked figures, the beautiful Hermine and the beautiful Pablo, side by side in a deep sleep of exhaustion after love's play" (Hesse, 1974, p. 238). Haller, discovering that a knife has replaced the magic mirror in his pocket given by Pablo, stabs Hermine. Still in a dream state, Haller watches the figures only to himself awaken when Pablo emerges from his blissful slumber. Pablo covers the dead/sleeping figure of Hermine and then exits, leaving Haller alone with the body of his beloved.

The Steppenwolf has failed the test of his re-education. Bourgeois jealousy has lead to a transgression of the Theatre's code of unreality. The ego's possessiveness has perverted the play of imagination and brought on a violent, destructive fantasy which Haller mistakenly believes to be reality. Hermine is not dead, but neither has the wedding of the Steppenwolf's dichotomous personality been consummated. In terms of the novel's comedy, the paradisaical level is not sustained. The promise of wholeness, held out during the Masked Ball, remains unfulfilled. However, the fall is not back to the infernal as the play of the novel's imagination is not yet complete.

When Pablo later returns to the booth, Haller perceives him as Mozart, one of the Immortals. The theme of the Immortals and their realm has been constant throughout *Steppenwolf*. Even before coming upon the Treatise, Haller had momentarily visited the other world, "a cool and star bright" realm while listening to classical music. The Treatise itself spoke not only of, but also from the perspective of the Immortals. Haller had encountered the Immortal Goethe in dreams, and in one of the Magic Theatre's fantasies, he had conversed with Mozart. Goethe and Mozart figure as, what Northrop Frye terms, "chorus character"-- characters who give voice to the same perspective as the chorus and who are also involved in the action of the story. Pablo's appearance as Mozart further reinforces his roles as wise man and as a psychagogue who moves back and forth between the novel's two realms. In Pablo/Mozart the apparent dichotomy between jazz and classical music, between the sensual and the sublime is reconciled.

The "two world" motif is both a persistent element in comedy, stretching back to Aristophanes and continuing through Shakespeare to the present, and integral to Hesse's chiliastic vision (to again borrow a phrase from Ziolkowski). In *Steppenwolf*, Hesse experiments with the traditional Christian version of this vision by rendering the simultaneous existence of the fallen world and the imaginal Third Kingdom of the Spirit. The vehicle of experimentation is, as has been noted, the technique of double perception which gives literary embodiment to the coexistence of the two kingdoms.

*Steppenwolf's* fallen world is divided into three separate realms, each with a different relationship to the world of the Immortals. The bourgeois world has no inkling of the other realm. The *Steppenwolf's* isolated, subjective world of introspection and philosophical speculation glimpses the other world but lacks the vital constitution to sustain the vision. The jazz world, on the other hand, acknowledges its deficient condition but proceeds to embrace life relying on homesickness for the other world as orientation for living in a fallen world. This highly romantic view of the jazz world should not be taken as a literal advocating of drugs, prostitution, etc., but rather as a metaphor for the embodied imagination--an imagination that sees the immortal in and through the finite. Pablo and Hermine are agents of this imagination and the role of the Magic Theatre has been to initiate the *Steppenwolf* into its workings.

The archetypal pattern of comic action begins in the distress of the fallen world, moves into the other world in which there is a metamorphosis which is the comic resolution, then goes back into the normal world. *Steppenwolf*

closely follows this pattern with the comic resolution taking the form of Haller's resolving or dissolving, if only temporarily and albeit incompletely, the dichotomies of his fallen existence: man/wolf, spirit/body, the either/or consciousness in which he has led his tortured life. In *Steppenwolf*, as in all comedy, the motive for the movement into the other realm is not as much escape, as it is mimesis. Haller is to learn to imitate the Immortals. Because he has failed in this by, as Pablo tells him, "stabbing with knives and spattering our pretty image with the mud of reality," (Hesse, 1974, p. 247) Pablo and the Magic Theatre have one more lesson for the *Steppenwolf* before he is returned to the normal world.

Pablo/Mozart brings a radio into the room where Haller sits with the motionless figure of Hermine. To the *Steppenwolf's* ears, the radio spits out a "mixture of bronchial slime and chewed rubber," (Hesse, 1974, p. 241) not music. Like the gramophone, the radio is symbolic to Haller of a decadent modernity's "war of extermination against art" (Hesse, 1974, p. 241). This symbolism is transformed through Mozart's instruction. "You hear," the Immortal tells the disbelieving Haller,

not only a Handel who, disfigured by radio, is all the same, in this most ghastly of disguises still divine; you hear as well and you observe, most worthy sir, a most admirable symbol of all life. . . . Everywhere it obtrudes its mechanism, its activity, its dreary exigencies and vanity between the ideal and the real, between orchestra and the ear. All life is so, my child, and we must let it be so; and, if we are not asses, laugh at it . . . learn to listen. . . . Learn what is to be taken seriously and laugh at the rest. (Hesse, 1974, p. 243)

This is exactly the lesson Haller has failed to learn in the Theatre, the lesson of laughter, the knowledge of what is to be taken seriously. As punishment for stabbing "the reflection of a girl with the reflection of a knife," (Hesse, 1974, p. 243) Haller is laughed out of the Magic Theatre and barred from re-entering for a period of twelve hours.

If he is to endure life, it is the laughter of the Immortals which the *Steppenwolf* needs to emulate. On numerous occasions, in dreams and fantasy, Haller has heard the "beautiful and frightful," other worldly laughter of the Immortals. As Haller had entered the Magic Theatre, Pablo had told him, "You are here in a school of humor. You are to learn to laugh. Now, true humor begins when a man ceases to take himself seriously" (Hesse, 1974, p.

202). Humor accepts the world; having a sense of humor is simultaneously a depreciation of the ego and appreciation of life. Humor is antidote to the deadly, literal minded seriousness with which Haller has divided his being into frowning man and leering wolf.

Integral to comedy's didactical dimension is the castigation of particular vices singled out during the course of the action. In *Steppenwolf* that vice is ego inflation and domination resultant in a will turned against life. "Self-hate," observes the bourgeois author of the introduction in regard to the *Steppenwolf*, "is really the same thing as sheer egoism, and in the long run breeds the same cruel isolation and despair" (Hesse, 1974, p. 12). The "tragedian" Haller, as Mozart knowingly asserts, "must apprehend the humor of life, its gallows-humor" (Hesse, 1974, p. 246). Faced by the finitude and suffering of human existence, the *Steppenwolf* must learn to laugh as it is only laughter which will liberate him from the dark and lonely throws of despair.

To the *Steppenwolves* of this world, Haller has read in the Treatise, "a third kingdom is open ... an imaginary and yet sovereign world, humor" (Hesse, 1974, p. 62). The *Steppenwolf* had all but entered that kingdom when Pablo had revealed the mirror reflection of his dual existence.

For a moment there was a convulsion deep within me too, a faint but painful one like remembrance, or like homesickness, or like remorse. Then the slight oppression gave way to a new feeling like that a man feels when a tooth as been extracted with cocaine, a sense of relief and a letting out of a deep breath, and of wonder, at the same time, that it has not hurt in the least. And this feeling was accomplished by a buoyant exhilaration and a desire to laugh so irresistible that I was compelled to give way to it. (Hesse, 1974, pp. 202-203)

Laughter appears with the collapse of the given; it comes on in the breakdown of dichotomies. Laughter is the spontaneous accompaniment of release from stuckness. It is the invocation of the body's participation in magical thinking. Having a sense of humor means having a way out of the ego's bondage; it means embodied imagination, the capacity to perceive the invisible in and through the visible. "[H]umor alone," contends the Treatise, "(perhaps the most inborn and brilliant achievement of the spirit) attains to the impossible and brings every aspect of human existence within the rays of its prism" (Hesse, 1974, p. 63).

*Steppenwolf's* laughter is the light of imagination transforming a fallen world. Not coincidentally, Haller uses metaphors of light to describe the

laughter of the Immortals. Laughter and magical thinking form a unified vision. As the one dissolves appearances, the other perceives essences. This is what Pablo/Mozart had sought to teach the Steppenwolf in tuning his ear to the radio of life.

Suddenly, Mozart is there no longer, only Pablo who offers Haller another “charming cigarette” and mildly chastises the Steppenwolf for not having “learned the game better” (Hesse, 1974, p. 247). Exhausted, Haller’s mind drifts under the narcotic influence of the “sweet and heavy smoke” (Hesse, 1974, p. 248). In the twilight of a deep sleep, Haller comes to a new awareness. He begins to understand the Magic Theatre and the world of the Immortals.

A glimpse of its meaning had stirred in my reason and I was determined to begin the game afresh. I would sample its tortures once more and shutter again at its senselessness. I would traverse not once more, but often, the hell of my inner being. . . . One day I would be a better hand at the game. One day I would learn how to laugh. Pablo was waiting for me, and Mozart, too. (Hesse, 1974, p. 248)

When he wakes up, the Steppenwolf will return to the tortures of his inner being, but he is not damned to the hellish existence with which his narrative began. The comic imagination has interceded to transform the lone wolf’s fate. The union of magical thinking and laughter has seen through Haller’s tragic dilemma in the affirmation of the dance of life over the despair of death. Haller will not be consumed by the desire for suicide. That fate has been averted; tragedy has been foresworn. No, Haller’s hell is, at the close of the novel, purgatorial, not infernal. The justice meted out by the Immortals condemns Haller to go on living; time is on the side of life and Fortune. Pablo and Mozart have offered fellowship, and the world of jazz and the realm of the Immortals remain opened to the Steppenwolf. There will be other balls and journeys once more through the Magic Theatre. There is hope that the Steppenwolf’s destructive split between spirit and matter will give way to the joys of the embodied imagination and that he will, in time, learn to laugh.

### *Conclusion*

Once Steppenwolf has been seen as a work of the comic imagination, those interpretations which would make of it a paean to drug use or which

one-sidedly emphasize the theme of alienation are recognized as the misunderstandings Hesse lamented. But with that established, other questions arise concerning the novel's artistic merits, its particular comic vision and its psychological character, and the relationship of that vision to contemporary culture. On these questions, then a few final comments.

Appreciation of *Steppenwolf's* sonata structure quells criticisms of formlessness. Indeed the novel's complex composition is a credit to Hesse's craftsmanship. His employment of double perception in weaving the fantastic into the very fabric of realistic narrative is quite masterful and reveals a flattering debt to German Romanticism (Ziolkowski, 1965). The novel's final movement, the Magic Theatre, is a tour de force of imagination despite the interpretative difficulties it may cause casual readers. Still, Hesse too often falls into clichés and has the unfortunate habit of using his characters to make editorial statements whose intent might be better conveyed in the novel's action or descriptive passages. The net result is that some of the work's metaphors appear contrived instead of natural, the reader is told things he or she should be shown, and on occasion, important concepts are left hanging without sufficient textual support. While these shortcomings do detract from *Steppenwolf*, they do not substantially undermine its literary achievements, make the novel any less interesting or exciting, or lessen an appreciation of its comedy.

*Steppenwolf* is undoubtedly a psychological comedy, partaking as it does of the complex and paradoxical realm of interiority usually reserved to tragedies. Much has been made of the influence of Jungian psychology in the novel. The circumstances surrounding the novel's composition lend support to this view. Hesse had undergone a course of analytical treatment with a student of C.G. Jung and had even had several sessions with Jung himself. Motifs from Jung's psychology are scattered throughout the book. Much of the language in the "Treatise on the *Steppenwolf*" has a distinctly Jungian ring. The novel's action takes place as Haller approaches fifty, the stage of life in which Jung taught that true individuation occurs. The object of Haller's quest is easily seen as the Self, conceived in Jungian terms. Hermine is an Anima figure, the feminine side of Haller's personality which he must go through to reach the Self. And the wolf in Haller is clearly his Shadow, the dark yet vital side of his character. Further examples could be sighted *ad infinitum*.

Jung's psychology proved useful to Hesse not only because of that psychology's emphasis on imagination as a primary dimension of human

existence but also because of the spirituality inherent in Jungian psychology. When he wrote *Steppenwolf*, Hesse was convinced that the only way toward a transformation of society was through the rebirth of individuals. And, because he perceived the crisis of the modern world in spiritual terms, the desired rebirth had also to be of a spiritual nature. Thus in *Steppenwolf*, Hesse appropriated many of the concepts and the dynamic of Jung's personality theory, as well as its goal of individuation: spiritual and psychological wholeness attained through the self-realization of the individual. In correspondence Hesse wrote: "Psychoanalysis has at bottom no other goal than to create a space within oneself in which God's voice can be heard" (quoted in Freedman, 1973, p. 160). In *Steppenwolf*, that space is the imagination and the voice is the laughter of the Immortals.

Despite the novel's spiritual and metaphysical overtones, partially the result of the Jungian influence and partially the expression of Hesse's own spiritual imagination, *Steppenwolf's* comedy is open to interpretation on a more phenomenological level. Hesse has created an "objective correlative," to use T.S. Elliot's famous term, for the *Steppenwolf's* psychological life. Witness the comments in the introduction by the bourgeois author concerning "the truth of the experiences related in Haller's manuscripts":

I have no doubt that they are for the most part fictitious, not however, in the sense of arbitrary inventions. They are rather the deeply lived spiritual events which he has attempted to express by giving them the form of tangible experiences. . . . I have no doubt that they the fantastic happenings have some basis in real occurrences. (Hesse, 1974, p. 22)

Haller's manuscripts do not portray "tangible" reality, that is, objective reality perceived from the bourgeois perspective. The reality in which the manuscripts find their ground is not a factual, literal reality, but rather metaphorical psychological reality. They provide a provocative account of psychological reality, a reality of metaphorical reflection lived through the magic mirrors of the world, things and other people (Romanyshyn, 1982). Two examples from Haller's account are particularly illustrative. The first is the *Steppenwolf's* insight that the "playthings" of the jazz life style confer life and magic to a dead material world. Second is Haller's recognition of Hermine as a mirror into his own soul. Indeed, Hermine observes that we should all be such mirrors for each other.

The perception of life as a reality of metaphorical reflection is what characterizes Steppenwolf as a psychological comedy. Accordingly, the transcendence made possible through Haller's re-education--which may legitimately be described as an initiation into psychological reality--is not an overcoming of physical existence but rather the realization of possibilities which go beyond the stagnant, deadly situation of Haller's ego domination and absorption in a literally dual existence. These possibilities are opened because psychological reality is the disruption of the dichotomies and divisions which had previously structured the Steppenwolf's life. With the breakdown of the Steppenwolf's split between mind and body, subject and object, comes the laughter of release and the revivification of the mundane world provocative of the wonder which accompanies metaphorical psychological reflection.

In creating this account of psychological life, Hesse's art and vision are one. By making his readers experience metaphorical reality through double perception, Hesse disrupts the very dichotomies from which the Steppenwolf himself must gain release. Hesse realized that to some extent, we are all Steppenwolves caught in the divisions between subject and object, inner and outer, mind and matter. We are all subject to the homelessness of modernity. Little wonder that the 1960s' counter-culture, a generation who felt most acutely that its society was held by a materialism that was dead and a spirituality which was empty, should be attracted by Steppenwolf.

To endure life, one must embrace it through humor and imagination. To overcome alienation, one must reorient one's perception of reality, not take refuge in despair. This is the vision of human life that places Steppenwolf within the comic tradition. It is as well the re-visioning of contemporary reality which has given Hesse's psychological comedy its claim to authentic cultural relevance.

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