1-1-1999

In Search of a New Totality: Herman Hesse's Demian

Jeffrey Shannon
Western Kentucky University

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.wku.edu/stu_hon_theses

Part of the English Language and Literature Commons

Recommended Citation
Paper 95.
http://digitalcommons.wku.edu/stu_hon_theses/95

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by TopSCHOLAR®. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors College Capstone Experience/Thesis Projects by an authorized administrator of TopSCHOLAR®. For more information, please contact topscholar@wku.edu.
In Search of a New Totality:
Hermann Hesse's Demian

Jeffrey L. Shannon
Honors Thesis
In Search of a New Totality:
Hermann Hesse's Demian

Following World War One, the average man of the early twentieth century was faced with a massive void in his life as he saw those beliefs to which he had previously held tight, disappear or become disproven with frightening rapidity. Man's totality in a sense was destroyed, and it fell to the writers of the time to fill that void and to create a new totality. In an attempt to do just that, Hermann Hesse penned the novel Demian, The Story of a Youth under the pseudonym Emil Sinclair. Hesse enjoyed an immediate critical success and garnered a large following composed mostly of the youth of the early 1900's with another wave of popularity in the 1960's. Commercially, Hesse was a great success, but was he successful in the search for this new totality?

In 1919, a novel appeared on the market taking first Germany then the world by storm. It had the working title of Demian, The Story of a Youth, and its author was an unknown, Emil Sinclair, who claimed to write not a work of fiction but the story of his life. His "story is not a pleasant one; it is neither sweet nor harmonious, as invented stories are; it has the taste of nonsense and chaos, of madness and dreams -- like the lives of all men who stop deceiving themselves" (Roloff and Lebeck 2). Demian, The Story of a Youth takes on the confusion and frustration of Hesse's time at the very outset of the novel with the existentialist's despair:
Ich wollte ja nichts als das zu leben versuchen, was von selber aus mir heraus wollte. Warum war das so sehr schwer? 1

Sinclair's audience empathized with his lament and Demian's sketchy plot of a youth's search for himself. The novel was discussed and lauded in coffee houses and literary guilds around Europe. Thomas Mann compared the relatively small "stirring prose-poem" volume to Goethe's Werther and wrote to Sinclair's publisher in Berlin "and urgently asked him for details about this striking book and who 'Sinclair' might be" (Roloff and Lebeck xi-xii).

It was hailed immediately as a revolutionary forerunner of a new and striking literature, but it was certainly not iconoclastic in form. Its progression of events from the childhood home, divided between light and dark, to the hallucinatory apotheosis in the midst of shellfire suggests the novel of education -- the "Bildungsroman." This is a story of learning, of progression, as Sinclair learns to overcome the guilt and shame of his childhood and to achieve -- with the help of his schoolfriend Demian (the daemon or devil's advocate), the organist Pistorius (the therapist), and ultimately Demian's mother, Frau Eva (the anima -- the Urmutter) -- a new vision of himself transcending inner divisiveness, outer hostility, and war (Freedman 191).

In America, this "Sinclair" was seen far more radically as the writer of man's interior, psychological life, and as a mystic of the East, whereas in Europe, he was viewed by the young as a

1. All I ever really wanted to try to live, was that which was inside of me wanting to come out. Why was that so very difficult? (Hesse 2)
guide whose interior salvation was more often than not identified with a return to nature, which, in the twenties, was replaced by art and eventually by a spiritual regeneration that had been provided by his Indian and Chinese researches. His involvement in psychoanalysis, clearly known in Germany though perhaps not quite so significant, became the central issue, and the symbolic world he reconstructed served the readers of the most varying levels of sophistication, from young people who had adopted a Bohemian way of life to conventional students in secondary schools and universities. It was a peculiarity of this generation that a writer could be meaningful only if he were stripped of both his artistic disguises and his connections with a specific time and place (there is an obvious lack of dates throughout the novel). For these readers, Sinclair's novel was not fiction in the ordinary sense but a text for instruction and meditation. He became a literal sage and teacher for his European admirers as he was flooded with letters and visits from pilgrims on foot and bicycle seeking advice in his Montagnola retreat in Switzerland. Their American counterparts elevated him to the status of myth -- a mixture of Jesus and Buddha -- in no way tied to contemporary time schedules or geography.

Later in the twentieth century, his more commercial success and adoration (which he reportedly despised) came in the form of rock groups and cafes taking on the names of his novels. Further name dropping appeared in comic books, films, on t-shirts, and television (Freedman 11).

But before this, the literary world pondered the mystery of
this unknown newcomer until, upon the awarding of the Fontane Prize for the best new writer, Sinclair stepped forward to reveal himself not as a newcomer but as Hermann Hesse. Many had already surmised Hesse's identity because of literary comparisons and several indiscretions along the way, but the shock was nonetheless inevitable.

The use of the pseudonym was easily justifiable. This was no work of the familiar Hermann Hesse who wrote of himself, "I was considered a nice poet and lived at peace with the world." This was something altogether different and almost revolutionary in thought and conception. It was forged in "white heat, under the immediate impact of the psychotherapy of Dr. Lang" (Field 43) after Hesse's "hellish journey" through himself. This was a work which broke from Hesse's earlier works, leaving the author of Demian deserving of a new name. This poet was no longer naive nor did he live in peace with his world.

Demian was like Hesse's earlier works insofar as it had only a bare minimum of exterior action or "plot." Emil Sinclair was conceived as all three -- author, narrator, and main character -- relating the events in his life between the ages of ten and twenty but intentionally omitting all dates (although Ziolkowski, author of The Novels of Hermann Hesse, concludes that the period is obviously between 1904 or 1905 to the spring of 1915). The novel opens as a ten-year-old Sinclair allows, through his own naive, a lower class boy, Franz Kromer, to blackmail him for a crime of which he is innocent. Sinclair, forced to comply to Kromer's threats of exposure, undergoes a personality change in
order not to admit that his previous boasting was a lie. His prosperous and devout family is shocked by his alteration. His boyish innocence turns to suspicion and rebellion. Max Demian then comes upon the scene. Through observation and shrewd reasoning the older boy, who is new in town, ascertains the root of the trouble and manages to free Sinclair from Kromer's menace.

Mostly out of shame, Sinclair for several years barely notices the controversial figure of Demian until he is stirred from his intellectual lethargy by Demian's probing questions and challenges to the deeper meaning of Bible stories discussed in communion class. The two become strong friends until Sinclair is sent away to boarding school, and the friendship gradually dissolves.

Toward his second year in the boarding school, Sinclair's empty and uneventful first year is followed by a particularly debaucherous and impossible period during which he is placed on probation and his father is summoned. Sinclair simply awaits his inevitable expulsion with apathy until spring, when he begins to notice an unknown girl, whom he dubs Beatrice, walking through the park every day before him. He never actually meets nor speaks to this girl, but he worships her from afar, imbuing her with all the qualities he desires. He is in love with this new idol in his life. His grades suddenly begin to rise; his behavior changes; he takes up painting in an attempt to capture the image of his Beatrice on paper. In the process, however, Beatrice the image vanishes and Sinclair finds the idealized image he paints to resemble strongly his old friend Demian.
He finds himself caught up in the memories of his friendship with Demian and, in particular, Demian's interest in a carved, time-worn figure of a bird set in the keystone above the entrance to his family's home. He struggles to recall the figure and sets out to make a painting of the bird from memory. The finished work he mails to Demian. The response is a cryptic note tucked away in one of Sinclair's textbooks in which Demian links the bird figure to the Gnostic deity Abraxas, the god who combines and embodies both Good and Evil -- Light and Dark -- which becomes Sinclair's ideal figure in his search for himself and for meaning in his life.

After much soul-searching and probing, Sinclair achieves a certain amount of intellectual maturity and independence. At this point he meets Pistorius, the renegade theologian, attracted by the magic of his organ music late nights in a church. Sinclair is now eighteen and through Pistorius is introduced to a wide variety of antiquarian beliefs and myths (including Abraxas) which spur him into greater intellectual curiosity. Pistorius acts as a sort of amateur psychologist, interpreting Sinclair's frequent dreams whereby he begins to realize his problems are in actuality internalizations of universal problems and questions. Gradually, though, Sinclair outgrows his new teacher, and the two part ways when Sinclair leaves school to go to the university.

The following year, Sinclair is once again reunited with his old friend Demian, who introduces him to his mother, Frau Eva. The mother and son bring Sinclair into their lives and into an intimate circle of intellectuals from diverse areas who all
believe steadfastly in the religious rebirth of the individual. Sinclair is caught up in the acceptance and the challenge to think. In Frau Eva he finds the realization of the ideal figure he had sought so long in vain to capture in all his paintings and to impart to Beatrice. He is drawn to her with a passionate, familial, erotic, and mystical force he has never before experienced, wherein the mother/lover motif takes on a particularly strong Freudian Oedipal cast.

This period lasts through the winter and into the summer of 1914 and is the fulfillment of all of Sinclair's previous searching and dreams. As foreshadowed by Demian's dream vision, war breaks out. A reserve officer in the calvary, Demian marches off to the front, followed shortly by Sinclair.

In the spring of 1915, a seriously wounded Sinclair finds himself in a hospital where he is taken for treatments and awakens next to a mortally wounded Max Demian. Demian imparts some final wisdom to his prodigy and after a farewell kiss and embrace is never seen again. Only after Demian's death does Sinclair begin to write down his account and memories of his youth and his friendship with Max Demian (Ziolkowski 91-94).

This was the story, as Ralph Freedman states in his book Hermann Hesse: Pilgrim of Crisis, of a boy and a young man, torn between the need for the security of his home on the one hand and for freedom, sensuality, even crime outside the home on the other. This had been Hesse's perennial theme. It had also been the theme he shared with most concerned adolescents, especially at this time near the end of the war. With an uncanny sense of identification
with those trying to find themselves after the uncertainties of puberty, Hesse created from his life's arduous pilgrimage a symbolic biography that a whole generation in wartime Germany could make its own (Freedman 190). Although he was not one of these youths, he so accurately captured their feelings of betrayal, confusion, fear, and more importantly longing, that they accepted him and honored him as one of their own.

Thomas Mann, in 1947, wrote:

The electrifying influence exercised on a whole generation just after the First World War by Demian, from the pen of a certain mysterious Sinclair, is unforgettable. With uncanny accuracy, this poetic work struck the nerve of the times and called forth grateful rapture from a whole youthful generation who believed that an interpreter of their innermost life had risen from their own midst -- whereas it was a man already forty-two years old who gave them what they sought. (Roloff and Lebeck ix)

Demian appealed to an audience born around the turn of the century which was facing not only the threshold of adulthood, but the aftereffects, too, of a long, lost war, a juncture both historical and psychological. The book mirrored its audience's relation with and psychological adjustment to the war's end and with the resulting shift in personal and public values; however, it also dealt with the sexual fears and fantasies of young adults at the brink of maturity. These were the conditions both of the hero, Emil Sinclair, who at first was also the declared author, and of the saviors like Demian who wisely led him out of his despair (Freedman 7).

This was a time of terrible confusion on the part of many all over the world, which was reflected specifically in the current literature. The youth of this time were struck particularly hard,
especially in Germany where the parental role models were no longer sufficient to the present needs. Times were different; it was a new world and the youth were forced to look for their own way. Germany was no longer a hectic hodge-podge of states and villages. It was a country, one that had dared to take on the world in war and lost.

This was a time in which nineteenth century theologians, such as David Friedrich Strauss and Ernest Renau, had reduced Christ to a purely historical or mythical figure. God was now no more, according to Ludwig Feuerbach, than a projection of man's own image. Planck and Einstein were shattering the classical concepts of matter, time, and space. Freud and Jung were tearing down the comfortable concepts of deterministic behavior and forging a vastly more complicated image of man.

This was a time which saw the emergence of many nationalistic minorities and the growth of a new social class, all of which wreaked havoc with the previous theories of politics and economics, and forced the individual to rethink his own position in society. Anthropology and sociology now insisted on the relativity of ethics and morality, a relativity which began slowly to undermine the foundations of Victorian and Welhemine society (Ziolkowski 16).

As in no other age, those beliefs held by man to be true -- unquestionably true -- were torn down and done away with completely with a frightening rapidity. The major problem was that the beliefs were not replaced with a new unity. Suddenly, inexplicably, God was dead and man was no longer what he once
thought he was. No new answers were given, only questions. Man found himself staring into the face of a void with chaos crashing in around him.

The man of the twentieth century was faced with an existentialist crisis of tremendous urgency. He was forced to look into himself for the answers, since the outer world had failed to provide them. He had to look inside himself and ask, "What is man?" Hesse addressed this question in the opening pages of *Demian* as

> Wenige wissen heute, was der Mensch ist. Viele fühlen es und sterben darum leichter, wie ich sterben werde, wenn ich diese Geschichte fertiggeschrieben habe. 2

But for man to look inside himself was exactly what Hesse was calling his readers to do. In Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, "the Karamazovs -- and here Hesse is talking the language of Freud and Jung -- peer into the chaos within their own breasts and are healed by this act of recognition" (Ziolkowski 21-22). This is a call for the individual to journey into himself and to examine that which is inside -- a so-called "unmasking of reality." This is a trip which Hesse himself had to undertake, and which he dubbed "the hellish journey through myself."

"The unmasking of reality," says Ziolkowski, "can be precipitated by any sudden jolt in our lives -- war, illness, misfortune, -- but when it happens, the shock of our perception is severe enough to 'render questionable all order, all comfort, all

---

2 Few know today what a human is. Many sense it and die easier because of it, as I will die when I have finished writing this story. (Hesse 101)
security, all faith, all knowledge.' It was a crisis of this sort that transformed Hesse from simply another best-selling writer of the decade (1904-1914) into the exciting, probing author of Demian, whose hitherto unquestioned reality had suddenly revealed itself as a perilous, seething turmoil" (6).

The conditions listed by Ziolkowski were indeed all faced by Hesse. War -- he had lived through World War One, only to see his world drastically and unalterably changed, even destroyed. Illness -- his father had just died, his youngest son Martin was seriously ill for over a year, and his wife's mental derangement had reached such a stage that it was necessary to have her committed. Misfortune -- due to his anti-war campaigns, "subscriptions were canceled, book dealers refused to handle his works, he was branded as a traitor by the German press, poison-pen letters began flowing across the border" to his home in Switzerland, "and even old friends in Germany terminated their relations with the 'viper that they had nurtured at their breast,'" (7-8) says Ziolkowski.

Hesse took his "hellish journey"; he peered into the chaos in his breast, and when he came out, he brought forth Demian. Out of the confusion that was the modern world, Hesse presented his audience with a calling:

Wahrer Beruf fuer jeden war nur das eine: zu sich selbst zu kommen. 3

According to Ziolkowski, however, "nothing is more difficult for the individual than to find the way to himself, to live his

3 The true profession for everyone was only the one; to come to oneself. (Hesse 220-221)
own true life according to his own inner principles. The natural
tendency is for the individual to fall back into the accustomed
routine and to accept the standards of his group" (95).

But this was a time of great urgency. With man's outer
existence destroyed, he had no choice but to let out that which
clamored within, that which demanded to be free and to be lived.
Socrates' call to "know thyself" was no longer simply a key to a
higher plane of living; it was now the key to survival. What were
needed were, as Hugo von Hofmannsthal states, "mystics without
mysticism, writers keenly sensitive to the discongruities of life,
who longed for a resolution of conflict here on earth and not in a
transcendant realm of the future or the beyond. They are mystics
inasmuch as they wish to pierce through the veil of apparent
conflict; but without mysticism inasmuch as their resolution is
immanent, not transcendant" (Ziolkowski 29).

The responsibility of rebuilding a totality fell to the
writers. It was up to them to probe society, to probe themselves,
to break through that eggshell (to borrow a term from Demian), and
to see what was inside. The paths to this awareness were as
numerous as the beliefs that had been taken away. Hermann Hesse
chose to research them all. His belief was borrowed from
 teachings of Sigmund Freud, who spoke out on the "Ganzheit" of the
individual -- or the totality. By this theory, Freud maintained
that for the individual to live in harmony with himself, to be
able to realize his full potential, he must first recognize and
accept all those parts of his character which constitute his
personality -- not just those moral facets, or the more desirable
facets, but also the so-called negative aspects. One must recognize the potential for criminality or perversion or brutality or aggression (Wich).

Borrowing from Dostoevsky's writings, Ziolkowski writes of Hesse's Russian Man who "is a person who acknowledges the unconscious urges and impulses within himself. European culture has traditionally striven to reject, repress, and ignore these creatural impulses, to deny their very existence" (21). But in the struggle for totality these "creatural impulses" could no longer be denied; they needed to be faced and accepted.

Pistorius, in Demian, tells young Sinclair, "Es ist ein grosser Unterschied, ob Sie bloss die Welt in sich tragen, oder ob Sie das auch wissen! Ein Wahnsinniger kann Gedanken hervorbringen, die an Plato erinnern, und ein kleiner frommer Schulknabe in einem Herrnhutter Institut denkt tiefe mythologische Zusammenhaenge schoepferisch nach, die bei den Gnostikern oder bei Zoroaster vorkommen. Aber er weiss nichts davon! Er ist ein Baum oder Stein, bestenfalls ein Tier solange er nicht weiss." 4

Does this line of thinking, however, give the criminal an excuse for his crime? Should the individual lead out those creatural impulses? According to Hesse's Russian Man, "to think of crime, to dream of it, to be acquainted with its very possibility" is satisfactory as the Russian Man "is not a willful

4 There is a big difference between simply carrying the world in you and being aware of it, too! An idiot can call forth thoughts that remind one of Plato, and a pious little schoolboy in a Herrnhutter Institute thinks deep mythological thoughts in a creative way which one would see by the Gnostics or Zoroasters. But he knows nothing of it! He is a tree or stone, at best an animal, so long as he does not know. (Hesse 199-200)
criminal. For the criminal act, the 'acte gratuit' in Gide's sense, is an extreme case, almost an existential 'Grenzsituation.' Normally it suffices merely to think 'criminally,' that is, to acknowledge the validity of all things, the potentiality of all deeds" (Ziolkowski 21).

As in none of Hesse's previous works he drew on four sources which mark *Demian* as a work with a very noticeable difference. First, Hesse turned toward the East to be able to better represent an interior world "that changed the outward realism into an apparently more obscure but compelling accurate way of representing the psyche." Fine examples are both Sinclair's realization that Cain and not Abel was the "Elect, the man who can transcend the simple dichotomy of good and evil, and the gnostic Abraxas myth in which good and evil are combined." These refer to a more internal arena in which the conflicts can be symbolized, faced, and ultimately resolved (Freedman 190).

Second is Hesse's use of the "painting of dreams." Again, one sees the use of symbolism in order to resolve conflicts; however, with this example, the internal is brought out and made external as is the case with Sinclair's drawing and redrawing of Beatrice's portrait, the heraldic emblem, and so on. These, according to Ralph Freedman, furnish "the imagery of his mind by which a sense of himself could be distilled as a painting" (Freedman 190-191), which is related most definitely to the third part -- the insights offered by psychoanalysis. It is common knowledge that Hesse underwent a long period of psychoanalysis by a student of Jung, Dr. Joseph Lang. Several sources maintain that
Dr. Lang is indeed personified in *Demian* as Pistorius, who "unlocked the secrets of the self" both in the novel and in Hesse's personal life. "Pistorius leads Sinclair," writes Freedman, "to those ancient yet living religions that presupposed Nietsche's recommended leap to deeper insights across the boundaries of good and evil" (Freedman 191).

The fourth and final source was the war. At this point Hesse's attitude toward the war was changing. He was uncertain, and it was this uncertainty that allowed him to so successfully paint the full spectrum of betrayal and loss, of spiritual needs and commitments which allowed his younger readers to identify with him as forcefully as they did (Freedman 191).

With these four ingredients, Hesse already had a good start in dealing with the various parts of the individual's totality; the main themes with which he dealt were childhood, criminality, religion, mysticism/paganism, debauchery, sexuality, philosophy, psychology, war, and peace. Hesse then needed a character to undertake this journey toward the realization of totality, someone who could represent not only Hesse's "hellish journey" but also the "hellish journey" of an entire generation faced with a reality formed in Chaos. Emil Sinclair was born. Hesse had already used this pseudonym in publishing several anti-war articles; now it was to be used in its most powerful role -- as author and main character of *Demian*.

The use of this particular name, Sinclair, has been debated by many. Some suggest Hesse was referring to an actual acquaintance of the same name; however, due to the highly symbolic
content and purpose of the novel, the more likely explanation would be the combining of the English word "sin" with the French "clair," which suggests Hesse's coming to terms with his shadows (using Freud's term to describe the darker regions of the psyche) --bringing his sins to the light and thus achieving totality.

Hesse then endowed Sinclair with qualities with which the "everyman" can identify. Sinclair is neither so debaucherous nor so good that the reader cannot identify with him. Sinclair encounters a very normal albeit very wide range of experiences. The reader can then follow Sinclair on his journey through each shattered belief as he faces it and achieves a new totality where the old was destroyed.

Sinclair needs now only an impetus to start him on his journey. In the beginning he merely pendulates between light and dark -- good and evil -- two opposing poles. Ziolkowski states that "ideally these forces are in perfect harmony, and the world is a stable unity of all opposites. Yet more often one pole has ascendancy over the other, and this condition is the basis of all human notions concerning good and evil. Good and evil are totally relative terms, depending for their validity upon the pole from which the subject views the object. Magical thinking is the capacity of the individual to see beyond the apparent disharmony of the polar opposites and to perceive the essential unity and totality of all things, within the individual as within the world." Hesse himself defined magical thinking as "the ability to exchange inner and outer reality" (Freedman 25), while for Myshkin, in Dostoevsky's The Idiot, "the highest reality is the
magical experience of the reversibility of all concepts, of the equally justified existence of both poles" (Freedman 23).

Sinclair cannot yet, however, recognize the justifiable existence of both poles and instead pendulates between the two until the arrival of Demian, the impetus, Sinclair's daemon. Demian dares to question Sinclair's reality, forcing Sinclair to question his own reality himself. More importantly, Demian symbolically supplies Sinclair with that inner unnameable quantity which was clamoring to be set free. Sinclair recounts a dream in which Demian appears, holding the bird from the heraldic emblem above Sinclair's parents' home. The emblem portrayed a bird fighting its way out of its egg, which, in the novel, is representative of the world. This becomes an important symbol of freedom and totality, as Demian himself once explained: "der Vogel kämpft sich aus dem Ei. Das Ei ist die Welt. Wer geboren werden will, muss eine Welt zerstören." 5 Interestingly enough, from this dream Sinclair recounts:


Here Sinclair gives full credit to Demian for awakening, or rather placing, this clamoring unnameable quantity within him and

5 The bird fights itself out of the egg. The egg is the world. He who wishes to be born must destroy a world. (Hesse 185)
driving him to seek his totality. The bird itself, being set into
the keystone over the door to the Sinclair household, is a
symbolization of Sinclair himself -- what he truly is. One should
notice that he describes the bird as being at times small and gray
and then powerfully large and multi-colored. Here the totality or
multiplicity of the individual is suggested. The individual
cannot be easily categorized by one term; he is a combination of
many. Demian assures him, though, that it is indeed the same
bird -- one individual with many facets.

"When I had swallowed it," says Sinclair, "I felt with an
immense deathly fright that the heraldic bird emblem I had just
swallowed was alive inside of me, filled me and began to tear me
apart from the inside." This must be compared with the previous
statement, that "whoever will be reborn must destroy a world" --
speaking, of course, of the bird fighting its way out of the egg.
Sinclair's body now represents this egg or the world in the sense
of being taken from the external to the internal symbolization
where the conflict can be faced and resolved. It is that part
which is old and useless which must be destroyed in order that the
new may live. This then relates directly to the very opening
lines of the novel once again:

6 In the night I dreamt of Demian and of the coat of arms. It
metamorphized steadily, Demian held it in his hands, at times it
was small and gray, at times it was powerfully large and multi-
colored, but he explained to me that it was still indeed one and
the same. But, finally, he forced me to eat the coat of arms.
When I had swallowed it, I felt with immense terror that the coat
of arms I had swallowed was alive inside of me, filled me, and
began to consume me from within. Full of a deathly fear, I bolted
up and awoke. (Hesse 182)
Ich wollte ja nicht als das zu leben versuchen, was von selber aus mir heraus wollte. Warum war das so sehr schwer?

Hesse has taken that unnameable force desiring to be set free and has symbolized it as the heraldic emblem which rests over the Sinclair residence, set into the keystone over the front door. This integrally relates the emblem directly to the family. It is important to consider that Hesse is not dealing with the original emblem at all, but rather his narrator's memory interpretation of that emblem. Thus, Sinclair takes that integral part of the family, that which is shared, and makes it his own with its own particular stamp.

Demian, as a novel, is fraught with symbols of unity and totality, one of the most obvious being the use of the egg, a very common and ancient symbol of both life and totality. In Demian the egg must be destroyed so that the individual may live. Hesse borrowed heavily on this point from a Roman cult symbol, according to Ziolkowski, in which the bird and the egg symbolize "the spiritual rebirth of the individual" and "is used appropriately here as a symbol for Sinclair's religious search and growth" (Ziolkowski 117). In the introduction Hesse writes:

Jeder trägt Reste von seiner Geburt, Schleim und Eischalen einer Urwelt, bis zum Ende mit sich hin. 7

Here again is the reference to eggshells which one carries with him to the very end -- remnants of an archaic society no longer useful to the individual, but there nonetheless. Also, 

7 Everyone carries remains of his birth, slime and eggshells of a primeval world, with him to the very end. (Hesse 102)
Sinclair speaks of Pistorius' words acting as gentle but steady hammer blows which broke through the eggshell that surrounded him:

Alle aber, auch das banalste, trafen mit leisem stetigem Hammerschlag auf denselben Punkt in mir, alle halfen an mir bilden, alle halfen Haute von mir abstreifen, Eierschalen zerbrechen, und aus jedem hob ich den Kopf etwas hoeher, etwas freier, bis mein gelber Vogel seinen schoenen Raubvogelkopf aus der zertruemmerten Weltschale stiess. 8

The egg, according to J. J. Bachofen, also "symbolizes the two poles of the world -- the 'light' and the 'dark' -- in Roman antiquity" (Ziolkowski 117). This brings one to the next major symbolism, the personification of both good and evil, light and dark -- Abraxas -- the gnostic deity Sinclair learns of first in the classroom and later through Pistorius and Demian. Sinclair describes Abraxas in comparison with his dream lover, Beatrice, as

Engelsbild und Satan, Mann und Weib in einem, Mensch und Tier, hoechstes Gut und aeuusserstes Boeses...Wonne und Grauen,...Heiligstes und Graessliches ineinander verflochten, tiefe Schuld durch zarteste Unschuld zuckend -- so war mein Liebestraumbild, und so war auch Abraxas. 9

This sense of totality through the joining of seeming opposites is also common in the oriental conception of Yin and Yang in which opposites work together to form a whole. Hesse's ------

8 But everything, even the most banal, struck me with gentle, persistent hammerblows on the very same spot, all of them helped to form me, all of them helped strip skin from me, break the eggshells, and from each of them, I raised my head somewhat higher, somewhat freer, until my yellow bird stuck its beautiful bird-of-prey head out of the demolished world shell. (Hesse 200)

9 Picture of an angel and Satan, man and woman in one, human and animal, the highest Good and most superficial Evil...bliss and horror...the holiest and the grisliest damned in each other, deep guilt twisting in the most tender innocence -- so was the dream picture of my love, and so also was Abraxas. (Hesse 188-189)
Piktor's Metamorphoses makes tremendous use of the symbolism as Piktor, the main character, undergoes one metamorphosis but is unable to continue metamorphosizing as all the other creatures are able to do until he joins and becomes one being with a woman. Upon his achieving his totality, he is at once able to metamorphosize into anything he wishes. The difference in Demian is that Sinclair's goal is not merely to undergo a series of metamorphoses, but rather to find his true self.

Abraxas is introduced early in the novel when, while after a communion class, Demian expresses his sentiments on God and Satan:

Es handelt sich darum, dass dieser ganze Gott, alten und neuen Bundes, zwar eine ausgezeichnete Figur ist, aber nicht das, was er doch eigentlich vorstellen soll. Er ist das Gute, das Edle, das Vaterliche, das Schoene, und auch Hohe, das Sentimentale -- ganz recht! Aber die Welt besteht aus anderem. Und das wird nun alles einfach dem Teufel zugeschrieben, und dieser ganze Teil der Welt, diese ganze Haelfte wird untergeschlagen und totgeschwiegen...wir sollen Alles verehren und heilig halten, die ganze Welt, nicht bloss diese kunstlich abgetrennte, offizielle Haelfte! Also mussen wir dann neben dem Gottesdienst auch einen Teufeldienst haben. Das faende ich richtig. Oder aber, man mussste sich einen Gott schaffen, der auch den Teufel in sich einschliesst, und vor dem man nicht die Augen zudruecken muss, wenn die natuerlichsten Dinge von der Welt geschehen. 10

10 It's like this, this whole God thing, Old and New Testament, is certainly an outstanding figure, but not what he should actually represent. He is the good, the honorable, the fatherly, the beautiful, and also the high, the sentimental -- and that's fine! But the world is composed of more than that. And all that is simply attributed to the Devil, and this whole part of the world, this entire half is suppressed and held deathly quiet...we should honor everything and hold everything holy, the whole world, not just this artificially separated, official half! So, next to God's mass, we should also have a Devil's mass. I think that would be right. Or, one would have to create oneself a god, which incorporates the devil in it, and in front of whom one wouldn't have to close one's eyes when the most natural things in the world occur. (Hesse 156-157)
Demian maintains that the world is made up of more than just goodness and light, that it also consists of evil and darkness -- that which is ascribed to the Devil; therefore, one must accept the totality and if something is to be honored it should be the entirety, not merely one part. To better clarify his point, he emphasizes the relativity of the conceptualization of good and evil by retelling the story of Cain and Abel. By Demian's reckoning, Cain is not necessarily an evil-doer, merely misunderstood. Perhaps his "Mark of God" was not a punishment for murder but a mark of his intelligence, his ability to think -- a mark which set him apart from the others, causing those with whom he came in contact to invent the story of his murdering his brother to further alienate him and ease their own discomfort.

When speaking of the Crucifixion and the two thieves on the cross, Demian sides with the thief who refuses to repent of his sins, saying that he is the stronger of the two. He takes responsibility for his actions and will pay the penalty for them. As for the other, Demian maintains that it is much easier to repent facing impending death, because the thief will not actually have to live by this new code he has adopted. This is the way of the weakling. The unrepentant thief carries the Mark of Cain, as do Demian and Sinclair.

Demian stresses the relativity of morality, that actions or concepts cannot always be defined in black and white terms. By taking the side of the traditional evil-doers in these two biblical accounts, Demian does not align himself with the darker half; he is merely trying to make Sinclair, as Hesse tries to make
as a whole instead of opposites. This is the gnostic concept of Abraxas.

To a lesser extent Hesse uses fire and music as symbols of unity and totality, concentrated specifically in the time when Sinclair was under Pistorius' tutelage. Sinclair speaks of the wonder he experiences when staring into the fire:

Wir sehen die Grenzen zwischen uns und der Natur zittern und zerfließen und lernen die Stimmung kennen, in der wir nicht wissen, ob die Bilder auf unserer Netzhaut von äußeren Eindrücken stammen oder von inneren. Nirgends so einfach und leicht wie bei dieser Übung machen wir die Entdeckung, wie sehr wir Schoepfer sind, wie sehr unsere Seele immerzu teilhat an der beständiglen Erschaffung der Welt. Vielmehr ist es dieselbe unteilbare Gottheit, die in uns und die in der Natur taetig ist, und wenn die äußere Welt unterginge, so wäre einer von uns fähig, sie wieder aufzubauen, denn Berg und Strom, Baum und Blatt, Wurzel und Bluete, alles Gebildete in der Natur liegt in uns vorgebildet, stammt aus der Seele, deren Wesen Ewigkeit ist, deren Wesen wir nicht kennen, das sich uns aber zumeist als Liebeskraft und Schoepferkraft zu fühlen ist. 11

In this section Hesse is able to relegate that position once reserved for God to man himself, who is joined with nature. The reader must keep in mind that at this time God was thought of as mainly a reflection of man himself, and Jesus was considered

11 We see the borders between us and nature tremble and flow and get to know the mood in which we no longer know whether the pictures on our retina stems from external influences or from internal. Nowhere else quite so simply and easily can we make the discovery how very much we are creators, how very much our souls have a part in the continuous creation of the world. It is much more this same inseparable godhood, which is active in us and in nature, and should the external world be destroyed, one of us would be capable of rebuilding it, mountain and stream, tree and leaf, root and bloom, every structure in nature lies exemplified within us, stems from the soul whose being is eternity, whose being we cannot know, but which we can feel mostly as the power of love and creation. (Hesse 198)
merely a myth or legend. "In fire," writes Ziolkowski, "as in music or the Glass Bead Game, all elements are united and the boundaries between things disappear" (Ziolkowski 27), including the boundaries between man and God, and man and nature. No longer is only one of these responsible for any one thing, but all share in one totality in the responsibility. Hesse goes further to say that if the world were destroyed down to one person, that remaining one would be able to recreate everything anew, from the mountains and streams, to the roots and flowers -- as every natural form is latent in each individual whose essence and soul is eternity. Perhaps man shunned God at this time, but the concept of divinity was never far from his thoughts, especially in Hesse's writing.

With decidedly Nietzschean flavorings, Hesse uses a blatantly Christian tone throughout Demian, the goal being a life which somehow reaches above the concepts of good and evil but is constantly restrained by strict Judeo-Christian morality (Ziolkowski 105). A step away from morality meant a step in the direction of sin. "Meine Suende war, dass ich dem Teufel die Hand gegeben hatte," lamented Sinclair. With this feeling of separation, came the feelings of an outsider who calls out "die Gnade Gottes war mit ihnen allen, aber nicht mehr mit mir." 12

This religious imagery is impossible to escape, especially, it seems, for Sinclair in his trying to achieve the Nietzschean state above good and evil. Loneliness and isolation set in as Sinclair recognizes the "closed Gate of Eden" he has created.

12 My sin was that I gave the Devil my hand...The grace of God was with them all, but no longer with me. (Hesse 222)
separating him from his childhood. Upon the introduction of Beatrice, he becomes willing to serve out his life as "a temple servant, with the goal of becoming a saint." He likens himself in the pit of his deepest loneliness to Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. The novel itself is filled with free quotations taken from the Bible: Europe "had won the whole world, but lost its soul thereby."

Hesse consciously created a "stylistic tension" between Christian phraseology and Nietzschean themes. Said Hesse, "I myself consider the religious impulse as the decisive characteristic of my life and my work. The realization that the individual, whether faced with the World War or with a flower garden, experiences the external world with a manifestation of the One, the Divine, and fits himself into it, seems to me to be the primary and predominant characteristic of my nature" (Ziolkowski 106), and through the character of Pistorius, Hesse adds:

\[\text{Ach, jede Religion ist schoen. Religion ist Seele, einerlei, ob man ein christliches Abendmahl nimmt oder ob man nach Mekka wallfahrt. 13}\]

Sinclair, through Pistorius, is introduced to various cults and religions, adding to his own knowledge of and experience with Christianity. When Sinclair feels that he can learn nothing more from Pistorius, that he has somehow outgrown the organ player, he leaves him in his continuing search for those missing parts of himself.

Early on Hesse deals with the subject of sexuality with the

13 Oh, every religion is beautiful. Religion is soul, regardless if one takes the Christian Communion of makes a pilgrimage to Mecca. (Hesse 204)
character of Beatrice. While Sinclair never actually meets this unknown girl whom he christens Beatrice, she, or rather Sinclair's ideal of her, dominates his thoughts and dreams, leading him from his previous life of debauchery. He becomes a model student, content to watch Beatrice from afar. With the earlier onset of puberty and the awakening of his sexual desires, Sinclair finds that he cannot reconcile himself with the society to which he has forced himself to conform. At this point, it is again Demian who supplies the answers by questioning not the validity of those natural sexual instincts but rather the validity of the society which finds it necessary to condemn them (Ziolkowski 98). It is only later, after being separated from Demian, that Sinclair first comes in distant contact with Beatrice. Soon the ideal far outstrips the reality as the girl herself walks farther and farther ahead and is more and more distant until she is gone altogether.

It has been suggested that a strong sexual link is evident between Frau Eva and Sinclair near the end of the novel; however, this is more of a psychological representation -- or archetype -- drawing heavily on Hesse's meetings with Lang as well as his studies of both Freud and Jung. Her name immediately draws a very conscious connotation with Eve, the mother of mankind. She is also linked by action and relation with Demian to Mary, the mother of Jesus. Demian draws heavily on the figure of Christ for many reasons, the more obvious being his spreading of his plan of salvation, his active use of disciples (such as Sinclair), his almost supernatural powers, and, finally,
his death at the end of the novel so that Sinclair may live.
Demian's relation to the Christ figure doubly strengthens Frau Eva's to the figure of Mary. In both cases, Frau Eva is obviously the mother figure -- the "Urmutter." Sinclair has faced all those aspects and facets which make up his life -- his sum total of being. He has hammered at the eggshell and is now struggling to be free. What is necessary is the rebirth, and for the rebirth the mother is necessary. Sinclair is drawn to Frau Eva, who prepares him for this rebirth. He says of her:

Mochte sie mir Mutter, Geliebte, Goettin werden -- wenn sie nur da war! wenn nur mein Weg dem ihren nahe war!

Frau Eva is the sum total of Sinclair's journey; she is mother, lover, goddess, and the final stage of his journey. Here are not the qualities of an incestuous liaison (Frau Eva being the mother image) in an overtly sexual fashion, but more of a rebirth. Jung writes:

Particularly the sun-myth shows us to what extent the basis of "incestuous" desire is to be found not in cohabitation, but in the unique wish to become a child again, to return to the protection of one's parents, to get back into the mother so as to be born by her once again. On the way to this goal, however, stands incest; that is, the necessity of entering the mother's body once more. One of the simplest ways would be to impregnate the mother and identical with oneself, to produce oneself again. Here the incest prohibition interferes, and hence the sun myth or rebirth myths invent all conceivable analogies for the mother in order to permit the libido to overflow into new forms and thus to prevent it effectively from descending to more or less actual incest. (Ziolkowski 137)

The war arrives, Demian goes off to fight, and Frau Eva sends

14 Would that she was mother lover, goddess to me -- if only she was there! If only her path was near that of mine! (Hesse 233)
out into the world her newborn Sinclair, who enters the war shortly thereafter. The war is a sort of tempering by fire. Sinclair is reborn, but it is not until he receives Demian's parting kiss that he at last comes to life -- much akin to God's breathing life into the clay. Sinclair now stands whole.

But is Hermann Hesse successful with *Demian*? Has he, in fact, created a new totality to fill the void left by the destruction of the other? Is Sinclair truly whole? One can very easily answer no. Sinclair is not truly whole and, thus, Hesse has not filled the void and is not successful with his novel.

The main problem is Sinclair's weakness and constant need for guidance and a master, without which he quickly becomes totally helpless and falls into despair. He begins under the guiding force of his parents until his run-in with Kromèr. Suddenly, his world falls apart until he is freed by Max Demian. He retreats immediately to the "lap" of his family, pretending to a childhood innocence he no longer possesses. This is replaced later, once again, with Demian's guidance until Sinclair is forced to go to boarding school, where, separated from a strong ruling force, he turns to a life of debauchery and is nearly expelled from school. At this point, Beatrice enters his life. Clearly she does nothing directly to control him, and he is the one who makes the decision to improve his life; however, he finds it necessary to have Beatrice as the catalyst or rather guise under which he exerts this self-control. As Beatrice's image gradually fades, it is replaced with that of Demian until Sinclair comes under the tutelage of Pistorius. Granted, Sinclair makes the break himself
from Pistorius, but within a year he is once again reunited with his old friend and mentor, Max Demian, this time, however, with Frau Eva and their tight-knit circle of friends.

The most troublesome passages come at the end of the novel, though, when Demian, on his deathbed, says to the supposedly newly reborn Sinclair:


This is a farewell speech to one who has supposedly journeyed through himself, faced all his shadows, and been reborn whole; yet, Demian tells him that he will be the voice inside Sinclair, guiding and prompting him. This, by no means, presents a person capable of standing on his own. Further, Sinclair, in closing the novel, speaks of looking deep within himself when times are hard, into some internal mirror at his own reflection "das nun ganz Ihm gleicht, Ihm, meinem Freund und Fuehrer." 16

With the word "Fuehrer," Sinclair makes it clear that it is Demian who is in control. It was Demian who, in Sinclair's dream, ordered him to consume the heraldic emblem, thus creating that clamoring unnameable quantity within him, and now it is

\[\text{---------}\]

15 Little Sinclair, look out! I'll have to go away. Perhaps you'll need me once again, against Kromer or some such thing. When you call for me, I won't come any longer so crudely, riding upon a horse or on a train. You'll have to listen down inside of you, then you'll notice that I'm inside of you. Do you understand? (Hesse 256)

16 ....which now resembled Him totally, Him, my friend and my leader. (Hesse 257)

Demian's voice which prompts him when he listens to that voice
Demian who looks back when Sinclair looks into a mirror; it is within himself. In the closing sentence, Demian is raised to a god-like position which is especially emphasized by the capitalization of the pronouns which are usually reserved for references to God.

But this criticism is too simple and too demanding of the novel. Hesse did not intend to create a new philosophy for the world when he penned Demian. "There are no absolute standards valid for everyone," Demian announces (Ziolkowski 104). Hesse was not out to create a finished product with Sinclair; he is merely the beginning. Sinclair looks into the chaos within his own breast and is reborn, and just as a baby, he is not yet fully formed. He is only at the beginning of a long road.

Demian as a novel is not finished. Hesse simply brought Sinclair to a point where he was able to make his own decisions, choose his own destiny, and live his own life free of the old, out-dated stipulations of a society less concerned with needs and practicalities as with following some now irrelevant code of ideals. Before his rebirth he had nothing upon which he could stand, nothing in which he could believe. Sinclair, at the close of the novel, is still very young, and in his life he may succeed or he may fail. Hesse does not presume to dictate the end. He only offers what he is capable of giving, as Hesse himself was only forty years old when he produced Demian. He could not say how this character's life, which so closely mirrored his own, would end. He did not have the experience, and Demian is a mostly autobiographical novel.
Ziolkowski writes, "man, as Sinclair comes to realize, is not a complete and perfect being as he comes into the world, but only a trajectory of nature in the direction of the perfect man ('ein Wurf der Natur nach dem Menschen hin')" (Ziolkowski 103-104), and as such, Demian and Hermann Hesse are successful in creating a totality to fill the void -- not the absolute standard, but a totality.
WORKS CITED


