

# *The Dream of a Journey to the East: Mystery, Ritual and Education in Hermann Hesse's Penultimate Novel*

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*The Journey to the East is Hermann Hesse's most deeply personal book. This enigmatic novel, with its deceptively simple narrative structure, lends itself well to multiple interpretations. To date, however, little attention has been paid by educationists to the book. This paper attempts to address this lacuna in the literature, beginning with an examination of the autobiographical and dream-like qualities of the novel. This is followed by a detailed analysis of the ritual of confession undertaken by H.H., the narrator and central figure in the book. H.H. lives in despair following the apparent dissolution of the League of Journeymen to the East. He seeks to overcome his despair, and learns the League is alive and well, through the character of Leo. At the end of the book H.H., having confessed his 'sins' and faced both his League brothers and himself, believes he has found the answer to his troubles. This paper argues that in his solution, H.H. fails to grasp of the importance of education, questioning and critique in self understanding and development. This being so, it is suggested, he will be unable to make the most of the knowledge available to him through the League archives, and his reflections on himself, Leo and the purpose of his existence will have only limited lucidity. He will, the paper concludes, have a long way to go on his journey to 'the East'.*

## Introduction

Many of Hermann Hesse's novels have an autobiographical flavour. The pressures experienced by a gifted young scholar in *Beneath the Wheel* (Hesse, 1968) were shared by Hesse. The alienating effects of commitment to the artist's life, portrayed with gentle sadness in *Rosshalde* (Hesse, 1972), were also felt by Hesse. Harry Haller goes through a mid-life crisis in *Steppenwolf* (Hesse, 1965), just as Hesse did. Hesse's penultimate novel, *The Journey to the East* (Hesse, 1956), is, however, perhaps the most deeply confessional of his books. Indeed, Hesse wondered at one point if he 'wasn't a little too personal in this piece of writing', putting too many of his own private thoughts into the novel (cited in Tusken, 2002, p. 500). The central character's full name is never revealed, but his initials are H.H. and his inner struggles mirror those experienced by Hesse throughout his life. The book is overtly self-referential, with a blurring of boundaries between 'fact' and 'fiction'. As such, it can, as Middleton (1957) points out, be read as a chronicle, albeit not an ordered or systematic one, of Hesse's own intellectual history.

Stanley Antosik observes that *The Journey to the East* has ‘a well-deserved reputation for ambiguity’ (1978, p. 63). This is a novel that, despite its apparently simple narrative structure, can be read on multiple levels. The book begins with H.H. looking back on his time with a group of ‘Journeyers to the East’ who were members of a mysterious League. H.H.’s hazy reflections on the past in the lengthy opening chapter give way to a series of events more grounded in the present in the chapters that make up the second half of the book. H.H., believing the League has disappeared, falls into despair. The turning point, it seems, had been the disappearance of the servant Leo. With Leo gone, members of H.H.’s group lose their cohesion, begin arguing with each other, and dissolve. With many years having passed, H.H. wishes to write a history of League, but struggles to do so. He speaks with an old friend, Lukas, about his difficulties and together they discover that Leo may still be alive. H.H. eventually meets up with Leo and discovers the League still exists. Leo turns out to be President of the League and, after taking H.H. on a long and confusing journey through city streets, arrives at a building where other members gather for an elaborate ritual. H.H. confesses that it was he who had abandoned the League and its principles, not the League that had abandoned him. He commits to the faith again, is acquitted of his sins of egoism and neglect, and is accepted back into the fold of League brothers. Judgment having been passed, H.H. is required to confront the information held about him in the League archives. This culminates in the discovery not of something written but of a strange double-sided figure. H.H. comes to realize that the figure represents himself and Leo, one part weak and decaying, the other strong and alive, and that eventually the two will become one. On this mysterious, deeply symbolic note, the book ends.

This paper analyses *The Journey to the East* from an educational perspective. The first section discusses the autobiographical and dream-like qualities of the novel. Particular attention is paid to the unusual treatment of time, space and character relationships in the book. This is followed by a detailed examination of H.H.’s confession. The third section provides a critical reading of H.H.’s experience in the light of esoteric ideas on knowledge and dreaming. The last part of the paper extends these ideas by comparing H.H.’s development with that of Joseph Knecht, the main character in Hesse’s final novel, *The Glass Bead Game* (Hesse, 2000a). It is argued that H.H., unlike Knecht, fails to develop a critical understanding of himself, Leo and the League. He does not grasp, as Knecht does, the significance of education in his further development as a human being. This being the case, he will not be able to make the most of the archives available to him in his quest for knowledge, and his reflections will have only limited lucidity. He will, it is concluded, have a long way to go on his journey to ‘the East’.

### **A Dream? Hesse’s Journey to the East**

What are we to make of this enigmatic novel? What kind of book is *The Journey to the East*? And what can it tell us about Hesse himself? *The Journey to the East* is autobiographical in multiple senses. It conveys aspects of Hesse’s philosophy (e.g., on the limits of reason, the dangers of a certain kind of modernist development, and the nature of reality). In the character of H.H., readers find many of the qualities Hesse himself exhibited in his long life, with emotions ranging from joy to despair. H.H.’s quest, his desire to make his life meaningful and worthwhile, was also Hermann Hesse’s lifelong commitment. As if to remove any doubt that this is Hesse’s journey as much as H.H.’s, *The Journey to the East* is populated with characters from Hesse’s other novels. Some are even quoted as authorities. In the first chapter, for example, in making a point about the difficulty of expressing thoughts through words, H.H. appeals to Siddhartha as a wise friend from the East. Klingsor, the artist from Hesse’s story ‘Klingsor’s Last Summer’ (Hesse, 1973) appears several times, and occasional references are made to other Hesse characters.

This should not be taken to imply that events, thoughts and relationships in *The Journey to the East* map directly on to Hesse’s life. Such a reading would be naïve and misleading. H.H.’s life differs from

Hesse's in some important respects. There is, for example, no evidence that Hesse went through a confessional ritual of the kind experienced by H.H. It might be said that Hesse underwent a form of confession when he subjected himself to psychoanalysis. Yet, this differed substantially from the organised, hierarchical, group-based ritual described in *The Journey to the East*. The point of stressing the autobiographical qualities of the novel is that in H.H.'s striving, we can see the beginnings of what *could* be an educational process—a process Hesse saw unfolding within himself. The story holds out the *promise* of education, but H.H. does not realise this – at least not as clearly and fully as he could. H.H., like Hesse, yearns to know more about himself and his purpose in life. He seeks, as Hesse did, to *learn*—but unlike Hesse, he does so, as we shall see later in this paper, in a strictly limited way. Hesse, however, can *teach us*, in part by drawing on what he had learned through his own inner struggles. In *The Journey to the East*, Hesse captures, evocatively and effectively, the nature of a certain kind of despair, while also granting us the opportunity to reflect critically on H.H.'s response to this. In this sense, among others, the book can *be* educational, even if it does not contain a fully developed theory of education.

It is not just Hesse's own literary creations who come to life in the novel. Don Quixote and Sancho Panza are treated almost as real people, with actions and ideas and influence on a par with the other characters in the novel. This is doubly interesting, as Cervantes himself allows for a similar blurring of boundaries in *Don Quixote*. In the second part of that great novel, composed a number of years after the first part had been written, Cervantes has his characters reflect on *Don Quixote* the book. The publication of what has become known as the 'false *Quixote*', the author of which has never been identified, complicates matters further. The 'false *Quixote*' appeared in 1614. Cervantes became aware of this while he was writing the second part of the novel, which was to appear one year later. (See Cervantes, 2005, pp. 472-473, p. 453 note 2.) H.H. recalls riding with Sancho (p. 27), and Don Quixote is listed along with Plato, Lao Tse, Xenophon and Pythagoras as a co-founder and brother of the League (p. 55). Among those brothers, H.H. also includes literary creations such as Tristram Shandy and literary *creators* such as Novalis.

*The Journey to the East* reads much like a series of reflections written down after a long and affecting dream. The dream in this case, however, is, in certain respects, Hesse's *life*: a literary life, a life of 'sins' and lapses in faith, but also one of ongoing commitment to a certain form of spiritual striving. The dream-like quality of *The Journey to the East* pervades the book as a whole, but is particularly evident in the lengthy first chapter. This part of the book provides a nostalgic recollection of fragments of past experience. What H.H. conveys, however, is more a form of *inner* experience than anything else. The experience for the *reader* (or at least for this reader) is similar to that in encountering Kafka's work and particularly his book *The Castle* (Kafka, 1998). (Kafka, as is well known, never completed any of the three novels that survive him, and these would never have seen the light of day had his friend Max Brod not chosen to ignore his request to destroy his draft manuscripts.) *The Trial* (Kafka, 1988) also has the effect of being slightly out of sync with reality, of not quite being in focus, but this effect is more marked in *The Castle*. In a different era and context altogether, Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (Okri, 1991), in weaving spirit-child Azaro's visions with the often mundane, sometimes violent, events of everyday life, has a similar effect. The interpenetration of different moments in history is also conveyed through Gabriel García Márquez' *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (Márquez, 1972), with its account of the lives of succeeding generations, the boundaries between them becoming all the more blurred by the repeated use of the same names from one generation to the next.

*The Journey to the East* speaks to this blurring of boundaries—this hazy movement between different levels of reality and experience—in the text itself. H.H. admits at one point, in his conversation with Lukas, that he is having difficulty approaching his subject—his history of the League (or at least his section within the League)—not because of a lack of literary ability but because the reality he once experienced exists no longer. H.H. continues:

[A]lthough its memories are the most precious and vivid ones that I possess, they seem so far away, they are composed of such a different kind of fabric, that it seems as if they originated on other stars in other millennia, or as if they were hallucinations. (p. 56)

There is, then, a self-conscious recognition of the other-worldliness created by the narrative within the novel, and this is given added weight by the structure of the book. For while the first part of *The Journey to the East* is the most dream-like in character, the other sections of the book also seem to move uncertainly between different times and places, leaving the reader without a firm set of coordinates in seeking to understand H.H.'s experiences. Much must be drawn by inference, and even where places are named and periods of time are mentioned (we learn, for example, that approximately ten years have passed since the dissolution of H.H.'s group within the League), the reader is never quite sure how much stock to place on these comments. H.H., moreover, makes abundantly clear that he has doubts about his memories and is suffering from a certain kind of despair.

Hesse's use of the first person narrative only adds to the sense of ambivalence and uncertainty here. For this is a story told by H.H., and when other narrative viewpoints are allowed to intrude—even if only briefly—they cast events in a rather different light. Near the end of the book, H.H. discovers other accounts in the League archives that provide quite different interpretations of what went wrong when Leo disappeared from H.H.'s group of journeyers to the East. There is, throughout the novel, a residual ambiguity about whether the story is really being constructed in the past or present tense. This too finds comment in the text itself. H.H. says that his tale becomes 'even more difficult because we not only wandered through Space, but also through Time' (p. 26).

We moved towards the East, but we also traveled into the Middle Ages and the Golden Age; we roamed through Italy or Switzerland, but at times we also spent the night in the 10<sup>th</sup> century and dwelt with the patriarchs or the fairies. During the times I remained alone, I often found again places and people of my own past. (p. 26)

So, is *The Journey to the East* an example of a novel in the magical realist tradition? Perhaps, but this categorization, for me, does not capture adequately the purpose of the book. For although the narrative appears to move between past and present and have its characters do things we normally conceive as impossible, these features of the book are very much in the service of something else. They work, collectively, to create a portrait of H.H.'s developing awareness of himself. This, I shall argue, does not advance as far as H.H. believes it does by the end of the book. The crucial missing ingredient in H.H.'s journey of self-understanding, it will be suggested, is *education*.

## A Ritual of Confession

What kind of journey does H.H. undergo in *The Journey to the East*? The narrative, to be sure, does describe travels to places that appear to have a material reality, and the events following H.H.'s meeting with Lukas—his seeking out of Leo's residence, and his subsequent trial and confession in the assembly of League members—seem to take place within definite periods of time. But closer examination of the text reveals that even on these points, features of physical geography and the flow of time are not in themselves as important as the journey in *consciousness* being undertaken by H.H. By adopting what Crenshaw and Lawson (1972) call a 'fairy-tale form' in *The Journey to the East*, Hesse is able to transcend chronological time:

The fairy-tale form is especially conducive to changes and permutations of time. If by being set in a mythical or vague locale, the fairy tale achieves a kind of universality, then this universality is reinforced by a parallel vagueness of time: "einmal," "once upon a time." Such formulas do

not eliminate time; rather, they allow enough temporal detail to effect a balance between alienation and understanding on the part of the listener or the reader. (p. 54)

The climax of H.H.'s journey in consciousness is his confession. This is depicted as an elaborate ritual in the last part of the book, and is similar in many respects to the forms of religious confession practised within some traditions of Christian worship. Upon his rediscovery of the League, H.H. is named as a 'self-accuser', and he is required to purge himself of his 'sins'—to humiliate himself in front of others—before finding redemption.

Time in the last and most dramatic part of the book is compressed, with a series of pivotal events occurring in quick succession, whereas the period leading up to H.H.'s eventual reconnection with Leo is rather vaguely defined. H.H. notes that after learning of the existence of a resident named Leo in Seilergraben, he visits the house 'frequently, twenty times or more', finally succeeding in meeting Leo 'the day before yesterday' (p. 63). The path H.H. is required to take in following Leo to appear before the assembled officials and the High Throne is a labyrinthine route, with multiple detours and two stops for Leo to pray; it is a walk that takes all morning but which 'could easily have been done in a quarter of an hour' (p. 84). Here geography seems to intrude a little more overtly, with the mention not only of a church (or two churches: the narrative is unclear on this point) and the Town Hall. But these are the only two landmarks, in an entire morning of walking, that H.H. notices or considers worth mentioning. The building for the confession is described as immense, with passages, stairs and antechambers; it looks like 'an extended Council building or a museum' (p. 84).

Features of physical geography are described with just sufficient detail to provide the appropriate *symbolic* effect. The maze-like journey taken in the morning symbolizes the confusion H.H. is experiencing (to which he admits at one point: p. 84), but the path, while constructed through a series of zigzags, is a path all the same. His arrival at his physical destination is, symbolically, an arrival at the moment of truth in fulfilling the destiny to which he refers at the very beginning of the book ('It was my destiny to join in a great experience': p. 3). In reaching the imposing, eerily silent museum-like building, he is approaching what he regards as a defining moment in his development as a human being. Before beginning the long morning walk with Leo, H.H. says to himself:

The League had summoned me, I was awaited by the High Throne, everything was at stake for me; the whole of my future life would be decided, the whole of my past life would now either retain or completely lose its meaning—I trembled with expectation, pleasure, anxiety and suppressed fear. (pp. 83-84)

With his arrival at the building everything looms large: the immensity of the physical structure is matched by the enormity of the occasion for H.H. in his journey. This sense of importance is heightened by the number of people who fill the hall and by the characters H.H. identifies in the crowd. He sees, for example, 'the ferryman Vasudeva' (p. 87), the significance of which becomes clear if one has read *Siddhartha* (Hesse, 2000b). Vasudeva in that novel is a man of great wisdom and quiet inner strength from whom Siddhartha learns a great deal. To have Vasudeva sitting now among those who will look on and judge him places tremendous moral pressure on H.H., who is perhaps more obviously *Hermann Hesse* at this point than at any other point in the novel.

At the head of the assembly is Leo, who can now finally be revealed as President of the League. Entering in a robe sparkling with gold, Leo climbs through rows of officials to sit upon a Throne 'like a Pope' (p. 98). H.H. becomes aware that he has lost his League ring, and, more regretfully still, realizes that he had not missed it until that day. Leo begins to speak and after a series of pronouncements and questions, declares that H.H. has been acquitted and is now able to begin his second novitiate. With this, he returns the ring H.H. long believed had been lost. H.H. experiences further remorse when he realizes he has forgotten the four basic precepts of the vow symbolized by the four stones on the ring. He feels the words are still within him, but he cannot bring them to the surface: 'I had forgotten the

wording. I had forgotten the rules; for many years I had not repeated them, for many years I had not observed them and held them sacred—and yet I had considered myself a loyal League brother’ (p. 107). Filled with ‘dismay and deep shame’, H.H. is then advised by Leo that if he wishes to enter the ranks of the League officials he will have to pass a test of faith and obedience.

This process is not straightforward, for H.H. is at first unable to accept the challenges issued to him by Leo. He is asked whether he is willing to tame a wild dog as a test of his faith, and, recoiling in horror, says ‘No, I could not do it’ (p. 108). The Speaker then asks H.H. whether he is prepared to burn the League’s archives on command, and proceeds to demonstrate what is required by burning a portion of them before H.H.’s eyes. Again H.H.’s reaction is one of horror and again he refuses. It is only at this point that he realizes each succeeding task will require greater faith, and in response to the third request—that he consult the archives about himself—he finally accepts. This is the beginning of the culminating moment in the novel: the point at which H.H. *faces himself*, full of trepidation, in a manner that has been impossible for all the years in his existential wilderness away from the League. Fearful but also curious, he is drawn to one poorly filed memorandum standing out from the others. On this he finds just two words: ‘Morbio Inferiore’. In these two words, H.H. finds the key to his crisis and his redemption. It was in Morbio Gorge that Leo had apparently disappeared from H.H.’s group of the League, after which the group quickly fell apart. H.H. discovers alternative accounts of the events of that time from two other members of the disbanded group, both of whom interpret the situation rather differently.

Unable to wait any longer, H.H. finally locates the section of the archives with his own name. He finds nothing written; instead, there is a figure, old and worn, made from wood or wax. The figure is really two figures attached by a common back. At first disappointed, H.H. notices a candlestick fixed to the wall by the two-part figure. Lighting the candle, the double figure becomes brightly illuminated and then, slowly, H.H. comes to perceive what this is intended to represent:

It represented a figure which was myself, and this likeness of myself was unpleasantly weak and half-real; it had blurred features, and in its whole expression there was something unstable, weak, dying or wishing to die, and looked rather like a piece of sculpture which could be called “Transitoriness” or “Decay”, or something similar. (p. 117).

At the same time, the other figure joined to this one ‘was strong in color and form’. H.H. begins to realize this other figure resembles Leo and at this point discovers a second candle on the wall. In lighting this, his revelation becomes complete:

I now saw the double figure representing Leo and myself, not only becoming clearer and each image more alike, but I also saw that the surface of the figures was transparent and that one could look inside as one can look through the glass of a bottle or vase. Inside the figures I saw something moving, slowly, extremely slowly, in the same way that a snake moves which has fallen asleep. Something was taking place there, something like a very slow, smooth but continuous flowing or melting; indeed, something melted or poured across from my image to that of Leo’s. I perceived that my image was in the process of adding to and flowing into Leo’s, nourishing and strengthening it. It seemed that, in time, all the substance from one image would flow into the other and only one would remain: Leo. He must grow, I must disappear. (pp. 117-118)

### Esoteric Connections

Hesse’s apparent resolution of H.H.’s crisis warrants careful contemplation. H.H. himself recognizes something deeply symbolic at work in the construction of the two figures, and Hermann Hesse as author invites us to take this further. What is it that is slowly flowing from one half of the figure to the

other? The most obvious answer is that it is ‘the self’—but what *kind* of self does Hesse have in mind here? The comparison with a snake moving is of interest given the title of the book, for the image of a snake coiled upwards is an Eastern symbol for the ‘secret’ of kundalini—the form of energy believed by Hindu mystics to be present, even if only in latent form, in all human beings. And in fact kundalini is mentioned early in the book. Near the beginning of the first chapter H.H. recalls that different members of the League had set a range of goals for themselves—goals, he says, he respected but could not understand (p. 9). One member had set himself the task of ‘capturing a certain snake to which he attributed magical powers and which he called Kundalini’ (p. 10). Kundalini awakenings, as understood in some mystical traditions, can be sudden and dramatic (see, for example, Krishna, 1996), or they can occur in more gradual and controlled ways.

Kundalini energy can be aroused by meditation and other forms of spiritual practice, or it can be awakened with little warning by traumatic events. H.H.’s experience in *The Journey to the East* seems to combine both elements. On the one hand, his trial in front of Leo and the other League officials constitutes a moment of great drama in his life. This final part of the book releases, climatically, a certain tension that has been building throughout the novel. On the other hand, his own reflections in the closing moments of the narrative suggest he is just beginning a more gradual process of development. Having confessed his ‘sins’, more to himself than to anyone else, he is ready to face himself and the tasks that lie ahead.

Yet, his own answer to the problem of facing himself is to see the self he is confronting as the poorer complement to Leo. Leo is H.H.’s *higher* self, and he expects himself to dissolve into this. ‘I must disappear’, he says, begging the question of who the ‘I’ is—and indeed, of who or what *Leo* is meant to be. Addressing the question of who Leo might be is arguably one of the keys to understanding not merely H.H. but the purpose of the novel as a whole. Hesse seems to me to provide us with at least two possibilities here. On the one hand, Leo appears to exist in the novel as a flesh and blood human being. H.H. recounts his (Leo’s) work as a servant and bag carrier in earlier years and he meets up with him again later in life. But Leo can also be conceived as something more than this. Reference has already been made to the dream-like quality of the book’s lengthy first chapter. It is possible, however, to see the *entire novel* as resembling a kind of dream. The movement between ‘fiction’ and ‘fact’, the mixing of past with present, the flitting about one from one place to another: all of this is consistent with conscious experience in dreams.

There are more clues that lend weight to this interpretation, and suggest, moreover, a likeness to a particular type of dream. As has been noted, when H.H. is taken into the museum-like building where his trial is to be held and his confession is to be made, he eventually arrives at the League archives: these are so vast they stretch for ‘many hundreds of yards’ (p. 85). ‘It seemed to me’, H.H. says, ‘as if the whole world, including the starry heavens, was governed or at least recorded and observed from there’ (p. 85). When these ‘immense treasure-chambers’ (p. 89) are placed at H.H.’s disposal for his work in writing a history of the journey undertaken by his group of Journeyers to the East, he is filled with hope that he will finally be able to complete his task—a task he now regards as greater and more worthwhile than ever. He quickly realizes, however, that the work he had completed to date will be worthless and resolves to begin afresh.

These ‘inexhaustible archives’ (p. 90) bear a resemblance to the idea of ‘Akashic records’ embraced by some esoteric traditions. Such records are said to hold the entire store of human knowledge—to be a repository not only of all recorded information but of all human events and thoughts. Among the more well known adherents to this notion are theosophists, who, as it happens, are mentioned in the novel (p. 53). Rudolf Steiner, who committed himself to theosophy for a period before going on to found his own, related, philosophical system of anthroposophy, also subscribed to the idea that such records exist and can be accessed by initiates with knowledge of higher worlds (cf. Steiner, 1994a, 1994b, 1997). The event that prompted Steiner’s break with theosophy was the anointing of Jiddu Krishnamurti, then only a boy, by Charles Leadbeater as a future educational and spiritual leader. Leadbeater was a key figure in the Theosophical Society at the time and, together with

Annie Besant, played an important role in shaping the young Krishnamurti's upbringing in his teenage years. Krishnamurti himself went on to break with the new order founded by the theosophists (the Order of the Star of the East), developing his own comprehensive approach to philosophical and educational questions. (On Krishnamurti's significance for education, see Thapan, 2001.) The views of theosophists are not endorsed in *The Journey to the East* or in Hesse's other novels, but it is significant that they feature at all. (Hesse's novel *Gertrude* also includes reference to theosophy: see Hesse, 1974.) Hesse found something worth considering in theosophical ideas, even if a theosophical worldview was ultimately not for him.

H.H.'s 'dream' is very much like what is known as a *lucid* dream, where the dreamer becomes aware that he or she is dreaming and, as a result of this, gains some control over the events in the dream (see LaBerge, 1985; LaBerge and DeGracia, 2000; LaBerge and Rheingold, 1990; Purcell, Mullington, Moffit, Hoffmann and Pigeau, 1986). Only expert lucid dreamers can retain such control for sustained periods of time (although the sense of time too can become distorted within the dream); there is sometimes a slipping in and out of different states of conscious control and a definite effort often needs to be made to retain the memory of the dream. H.H.'s experience in the novel conforms to this pattern, with varying degrees of clarity and control throughout. Lucid dreams, in some esoteric traditions, provide (for those who are at the appropriate level in their path of development) one means through which to access the Akashic records. H.H. accesses the archives of the League with apparent full awareness of what he is doing, and yet he has already warned readers of the unreliability of his memory and of his despair. He has just undergone an emotionally exhausting confession and, as the novel closes, feels 'overcome by an infinite weariness and desire to sleep' (p. 118). This completes the metaphor. Symbolically, H.H. is *already* asleep. (The Russian mystic Gurdjieff argued that we exist in a perpetual state of sleep in our ordinary lives, from which we can only awaken with systematic 'work'. See Smoley and Kinney, 1999.) H.H. recalls the past in only hazy detail. As the narrative progresses, he has moments of greater lucidity (including his conversations with Lukas and his contemplation of the double-sided figure in the archives). Through these lucid moments he seeks to gain greater knowledge of himself and the world. But these moments do not last for long and soon sleep is needed again.

### **Educational Possibilities**

The point of the analysis thus far is not to suggest that *The Journey to the East* should be conceived as *literally* a lucid dream (or a series of such dreams). Rather, what matters is that H.H.'s experience is analogous to this, and this has important implications for an educational reading of the book. To understand why this is so, brief attention needs to be paid to Hesse's final novel, *The Glass Bead Game* (Hesse, 2000a). *The Glass Bead Game* centers on the life of Joseph Knecht, who grows up in Castalia, an intellectual community of the future. The centerpiece of Castalian life is the Glass Bead Game, a kind of universal language, a means for reproducing the content and values of a culture, and for linking different arts and disciplines. Knecht rises through the elite Castalian schooling system and becomes an expert in the Glass Bead Game, eventually reaching the exalted position of Magister Ludi (Master of the Game). Along the way, however, Knecht, in part through his dialogical relationships with two other characters (Plinio Designori and Father Jacobus), develops an increasingly critical view of the Castalian way of life and decides to resign his prestigious position as Magister Ludi in favour of a quiet life as a private tutor.

Several features of *The Glass Bead Game* are of interest here. The idea of gaining access to vast archives of knowledge, introduced near the end of *The Journey to the East*, is extended and reworked in *The Glass Bead Game*. The latter novel posits the idea of *unlimited* access to knowledge, and in this sense has an even closer connection than *The Journey to the East* with the esoteric concept of Akashic records. Theoretically, the narrator informs us, the Game is capable of reproducing the 'entire intellectual



content of the universe' (p. 7). While the origins of the Glass Bead Game date back thousands of years, with antecedents in both the East and the West, the Game in its contemporary form arose from the ruins of the Feuilleton Age. The Feuilleton Age was *Hesse's* age: the first half of the twentieth century, with its World Wars and bourgeois individualism (Wilde, 1999). As Antosik (1978) points out, Hesse felt disgust at the changes occurring during this period and sought to provide an alternative way of thinking about the meaning and purpose of human life. He turned to the writers and sages of earlier ages for inspiration in seeking a new direction for human growth and understanding. *The Journey to the East*, with its League of journeyers, is consistent with this. *The Glass Bead Game*, while taking the vision of an alternative community further, also challenges some of the assumptions underpinning *The Journey to the East*.

The emphasis in the fictional world of Castalia, it is worth noting, is on knowledge and works of art and culture that have *already been created*. Castalians do not devote themselves principally to the development of *new* knowledge and art. Their goal is to 'play' in a sophisticated way with what is already there, and through this to engender a certain mode of being. In seeking this, the meditative element of the Game is crucial. Contemplation, the narrator tells us, was the final element introduced to the Glass Bead Game, and it allowed participants to concentrate in a deeper way on the meaning and significance of the symbols employed. Yet, neither contemplation nor any of the other practices associated with the Glass Bead Game is sufficient to lead all participants on to the form of critical, questioning understanding Hesse came, in the later part of his life, to see as necessary for human beings. Meditation in Castalia serves, for most, more as a kind of therapy—a self-administered 'pill' to be taken as a calming influence in times of potential distress (Durrani, 1982). What is lacking, Hesse wants to show us, is a probing, searching, restless attempt to *know*—a lifelong, 'everything at stake' effort to develop a deeper, more robust understanding of oneself and one's society. H.H. begins this journey, but comes to believe, in a manner at odds with Hesse's orientation to life, that the answer lies in faithful obedience to the dictates of Leo and the League. Neither his dream-like recollections of his days with his group of Journeyers to the East nor his revelation in the archives of the League reach the form of critical understanding displayed by the mature Joseph Knecht in *The Glass Bead Game*.

Knecht, while in many ways a model Castalian, nevertheless has doubts and questions that demand investigation. Plinio Designori, an outsider who spends part of his youth being educated in Castalia, helps in pushing Knecht to reconsider his comfortable assumptions about the superiority of the Castalian way of life. The challenge Joseph receives in his youthful debates with Plinio finds further stimulation when he is sent to a Benedictine monastery in Mariafels, also outside Castalia. There, Knecht forms an intellectual friendship, based on lengthy philosophical discussions, with one of the monastery's senior figures, Father Jacobus. Father Jacobus teaches Knecht the value of history and helps him to place Castalia and the Glass Bead Game in a broader social context. Knecht's doubts about Castalia remain, even while meeting, in exemplary fashion, his obligations as Magister Ludi. Knecht comes to see education as fundamentally important and regards Castalia's inability to look outwards, to establish contact and build understanding with outsiders through teaching, as one of its most fatal flaws. Knecht wants not only to teach but to *learn* from those who have had different life experiences from his own. Knecht comes to realize that Castalia, by not placing proper value on education, has already begun to decay and will one day disappear.

H.H. believes he has found what is necessary for his completion in the person and figure of Leo, but his solution lacks the appreciation of education—its value and significance for human life—that is evident in the mature Joseph Knecht. The philosophy of the Brazilian educationist Paulo Freire is helpful in elaborating on these ideas. Detailed analyses of Hesse's work in the light of Freirean theory can be found elsewhere (Roberts, 2007, 2009/in press); there is space here for brief comments only. 'Education', for Freire, is intimately connected with the process of humanization. While humanization is, Freire believes, a universal ethical ideal, different people pursue this ideal in different ways depending on their circumstances. Education as a humanizing process blends rational, emotional and active elements. Freire identifies a number of dispositions characteristic of those engaged in humanizing

education. These include curiosity, openness, tolerance, humility, an investigative spirit, and a willingness to question. Freire also emphasises the importance of love and hope in education. We must, he maintains, come to love the process of seeking to know and to learn, and those who teach need to care deeply for the students with whom they work. Hope is crucial, even in times of despair; in fact, this is when it matters most. For no matter how difficult our circumstances may be, there is, from a Freirean perspective, always hope that our situation could be otherwise. Education, for Freire, is a process of both *knowing* and *being*. As conscious beings, Freire points out, we have the capacity to reflect critically on reality. We can, on the basis of this reflection, *change* the world—and ourselves. This entails not abstract, isolated, individual cognition, but the synthesis of reflection with action in praxis. The process of education is practical as well as intellectual, and social rather than individualistic. We can never, Freire stresses, know, learn or be alone; we are beings of communication and dialogue is fundamental for our growth and development, through education, as human beings. Dialogue in Freirean theory is not mere idle conversation; rather, it has a definite structure and strong sense of direction and purpose. In seeking to educate ourselves, with others, we must, Freire believes, face the object of our study with a searching, probing, inquisitive attitude. We must be open to both being challenged and to challenging what we find through our educational efforts. Addressing educational problems demands that we place them in their broader historical, social and cultural contexts. Education is a profoundly unsettling process; it is meant to be uncomfortable, and it is necessarily lifelong. We can never, from a Freirean point of view, ‘rest easy’, assuming we know all that is worth knowing. We must learn to live with uncertainty; indeed, uncertainty should be celebrated as the basis from which investigation, knowing and education can proceed. There will always be more educational ‘work’ to do, and ongoing critical reflection will always be required. (See Freire, 1972, 1985, 1997, 1998a, 1998b, 2004; Freire and Shor, 1987; Horton and Freire, 1990.)

H.H. exhibits some of the characteristics described by Freire as part of the educational process. He is curious to know more about the League and, after meeting with Lukas, he adopts an investigative posture in seeking out Leo. In his confession, he has to humble himself in front of the assembled group of League members. His discovery of the little double-sided figure prompts a certain kind of self-reflection, but there are limits to this. In his desire to become more like Leo, he loses sight of his own capacity for humanizing praxis. The process of reflection he engages in following his confession lacks the probing, critical depth Freire sees as necessary for a full educational life. H.H. fails to make the most of the opportunity for extended dialogue with Lukas, and his encounter with Leo in the ritual of confession has an anti-dialogical character. Leo does not adopt an aggressively arrogant stance in his relationship with H.H., but in the confession episode he sits like a king on a throne and, in effect, ‘talks down’ to his fellow journeyer. H.H. reaches conclusions about himself too quickly in examining the little figure. He does not test his views in the dialogical company of others, and he does not examine the ritual of his confession critically. He is respectful of Leo, as Freire believes we should be when seeking to learn with others, but he fails to ask searching questions of him. He is challenged by Leo, but, given the intimidating nature of the ritual he undergoes, does not have the confidence or the means to issue a similar challenge of his own. Leo is almost idolized. He is set up as a kind of guru, something Freire always resisted (see Roberts, 2000). The confession is a deeply emotional process for H.H., as Freire says education should be, but the rational element of an educational process cannot be ignored. H.H. dampens this in favour of commitment through faith and humbles himself in front of the assembled crowd. He lets go of his critical capacities and gives himself over to the power of the ritual and the commanding presence of Leo. This being the case, the potential of the confession to become a humanizing educational process (in Freirean terms) is reduced.

Knecht in *The Glass Bead Game* is much closer the educational ideal advanced by Freire. Knecht is a restless being, seeking throughout his life to always know more. While humble and open-minded, he is not a passive being. He has a sharp, critical consciousness of himself and his social surroundings. He is not satisfied with the answers provided by the Castalian authorities, and asks difficult questions of the Masters, both as a student and as Magister Ludi. He develops strong dialogical relationships with

Father Jacobus and Plinio Designori, and continues to learn from these relationships until near his death. He sees education very much as a lifelong process, giving up the privileges of his position and everything he has known to pursue further learning, to experience more of what life has to offer, and to contribute to the well being of others in new ways. He adopts a critical but balanced and fair minded view of Castalia. He is an emotional being, caring for his colleagues and for those he teaches, but he does not ‘switch off’ his rational faculties in doing so. He is able to consider himself and others in the light of broader social, cultural and historical changes. He is not without his flaws, but is willing to continue reflecting and working with others in seeking self-understanding and transformation. Knecht’s attempt to *know* is also a striving to *be*—to become more fully human, realising the potential he believes has been stifled in Castalia. Within the protected confines of Castalia, he has achieved a great deal, but he realizes his journey is incomplete. He is comfortable with the discomfort posed by his quest for education and self-knowledge, and embraces his somewhat uncertain future with vigor and enthusiasm.

The expansive archives are open to H.H., but his ability to make something of this vast store of knowledge will be limited by his as yet immature and still egotistical understanding of himself. He need not ‘throw Leo overboard’ (as Lukas advises him to do), but it will be necessary for him to appreciate that uncritical acceptance of Leo as a model for his own development will provide at best only a partial knowledge of himself and the meaning of the League. As noted above, H.H. relies too heavily on faith—faith in Leo as a kind of father figure (Tusken, 1992) and in the goals and methods of the League—and abandons reason too quickly. Faith, he indicates earlier in his narrative, should have primacy over reason and ‘so-called reality’ (Hesse, 1956, p. 52). H.H.’s dialogue with Lukas provides a warning about the dangers of acquiescence to Leo, but H.H. does not heed this. At the end of the novel, H.H. believes, or implies that he believes, he has solved the riddle of his existence. This moment of apparent clarity is, however, but a step along the way in his ongoing path of development. There is still a dream-like quality to his sense of purpose and his conception of himself relative to others. So, like a lucid dream, H.H. will slip in and out of focus, and can—contrary to his implied expectations—look forward to a long, complicated and difficult path in his journey to the mythical ‘East’.

There has been much debate over the meaning of the ‘East’ in *The Journey to the East*, but rather less attention has been paid to the other key word in the title. One of the keys to understanding this enigmatic novel, I think, lies in the word ‘journey’. The fact that it is a journey and not, for example, an arrival, is itself of significance—especially from an educational point of view. For the idea of a journey suggests the possibility of *learning*—and in this case, of *lifelong* learning. For Hesse, this journey never ends. We never quite reach the point at which we can declare, comfortably and permanently, ‘I am now home; there is nothing more for me to do’. Hesse himself, even while living in self-imposed relative seclusion, never believed he reached this point and remained a restless being until his death. This was not contrary to his mature conception of spiritual fulfillment and self-understanding but, as *The Glass Bead Game* shows, utterly consistent with it. It will, Hesse believed, *always* be necessary to keep reflecting and learning, and doubts, questions and critique are fundamentally important in this educational process.

## Conclusion

This paper has suggested that *The Journey to the East* depicts the inner striving of not just H.H. but Hermann Hesse as well. By the time *The Glass Bead Game* had been published, however, Hesse had traveled some way from the position occupied by H.H. in *The Journey to the East*. *The Glass Bead Game* remains an *ideal*; one closely connected with the opening up of vast stores of knowledge for the betterment of humankind. But the central character in *The Glass Bead Game*, Joseph Knecht, comes to see that limiting oneself to ‘playing’ with knowledge, no matter how expansive the archives may be, will leave one in a dream-like state, disconnected from the messy, complex, vital realities and struggles of

everyday life. H.H. lacks a *critical* understanding of himself, Leo and the League, in part because he has failed to appreciate the importance of dialogue and education in the quest for human fulfillment. *The Glass Bead Game* thus provides an effective critique of *The Journey to the East* and holds some important lessons for all educationists. We have much to learn from H.H., from Knecht and from Hermann Hesse himself as we continue on our own educational journeys, East and West.

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