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Relevance of Hermann Hesse: A systematic review of different perspectives

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Abstract

During the first decades of the twentieth century, many European intellectuals were developing negative responses to modernity. Hermann Hesse was aware of the moral and social difficulties plaguing Europe at that time and dealt with these problems in his writing. Despite being a German author, he is well-read even today, and his characters' quests and journeys of self-discovery captivate young people worldwide. His literary world, comprised of novels, poems, and autobiographical reflections, is deeper and bigger than what has been discovered. This paper systematically analyses 100 studies on Hesse and his works from journals indexed in the Web of Science. This study aims to bring out the relevance of Hesse by analysing the historiography of the studies on Hesse's works and interrogating the significance of different perspectives on him which will open doors for future studies in health humanities and memory studies.

Keywords: German literature, Hermann Hesse, health humanities, memory studies

Introduction

Hermann Hesse German novelist and poet who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1946, is well-read worldwide. Even today, his characters' worldwide quests and journeys of self-discovery captivate young people. His literary world, which is comprised of novels, poems, and autobiographical reflections, is deeper and bigger than has yet been discovered. During the first decades of the twentieth century, many European intellectuals were developing negative responses to modernity and to what they perceived as the loss of human civilization against the backdrop of fascism and the devastation of two world wars. These intellectuals frequently resorted to religion, art, or philosophy for alternatives to contemporary human problems. Hermann Hesse was acutely aware of the moral and social difficulties plaguing Europe at the time of his writing. Hesse embraced art as a form of rehabilitation, protest, and dreaming. Several evolving polar themes show this growth, including the burgher and the artist, the actual and the ideal, sensuality and spirituality, time and timelessness, multiplicity and oneness, and aestheticism and social commitment. Hesse was considerably more moved by a sensitive reader's open-hearted and unprejudiced reaction to literature than he was by a critic's celebrations, however clever they may have been ^[1]. This review paper aims to analyse the historiography of the studies on Hermann Hesse his works and interrogate the significance of different perspectives on him, which will open doors for future studies.

Materials and Methods

This paper analyses 100 studies on Hermann Hesse and his works taken from the journals indexed in the Web of Science. Many studies are published in different languages, especially in German, however, this analysis limits itself to works published in English. The following Flow Chart explains this in detail:

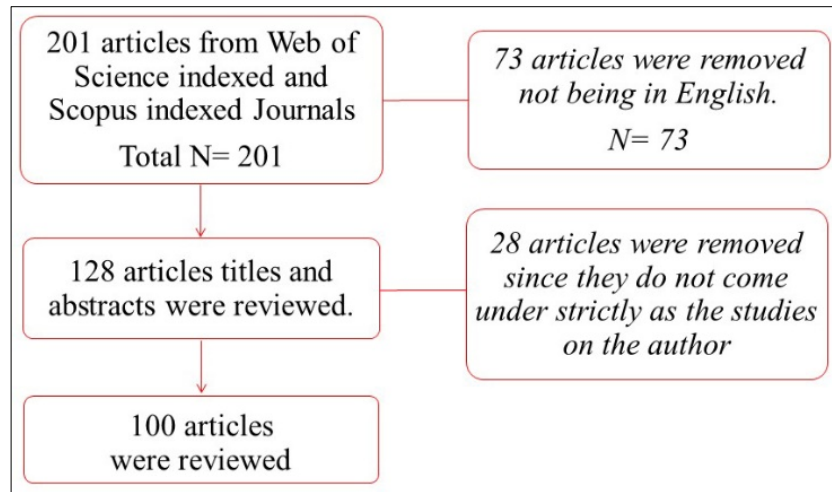


Fig 1: Flow Chart

These studies that are done on Hermann Hesse and his works can be labelled into 8 different categories. Biographical and relevant studies clubbed with the influence of other literature; especially Russian literature are considered as one category. Educational studies are the second category whereas philosophical studies make the third category.

This category includes studies from the perspective of Western, Eastern, and political philosophy. The fourth category contains psychological readings and the fifth one would be studies based on the theme of relationship. The sixth category includes studies focusing on religious themes, especially the Christian religious themes in the works of Hesse.

The seventh category deals with the studies that read Hesse from a romanticist or modernist perspective. The Last category deals with the vital theme of self-realization.

These 100 articles' year of publication span from 1948 to 2022 and these are divided into two categories based on the year 2002, the 125th year of Hesse's Birth, and the 40th year of Hesse's death. Besides, the place of publications falls under 14 countries in four continents and one trans-continental country, Russia. Using Microsoft Excel 2010 the data is processed and analysed. A detailed discussion of these studies is given where the studies are arranged into 8 categories.

Results and Discussion

The 100 articles are published from 14 countries which shows the readership of Hesse. The United States and the UK published articles consistently from 1948 to 2022. Of 100 articles, based on place of publication, 52 articles come from the North American continent, 37 articles are published from the European continent, 6 are from the Asian continent, 3 are from the South American continent and 2 from Russia which is considered to be a trans-continental country. Of the 52 articles those are published from the North American continent, 47 are from the United States, and the rest 5 from Canada. Of 37 articles published from the European continent, 17 are from the United Kingdom. These 100 articles are published by 53 different publishers.

Concerning the distribution of the articles according to the theme of Publication as per the results shown in Figure- 2 below, 17% of the published articles are in the category of the biographical detail, relevance, and influence of Hesse, 9% read Hesse from an educational perspective, 23% reads from a philosophical perspective, 8% studies deal with the Psychological Reading, 6% of articles is on the theme of Relationships in different spheres, 11% of studies come under religious reading, 16% read Hesse either from Romanticist or Modernist perspective, and 10% of articles explore the theme of Self-realisation and its various possibilities.

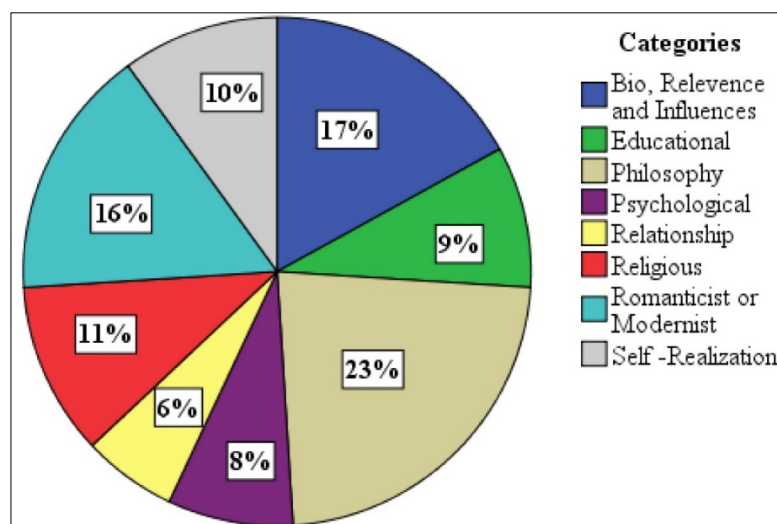


Fig 2: Distribution of Articles

In a detailed analysis, 7 articles from the first category deal with the biographical details, 5 articles deal with the relevance of Hesse and the rest 5 deal with the influence of other literature on Hesse. In seven biographical studies, the first one brings out the biographical details of Hesse by exploring the relationship between Hesse and his age ^[2]. Five of them speak about the biography of Hesse connecting his life with his works. These three are from Mileck in which he analyses the three different stages of his writings through which details about Hesse's life ^[3], bio-bibliographical sketch ^[4], and the close connection between Hesse's life and his art ^[1]. Kuschel ^[5] explores the author's experiences in life and how they affected his writing rather than explicitly explaining Hesse's biography whereas Schoening ^[6] looks at how the author's life and work were related in terms of how they were mirrored in the text's properties. Tusken's ^[7] study highlights Hesse's Pietism ancestry, his unhappy childhood, his trying formative years at school, his essential seclusion, and calls attention to some of Hesse's most notable stylistic elements.

Among the five articles speak about the relevance of Hesse, Ziolkowski's ^[8] study speaks about the relevance of Hesse related to youth, particularly among young scholars and Dornheim's ^[9] research shows the popularity and reception of Hesse's work in Argentina especially among the youth. Cardinal's ^[10] study explains how the term 'Steppenwolf' from Hesse, has continued to be used in fiction, on the internet, and even in the marketplace, bringing out Hesse's relevance. Briët *et al.* ^[11] bring out the possibilities of Hesse's narratives to compare with the present situation and shows the relevance of his narratives in the context of the treatment of his sciatica.

The latest study by Moser ^[12] speaks about the relevance of exploring the colourful legacy and ongoing effect of the novel, *Siddhartha*. Five studies focus on the relationship between Hesse and other literary traditions especially Russian and French literature with Hesse. Two of these studies consider Hesse as a critical reader of all the literature and conclude that his critical essays reveal Hesse's understanding of the craft of fiction ^[13, 14], and rest three speak about Hesse's passion for Russian literature especially for Fyodor Dostoevsky ^[15-17].

Nine of the studies read Hesse from an educational perspective. All of them except one focus on the novel, *The Glass Bead Game* to explore the educational elements in Hesse from different angles such as a visual language capable of interdisciplinary perfection ^[18], contemporary curriculum discourse, and discusses the rise of a new orthodoxy through engaging in the politics of silence and guilt ^[19], the unified university system is examined in terms of a politics centred on cybernetic control ^[20], the institutional crisis in education ^[21], and to comprehend how to institutionalise teaching strategies that promote independent thought ^[22].

Of the nine articles, four are from Peter Roberts. Three of them are the studies based on the novel, *The Glass Bead Game* which focuses on the value of education ^[23], greater pedagogical relevance and significance of the educational process ^[24], and the relationship between contemplation and conscientization ^[25]. One study based on *The Journey to the East* explores the value of education, enquiry, and criticism in self-development ^[26].

Out of 100 articles, 23 are readings from a philosophical perspective of which 9 are searching with the background of

Western philosophy whereas 5 are with Eastern philosophy and 5 speak about the holistic philosophical background ^[27], Western intellectual history's striking similarities to Eastern religious doctrine ^[28], placing classical Indian tradition materials along a continuum that runs from Romantic tradition to Existentialistic attitude ^[29], Universalist philosophical claims are refuted by Hesse ^[30], and universal philosophy from the perspective of current global uncertainty ^[31]. The rest 4 articles read Hesse from the perspective of political philosophy such as Hesse's politics of detachment ^[32] and Hesse's retreat into the aesthetic as fundamentally a political action ^[33], Hesse belongs to that unique school of anarchism ^[34], and Hesse's work in the context of the development of ecological ideals in Germany and abroad ^[35].

The 9 articles that read Hesse from the background of Western philosophy are based either on the different philosophers or on philosophical schools. One focuses on existentialist philosophy as such ^[36] and the other on the theme of mescalinated from existentialism ^[37]. Three of the studies do the Nietzschean reading of the Hesse in which Reichert's ^[38] study focuses on Nietzschean nihilism, Punsly ^[39] reads Hesse with Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, and Koza's (40) study places Hesse with reference to Kant, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche. Hesse is read in the backdrop of the Hegelian concept of an Absolute Spirit by Krapp ^[41]. Zimmermann & Wiedenmann's ^[42] study reads Hesse in the context of the philosophy of information and multiple epistemic and sociological ramifications. Wolfendale ^[43] explores the last novel *The Glass Bead Game* as profoundly philosophical, explicitly referencing the canon of contemporary European philosophy, subtly encoding its themes in institutions and characters, and symbolically crystallising their tensions into a single conceptual innovation, which stands for a universal language and symbol of intellectual synthesis. Desimoni's ^[44] study contrasts Hesse's thoughts with those of Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre to clarify them.

5 studies from the perspective of Eastern philosophy generally concentrate on analysing three works of Hesse such as *Siddhartha*, *The Journey to the East*, and *The Glass Bead Game*. In these, one article refers to Eastern philosophy in general. It compares *The Journey to the East* and *The Glass Bead Game* and discusses the earlier one as a prelude to the latter one and as a failure to achieve it. *The Glass Bead Game's* composition brought the premise and plan for the travel to the East to fruition ^[45]. Three articles focus on Indian philosophy in particular ^[46-48]. *Siddhartha* by Hermann Hesse is largely autobiographical and has a lengthy and fascinating background, according to Malhaner ^[46]. Carnahan ^[47] interprets Hesse's works using the Vedanta philosophy of India. Baumann's ^[48] study demonstrates how Hesse's fundamental beliefs and his artistic creations are greatly influenced by the ways of Indian thought and that they were just as significant to him as Christianity and Taoism. Later study reads the influence of Laozi and Zhuangzi's Taoist philosophy on Hesse ^[49].

8 studies deal with the Psychological Reading of Hesse's work. Out of these 5 of them read Hesse from Jungian psychology. In these, Vilella's ^[50] study focuses on Jungian psychology generally and Danylova ^[51] reads Hesse's novel *Steppenwolf* from a Jungian process of individuation. The other two focus on different aspects of Jungian psychology. Maier ^[52] examines the application of Jungian symbols and

archetypes in Hermann Hesse's works in his study. The gender roles and archetypes of anima and animus that can be seen in the characters of Hermann Hesse's novels are the focus of Rodchyn's [53] study. Through a psycho-critical examination, Breugelmans' [54] study reveals how this influence affected key literary elements in these works, independent of Hesse's conscious reactions to his meetings with Freud and Jung. Based on Lacanian psychoanalysis, philosophy, and a more general structuralist understanding, Gullatz owns two studies one with the help of Lacanian psychoanalysis in general [55] and another using the Lacanian idea of the 'gaze' as opposed to the 'eye' [56]. Johansson's [57] article deals with Hesse from an Ovidian, a Freudian, and a neo-Platonic perspective. 6 articles are on the theme of Relationships in different spheres. Naumann's [58] study argues that Hesse believed the elimination of the individualistic artist was necessary for both the preservation of heritage and the intellectual needs of society in contrast to Hofmannsthal. Taylor Jr [59] studies the novels of Hesse and brings out the theme of friendship and its rise, development, and conflicts. Whereas Tusken [60] studies the masculine-feminine interplay in the novels of Hermann Hesse, especially in *Demian* and the following novels. Hesse's protagonist's inability to have a meaningful and lasting relationship is brought forth by Rauch-Rapaport [61]. The importance of matriarchal mythology in Hesse's *Narziss und Goldmund* is studied by Lubich [62]. Whereas von Seth [63] examines the intersections and connotations of queerness with otherness in Hermann Hesse's novels.

In 11 studies that come under religious reading, 7 articles explore Christian concepts. The concept of paradise; the Garden before the serpent enters is studied by Jehle [64]. Colby's [65] study notes how the Prodigal Son, or the Lost Son as Hesse is known to the Germans, corresponds to both his self-image and the images of his heroes. If one article presents Bertram's episode as an episode of good and evil [66], another one explains the theological and literary standpoint of Hesse and claims that Hesse emphasises self-realization and places a higher priority on the aesthetic and ethical facets of existence [67]. The idea of the resurrection of the body in the works of Hesse is studied by Davis [68]. The biblical motif of war between light and darkness is studied in his work by Knapp [69]. The Gnosis influence on Hesse's writings is exposed by another approach [70]. Four articles deal with the theme of the new world and are expressed in different ways such as the magic world of alternative community that would satisfy all of humanity's material and spiritual demands [71], the Utopian world [72], the new world modelled after a living organism [73], and the new kingdom that opens the door to a real utopia [74].

of 100 articles 16 articles are reading Hesse either from Romanticist or Modernist perspective. Among these four articles reads Hesse from a romanticist perspective where

one asserts that Hesse is a German romanticist [75]. Ziolkowski [76] brings out Hesse's transitional position whereas Freedman [77] reads Hesse as the final standard-bearer of romantic values at the age of mechanisation, and the fourth one explores the neo-romantic longings of Hesse and describes Hesse as a lonely romantic who universalizes these longing [78]. The other 12 articles read Hesse from a Modernist perspective and only one in these studies asserts Hesse to be modern in the truest meaning of the word [79], and others read Hesse with modernist themes. Two of the articles explore the theme of lonely outsiders and troubled youth [80, 81], and one deal with the issue of the evil, demonic elements of disorder and anarchy due to modern approaches that underlie music [82] and another deal with the theme of philosophical condemnation of the spiritual emptiness of modern existence [83]. Petropoulou's [84] study reads Hesse with the theme portrait of women and explains the individuation process of failure in modernity and modernist literature. Swales' [85] article compares Hesse's work with German high modernist works, von Stuckrad [86] reads Hesse as the dialectical answers are integral to the mission of European modernity rather than being anti-modern, and Zilcosky [87] considers Hesse as a teacher who talks us about more in-depth the problems of first globalisation, Modernism. The last three articles deal with the theme of a dual world and multiple conceptions [88], a reflection of modernism [89], and the transcendent liminality of modernist consciousness [90].

10 articles explore the theme of Self-realisation and its various possibilities in Hesse's novels. The search for 'being' that the protagonist goes through in the works of D.H. Lawrence and Hermann Hesse is examined by Farrer [91]. Rolfe's [92] study summarises how closely the hero's quest for fulfilment in each work resembles the establishment of a new kingdom. The protagonist's quest for authenticity as a path for self-retaliation is explored in Solbach's [93] work, and Kasavina's [94] study presents comprehension of the existential experience as a synthesis of life's emotions and their mental understanding, structuring, and connecting as another expression of self-realisation in Hesse. In his work, Shah [95] notes that Hesse, through *Siddhartha* Hesse teaches that religion facilitates many people in finding meaning in life, but it does not fill the role of careful contemplation. Another 5 studied on this theme explores the degree of universality that exists concerning the themes of self-alienation, death, and human identity [96], the identical routes to self-realization [97], the never-ending journey for self-realization [98], the process of self-becoming as the ultimate cure for both the individual and society [99] and dance as a concept of self-overcoming [100].

The following Fig.3 provides the Theme of Publication against the Year of Publication before and after 2002.

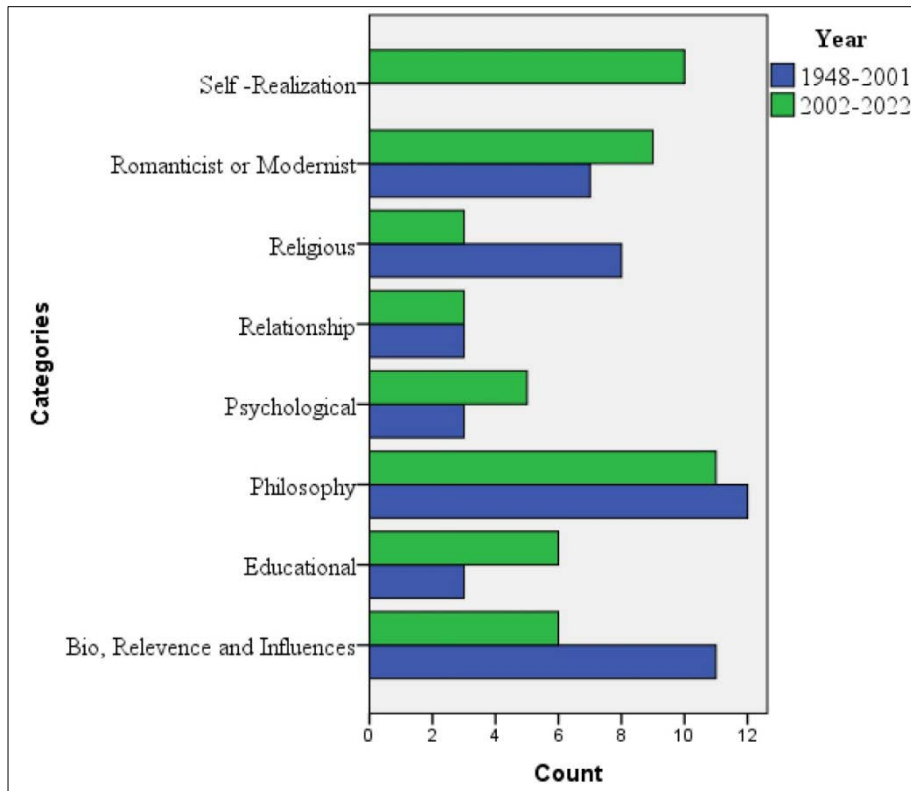


Fig 3: Articles Before and After 2002

The Fig.3 states that two themes lost their significance after 2002 that is biographical studies as well as religious reading on Hesse, instead educational reading, psychological reading, and, readings from the perspective of romanticism and modernism increased significantly. Interestingly the philosophical reading sustains consistently all through the years and has not lost its significance with sizable articles. Out of 100, 23 studies are philosophical readings. This in turn reveals the significant perspective to read Hesse. Another important change to be noted is the emergence of a new perspective after 2002 which is the theme of self-realization. Before 2002 there were no articles on the theme of self-realization whereas 10 studies came after 2002.

Conclusion

Consistent studies on Hesse from 1948 to today reveal the continued relevance of Hesse's Writings not only in Germany but around the globe. 2002 onwards one can find a renewed interest in his writings, especially focusing on the theme of self-realization, which shows the possibility of further research on Hesse from a different perspective is still possible. The continued tug of war on whether Hesse should be read from the romantic perspective of modernism is still relevant to understanding his works. Though the psychological experiences of Hesse and the friendship of C. G. Jung and Hesse are celebrated, the psychological reading of Hesse in the academic field is not that significant. The philosophical readings of Hesse are very significant and most in number. The continued presence of studies dealing with the philosophical readings of Hesse from the perspective of different philosophical schools reveals the multifaceted possibilities of reading Hesse. This analytical study suggests the possibility of reading Hesse's fictional world from the new perspectives of health humanities and memory studies.

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