

# ERNEST GAMES. THE POLITICAL DIMENSION IN HERMANN HESSE'S NOVEL *THE GLASS BEAD GAME*

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**Abstract:** *Hermann Hesse's life and work was connected to Romanian intellectuals and from such circumstances derives the research interest in this study. The Romanian perception of the author's literary and essayistic works has been branded by two distinct voices: the first being the dissemination of his work through translations and research by Romanian researchers, and the second being the academic examination of his oeuvre by researchers, that have Romanian origins. Within the Romanian borders the extent of the academic research of the author's work remains limited to a small circle of specialists, in comparison to the case of Thomas Mann. Nevertheless, the reception of his novel The Glass Bead Game in Romania is but one further reason to focus on his work within the academic debate on the literary motif of play/game. The following investigation will seek to establish which game is actually played in The Glass Bead Game, this being the fundamental question of this undertaking. The approach to the novel itself will be in an indirect manner, through the lens of a preliminary written text – The Political Introduction to The Glass Bead Game, which offers a reading perspective, that reveals the novel as an allegory of a political message and various power games. The Glass Bead Game explores and expounds on the utopian and safe playground of the academic province of Castalia, in which the writer tests and elaborates on themes regarding the balance of forces in a social and political hierarchy. In terms of game theory, the present study proposes a reading key based on Huizinga's book Homo Ludens.*

**Keywords:** Hermann Hesse in Romania, political game, second version of the preface to the *The Glass Bead Game*

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"If play cannot be directly referred to the categories of truth or goodness, can it be perhaps included in the realm of the aesthetic?" (Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 1949, 7)

## 1. Hermann Hesse in Romania

The reception of Hermann Hesse in Romania is shaped by a distinctive combination of biographical fascination, political censorship and the philosophical kinship to Romain Rolland's vision of *humanism*.

Due to the research purpose of this study, the chronological presentation of the publications and translations of Hermann Hesse's work will not get primary attention,<sup>1</sup> it is rather relevant to analyse the possible categories of dealing with the author in our country. The reception process is carried out by two different categories of public: the literary or cultural critics and the public in Romania, and the literary critics and readers with Romanian origins, who are active and live outside the national borders. The two categories are represented by two extraordinary personalities who also shaped the international research on Hermann Hesse's work.

The nationally bound category stands out through the personality of the Germanophone intellectual from Timișoara, professor and writer Rudolf Hollinger, who conducted an almost one-way correspondence with Hermann Hesse between 1957-1960. According to professor Mihaela Zaharia, who in 2023 edited this letter exchange in four languages<sup>2</sup>, Hollinger received from Hesse only one written line, in addition to numerous postcards and books. Hollinger's letters reveal his fascination for the work of the German writer, whereas the gifts from the German Writer stand for his appreciation of his reader-admirer. Hollinger makes different attempts to translate the poetry of Hermann Hesse, but the texts never see the light of print. Hollinger's efforts towards a broader reception of Hesse's works in Romania was followed by the late Germanist George Guțu and by Ioana Pârvulescu, both of whom provided deeply comprehensive analyses in the prefaced novels translated into Romanian.

Ioana Pârvulescu, Romanian writer and literary critic, offers a layered comparative approach in *Dilema* (1995), juxtaposing *Das Glasperlenspiel* with Kafka's *Der Prozess* and *Das Schloß*. She positions Hesse's magisterial protagonist Josef Knecht as a counter-image to Kafka's tragic subjects, identifying "Castalia" – a name which she reads as derivative from the Kafkian *Castel* – as a province of spirit and

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<sup>1</sup> Hermann Hesse has been already known to the Romanian public since the interwar period, through a number of mentions and biographical portraits. The largest one was published in *Revista Fundațiilor Regale* 1944 1/XI, where Petronela Negoșanu offers a well-documented description of Hermann Hesse's life and its importance for the understanding of his novels. Negoșanu asserts the stereotypical approach to his work, by presenting him as a traditional writer, which continues Jean Paul's preference for nature: „Scriitorul german de circulație europeană, Hermann Hesse, este ultimul cavaler din șirul glorios al romanticilor. El este pe linia lui Jean Paul, de care îl leagă iubirea de natură, și de neliniștile inimii [...] Hermann Hesse nu iubește lucrările de mare format (sic!) [...] Mai mult ca niciunul dintre poeții contemporani, Hermann Hesse este înrădăcinat în tradiție. [...] Pentru a înțelege însă mai bine firea ciudată a poetului, însingurarea lui nu numai literară ci și omenească, cât și înrudițiile sale spirituale, trebuie să cunoaștem familia din care se trage” (RFR 1944 1/XI, p. 72). This research direction, that from the contemporary point of view is not based on philological scientific rigor, will be difficultly surmounted by the Romanian scholars and readers of Hermann Hesse.

<sup>2</sup> Zaharia, Mihaela (Ed.), *Rudolf Hollinger: Briefe an Hermann Hesse / Scrisori către Hermann Hesse / Lettres à Hermann Hesse / Letters to Hermann Hesse*. Translated into Rumanian and French, and commented by Mihaela Zaharia, translated into English by Roxana Ilie. Iași, Ars Longa Publishing House, 2023.

suggesting that Hesse's utopian narrative rehabilitates "good" in a Kafkaesque world. Pârvolescu's analogical method opens avenues for dialogizing Hesse's narrative structures within the Central European Modernism, based on rigorous philological research instruments. Although Ioana Pârvolescu argues the similarities between the two writers only from a chronological point of view, the fact that Hesse wrote about Kafka's novels in his essay collection *Eine Literaturgeschichte in Rezensionen und Aufsätzen*,<sup>3</sup> it is known to specialists. Hesse began his work on the *Glasperlenspiel* in 1931, and by that time he had already wrote about Kafka's *Der Prozeß* and *Das Schloß*. Regarding the research focus of this study, one could say that Hesse's game vision grew along with his essays about Kafka's work. Hesse states in 1935, that Kafka's novels „spielen ein lebensgefährliches und unentrinnbares Spiel, mit wunderlichen, komplizierten, vermutlich sehr tiefen und sinnvollen Spielregeln, deren völlige Kenntnis aber in einem Menschenleben nicht erreichbar ist, und deren Geltung, je nach Laune der unbekanntem herrschenden Mächte, beständig schwankt.“<sup>4</sup> (Hesse 1935, 477)

Moving into the wider Romanian critical landscape, Andrei Pleşu deploys Hesse's works in mainstream literary and popular discourse. Pleşu, as a leading philosopher and public intellectual, uses in *Dilema Veche* (2009), the figure of Josef Knecht to typify what he frames as German hierarchical discipline and the structure of the "German spirit." This reading tends to flatten Hesse's spiritual complexities into cultural stereotypes, though Andrei Pleşu captures exactly the central aspect of the social criticism undertaken by Josef Knecht against Castalia, i.e. its lack of flexibility and authentic organic growth,<sup>5</sup> but without mentioning this aspect of the novel.

The translator of the novel, Ion Roman<sup>6</sup>, offers a surprisingly fresh reading key, although in his preface to the translation still reverberates some early stereotypes about Hermann Hesse. Roman, having the advantage of posterity, understands and describes Hesse's poetical evolution and renders thus the possibility to read his work beyond his childhood or his psychoanalytical sessions.

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<sup>3</sup> Hermann Hesse, *Gesammelte Werke 12. Schriften zur Literatur II*, edited by Volker Michels, Frankfurt am Main 1970. Pp. 477- 491.

<sup>4</sup> Free translation by VB: The novels play a life threatening and inescapable game, with whimsical, complicated, probably profoundly meaningful rules, which remain beyond the comprehension of a person. The validity of these rules changes constantly according to the mood of the unknown political powers.

<sup>5</sup> Other Romanian researchers of Hermann Hesse's work: Lucia Gorgoi, Mihaela Zaharia, Petra Korry, Veronica Buciuman. All the above are Germanists and regard the novels of Hermann Hesse from a literary theoretical point of view.

<sup>6</sup> Hermann Hesse, *Jocul cu mărgele de sticlă*, trad. by Ion Roman, Editura pentru Literatura Universală 1969, also RAO 1997 and 2013.

The second category of reception consists of critics and readers outside the national borders. Within this context the personality of Joseph Mileck draws attention. Joseph Mileck (1922–2022) was an eminent scholar of Hermann Hesse, whose early connection to Romania formed a meaningful part of his life and academic trajectory. Born in Sanktmartin, a German-speaking village in Romania's Banat region, Mileck spent his childhood both in Romania and Canada after his family emigrated in the 1920s. His Romanian roots continued to shape his worldview, educational resilience, and multilingual capacity. After excelling academically in Canada and the United States, Mileck completed his doctorate at Harvard with a dissertation on Hermann Hesse's *Steppenwolf*, launching a remarkable career as a Hesse scholar at the University of California, Berkeley. He authored the influential monography *Hermann Hesse: Life and Art* (1978) and which remains a foundational work in most Hesse studies up today.<sup>7</sup> His work sets the trend for the autobiographical approach to Hesse's novels and defines the thematical vein of his novels, research direction that can also be traced in the studies of Romanian scholars.

While in Romania there has been devotion and careful editing of correspondence and translation work, several fundamental perspectives in the Romanian context remain underexplored or superficially treated. The post-communist years allow a diverse, yet still associative or anecdotal, critical approaches to Hesse's work, as seen in major national journals; translation efforts remain fragmentary, and a cohesive Romanian Hesse scholarship never materializes, excepting the monographies by Petra Korry and V. Buciuman.

The Romanian critics regard the novels and poetry of Hermann Hesse as rather subdued to Central European psychoanalytical traditions or to a rather simplified dualistic point of view upon the German Romanticism and Classicism. Hermann Hesse's political position and his interest for historical development did not constitute a focal point of scientific reading and criticism in Romania. Nevertheless, Hermann Hesse reveals a far more balanced political position within the context of both World Wars than his writer fellow Thomas Mann. Hermann Hesse's declared and explained pacifism was deficiently interpreted in Romania as passivism, which is strongly contradicted by the facts regarding Hesse's projects during the World Wars. Thus, during the 1st WW, he provided the German soldiers with books to read in the tranches, it was a gesture of support and profound humanitarianism, but also a form of joining the army. After this experience his pacifism deepened to such an extent that during the 2nd WW, he supported only the peace process, by offering shelter to Jews escaping the Nazi-Germany. Even his last wife, Ninon Ausländer, was a born Jewish Czernowitzer.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.poetsinthegarden.com/poets-in-the-garden/joseph-mileck-may-28-1922-december-23-2022> [last seen on 07.10.2025].

The next part of this study concentrates on showing that Hermann Hesse also played a political game when writing his Nobel Prize winning novel, *The Glass Bead Game* and that the Nobel-Prize-Committee recognized his narrative intention.

## 2. Which game is being actually played in *The Glass Bead Game*?

### 2.1. Theoretical clarification

Conceptually, the game-philosophical hypothesis operates on the assumption that any human experience can be carried out and reflected upon within the field game in the most profound manner possible, but without serious consequence. Accordingly, activities such as war and politics are categorized by the Dutch philosopher Johan Huizinga as games carried out on a real playground with consequences. Games and playing thus become a function of culture:

If we find that play is based on the manipulation of certain images, on a certain "imagination" of reality (i.e. its conversion into images), then our main concern will be to grasp the value and significance of these images and their "imagination". We shall observe their action in play itself and thus try to understand play as a cultural factor in life. (Huizinga 1949, 4)

Huizinga supports his thesis regarding games as cultural factors by analysing language games, and even the terms *fun* and *ernest*, which pose difficulty when translating them into other European languages.

The great archetypal activities of human society are all permitted with play from the start. Take language, for instance – that first and supreme instrument which man shapes in order to communicate, to teach, to command [...] by naming [things] we raise them into the domain of spirit [...] Behind every abstract expression there lie the boldest of metaphors, and every metaphor is a play upon words. Thus, in giving expression to life, man creates a second, poetic world alongside the world of nature. (Huizinga 1949, 4)

Hermann Hesse explores in his novel the fine line between play and non-play, because the turning point of the action, where the main character seems to have failed the life plan as game master, is in fact the reminder, that not everything is a game, that the *Glass Bead Game* fails to reassure its universal function of preserving valuable cultural and scientific thought. The pseudohistorical description of the game reveals the same aspects, that Hermann Hesse drew attention upon, when writing about the novels of Franz Kafka, i.e. the game is life threatening and inescapable, with whimsical, complicated, profoundly meaningful rules, which remain beyond the comprehension of a person. The validity of these rules changes constantly according to the mood of the unknown political powers.

In the attempt to summarize the story of this novel it would be appropriate to say that the glass bead game is an institutionalised form of experiencing different solutions to contemporary societal and political crises. The utopian construction of

pedagogical province relies on the argument, that within his perimeter the game is being kept in its most authentic form and thus allowing the mankind to preserve its cultural goods. The actual story of Joseph Knecht is preceded by a preface, which draws attention through the distancing narrative effects and its intentionally constructed pseudoscientific tone and display of arguments. But this published version of the preface is the fourth version of this fragment.

The literary fragment, entitled *Die politische Einleitung zum Glasperlenspiel* presents the writer in a manner that deviates from the prevailing perception of Hermann Hesse's literary and ideological position within the neo-romantic movement of the early twentieth century. Beyond the historical perception this fragmentary version of the introduction to the novel, reveals a narrative tonality which is less burdened by aesthetical exercise allowing the message and the political attitude to shine through authentically. The fragment was published in 1934 in the December issue of the Berlin newspaper *Neue Rundschau*, just as other chapters of the novel saw the print between 1938 and 1942 due to Hesse's publisher Peter Suhrkamp.<sup>8</sup>

## 2.2. The underlying game

The *Political Introduction to the Glass Bead Game* critiques the profound degradation of intellectual and moral standards in the education system, including the university, of a certain era, despite the presence of a few high-calibre scholars. This moral decline and intellectual irresponsibility led to "tragic-hilarious or corrupt" (Hesse 1932, 486) circumstances in higher education, exemplified by students engaging in unauthorized protests, strikes, and even threatening professors' lives. To illustrate this state, the text presents two examples of major works by fictitious German professors, published around 1950, which became notorious as curiosities.

Professor Lankhaar's *The Lie About War Guilt* is a massive, two-volume work (over 1,500 pages in quarto format) published at the age of 82. He dies immediately after its presentation, with the poignant detail that the "consciousness of his own high mission" (Hesse 1932, 487) supposedly kept him alive. The book was a belated, 35-year-late attempt to refute the accusations levelled against the German people and their leaders by their enemies during the WWI. These wartime insults, which had been widely forgotten or mocked by the rest of the world by 1950, included calling the Germans "Huns" "vandals" and "cannibals" and blaming them solely for the war's outbreak. With a "playful enthusiasm" (idem) Lankhaar used similarly unflattering terms for the opposing nations (e.g. "false Gaul", "cowardly Briton", "Italian traitor") to

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<sup>8</sup> Michels Volker: *Zur Aktualität von Hermann Hesses »Glasperlenspiel«*. Studii din ediția jubiliară a romanului »Das Glasperlenspiel«, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 2002, p. 21.

argue for the absolute innocence of the German people, Emperor, generals, and diplomats. He offered “clear” documentary proof that the sole culprits were a French king long dead, Louis XI, and an obscure French official, Théophile Delcassé.

While this bizarre and abstract work by a “decrepit old man” found virtually no readership abroad and was met with “respectful pity” and silence by the European press, in Germany, though also unread, it gained a reputation lasting “almost two centuries”. The text explains this lasting notoriety by noting the book’s function as a “mine of gold for political *condottieri*” (political mercenaries) who used it to fuel their internal conflicts, coups, and speeches, thus continuing the cycle of political and intellectual abuse.

Professor Schwentchen's *Green Blood* deals with the intellectual environment, which was corrupted by a new myth about the “green blood”, invented by a conspiratorial youth leader and adventurer named Litzke (known as the “secret emperor” of Germany). This myth was designed for a youth generation already “unaccustomed to thinking” due to pre-existing racial legends. The generally spread fear and terror prevented official contradiction of this legend. People knew their lives were at stake if they incurred the wrath of the fanatical youth, showing the extent of societal and academic intimidation. Schwentchen, whose actual university chair was for tennis science (a reflection of the university’s absurd lack of focus), not philology, cited figures like Zoroaster and Manu and borrowed words from Sanskrit, Sumerian, and Greek – languages he himself couldn't read. This academic legitimization of the “green blood” myth, leveraging his university authority, allowed Schwentchen to achieve his goal: he was promoted to the highest hierarchical levels.

This political introduction does not bare the marks of the aesthetic distancing effects of the final version, and it is clear in its discussion of the time of Hermann Hesse’s life, thus offering the key to understanding the fact, that the novel’s message is political rather than philosophical or aesthetic.

The kernel ideas of this fragment will be stylistically polished and enunciated in the final literary version of the novel, but the considerations on the Aryan theory are further codified in the work of fiction, in contrast with the rather transparent referentiality in the political fragment. In the published novel the chronist uses language characteristic of the era of the Catholic Inquisition to describe the national-socialist atmosphere and mentality of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Germany. The mechanisms of self-censorship are recognizable in the following fragment from the fictional work:

Viața intelectuală a epocii foiletoniste ar putea fi asemuită cu o plantă degenerată, care și-a pierdut vlaga dând lăstari hipertrofice, iar corecturile ulterioare, cu retezarea plantei până la rădăcină. Tinerii de acum [castalieni], care doreau acum să se dedice studiilor intelectuale, nu mai înțelegeau prin aceasta a ciupi câte ceva pe la universități, unde profesori vestiți și buni de gură, dar fără autoritate, să le prezinte resturi din vechea cultură superioară; ei trebuiau să

începe cu aceeași strășnicie, ba chiar mai strășnic și mai metodic decât o făceau cândva inginerii pe la politehnici. Luau piepțiș un urcuș anevoios, erau obligați să-și purifice și să-și întărească puterea de gândire cu ajutorul matematicii și al exercițiilor scolastic aristotelice, iar în afară de aceasta trebuiau să renunțe cu desăvârșire la toate bunurile considerate până atunci de către învățații mai multor generații ca vrednice de obținut: câștigul bănesc rapid și lesnicios, celebritatea și onorurile publice, elogiile presei, căsătoriile cu fete de bancheri și industriași, răsfățul și luxul în viața materială. Scriitorii cu opere trase în tiraje mari, cu premii Nobel și vilifoare drăguțe la țară, medicii faimoși, cu decorații la cheutori și valeți în livrea, academicienii cu neveste bogate și saloane pline de strălucire, chimiștii cu fotolii în consiliile de administrație din industrie, filosofi cu fabrici de foiletoane și conferințe în săli arhipline, cu entuziaste aplauze și buchete de flori – toate aceste figuri dispăruseră și nu au mai apărut până astăzi. Firește, mai existau și acum mulți tineri dotați, pentru care acele figuri rămăseseră totuși modele vrednice de invidiat, dar căile spre onorurile publice, spre bogăție, celebritate și lux nu mai treceau prin amfiteatre universitare, prin seminarii și teze de doctorat, în ochii lumii profesiunile intelectuale, decăzute, dăduseră faliment, iar prin aceasta spiritul își recucerise capacitatea de dăruire ispășitoare și fanatică. Talentele care năzuiau mai mult spre strălucire și huzur trebuiau să întoarcă spatele preocupărilor intelectuale, căzute în dizgrație și să-și aleagă acele profesiuni pe seama cărora fuseseră lăsate prosperitatea și profiturile materiale. (Hesse 2013, 46-47)

Describing the same intellectual and educational crises the narrator does not attack one or two personalities but goes into only apparently significant details regarding different types of intellectuals. The comparison of the good Castilians on the one side, who managed to save through their intellectual endeavours the European culture from the feuilletonistic era with their predecessors, who made by their superficiality the existence of the Castilians and of the glass bead game necessary, is also almost undetectable and can be easily overseen by a superficial reader. This parallel softens the critical tone, but it cuts even deeper through irony and detachment. The narrator decides to depict the intellectuals of the criticised era by virtue of their possessions rather than of what they are. The usage of this rhetorical strategy the narrator achieves two key objectives with a single action: he paces the narrative's rhythm and tonality, thus giving voice to a more mature and credible chronicler figure, that chooses the distanced narrative modality. This distancing enables the narrator to his second achievement, the conveyance of the message that for the intellectual of the feuilletonistic period, scholarship and learning do not represent attributes of their being or aspects of identity, but mere possessions, superficial credentials in form of unauthentic paper titles and diplomas.

The serious narrative tonality, used in the description of the Castilians, ends in the point, where the reversed irony introduces a serial enumeration of different variations of the same human profile – individual existences build on possessions not on authentic living and being. Paired with the usage of diminutives this reversed or hidden irony conducts the tropic parallelism toward a negative hyperbola. This diplomatic language games are both necessary and intentional. Reading the direct,

almost invective form of addressing from the *Political Introduction to the Glass Bead Game*:

Chiar și în vremurile acelea trăiau câțiva învățați de mare clasă, însă în ansamblu școala, inclusiv universitatea, se degradaseră la un nivel îngrozitor de lipsă de responsabilitate, iar imperativele moralității intelectuale parcă fuseseră uitate. Drept exemplu pentru circumstanțele tragico-hilare ori corupte, în care se aflau școlile înalte (ale căror învățăcei demonștrau, făceau greve, amenințau viața profesorilor după bunul plac ș.a.m.d.) menționăm aici două cărți impunătoare ca volum a doi profesori germani, apărute în jurul anului 1950 și care și-au dobândit un oarecare renume în calitate de curiozități.<sup>9</sup>

it becomes clear, that the construction of the fictional narrator figure was supported by a deeper authorial intentionality.

The actual game at play was Hermann Hesse's intention of breaking the walls of the German censorship, to disseminate this message to a broader public and to prevent the Great War, which he had predicted in his writings from this period. This rhetoric of a masque-play is well known to the Romanian reader of literature from the communist era, the de-masque process being the touchstone of rhetorical artistry. The remaining question to be addressed is whether Hesse feared for his safety the same way the Romanian intellectuals did when refusing to succumb to the totalitarian regime? Rudolf Hollinger's resonance to the writings of Hermann Hesse was not a coincidence, the life in the first years of communist regime in Romania, needed an adequate form of expression, and Hesse provided his readers with a model of less dangerous modes of expression and articulation of authentic knowledge, feeling and thinking.<sup>10</sup>

### 3. Discussion and concluding considerations

1914 and the WWI represent a period of *risveglio/Erwachung*<sup>11</sup> in Hermann Hesses political attitude, this being the moment when the young writer distances

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<sup>9</sup> Free translation by VB of the following fragment: „Es lebten zwar auch damals einige Gelehrte von hohem Rang, doch war im ganzen die höhere Schule einschließlich der Universität auf einen schlimmen Grad von Verantwortungslosigkeit gesunken, und die einfachsten Gebote intellektueller Redlichkeit schienen vergessen worden zu sein. Als Beispiele für die rührend-lächerliche sowohl wie für die verderbte Seite dieser Zustände an den Hochschulen (deren Schüler damals übrigens nach Belieben streikten, demonstrierten, die Lehrer am Leben bedrohten usw.) nennen wir zwei um 1950 erschienene umfangreiche Bücher deutscher Professoren, welche beide als Kuriosa eine gewisse Berühmtheit behalten haben.“ (Hesse 1932, *Politik des Gewissens*, p. 486)

<sup>10</sup> See Gerginova Zlatka. Traum namens Hermann Hesse, *Balkanistik Worlds* 2025/ 1, p. 341-343. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14226321>,

Url: <https://www.ceeol.com/search/viewpdf?id=1339588> [last seen on 15.09.2025].

<sup>11</sup> Mauro Ponzì: *Il mito della giovinezza*. Roma 2002. p. 262, 263.

himself from the general aggressive pan-Germanic positions, joining the pacifist's positions, as militant through culture and moral, intellectual stance.

Hermann Hesse's political writings are less known and discussed, because, like many active and renowned intellectuals, Hermann Hesse expressed opinions before World War I that he later renounced. The writer's political thinking is formulated through open letters and diaries and focuses on the fate of his nation, which he does not simply abandon by retreating to Switzerland, but accompanies historically with significant gestures related to the specifics of his work. Thus, due to health problems, he was not enlisted in the German army during World War I but was tasked with collecting and distributing books in a library for prisoners and war wounded. During World War II, Hermann Hesse gave refuge and help to many Jewish families from all over Europe, but especially to the relatives of his wife, Ninon Hesse.

One of his political writings, entitled *O Freunde, nicht diese Töne!* – with direct reference to Friedrich Schillers *Ode to Peace* – will open the door to a massive public disdain and criticism, which threatened the writer into historic and aesthetic insignificance, and worse into losing his German audience. Joseph Mileck in *Hermann Hesse. Life and Art*, draws attention to the ambivalence of the discourse in the essay *O Freunde, nicht diese Töne!* (O friends, not these tones!) as well as to the contradictions in Hesse's political views. Mileck also repeats Hesse's defence arguments, according to which he placed himself in the service of a neutral humanity and all intellectuals should stay away from politics and follow his example.<sup>12</sup> However, the biographer refrains from claiming that this essay was an awakening moment, because his novels often reveal a deep discrepancy between humanistic expectations and historical and social observation, this being an indicator of the fact that the *risveglio / Erwachung* was rather a process not a moment.

As the critic Egon Schwarz observes, nowhere is the inner tension more palpable than in the Hessian relationship between his own individuality and morality and the behaviour of the German people on the world stage at that time. Hermann Hesse as many other German writers saw their primordial cultural matrix destroyed.<sup>13</sup> It is noteworthy in the biography of the German/ Swiss writer that he does not define his national identity simply by belonging to a people, but rather to a culture, which he tries to enrich by original appropriation. It is in this context that the political version of the *Introduction to The Glass Bead Game*, should be understood.

The discussion focuses on ways historical games are exposed through literary veiling. The author was aware that the direct attack on Nazi ideology and practices, which clearly emerges from the lines of the *Political Introduction*, would

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<sup>12</sup> Also see Buciuman, Veronica. *Sinceritas. Der poetologische Begriff in Hermann Hesses Prosawerk*. Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang 2010, p. 160.

<sup>13</sup> Egon Schwarz: *Hermann Hesse und der Nationalsozialismus*. In: Bauschinger, Sigrid, Reh, Albert: *Hermann Hesse. Politische und wirkungsgeschichtliche Aspekte*. Franke, 1986. p. 60.

have drawn the attention of the German authorities to the activities of his family, firstly their friendship to Jewish intellectuals and then during the war their direct support for Jews crossing Europe through Switzerland to seek refuge. Despite the writer's attempt to avoid this strategic mistake, his publisher Suhrkamp did not obtain official approval for the publication of the novel in Germany, as he had previously done with other writings by Hermann Hesse. Parts of *The Glass Bead Game* appeared previously, episodically in Swiss publications, thus with unremarkable impact on the German public. These circumstances also led to the writer's deep disappointment, so that he did not travel to Stockholm to pick up his Nobel Prize distinction.

The message regarding the monstrosity of the social, political, and cultural processes of the era – especially the year 1931, when Hesse had already began the research and writing the first lines of the book, years in which the writer confessed in his correspondence his conviction that German society was heading towards another war, much more devastating than the first one. Hesse profiled himself not as a deserter who takes refuge in a geography that offers him safety, but as a faithful cultivator of the German spirit, which he tries to save in and through his work.

The above considerations help us understand why Hermann Hesse chose to modify the text of the *Political Introduction* to his allegorical utopia from *The Glass Bead Game*, his motives going beyond aesthetic intentions.

In short, through his writing, Hermann Hesse exposes the imposture and mass manipulation by the perpetrating intellectual and political instruments of the National Socialists' propaganda, which used to refer to successful human models by means of a cliché-based language, public discourse based on sophistry, and a lack of courage in expressing one's opinion.

Focusing on his fictional oeuvre, whose utopian form proves to be a successful political camouflage, he conveys the desired message to all those who possess the code to decipher it. It is evident that, in the absence of consideration for the political substratum of the message, the work is a dense and challenging novel to comprehend. From the perspective of the multiple codification of the narrative discourse, the work can be regarded as a forerunner of postmodern literary construction. An analysis of the political version of the introduction to *The Glass Bead Game* reveals thus the construction of narrative mechanisms as a serious game, which just like in the case of a war, is made with the intention of becoming a process or phenomenon carrying consequences in the society, and not directly for the author.

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