

# Hermann Hesse - Biography

**Hermann Hesse** (1877-1962) was a German-Swiss writer and painter. His work centers on the quest for individual authentic self-awareness and spirituality. After his death in 1962, the youth subcultures embraced Hesse work. This popularity was rooted in the fact that the countercultures were seeking the same enlightenment as many of Hesse's characters. The University of Bern awarded Hesse an Honorary [Doctorate](#) for the profundity of his work. In addition, Hesse received many awards including Mejstrik-Preis of the Schiller Foundation in Vienna, Gottfried-Keller-Preis, Goethe Prize, Wilhelm-Raabe-Preis, Pour le Mérite and Peace Prize of the German Book Trade. Hesse was also awarded the Nobel Prize in literature in 1946.

On 2 July 1877, Hermann Hesse was born in Calw in Württemberg, Germany. His parents were Protestant missionaries for the Basel Mission. Hesse's mother was born in India while her own parents were on a mission. Johannes Hesse, Hermann Hesse's father, was born in Paide, Estonia, which was born controlled by the Russian Empire. The heritage of Hermann Hesse gave him both Russian and German citizenship. His father was employed by the Calwer Verlagsverein, a publishing house managed by Hermann Hesse's grandfather. The publishing house produced textbooks and theological books.

Swabian Pietism dominated the Hesse household. This system of belief encouraged believers to create small close-knit groups. This belief system left Hermann Hesse with a deep melancholy that would leave its mark on his later work. His mother would also offer Hesse a love of music and religious verse that would provide him with his spiritual and literary framework. Hermann Gundert, Hesse's maternal grandfather, was a [doctor of philosophy](#). Gundert was a polyglot who cultivated his Hesse's taste for international literature. He wanted his grandson to feel that he should have global concerns. This spirit caused Hesse to resist the nationalistic fervor that was to sweep across Europe.

The Hesse family moved to Basel, Switzerland in 1881. The family would stay until 1887 before returning to Calw. Hermann Hesse attended the Latin School in Goppinberg and then the Evangelical Theological Seminary of Maulbronn Abbey. His education became itinerant, and his relationship with his family became strained. After a failed suicide attempt, Hesse was sent to an institution at Bad Boll. Christoph Friedrich Blumhardt, a minister and theologian, oversaw his care. He was later moved to a mental institution in Stetten im Remstal and eventually another institution in Basel.

In 1892, Hesse [enrolled](#) in the Gymnasium in Cannstatt, passing the One Year Examination the following year. Hesse spent time with older friends and began to drink and smoke. In 1885, Hesse's half-brother Theo entered a music conservatory. Theo made this decision despite his family's protestations. Theo's dedication to his craft and desire to pursue his own goals left a deep influence on the young Hermann Hesse.

In the following years, Hermann Hesse apprenticed in a bookshop in Esslingen am Neckar and a clock tower factory in Calw. These experiences moved Hermann Hesse to return to his search for spirituality. In 1895, Hesse took another apprenticeship at a bookseller in Tübingen. This

bookseller specialized in legal, theological, and philological texts. During this time, Hesse began to study the works of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Friedrich Schiller. These works of these philosophers would have a profound influence on Hesse's later writing. He also studied Greek mythology. Hermann Hesse also spent time in the home of Fraulein von Reutern. He met peers who lived in city. However, his relationships with people his own age were difficult. In 1895, Hesse ceased alluding to Buddhism in his works (for a period of several years.)

Hesse published his poem "Madonna" in a Viennese journal in 1896. The following year Hesse published *Romantic Songs*, his first book of verse. His poem "Grand Valse" prompted Helene Voight to write to Hesse. In 1898/1899, Voight (who had married publisher Eugen Diederichs) convinced her new husband to publish Hesse's *One Hour After Midnight*. Financially, both books were unsuccessful. His mother declared *Romantic Songs* "vaguely sinful" because of the overtly secular theme.

In 1899, Hesse was employed by a seller of antique books located in Basel. He made connections with families that were intellectually inclined. Hesse felt stimulated as he began to investigate his spirituality since the city offered the chance to retreat into a quiet life of artistic investigation. An eye condition prevented Hesse from compulsory military service in 1900. While living in Basel, Hesse maintained a close relationship with many of the city's intellectuals. Hesse would release his novel, *Peter Camenzind* in 1904. Sigmund Freud claimed that this novel was one of his favorites.

In 1904, Hesse married Maria Bernoulli. The Bernoulli family had become famous for providing advances in mathematics. Hermann and Maria Hesse moved to Gaienhofen. Gaienhofen is a community located on Lake Constance. In 1904, Hesse also returned to his former interest in India and Buddhism. He returned to his interest after reading the works of Arthur Schopenhauer and Theosophy. Hesse continued writing. His story "The Wolf", which was written between 1906 and 1907, had many thematic elements that Hesse would later include in *Steppenwolf*.

Hesse's marriage became increasingly strained. In 1911, Hesse traveled to Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Sumatra, Borneo, and Burma. Hesse had planned on renewing his spirituality through this trip. However, the physical exertion of the travel made his depression worse. Hesse was able to find literary inspiration from his journey. When Hesse returned in 1912, he relocated his family to Bern. There was perhaps some hope that the change in location would help his marriage. The relationship did not improve.

In 1914, Hesse volunteered with the Imperial army. He was assigned to care for the casualties of World War I. Despite his desire to serve his country, Hesse inadvertently found himself surrounded by controversy. Hesse drafted an essay, "O Friends, Not These Tones." In this work, he argued that intellectuals should not fall victim to the extremities of nationalism. Hesse argued that despite the war everyone should embrace Europe's common culture. The public turned against Hesse.

In 1916, Hesse's emotional state was further undermined by the death of his father, his wife's worsening mental state, and his son's severe illness. Hermann Hesse became a believer in

psychotherapy and eventually formed a personal relationship with Carl Jung. Hesse continued to write, but adopted the nom de plume, Emil Sinclair.

By 1919, Hesse's marriage was irreconcilably damaged. Hesse moved to house outside of Minusio. Later, he would move to Montagnola. He began to paint during this period. In 1922, Hesse's novel *Siddhartha* was published. This novel reflected his full return to addressing Indian and Buddhist subject matter. It is perhaps Hesse's best known work. In 1923, Hesse became a citizen of Switzerland.

In 1933, Hesse helped Bertolt Brecht and Thomas Mann leave Nazi Germany. Although Hesse never openly condemned the Nazi party, his writing clearly illustrate his deep loathing for them.

Hesse married Ruth Wegner in 1924. Much like Hesse's first marriage, his second marriage was also very unstable. In 1927, *Steppenwolf* was published—another work which could be seen as Hesse chef d'oeuvre. Hesse's last major works was *The Glass bead Game*, published in 1943. Only three years after this work, Hermann Hesse was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. For the rest of his life, Hesse would continue to paint and write. He died on August 9, 1962.

His friend Hugo Ball would pen the first biography of Hermann Hesse. In the 1960s and 1970s, the counter culture and youth movements embraced the writings of Hermann Hesse for their spiritual observation.

**Hermann Hesse** was a German-born Swiss poet, novelist, and painter. (July 2, 1877 – August 9, 1962).