

***Gynos-Synthesis en route from Conflict to Harmony:  
A Psycho-spiritual Re-reading of Hermann Hesse's Steppenwolf***

Paul Pragash, St. Joseph's College, India

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**Abstract**

That 'Man is born free and everywhere he is in chains' is true of men and women today, greatly owing to the unresolved conflicts, intra-, inter-, and trans-personal in nature. A logical derivation from this truth is that a resolution of the conflicts would regain freedom for Man, and, that the process of conflict-resolution could best start at intra-personal level and flow over to the other levels, eventually becoming a globally-blossomed phenomenon. Working towards such harmony has become a 'fierce urgency' now, not only for the socio-economic-political activists, but for every thinker, particularly in the academic arena. The conference' theme addresses this urgency of the hour. In line with the focal theme of Libbreuro 2014, my paper studies Hermann Hesse's *Steppenwolf* a modern classic which records the conflict of a man torn between his individualism and social respectability and his self-affirmation and self-destruction, and attempts to show how the man in conflict, through a psycho-spiritual integration of the feminine, attains intra- and inter- personal harmony and contributes to the social harmony and synergy.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The modern human persons are technologically sound and the scientific achievements are enormous, but in the process of achievement, they seem to have lost contact with peace and serenity of soul, and entered many conflicts, intra- and inter-personal. The current paper touches upon one of the key ways, feminine integration (Gynos-Synthesis), to resolve conflicts in human persons, with an assumption, that conflict-resolution in the individuals would eventually result in conflict-resolution in the society. The 'feminine (Gynos) integration (Synthesis),' in and around which the paper revolves and evolves, is grounded primarily in Jungian Anima-Animus pattern (psychological), and in spiritual roots. The paper, with its psycho-spiritual perspectives and content, is an invitation to its readers to undergo similar integration and experience harmony and further generate the same in the society, contributing to social synergy and cosmic harmony.

## 2. HERMANN HESSE AND *STEPPENWOLF*

Hermann Hesse, a popular German novelist-poet-painter, born in Calw, Wurttemberg, in 1877, in his early days intended to follow in his father's footsteps as a protestant pastor and missionary, but later rebelled against traditional academic education, worked for sometime as a bookseller, antique dealer and mechanic, and with the successful reception of *Peter Camenzind* in 1904, devoted himself fully to writing. Protesting against German militarism, he moved to Switzerland in 1919 where he lived in self-imposed exile until his death at the age of eighty-five in 1962. His initial novels grapple with the theme of rebellion against traditional education and institutions, while his later novels are heavily influenced by psycho-analytical theories and a preoccupation with the Eastern philosophical thought and a search for a philosophy of life.

*Steppenwolf* is the story of Harry Haller, a man torn between his individualism and attraction to bourgeois respectability, and his conflict between self-affirmation and self-destruction. It is an account of neurosis, depression, schizophrenia and despair, in which, the protagonist narrowly bypasses a breakdown and resurrects to a new life through a resolution of conflicts and integration, accompanied by other characters in the work. The therapeutic way by which Harry Haller resolves his conflicts, experiences integration, and attains harmony in the feminine company of Hermine, Maria and Pablo, is studied below.

## 3. GYNOS-SYNTHESIS IN *STEPPENWOLF*

In the novel *Steppenwolf*, integration in the life of the major characters, particularly that of Harry Haller, takes place at various levels, namely, psychological, philosophical, aesthetic and spiritual. Harry who is disgusted with and disillusioned about his present life of despair, crisis and neurosis, yet longing to get out of the rut, gradually and healthily grows, in the company of other characters, particularly Hermine, Pablo and Maria, to integrate several aspects, notably feminine, and experience harmony.

3.1. Anima-Animus Integration: The study of the text reveals that a **Jungian anima – integration** takes place in Harry. A man according to Jung projects his anima onto women in four stages, as biological Eve, aesthetic Helen, virtuous Mary and wise Sophia. Maria comes as Eve and with her “magic touch of Eros,” (Hesse, 1965, p. 165) takes the otherwise frustrated Harry, who lives “in a poor pictureless vacancy” (p. 165), into a world of pleasure and joy. Maria is constantly associated with “images of the pleasure garden and of flowers” (Jillings, 1981, p. 51) and as Jungian Eve, she represents “the fulfilment of sexual desire” (p. 51). Maria who is sent by Hermine to Harry is “unusually gifted in love” (Hesse, 1965, p. 162), and “endowed in the little arts of making love” (p. 165) and she succeeds greatly in teaching Harry “the charming play and delights of the senses” (p. 163). She endows Harry with “new understanding, new insight, new love” (p. 163). Harry integrates the feminine charm, beauty and love, and spontaneously addresses Maria as “my beautiful, beautiful flower” (p. 164). That he has deeply inhaled the feminine is vivid in his elated utterance: “My heart stood still between delight and sorrow to find how rich was the gallery of my life, and how thronged the soul of the wretched Steppenwolf with high eternal stars and constellations” (p. 165). Maria’s “beautiful warm youth” (p. 161) gifts him with a sleep that is “deep and peaceful as a child’s” (p. 161). Such sleep is the fruit of a relished integration of the feminine in Harry. Maria, as a “purely female intercessor” unlike Hermine who is “Harry’s female version” (Ziolkowski, 1973, p. 161) awakens Harry to realize that he is not made up of mortal ruins but “fragments of the divine” (Hesse, 1965, p. 166). With his intimacy with Maria and his integration of the feminine through Maria, Harry’s “eyes are opened” and he sees his fragmented self as a “unity of one picture” (p. 166). Harry surrenders to the feminine as a child would, and nourished by the feminine, enters the world of imagination and immortality and feels that such an experience is the “goal set for the progress of every human life” (p. 167). A long dry frustrated life of Harry becomes one of delight, bliss and harmony with the integration of the feminine, the Jungian Eve, represented by Maria.

The landlady who is utmost cordial with Harry, represents the Jungian Mary, the virtuous feminine. She is found to be “human, friendly, ... auntlike or, rather, motherly relation” (p. 10) to every tenant. She is the same and even more caring to Harry, which he, who prefers oblivion, appreciates. She like a bourgeois lady neither makes fun of his odd movements, nor acknowledges him calling himself a “foreign body” (p. 121). Her values of “order, respectability and cleanliness” (Jillings, 1981, p. 52) are natural contrasts to Harry’s lonely and unorganized life. A love-hate attitude is seen in Harry, throughout the novel, towards the respectable ‘bourgeois’ life-style. The contrast creates in him an ill feeling towards bourgeois society but draws him to individuals like the landlady. She has a natural “empathizing” (Baron-Cohen, 2004, p. 8) feminine brain dominating her character. Her behaviours testify her “intelligent and motherly” (Hesse, 1965, p. 122) nature of congenial virtues which Harry admires and feels at home with. He imbibes her virtue of respecting the silence and temperaments of others, her tenants, and not disturbing others even in utmost painful moments.

That Hermine is Harry’s anima and that she plays the Jungian Sophia to Harry is evident throughout the novel. Harry after a long tedious walk, enters ‘The Black Eagle’ and there encounters a “pale and pretty girl” who makes him room to sit and

gives a “friendly and observant look” (p. 102) which is the beginning of a new chapter in Harry’s life – a welcome respite and comfort from a long dry life. He learns her name to be Hermine and she is able to divine his mind and heart and tell him his feelings, thoughts and dispositions. He tells her in amazement: “There’s nothing you don’t know, Hermine, it’s exactly as you say. And yet you’re so entirely different from me. Why, you’re my opposite. You have all that I lack” (p. 128). Hermine is Harry’s anima – the feminine within and the entire Harry – Hermine encounter is a process by which Harry integrates Hermine, his anima and attains harmony.

While Harry integrates gradually his anima – Hermine, reciprocally Hermine integrates her animus – Harry and even asks him to kill her after falling in love: “I need you as you do me. ... I want you to be in love with me. ... When you are in love with me, I will give you my last command and you will obey it, and it will be the better for both of us. ... You will carry out my command and kill me. There – ask no more” (p. 130-31). Though it happens at the end as per Hermine’s command, the process is one of integration and healing for both, particularly for Harry. Harry finds Hermine “charming” (p. 103), sensitive, intuitive and divining his life every bit. She treats him exactly in the way that is best for him at the moment. The way she convinces him to dance shows her verbal skill, a typical feminine feature. She empathizes with him fully and invites him to learn, besides “the difficult and complicated things,...the simple ones” (p. 106) which add fun to life. She gradually, with her nurturing and therapeutic talks, extricates him from too much intellectualism with which he has made his own life a “song of sufferings” (p. 106). She succeeds in putting herself in his shoes, understands and guides him that he feels; “she is like a mother to me, (though) young and beautiful, ...(with) wisdom, health and assurance” (p. 108 & 131). Her presence becomes space for him to open up his life freely and experience a therapeutic healing. In Hermine’s “beautiful and unearthly” (p. 129) presence, Harry feels that a miracle has happened in his life and he has become light and “the miracle should go on” and he is happy and willing to “surrender (himself) to this magnetic power and follow this star” (p. 125).

It is Hermine’s feminine “powers ... magic” that endows Harry with what he longs for in despair, “life and resolution, action and reaction, impulse and impetus” (p. 125) to joyfully move on in life. She is his “release and way to freedom” (p. 124). Her presence awakens in him the feminine qualities like, “capacity for love, the sensuous and spiritual” (p. 195). Hermine as the inner feminine power of Harry enlightens him on the purpose to live and die. Hermine’s presence gifts Harry with a peaceful sleep: “I slept greedily, thankfully, and dreamt more lightly and pleasantly than I had for a long while” (p. 111). He realizes that Hermine, the “wonderful girl” has come into his life to “shatter the death” hovering over him with her “good and beautiful and warm hand” (p. 120). His soul that had frozen, he acknowledges, “breathes once more” and experiences “joy and eagerness” leading him to a new life of laughter. Despair and frustration are replaced by “life, hope and happy thoughts” (p. 121). At that state of new vigour and rejuvenated life, he extols Hermine, his feminine self, saying that she knows “more of life than is known to the wisest of the wise. It might be the highest wisdom” (p. 132). Harry feels Hermine as part of his soul as his old self “is banished by a look from Hermine, as this look seemed to come from my (his) own soul” (p. 202). The soul-partnership of Harry and Hermine is made vivid by these instances and exchanges. Obviously, Hermine, as his anima, vitally plays the

Jungian Sophia to Harry and liberates him from a life of despair and misery and guides him into a blissful state. The therapy initiated by Hermine symbolically develops inside Pablo's 'Magic Theatre.'

The 'Magic Theatre' run by Pablo, the musician, who is portrayed in the novel as someone who has integrated the feminine characteristics, has a therapeutic effect upon those who enter the theatre and play the games well. Harry from the beginning of the novel has an inherent longing to enter the "Gothic doorway, ... mysterious, ... beautiful and quiet" (p. 48) which foreshadows his actual entry later into the 'Magic Theatre' wherein he explores his unconscious through many games and comes to a grasp of his life: "the climax of Harry's life is the account of his experiences in the section devoted to the Magic Theatre" (Hatfield, 2003, p. 116). Pablo guides Harry into the magic theatre, telling him, "It is the world of your own soul that you seek. Only within yourself exists that other reality that you long" (Hesse, 1965, p. 204) and he invites Harry to explore his own self and integrate the other part for himself. Pablo conducts the 'mirror therapy' – holds a mirror in front of Harry who sees his own "uneasy, self-tormented, inwardly laboring, and seething being ... the wolf's shape ... and disliked it too sincerely" and guided by the "bright and peculiar laugh" of Pablo, Harry gives way to his "desire to laugh so irresistible" and with that laugh, "the mournful image in the glass gave a final convulsion and vanished" (p. 205-7). The theme of laughter "runs throughout the novel" (Cornils, 2004, p. 178) but has an intensely- healing effect in the mirror therapy, in which Harry is guided to "apprehend the humor of life" (p. 179). Harry feels liberated.

Then Harry is led into the theatre wherein "the strange protagonists are part of his psyche" (Ziolkowski, 1973, p. 161). Inside the theatre, "Haller's pilgrimage resembles that of psycho-analytic education" (p. 161). He plays 'building-up of the personality' and learns to put together the disintegrated pieces of his personality "to build up ever new groups" and realizes that "the game of life" involves "endless multiplicity of moves" (Hesse, 1965, p. 224) and the job of integrating his life is in his hands. It is viewed by critics that "the Jungian aspirations towards wholeness, towards a re-integration of the multi-faceted personality" (Cornils, 2004, p. 179) is achieved by Harry in the magic theatre. In the next game, 'Taming of the Steppenwolf,' he sees his life ruled over by the wolfishness and dashes out the play-field, throwing the wolf out of him, desiring "nothing but to be beyond this wave of disgust" (Hesse, 1965, p. 228).

In the game, 'All Girls are Yours,' Harry relives his youth, "glowing current of fire, ... young and new and genuine" (p. 229). He blissfully relives "the thousand wishes, hopes and adorations" he used to send for the feminine, his girl-friend. Now he handles his passion "all the loves of his life" (p. 233) with maturity and feels "immeasurably happy" (p. 232), drinking from "the cup of passion" purely as "the lover" (p. 234), and giving himself "upto them without defence,... into the rosy twilight of their underworld" (p. 235), the world of the unconscious. He inhales the passionate fragrance of 'Eros' and feels within him that "all (girls) were mine (his), each in her own way" (p. 235). This integration of many girls in his life completes the integration of the feminine, anima, in its various aspects as Eve, Helen, Mary and Sophia. This game of Harry amidst many girls, integrating them all in the context of play, is a natural reminder of Krishna among Gopis. Having long played the games

and purged himself of wolfishness, despair and frustration, Harry rises to life, from “the unending stream of allurements and vice and entanglement” to “calm and silent” (p. 236). He feels free and “ripe for Hermine” and declares, “I belong to her wholly” (p. 236) which is evident of his integration of his anima, Hermine, and as “all was centre in her” he feels “led to fulfillment” (p. 236). In the deep sense of fulfillment in his union with Hermine, he is led, by his own integrated disposition, to kill (as part of the magic theatre) Hermine lying by Pablo, by which Hermine is seen no longer as external to him but already integrated into his own self. By this killing of Hermine, he also fulfills the love-commandment of Hermine that he has to kill her after falling in love with her – integrating her. Harry emerges as a freed person, “freed of all his inhibitions, finds compensation for all his defeats, acts out all his aggressions” (p. 117). Thus, the magic theatre functions as a “carefully worked out psychoanalytic treatment” (Hatfield, 2003, p. 117) for Harry and leaves him in harmony and bliss.

It is evident that Harry attains harmony through Jungian anima-integration, in and through his encounter with Hermine, Pablo, Maria, and the Land Lady, and the therapeutic journey through the magic theatre.

3.4. Spiritual Integration: Harry, who has been caught in the mire of routine and wallows in despair, crises and neurosis, through a therapeutic sojourn with Hermine, Pablo and Maria, who are all healthily reconciled with life through dance, music and acceptance of life in its mysterious and feminine aesthetic dimensions, experiences a ‘spiritual return’ home - to eternal consciousness, the eternal mother – Shakti, the cosmic womb. The intensely feminine companionship of Hermine and Maria infuse in Harry a “sacred sense of beyond, of timelessness” (Hesse, 1965, p. 180). And this sense reminds him of his dream of Goethe in which Harry understood that Goethe’s laughter was “the laughter of the immortals” (p. 181) and that immortal laughter a man experiences after passing through “all the sufferings, vices, mistakes, passions and misunderstandings” (p. 181). That transcendental laughter of the immortals enters the bone and flesh of Harry through dance and he experiences an eternal consciousness tapped within as he realizes at the same moment that ‘eternal consciousness’ involves a “return to innocence” and a “transformation into space” (p. 181). Harry experiences that space within him. He has, through the therapeutic effect of dance, become spiritual – feeling and being free and eternally conscious. This state of consciousness is called the ‘cosmic consciousness’ by saints and seers. Harry attains this state for there has always been a longing for “stillness and loftiness” (blend of yin – stillness and yang – arising) and he had in his heart constructed an “ascetic spiritual life” (Ziolkowski, 1965, p. 178) which all come true when the feminine aesthetic ambience creates in him a space for transcendental experience. In the stillness Harry experiences in an intimate embrace with Hermine, he also experiences the deep “ideal harmony” (Hesse, 1965, p. 76) between body and spirit which has always been a phenomenon in his intellectual awareness. This stillness in union with the feminine – pure integrated state – is very similar to the stillness Siddhartha experiences by the river. For both Harry and Siddhartha, this stillness (an intensely feminine character against action the masculine counter) is redemptive and integrative and establishes harmony in them. Siddhartha, in an integrated state, sees the entire reality as part of him, the river and the cosmos: “All flowed into each other” (Hesse, 1971, p. 134). Harry experiences an elevation of the personalities through suffering till they reach “God, the expansion of the soul” and “embrace the All”

(Hesse, 1965, p. 78) and become cosmic. Harry realizes that “fulfillment of the true selves lies not in living as individuals, but in returning to the spiritual world of the ‘All’” (Jillings, 1981, p. 59). In Harry there is a notable “resolution of crisis” witnessed in the process of a “mystical union” with the feminine, initiated and peaked in and through a dance in which “individuals merge in to a communion that ascends from sense to spirit” (Ziolkowski, 1973, p. 172). Harry experiences this ascending to the spirit in the communion with the feminine. Harry, moving far away from his life of despair, crisis and neurosis, through a gradual and healthy integration of the feminine, attains harmony and peace deep within him and the inner harmony is given a face through his laughter without an object, which is immortal.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

Harry Haller’s integration of the feminine in the psychological, and the spiritual realms at once inspire the readers and the listeners to try out similar integration consciously in and through our relationships with those in whom the feminine qualities are rich and flow forth freely, and if needed through psychotherapies, and methods like active imagination, meditations and exercises like Tai Chi. A regular practice to integrate the feminine qualities such as being passive, pondering, receptive, nurturing and surrendering, is sure to lead the modern human person, lost in high-speed and hyper-activity, into a realm of peace and harmony.

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