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Narative Time in the Novels of Hermann Hesse

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ABSTRACT

Time constitutes one of the most complex and vital artistic dimensions in Hermann Hesse's literary universe. Confronted with the existential crisis of modernity, the collapse of traditional European values, and the growing fragmentation of the modern self, Hesse abandoned the mechanistic and linear conception of Western temporality in order to construct a new narrative model grounded in subjective consciousness and spiritual experience. This study employs both classical and post-classical narratological frameworks – particularly theories of narrative temporality, anachrony, duration, simultaneity, and narrative frequency – to investigate the organization and representation of time in Hesse's major novels, including *Demian*, *Siddhartha*, *Steppenwolf*, *The Journey to the East*, and *The Glass Bead Game*.

The article demonstrates that Hesse systematically dismantles chronological continuity through analepsis, prolepsis, radical ellipsis, temporal dilation, and repetitive narrative structures. Narrative time in his fiction no longer functions merely as a chronological framework for events; instead, it becomes an experiential and philosophical structure through which memory, trauma, identity, and spiritual awakening are narratively articulated. The study further argues that Hesse constructs a non-linear temporal ontology characterized by simultaneity and the "eternal present," where past, present, and future coexist within moments of heightened consciousness. Ultimately, Hesse's narrative temporality operates through a triadic spiritual rhythm that moves from primordial innocence, through existential crisis and fragmentation, toward transcendence and reconciliation. By integrating narratology with cultural and ecological perspectives, this article reveals how Hesse transforms narrative time into a formal representation of existential becoming and spiritual self-realization in the modern novel.

Keywords: Hermann Hesse, Narrative Time, Modern novels, Narratological.

INTRODUCTION

Background and Research Context

Narrative time occupies a central position in modernist fiction and twentieth-century literary experimentation. The social and intellectual upheavals of the early twentieth century – characterized by rapid urbanization, industrial acceleration, and the profound trauma of two world wars – radically challenged the foundations of Western rationalism and historical consciousness. Concurrently, advancements in psychoanalysis and existential philosophy fundamentally reshaped prevailing conceptions of subjectivity, identity, and human experience. Within this turbulent milieu, the modern Western novel underwent pivotal formal and philosophical transformations, marked by a paradigm shift from external objectivity toward subjective consciousness, a growing skepticism toward coherent historical narratives, and a transition from mimetic representation to increasingly self-reflexive modes of literary construction.

Although nineteenth-century psychological realism had already begun to explore subjective experiences of temporality, the crisis of modernity intensified doubts about linear historical progress and mechanistic