

MA Creative Media Practice at UWS

2020 / 2021

Creative Skills Development | CSD

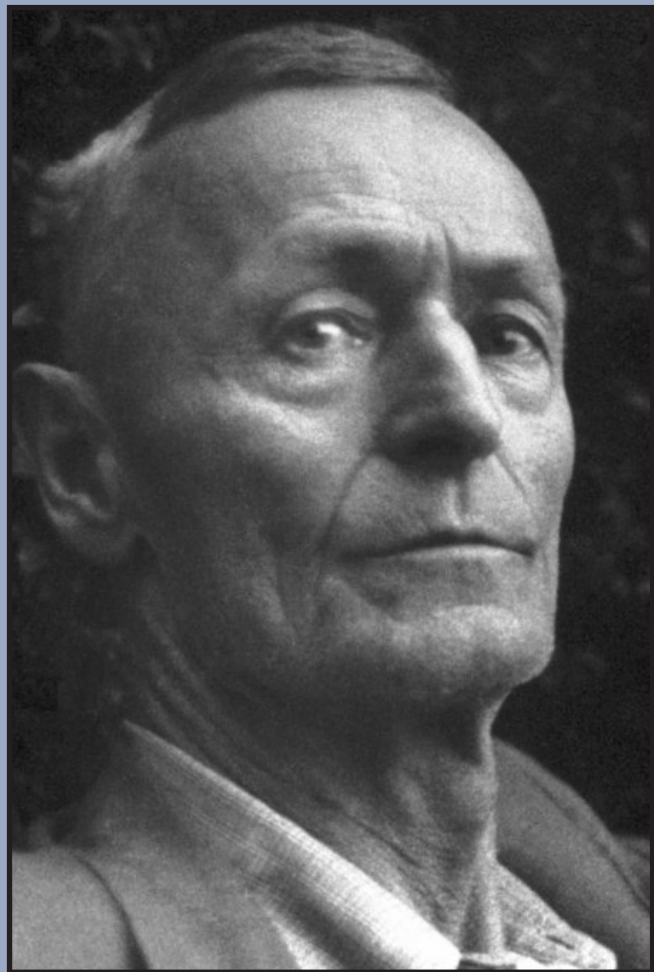
Hesse: A Letter & Poetry

– a creative homage –

DOCUMENT VERSION:
(V26_postUWS)

INITIAL DRAFT:
12.01.2021 (dd.mm.yyyy)

CURRENT DRAFT:
30.11.2021 (dd.mm.yyyy)



(The Nobel Prize, 2021)

Dear Mr. Hesse,

For some time now, I've been enjoying your poems in the anthology *Das Lied des Lebens: Die schönsten Gedichte*, published in 2019, as you know, in English "The Song of Life: The most beautiful Poems". I must say your work is truly wonderful, impressive, and truly extraordinary.

Among the works that stood out to me most are *Im Nebel* ("In the Fog"), *Stufen* ("Steps"), *Weißer Wolken* ("White Clouds"), *Wie eine Welle* ("Like a Wave"), and *Bekanntnis* ("Acknowledgement").

I should also say that when I read your Banquet speech you wrote in response to your 1946 Nobel Prize in Literature, I was very moved as I felt in alignment with your outlook and mindset. My sincere congratulations to you on that remarkable achievement.

Of the many poems in the book I particularly enjoyed *Wie eine Welle* and *Bekanntnis*. I wish to pay tribute and respect to you, your work, and express to you my admiration as a young writer at the beginning of my career. Being bilingual in German and English I appreciate the originals. I felt that I had to translate these two works into English for my peers to read. I would also like to pay tribute and respect to your work by responding to these two poems in my own words.

I commend you for your incredible achievements, your work, your mindset and your outlook, especially during one of the worst conflicts of this world; it is an outlook, I much admire.

Most sincerely,

Christopher J. Hill

Wie eine Welle (Like a Wave)

Specifically, its last stanza spoke to me. It has a grand, epic ring to it – one that is reminiscent of *Bekanntnis*. *Wie eine Welle* reads of life as adventurous, on the move, yet it expresses a sense of fleeting; life is ever progressing, time never stops and only few things tend to last. The ending is melancholic and hopeful, a thought of death being the convergence of life into the kingdom of longing, and of eternity. It is, however, also a lighter, more youthful look at the world.



Wie eine Welle (1901)

*Wie eine Welle, die vom Schaum gekrönt
Aus blauer Flut sich voll Verlangen reckt
Und müd und schön im großen Meer verglänzt –*

*Wie eine Wolke, die im leisen Wind
Hinsegelnd aller Pilger Sehnsucht weckt
Und blaß und silbern in den Tag verrinnt –*

*Und wie ein Lied am heißen Straßenrand
Fremdtönig klingt mit wunderlichem Reim
Und dir das Herz entführt weit über Land –*

*So weht mein Leben flüchtig durch die Zeit,
ist bald vertönt und mündet doch geheim
ins Reich der Sehnsucht und der Ewigkeit.*

Written when Hesse was 24.

Like a Wave (My Translation)

Like a wave, with its crown of foam
it stretches, full of longing, from floods of blue
to vanish, tiredly and lovely, in the great sea –

Like a cloud, sailing in the quiet wind
awakening the yearning of all pilgrims
to trickle, pale and silver, into the day –

And like a song at the hot side of the road
of an alien sound, of a wonderful rhyme,
how it bears your heart, far across the land –

Thus, my life blows fleetingly through time,
and soon it will fade, yet run, secretly,
into the kingdom of longing, and of eternity.



Bekenntnis (Acknowledgement)

Of all poems I had read, *Bekenntnis* had something mysterious about it. Though at first, I couldn't pinpoint what it was, it stuck with me. It speaks to me of a deep reflection on existence, what it means to live, and being conscious of the overarching whole, the evernescent nature of being. It also carries a maturity in its lines, a sentiment of realisation through aging. Hesse seems to have come to a recognition that appreciates the profundity of the cosmos and how fragile his life was. It is, very literally, an acknowledgement.



Bekenntnis (1918)

*Holder Schein, an deine Spiele
Sieh mich willig hingegeben;
Andre haben Zwecke, Ziele,
Mir genügt es schon, zu leben.*

*Gleichnis will mir alles scheinen,
Was mir je die Sinne rührte,
Des Unendlichen und Einen,
Das ich stets lebendig spürte.*

*Solche Bilderschrift zu lesen,
Wird mir stets das Leben lohnen,
Denn das Ewige, das Wesen,
Weiß ich in mir selber wohnen.*

Written when Hesse was 41.

Acknowledgement (My Translation)

Lovely reflection, to your games,
see how wilfully, I submit;
while others have purposes and goals,
for me 'tis already enough to live.


All things that ever moved my senses,
seem to me like a metaphor,
for the infinite and the one,
that, so very lively, I've always felt.

To read such sentiments in words,
will always make my life worthwhile,
for the everlasting, the being,
I know, it lives here within myself.



In Response – A Juxtaposition of *Wie eine Welle* and *Bekanntnis*

Upon reflection, I realised how *Wie eine Welle* and *Bekanntnis* appear to relate. It looks like *Bekanntnis* was written almost in a sense as an evolved, more mature, and more deeply reflective version of the themes in *Wie eine Welle*, 17 years before. When arranged in sequence, this possible relation becomes more evident. I also recognise a similarity between the development of Hesse's thoughts in these works and the way I've been developing my outlook and my poetry through continuous reflection. Writing *Bekanntnis* was similar to writing my own work. For *Wie eine Welle*, I had to adapt and combine my closed stanza approach to Hesse's open, continuous approach. It was also more difficult to write since it felt less profoundly reflective than *Bekanntnis*. I felt there was less depth to which to respond.



I hear – eyes closed – that sound of foam, – **1901**
that crown of those waves of blue.

I too remember! How they stretch, they long,
to fade, so soon, in glinting bursts.
In the open sea they end, dissolve and pale –

What dreamy thoughts are these, good sir?
A vision of ideals! Under quiet winds,
what pilgrim with those clouds were you?
This yearning, I think, I know it,
and, yet how it slips! Only a ghost of silver –

I too have walked, accompanied by song,
their familiar tunes like a friend.
My sorrows soothed, a hint, by gentle voices.
Yet, not always was I so at ease,
with that music, though it did uplift my soul –

Good sir: the spirit of a young mind,
in this gaze I see, of seeking!
Yet, this life will fleet; its current is swift.
À! What a romantic thought –
the kingdom of longing, and of eternity?

Let me laud your ownership, good sir,
of your life, and of its games.
My purposes – I do have – and my goals.
Yet, just to live? What is it then,
the drive, the pulse, that measure more?

What strength of heart, or determination,
upheld such faith in life alone?
I wonder – what lies in the passing of time.
Or, was it struggle that called,
good sir: what excites, in so purely being?

The glimmers that have moved my soul,
could ever I know them as truly?
How they whisper, of the infinite, and my all.
Ò! Could I recognise, like you –
how alive to me, they always feel 'n seem.

And, ever so, is it worthwhile – to see,
those signs, those subtle tokens.
For, in them, do we sense a place beyond?
Good sir: insight 'tis, to know –
it lives within you, the breath of eternity.

1918 –

The citation for Hesse's Nobel Prize reads:

“for his inspired writings which, while growing in boldness and penetration, exemplify the classical humanitarian ideals and high qualities of style.”

(The Nobel Prize, 1946), as quoted from The Nobel Prize website (2021).

Bibliography

Hesse, H. (2019) *Das Lied des Lebens: Die schönsten Gedichte*. 22nd edn. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag.

The Nobel Prize (2021) *Hermann Hesse* [Image]. Available at: <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1946/summary/> (Accessed: 13 January 2021).

The Nobel Prize (2021) *Hermann Hesse Facts*. Available at: <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1946/hesse/facts/> (Accessed: 13 January 2021).