

---

**Psychoanalytical Study of *Steppenwolf* by Hermann Karl Hesse**

---

**Sahil Kumar**<sup>1</sup>, Research Scholar (Department of English) Baba Mastnath University, Rohtak

**DR. J.K Sharma**<sup>2</sup>, Professor (Department of English) Baba Mastnath University, Rohtak, E-mail: sahilkumar1818@gmail.com

---

Paper Received on 12-01-2025, Accepted on 10-02-2025  
Published on 12-02-25; DOI:10.36993/RJOE.2025.10.1.274

---

**Abstract:**

The field of social Science is largely influenced by psychoanalytical study, which has emerged as a crucial method for comprehending the human mind since the 20th century. Sigmund Freud, the renowned psychologist, made substantial contributions and established a foundation for psychoanalytical studies. He presented various terms that elucidated the behavioral conditions of human' minds. Psychoanalysis has significantly assisted the counselor in comprehending and effectively treating patients. This research paper aims to thoughtfully analyze the psychoanalytical parameters of Alienation, ambivalence, and despair in Hermann Hesse's *The Steppenwolf*. Alienation is a psychosomatic disorder that causes an individual to become reclusive and distant. Individuals experiencing Alienation often begin to lead a solitary existence. Such an individual may cease engaging in social communication. Ambivalence refers to having mixed emotions or feelings about the same object. The subject at hand may refer to either a living being or an inanimate object or circumstance. If a person experiences opposing emotions regarding an object, they are ambivalent towards it. Despair signifies the absence of hope. Individuals often experience despair. Challenging and trying times in life frequently lead to feelings of hopelessness.

**Keywords:** psychoanalysis, Alienation, despair, ambivalence

**Introduction:**

Psychoanalysis serves to comprehend our mind and how it operates. Psychoanalysis aids in comprehending child psychology, human psychology, and social psychology. Psychoanalytic thinking enhances various academic disciplines. We have used this tool to interpret the psyche and improve our understanding of art,

---

literature, and history. Psychoanalysts focus on creating an advanced approach to comprehending the brain and the human mind. Psychoanalysis proves to be beneficial in therapeutic settings. Given the rise in stressful environments, the assistance of psychoanalysis has become essential. Psychoanalysis explores the depths of the mind to uncover the underlying causes of issues. Therefore, we cannot overlook its importance. In 1927, *Steppenwolf* made its debut. Harry Haller is the protagonist of *Steppenwolf*. Harry Haller is a self-loathing, fifty-year-old thinker who detests the bourgeois society in which he lives. He engages in sexual experiences and hallucinogenic substances as a path to fulfillment and self-exploration. Throughout the novel, he encounters a range of individuals, including two prostitutes and a saxophone player who dispenses drugs, while embarking on a quest for spiritual understanding. The novel employs both realistic and surrealistic techniques.

This research paper examines *Steppenwolf* by exploring the psychoanalytical themes of Alienation, ambivalence, and despair. Alienation is a psychosomatic condition that causes a person to become withdrawn and distant. A person experiencing Alienation often begins to lead a solitary existence. Such individuals might cease engaging in social communication. There is a significant likelihood of feeling isolated, which can result in depression. Alienation represents a major issue globally, stemming from social and economic decline, the ongoing disruption of social connections, and challenging work environments.

Ambivalence refers to having conflicting emotions or feelings about the same object. The subject at hand may be either a living being or an inanimate object or circumstance. If a person experiences mixed feelings about an object, they are ambivalent towards it. Such feelings may cause the individual to feel conflicted due to the contrasting emotions. Despair signifies an absence of hope. People often go through feelings of despair. Challenging and difficult times in life frequently lead to feelings of hopelessness. Factors like income, marital life, family, security, finances, and love can lead to feelings of despair. Despair often diminishes with the passage of time. However, when despair does not wane but instead grows stronger, it erodes hope in life, disrupts daily functions, and obstructs our ability to pursue our goals and desires. Psychoanalysts view this stage as clinical despair.

Clinical despair represents a total lack of hope and faith. It is marked by a sense of powerlessness, a negative outlook, and a lack of activity. Despair leads to discouragement and causes an individual to grapple with the search for meaning in life and the pursuit of happiness. It hinders a person from crafting a fulfilling and joyful existence for themselves. Individuals experiencing clinical despair may need support through counseling and medication. Neglecting clinical despair can result in suicidal tendencies among patients.

Hesse writes, "He led a quiet life, keeping himself to himself . . . For the man was not sociable; indeed, he was unsociable to a degree that I had never observed in

---

anyone before” (Hesse *Steppenwolf* 3). The story of *Steppenwolf* opens with the narration provided by the landlady's nephew. The nephew recounted the day he met Harry Haller. Harry was a fifty-year-old man who rented the attic room. He arrived with two suitcases and a book chest. Jan Hajda explores the theme of Alienation:

Alienation is an individual's feeling of uneasiness or discomfort which reflects his exclusion or self-exclusion from social and cultural participation. It is an expression of non-belonging or non-sharing, an uneasy awareness or perception of unwelcome contrast with others (758-759).

The narrator conveyed that Harry appeared alienated from the moment they first met. Harry remained alone, refraining from meeting anyone or hosting any guests. He chose to stay isolated for the entire day. The narrator encountered Harry only by chance on the staircase or in the corridor. Even in these meetings, Harry appeared detached and alone. The narrator admitted that he lacked any knowledge of Harry's background. Hesse asserts, “Every few yards, there was a poster or billboard advertising an all-girl band, a variety show, a cinema, or a dance night, but none of this was for me. It was all for 'everybody,' for normal people” (35).

Harry Haller recounted his experiences of aimlessly and solitary wandering through the streets. He frequently encountered a variety of advertisements related to leisure activities and entertainment. All these activities left Harry feeling isolated. Harry had always led a life of isolation. He could not partake in the joys that others experienced. During Harry's narration of the section, he referred to people in a typical manner, using the term 'everybody.' The reference indicates that Harry viewed himself as distinct from ordinary individuals. He always perceived a divide between himself and those around him. He viewed them as distinct from himself. Melvin Seeman discusses in *Empirical Alienation Studies*:

An Overview: The idea of community comes to stand for the full collection of troubles (the unity of miseries) that modern society supposedly generates—not simply loneliness and social isolation, but also normlessness (deviance), self-estrangement (detachment from, and instrumental use of, others), and cultural estrangement (loss of common values). (285)

Harry experienced a sense of detachment from the recreational pursuits that others found pleasure in. He was unable to appreciate or enjoy them in any way. He believed that he was not destined to engage in the pursuits that brought joy to others. Harry found it challenging to form emotional connections with others. He recalled several moments from his life that filled him with joy. One example was the musical piece that he had heard several years ago. Harry recalled the musical piece, and the memory brought a touch of joy to his mind. Holding onto a handful of moments filled with happiness and the challenges of socializing left Harry feeling isolated. He intentionally decided to live in a middle-class neighborhood so he could experience the lively atmosphere of such an area. Nevertheless, he appeared disconnected from

---

the entertainment and leisure activities set up in a bourgeois neighborhood. Hesse writes:

There was no doubt I had come with the best of intentions, but I just couldn't get into the right party mood. The deafening roars of enjoyment, the laughter, all the high jinks going on around me struck me as stupid and forced" (177).

Hermione invited Harry to the masquerade ball. She instructed Harry on most of the dance moves and insisted that he make himself available there. Harry felt a sense of unease about going to the ball. He attempted to delay his attendance at the ball for as long as possible. He strolled through pubs that evening to avoid having to participate in the entire event. He even viewed a movie just to ensure he would arrive late for the event. Harry consistently experienced unease in the presence of large crowds and loud environments. Rahel Jaeggi discusses in *Alienation*:

Alienation signifies a state of indifference and internal division, as well as a sense of powerlessness and a lack of connection to oneself and to a world perceived as indifferent and foreign. Alienation refers to the difficulty in forming connections with other individuals, objects, social structures, and, consequently, with oneself. (3)

Harry experienced a sense of isolation amid the throng of people. Although women invited him to join them in dancing, he was unable to comply. He made every effort to search for Hermione and Maria, yet he was unable to locate them. Harry experienced a sense of social isolation at the masque ball. He had made every effort to delay going to the ball. Moreover, upon reaching the ball, he attempted to abandon it. He was unable to partake in the festivities and find enjoyment. His struggles and worries prevented him from losing himself in the indulgent pleasures.

Harry kept to himself and rarely interacted with the guests. The nephew recounted the details of his initial encounter with Harry. He recounted the day when Harry came to stay in his rented room. Harry entered in an unusual manner, and when his aunt enquired about his desires, he casually noted that the air had a pleasant scent. The nephew watched as Harry ascended the stairs and made his way to his room, filled with a deep sense of disgust. David Engle and Hal Arkowitz discuss in *Ambivalence in Psychotherapy*:

In ambivalence, movement toward change is accompanied or followed by movement away from change and toward the status quo. Whether or not change occurs, the degree of change, and how well the change is maintained depends on the balance of the pros and cons of change. (2)

Harry contemplated the feelings of both affection and animosity towards the place. He felt mixed emotions about the room and the setting. The nephew remarked that while Harry appeared to enjoy the location, he also noticed him ridiculing it. The experience of both love and hate highlights the presence of ambivalence in this section of the novel. Harry appeared to both embrace and recoil from the middle-class

---

setting and environment. Harry asserts:

I also like the contrast between my life – my solitary, loveless, hectic, utterly disordered way of life – and this bourgeois family milieu. I like to savor the smell of peace and quiet, cleanliness, decency, and domesticity on these stairs. It never fails to move me despite my hatred of the bourgeoisie. (Hesse 30)

Harry, however, felt uneasy about the middle-class sentimentality. Harry harbored a deep-seated disdain for the neatness of the bourgeois despite his attraction to it. Harry detested the middle-class settlement. Harry was a solitary and isolated individual. Harry Haller found the family environment of the middle class unappealing. The middle class's cleanliness and orderliness did not appeal to Harry. His room stood in sharp contrast with the adjacent bourgeois area. His room was cluttered and in disarray. It undermined the sanity and equilibrium that the bourgeois environment offered. Despite being a loner, Harry found himself drawn to the family values embodied by the bourgeois. His life was marked by solitude, lacking in love and companionship, devoid of emotional attachment and sentimentality. The bourgeois lifestyle, on the other hand, was vibrant and characterized by strong family connections and deep emotional ties. Harry found himself in a state of conflict, drawn to the allure of bourgeois life yet struggling to fit into its culture.

Harry appears to struggle with an inner conflict, preventing him from engaging with bourgeois culture in a healthy manner. Until now, it has not been clearly stated whether Harry faced anxiety in his childhood, had an unstable relationship with his parents, or experienced unhealthy and inconsistent emotional bonding with them. Nonetheless, Harry does not conform to the bourgeois ideals of harmony, peace, and emotional stability. His struggle to embrace bourgeois culture reveals a sense of ambivalence within him. Hesse writes:

Although I said this with considerable force, it did not come from the heart. I could not imagine a contraption like that, for which I had absolutely no liking, in my study with its books, and there were lots of things about dancing that I also objected to. (124-125).

Harry felt a mix of emotions about his current life. He experienced conflicting feelings about his life. He experienced both love and hate for his life. He felt a blend of opposing emotions throughout his life. He was unable to fully embrace one way of life with complete commitment. He felt torn regarding the recent changes occurring in his life. His perspective on life embodies a mix of affection and disdain. Harry experiences mixed feelings regarding his life.

Hesse asserts, "At the same time, I realized that his pessimism was not based on contempt for the world but self-contempt, for however ruthlessly critical he could be when condemning institutions or individuals, he never spared himself" (11). Once Harry Haller took a room in the landlady's house, he caught the attention of her

---

nephew. The nephew viewed Harry as someone who was unwell. The nephew sensed that Harry was struggling with his mental well-being and his temperament. The nephew believed that Harry was enduring excessive hardship. The nephew observed the solitude and emotional deterioration occurring within Harry Haller. The nephew experienced compassion for Harry. Nevertheless, the nephew believed that the anguish and distress Harry was enduring stemmed from his depression. Rick Ingram contributes to *The International Encyclopaedia of Depression*:

Depression is commonly used to refer to emotional states of sadness, despair, numbness/emptiness/deadness/hopelessness, and related “down” or “blue” moods that often involve depletion of normal levels of energy, interest, mental focus, pleasure, social engagement, and appetite. (205)

The nephew noted that Harry held a critical, pessimistic, and cynical view of himself. He would chastise himself at the faintest hint of a mistake. Harry struggled with self-confidence and self-assessment. The nephew saw Harry as someone who had given up on life entirely. He thought that Harry was just going through the routine of life. He exhibited a distinct absence of enthusiasm and vitality, consistently appearing downcast.

The novel portrays Harry Haller as alienated from the outset. He finds it challenging to adapt to the bourgeois environment. Harry would roam the streets without purpose. He encountered numerous advertisements for leisure activities, yet none of them captured his interest. Even after Hermione had taught him the dance steps, he still felt uncomfortable at the ball. He loathed the vast assembly at the ball and made every effort to escape from it. Upon encountering Harry Haller, the narrator discerns Harry's inner conflict. Harry feels conflicted about the bourgeois community. His Alienation, as well as his ambivalence, stems from his inability to adjust to his surroundings. Harry feels mixed emotions about dancing. Although he convinces himself to take up dancing, his true motivation is simply to be near Hermione. Throughout the novel, Harry encounters profound despair. His despondency and hopelessness led him to feelings of despair. He reflects on the idea of suicide multiple times during the novel. His struggle to engage in leisure activities like others, his challenges in relationships, and his feeling of being an outsider in society constantly led him to consider suicide. This research paper examines the themes of Alienation, ambivalence, and despair in *Steppenwolf*.

### **References:**

- Engle, David E., and Hal Arkowitz. “Ambivalence in Psychotherapy: Facilitating Readiness to Change.” *Choice Reviews Online*, vol. 44, no. 01, Sept. 2006, pp. 44–0621. <https://doi.org/10.5860/choice.44-0621>.
- Hajda, Jan. “Alienation and Integration of Student Intellectuals.” *American*

An International Peer-Reviewed English Journal Impact Factor: 8.16(SJIF),Vol-10,Issue-1(Jan-Mar),2025  
Indexed in: International Citation Indexing (ICI), Cite factor, International Scientific Indexing (ISI),  
Directory of Research Journal Indexing (DRJI) Google Scholar, Cosmos and Internet Archives.

- 
- Sociological Review*, vol. 26, no. 5, Oct. 1961, p. 758.  
<https://doi.org/10.2307/2090205>.
- Hesse, Hermann. *Steppenwolf: A Novel*. Picador Modern Classics, 2015.
- Ingram, Rick E. "The International Encyclopedia of Depression." *Choice Reviews Online*, vol. 47, no. 04, Dec. 2009, pp. 47–1768.  
<https://doi.org/10.5860/choice.47-1768>.
- Jaeggi, Rahel. *Alienation*. Columbia UP, 2014.
- Jonas, Klaus, et al. "Attitudinal Ambivalence." *European Review of Social Psychology*, vol. 11, no. 1, Jan. 2000, pp. 35–74.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14792779943000125>.
- Lazarus, Richard. "Hope: An Emotion and a Vital Coping Resource Against Despair." *Social Research: An International Quarterly*, vol. 66, Jan. 1999, [philpapers.org/rec/LAZHAE](http://philpapers.org/rec/LAZHAE).
- Nock, Matthew K., et al. "Measuring the Suicidal Mind." *Psychological Science*, vol. 21, no. 4, Mar. 2010, pp. 511–17.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797610364762>.
- Razinsky, Hili. "Conscious Ambivalence." *Human Studies*, vol. 39, no. 3, Feb. 2016, pp. 365–84. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10746-016-9384-6>.
- Seeman, Melvin. "Empirical Alienation Studies: An Overview." *Springer eBooks*, 1976, pp. 265–305. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4684-8813-5\\_12](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4684-8813-5_12).

**How to cite this article?**

Sahil Kumar<sup>1</sup> & DR. J.K Sharma<sup>2</sup>, "Psychoanalytical Study of *Steppenwolf* by Hermann Karl Hesse" *Research Journal Of English (RJOE)*10(1),PP:268-274,2025, DOI:10.36993/RJOE.2025.10.1.274