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HESSE, WOOLF, AND THE “ART OF (RE)CONSTRUCTION”

A Comparative Study of Der Steppenwolf (1927) and The Waves (1931)

ABSTRACT: Written at the end of the 1920s, Hermann Hesse’s *Der Steppenwolf* (1927) and Virginia Woolf’s *The Waves* (1931) are marked by the discoveries of their time, more particularly those of psychoanalysis. Through the use of fragmentation devices (of the novelistic structure, the plot, the narrative) or through the complex network of characters organized around a central figure, these two novels explore the new conceptions of subject and his/her identity. By doing so, these novels confer a modernist orientation to *Bildungsromane*: the formation of the hero now corresponds to the understanding and integration of the different facets of a fragmented psyche. Nevertheless, far from being reduced to a mere literary transposition of psychoanalytical theories, these works, when taken in their aesthetic totality, actually constitute what I would like to call “*Gebildete Romane*” (“constructed novels”). The novelistic divisions as well as the multiplication of voices generate the presence of different points of view that dialogue with each other. They eventually interweave so deeply that they form the novels themselves. These constructed novels, conceived as the results of a dynamic between fragmentation and composition thus constitute singular literary objects in that they reinvent the genre and propose new conceptions of identity.

KEYWORDS: Modernism; Comparatism; Hermann Hesse; Virginia Woolf; (20th century) Novel; Polyphony; Fragmentation; Construction; Totality; Subject; Identity; Psychoanalysis; Self-writing.