

# Ambacher takes on Hermanne Hesse

. . . while Arnold will go “through culture shock”

## Hesse: Developed in 1977 and continues to be popular

BY DAVE EMSWILER

“His themes destroy the idea that you are merely a number,” states Dr. Robert F. Ambacher, of 20th century German novelist Hermanne Hesse.

“Hermanne Hesse in Translation” is a MSC course developed in 1977 by Ambacher of the foreign-language department. He said, “I came up with the idea for the course when foreign language enrollments were dropping in the early 70’s. I wanted to find out why everyone was reading Hesse and I quickly found out.”

According to Ambacher, Hesse was one among several other possible authors such as Thomas Mann, Franz Kafka, and Bertolt Brecht. “I thought I would start with Hesse and see how long he would hold up, then go on to other 20th century German writers,” he said. However, according to Ambacher the course has been filled ever since.

Hermanne Hesse (1877-1962) was a Nobel Prize winner for such works as *The Glass Bead Game*, *Steppenwolf*, *Siddhartha*, *Narcissus*, *Goldmund* and others. “He writes in a style that is easy to understand, he appeals to all ages,

though his simply-expressed ideas can be very complex. Hermanne Hesse has at least one answer to the problems of 20th century man — that is the self,” Ambacher said.

According to one classroom handout from Ambacher the ‘self’ is, “the archetype of order and unification . . . when the self is in proper order, a person is in harmony with himself and the world.” Thus “man becomes motivated to increase his understanding and the direction of his life.”

Hesse has had over 100 million readers, and he has been translated into more than 50 languages and dialects world-wide according to Ambacher.

Ambachers’ teaching style is as liberal as his material. The class meets in the lounge at Landes Hall. Coffee and tea are provided, and students are able to relax on couches and living room-style chairs. “I do not like the adversary relationship where teachers are on one side of the desk and students are on the other. The lounge puts people at ease. The dormitory is the students’ territory; I’m meeting them on their own ground,” he said.

“Students are most important,” he said. “You could get rid of the administration and teachers because the students could teach themselves. I like the fact that the class has continued to be popular.”

In 1978 Ambacher won the Commonwealth Distinguished-Teaching Chair, the highest award given to a teacher in Pennsylvania. The award included \$6000 dollars in cash.

The past fall session Ambacher has been on sabbatical. He said, “The sabbatical went well. It was designed so I could complete a course in German civilization on which I have been working on since 1965. With the assistance of two German exchange students, Martina Fuhrmann and Lothar Westershausen from Marburg, I was able to reach my goal. I hope to find a publisher in Germany.”

Apparently Thomas Mann, Franz Kafka and Bertolt Brecht will be in line a while for their own course-title at MSC. For now “Hermanne Hesse in Translation” and Ambachers’ coffee pot are both full.