

**Eveline Hasler**  
**Tessin-Calw/Calw-Tessin**

Written after spending February to April 2001  
as Hermann Hesse Writer-In-Residence in Calw

As a prelude to my period as Hermann Hesse Writer-In-Residence, I approach Hermann Hesse from the opposite direction; I travel from Tessin to Calw, following the writer's biography in reverse, so to speak. "Do you really want to travel north for weeks at the beginning of February?" my neighbours ask with a shake of their heads, pointing to the yellowish-green buds of the mimosa. "All you will find there is the return of the winter and the cold, what is making you go?" The magic of Hermann Hesse, I say.

They nod. Nobody seems to be surprised. Hesse is present wherever one goes in Tessin, one thinks of his texts while working in the garden or looking out at the lake, one sees him with straw hat and easel under the magnolia, and imagines the places he went for his walks. The day before my departure, in February 2001, there is a northerly föhn blowing over the south side of the Alps, the sky is cloudless and of an unnatural, transparent blue, the surface of the lake has a metallic glint to it, and the islands appear black when viewed against the light. Farewell visits. One of these it to see Heiner Hesse, who lives a few bends higher up the slope in an old mill. The memory of the man born in 1911 is fresh, he speaks of the houses and streets of Calw, shows me photos, sends his regards, giving me the telephone number of a cousin, the daughter of Fanny Gundert.

I then set off for a final walk which takes me through the terrain where Hesse, many years prior to Montagnola, sought recreation and inspiration: the slopes of Monte Verità and the Celtic rocks to the west of Ascona. Here, the trees are still as bare as in winter, the tangle of branches pearl-grey, the slopes sepia-coloured from the dead foliage deposited by the chestnuts. Climbing the steep incline, I pull myself up with the help of the clumps of broom, then stumble into a hollow, up to my hips in a drift of dead leaves. On the stone steps that wind their way up the granite rocks, I recall some lines from Hesse's poem "Bei Arcegno":

*"Ich gehe den alten Eremitenstieg,  
der zage Frühlingsregen tröpfelt sacht,  
Im kahlen Wind aufflimmert Birkenlaub,  
Braunspiegelnd widerglänzt der nasse Fels ...  
Hier ist mein heiliges Land, hier bin ich hundertmal  
den stillen Weg der Einkehr zu mir selbst gegangen ..."*

*["I walk the old hermit's stair,  
the faltering spring rain gently falls,  
in the raw wind, birch foliage shimmers upward  
Brown-reflecting, the wet rock glisten mirror-like ...  
Here is my holy land, here I have set off one hundred times  
on the quiet path of inner contemplation to my self ..."]*

Higher up, on the plateau, the wind is playing in the rushes, a buzzing sound draws me to the ponds under the rock face, where the brackish water is throbbing with life. The frogs are mating, spring is nigh.

*"Hier atmen falterhaft Gedanken fort,  
die ich vor Jahren hier in Fels und Ginster,  
in Sonnenlauch und Wind erjagt ..."*  
*["Here breathe on, moth-like, thoughts  
that, years gone by, I chased down  
in rock and broom, in wisp of sun and wind..."]*  
the poem "Bei Arcegno" continues.

During his time in Berne, too, Hesse was forever coming here to seek solitude, regeneration. "Am off to the Thebaic desert, i.e. to the area around Locarno, where I have already spent so much time living the life of a hermit," he wrote to Paul Gundert in Calw. Gusto Gräser, poet and man of nature, whom Hesse had got to know in the vicinity of Monte Verità, was probably the first to take the young writer out to this place. Gräser called it his Erdsternsaal ("earth star room"). I climb higher and look down to the lake from the little alpine meadow, with the bare, round granite rocks rising up like tortoise shells from the perpetually green vegetation.

On the way back, I stop in front of the cavern that is known locally as the *pagan grotto*, *heathen grotto*. I imagine how Hesse sought to play the hermit in this cleft, how badly the solitude suited him, especially when the Tessin rain poured down angrily for days on end. The text "In den Felsen – Notizen eines Naturmenschen" ("In the rocks – Notes of a man of nature") speaks of such experiences:

*"The first days of my hermitage were terrible. (...) I am writing these words lying on the floor in my shack, it's pouring with rain, and it is so cool that I have wrapped myself up to my arms in my woollen blanket. I am now happy that I brought paper and a pencil with me, although this kind of pastime actually runs counter to my intention. Yet with it now having rained for three hours, and no end in sight, lying alone in a shack, out in the wilderness, without books, without tobacco, without fire, without bread, weakened by fasting, would be really difficult to endure without this harmless writing pleasure."*

Caverns and clefts are places of reflection, rebirth, inspiration. Approaching from Herrenberg, I drive across a bright plateau criss-crossed by sections of forest. Suddenly, the mesa falls away and, below, in a cleft, lies Calw. Houses with pointed gables, nestling next to one another, the roofs interleaved. Cutting through the collection of buildings like a parting is the little river; here, next to the red sandstone bridge, I see the young Hesse still standing with his fishing rod.

Hesse omnipresent here, too: on my computer, he appears on the home page of the Sparkasse. In the storefront window of the city information office, he is greeting us from a poster: an elegant, highly cultured Hesse, dark suit, tie, watch-chain, cigar between his fingers. A finely chiselled face, an alert, erudite look, gold-rimmed glasses. Looking the way he does here, he could be stepping out of the office of a Calw tannery. Special edition of Hesse for Calw. The remaining Hesse - the half-naked truthseeker from the slopes of Monte Verità, for example - continues to live on the dark side of the moon.

In Schüzhaus, the well-documented and lovingly appointed museum, I encounter a more multilayered Hesse. I am pleased to see, on the wall of the library room, a woodcut by Max Bucherer. In the early 50s, the artist had the house in Tessin, the one in which we live, built without an architect, and lived there himself for many years. At the time, the widow of Hesse's friend presented us with a copy of this head, and thus it is that Hesse has been presiding over our apartment from the mantelpiece for the past nine years. I like my "Schreibklausur" in Calw. From this elevated hide, I am able to see most things: the industrious pedestrians, the schoolchildren, the bank's customers, I sympathize with the red-footed pigeons of eternally mincing step, with the steep roofs that glisten in the rain. Here, it does not rain as angrily as in Tessin, the rain is gentler, thinner, more monotonous. On a February morning, the half-timbered houses are covered by a thin layer of snow. These are the town and villages I imagined as a child, Advent calendar houses with silver cotton wool and illuminated windows that open out on to new dreams each day. Yet a glance outside the window of the flat of the writer-in-residence teaches me that this is a place where people work a lot and dream less. When seen from a bird's-eye view, the people appear to be hurrying even in the early morning, acting as if they were aware of

their destination, with only the children and young people with their schoolbags sometimes lingering, moving in more playful fashion. That slight, lanky boy over there could be Hermann Hesse at the age of fifteen.

In Calw, I begin to reread his early works.

Has anyone written better about the enchantments, trials and tribulations of one's younger years? The scenes of those events and occurrences are to be encountered everywhere one goes here in Calw. Over there the house of grandfather Gundert, here the house in which little Hermann was born, and in the workshop, at the intersection of Badgasse, lived the "Mohrle" whose early death so overshadowed the writer's youth.

Is Calw conceivable without Hesse, Hesse without Calw?

One day, on the trail of the young Hesse, I travel to Maulbronn.

Even today, there is still an ephor performing his duties there, though the wheel of time has changed quite a few things in this venerable old edifice since the days of *Unterm Rad*. The ephor who leads me up the spiral staircase to the oratory in the year 2001 sports a coloured sweater and quotes Hesse. The students of the third millennium out in the corridor, with their modish designer ponytails, once again display a remarkable resemblance to the portraits of former pupils: Kepler, Hölderlin, Herwegh, and also Straus, who was here to repeat a year. Hesse is not to be found in the ancestral portrait gallery. His room, says the ephor with regret, was cut in two in the course of refurbishment work, as if all memory of him was to be exorcised. A sticker on a door in the dormitory reads "Success is sexy." Under the stairs in the hallway is a baby carriage.

A silence descends on Calw on Saturday afternoons; on Sundays, not even the café is open. At the weekend, the place simply dies.

The people of Calw, I noticed, do not live in Calw but up in the well-sunlit villages on the rim of the basin.

In the little town, behind the delightful, museum-like half-timbered façades live Southern Italians and Turks. Every Saturday evening, the young people of Mediterranean descent emit a cry of liberation. Now we're on our own. Like in Sicily, they sit down on the steps, play with balls or cards. Shouts uttered in foreign tongues take hold of the place, which, now swept clean of the natives, moves a piece further south.

I, too, have remained, in my poet's chamber.

What is silence, and what effect does it have?

*"Nothing in the world is more abhorrent to man than to take the path that leads him to himself,"* the master writes in his *Demian*.

During the week, I work on a story about Hesse in Tessin for an anthology that is to appear in Hesse year 2002. Quite frequently, I give readings in bookstores, schools. It is only the Sundays I could do without. I look out of the Calw kitchen window, discovering, between the zigzag lines of the forest, the sole way out of this eel-pot-style fish trap: a high valley, covered by a cotton wool-like bank of fog. Fog is pushing through the pines up on the rim of the basin: streaks, haze, mist. Delphi fog. Like Hesse in the cavern in Arcegnò, I await inspiration in Calw.

What the fogs are unable to do on this dreary Sunday is no doubt effected by the hot springs in this area so rich in natural spectacles. Teinach is where I would like to head, to its delightful little natural baths. Yet it is hard to escape a cleft in the rocks, public transport here being a phantom. According to the timetable, the trundling train does stop in Teinach. I get off, look around me, a little lost, the town with the bathing temple seems to have been carried off by the fog.

Nothing but a brick hut, a wet road, the river.

Finally, I get my act together and set off on my way, my bathing bag in one hand, my umbrella in the other.

Wherever the way may lead. Way? Being on the way is everything, says the way.

Gradually, I began to make out faces in the haze of the cavernous cleft. Striking figures who, in Calw, rule over empires: music, history, local politics, pedagogics. A likable family clan represents the realm of books. Yet in the vicinity of the Sparkasse in particular, only friendly spirits appeared to me. Despite her little children, Frau Weinheimer always had an ear for my questions and needs, becoming dear and indispensable to me. Without a word of complaint, diligent experts dealt with the countless little hitches that occurred in my high-tech poet's chamber. At the Sparkasse, friendly Herr Ackermann watched over the letters and packages that arrived for me.

The Sparkasse, an empire caught in a balancing act between the pecuniary and the spiritual. It impressed me on account of its many layers. Down below, cheques and bills are pushed to and fro across the counters, while on the upper floors, where clients are offered what is no doubt devilishly good advice, exquisite pictures, mostly originals of works by Hesse and Schlichter, testify to the artistic sensibilities of the management. Yet the crowning glory of the bank is the little library with rare "Hessiana", and it was there that I spent some enjoyable hours in an inner dialogue with H.H.

I felt a living link to the Hesses whenever I entered the Jugendstil house on Gartenweg, where Marlies Bodamer, the cousin recommended to me by Heiner Hesse, resides. Teatime, with its lively talk and discussions, made me sense something of Old Calw and the Hesse era, and at the end I was allowed to look into the valuable cabinet containing the originals of the letters Hesse wrote to Fanny Gundert.

Emerging from the haze, and becoming ever clearer as they did, were other faces. Whenever cavern fever was seeking to grip me, the wise women appeared as in the fairy-tale, sticking her head of frizzy blonde hair out of a Picasso-blue car and taking me off with her. Without her, the springs and the charming villages around the rim of the cleft would have eluded me.

One day, Herr Hartmann took me on a tour of the monastery complex in Hirsau and I recognized the reformist and revolutionary force that had gone forth from the Nagold valley. From that point on, I enjoyed walking to Hirsau, it appearing to me as an eye in the forest, as a place of geomancy.

Yet not only in Hirsau, also elsewhere in this valley, rendered mystic by the shadows of trees, I found the people to be less simply fashioned than out in the country. They think and experiment, hatching out their own clever ideas, keeping, out in a hidden corner of the forest, their own springs and vapours of belief: Waldensians, Methodists, Anthroposophists, Pietists ...

At dinner in Old Calw, an old man at the table next to me enquired what a Swiss woman like me was doing in Calw.

I am on the trail of Hermann Hesse, I replied.

Whereupon he: Do you believe that Hermann Hesse prayed to God?

My response, which was cautiously phrased, did not appear to aggrieve him. He stood up and pressed, all dignity and peace, a prayer pamphlet into my hand. A descendant of shoemaker Flaig?

Weeks went by, the days gradually gaining in length and in warmth. One morning, the café moved its tables outside, the sky took on a blue, almost southerly aspect, over the pointed gables. I suddenly thought of my camellia, which may well have been close to wilting with its mandala-shaped flowers. In the night that followed, I heard Hermann Hesse, this time as the gardener from Montagnola, whisper to me: *"For the moment, it tastes wonderful, that sense of being settled, of having a home, that feeling of friendship with flowers, earth, spring, the sense of responsibility for a little piece of earth"* ... The calendar indicated that Easter was almost upon us. The same magic that had drawn me to the Nagold in Swabia

was now irresistibly pulling me back to Tessin, yet there was one thing I knew: I had a good time behind me and shall not be lost to Hermann Hesse and Calw.