Demian – Herman Hesse Essay, Research Paper

Herman Hesse?s novel Demian tells of a young boy

named Emil Sinclair and his childhood growing up

during pre-World War I. Emil struggles to find

his new self-knowledge in the immoral world and

is caught between good and evil, which is

represented as the light and dark realms. Hesse

uses much symbolic diction in his novel to give a

more puissant presentation of Emil Sinclair and

the conflict between right and wrong. The

symbolism gives direction, foreshadow, and

significance towards every aspect of the novel.

Emil Sinclair?s home as a young child is a very

important symbol in the novel. As Emil attends

school he is shown a world immoral value. The

confusion of which is right or wrong creates the

need for a safe haven for Emil. Emil refers to his

home as a realm of light and states that he and his

family all belong to that realm. The house itself

was once a monastery, giving it a more powerful

representation of the light realm. This symbolic

asylum represents Emil?s innocence within himself

and casts him apart from the real world. Another

safe haven Emil retreats to is after he finds

himself as a member of the mark of Cain. Eva?s

garden symbolizes the Garden of Eden (a

religious setting therefore of the light realm) and

Emil separates himself there as one with the mark

of Cain apart from the rest of the corrupt world.

Both settings symbolize Emil?s importance in the

world as well as his destiny.

The Garden of Eden presents itself as another

symbolic location. The event that Emil told the

story of stealing the apples from the garden was

a very symbolic point of the novel in which Emil

breaks away from his light realm. The garden that

Emil stole the apples from represented the

Garden of Eden and the apples, or forbidden

fruit, symbolized Emil’s first sin. This event

foreshadows what is next to come in the conflict

of good and evil. Emil?s first step out of the light

realm gives way to more symbolic events where he

becomes more submerged into the dark realm.

At the beginning of the novel, Emil notices that

there is a coat of arms above his house

representing the Cain religion. The coat of arms

contained a sparrow hawk bird on it. Hesse uses

this symbolic approach to give the sparrow hawk

purpose in the rest of the story, as a symbol of

the mark of Cain. Emil discovered that the bird

represents the god Abraxas. From this point, Emil

is determined to find the meaning of the bird and

Abraxas. After the rain washed away a painting

of Beatrice that Emil painted, Emil could see

Demian and himself in the canvas. Emil then

painted a picture of the sparrow hawk on the

same canvas. Hesse used this event to symbolize

the connection between Emil, Demian, and

Abraxas. After bringing these characters

together as one, Hesse was able to conclude Emil?s

transformation into the New World. Emil sees the

bird again above the hallway of Frau Eva?s home.

The bird in Eva?s hallway symbolized her home as

a house of Cain. Now Emil has found himself and

knows he belongs there. Emil sees the bird once

again outside in the form of clouds in the raining

sky. This clearly shows that the rest of the Old

World is ready for the transformation into the

New World.

In the last scenes of the novel, Emil is on the

battlefields of World War I. One night Emil

looks up into the sky and sees an image of a vast

village of people being engulfed into a god-like

figure which resembles Eva. The figure then

crouches over and gives birth to the people that

are now bright shining stars. This is the most

important symbolic event in Hesse?s novel. The

god-like figure symbolizes Eva, being the leader

of the Cain people. The people that where

engulfed by the god-like figure symbolize the

people of the Old World. The god-like figure now

represents the Virgin Mary and gives birth to the

New World, which are the people transformed

into stars. This event concludes the passing of the

Old World to the New World. Each character has

now fulfilled their destiny. Hesse uses the last

scene in his novel to illustrate a clearer

presentation of the transformation. The hospital

where Demian and Emil last speak symbolized the

stable in which baby Jesus was born. Hesse

creates the setting of the barn and surrounding

hay to enhance his representation. The irony of

this symbolic setting helps conclude not only the

characters destiny, but the Old World’s also.

The symbolic elements lead Emil to find himself

as an individual with the mark of Cain. Herman

Hesse used many symbolic items and events

throughout his novel to present Emil Sinclair’s

new self-knowledge. The utilization of Hesse’s

symbolic strategy shows his complexity as a

writer as well as in his characters. Combining

each of these symbolic elements created Emil

Sinclair’s character, purpose, and destiny

towards his new self-knowledge.