
Personal Narrative Assignment

Rationale: In Hermann Hesse's Steppenwolf (1927), the nephew of Haller's former landlady (the narrator of the preface) describes Harry's records as follows:

It was not in my power to verify the truth of the experiences related in Haller's manuscript. I have no doubt that they are for the most part fictitious, not, however, in the sense of arbitrary invention. They are rather the deeply lived spiritual events which he has attempted to express by giving them the form of tangible experiences. The partly fantastic occurrences in Haller's fiction come presumably from the later period of his stay here, and I have no doubt that even they have some basis in real occurrence. (22)

If the nephew's world is intended to be the same as our own, many of the experiences included in Haller's records are impossible or exceedingly improbable. But as the nephew states, these experiences are not arbitrary (just as all good art is never arbitrary). Instead, the events and characters in the records are tangible analogs for elements of Haller's metaphysical development. While perhaps none of these events occurred and none of these characters existed as described, they each represent real experiences from the world shared by Harry and the narrator.

Steppenwolf is a novel with few narrative plot elements. Instead, the novel is primarily concerned with the development of spiritual and metaphysical ideas through dialogue, metaphor, and symbolism, as well as the internal monologue of Harry.

Your challenge: To create a fictitious record of your own, in which the tangible experiences represent your own deeply-lived spiritual events.

Model your text after the novel to explore your own take on these metaphysical matters. Ultimately, the assignment should explore your version of the outsider v. insider dichotomy. Your text should reflect mastery of the novel, including elements of style, structure, and theme.

Length guidelines: 4-6 pages.

Format guidelines: All submissions must be double-spaced with a Times New Roman font and one-inch margins all around.

Submission guidelines: A complete rough draft will be due in class for peer editing. The final draft must be uploaded at turnitin.com.