

The concept of the family and its portrayal



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

“Your soul is the whole world” (Hesse 7). While the value of a soul is something that cannot be understated, the belief that it is the whole world does not leave room for many other people. In Hermann Hesse’s *Siddhartha* the titular character spends his life searching for answers from the world, only to discover that the answers were inside him the entire time. By the time Siddhartha reaches this conclusion however, he has abandoned everyone who has ever loved him, and he has done so in what he calls the justifiable name of the soul. Siddhartha finds his happiness, his peace of body, mind, and soul, but at an expense that is hardly his alone. He abandons his parents in favor of the Samanas; he abandons the Samanas and his best friend Govinda in favor of city life; he abandons city life and the relationships he has forged in it in favor of the unknown, only to find what he considers to be his place in the world, a life as a ferryman. Siddhartha throws his family away whenever he becomes struck by a bout of restlessness, and in doing so, he makes family seem irrelevant, unimportant and ultimately unnecessary. Siddhartha is immensely selfish, and does not deserve the contentment he finds living as a ferryman; rather, he deserves to eternally suffer the agony of abandonment he has impressed upon his mother and father, his friend Govinda, but most especially his child and the woman that gave birth to him.

In his first act of desertion, Siddhartha leaves behind his mother and father in order to find the way to fulfillment through the ascetic Samanas. With this departure from his idyllic village life, he sets a precedent he will continue to follow throughout his life. While leaving his parents is not incomprehensible, for he truly believes there is something more to the world than the ritualistic

mantras and meditation of the Brahmins, it is the fact that it was done in vain that makes it awful to behold. ““ When someone seeks...then it easily happens that his eyes see only the thing that he seeks, and he is able to find nothing, to take in nothing because he always thinks only about the thing he is seeking, because he has one goal, because he is obsessed with his goal”” (140). Siddhartha only sees his own desire of answers, regarding his soul and the world in its entirety, but he never stops to actually see what he does as a result. He wants to see the world, to learn from it, to get what he wants from it, but as a Samana he learns only to be disgusted by it. This is what he leaves his family for: to become bitter, and to empty himself of any actual self, for this is what he and his fellow Samanas believe to be the path to “ enlightenment”. As he feels himself learn to loath the same world he asks for the utmost of privileges from, to grant him wisdom and understanding, he recognizes that ultimately, he has accomplished little. Still, Siddhartha never stops to think that he might have been wrong, that maybe abandoning his mother and father was not the way to enlightenment. Siddhartha fails to grasp the unequivocal value of a family that loves him unrestrainedly, as he fails to fully appraise the value of the same kind of love from his friend Govinda. Govinda, who also leaves behind his home and family, his whole life, out of loyalty to Siddhartha, is also left behind by the once again absconding ungrateful narcissist. In an act that seems to just come naturally to him, Siddhartha leaves Govinda behind when he chooses to follow the Buddha, the so-called “ illustrious one”, because he finds what he considers to be a flaw in Buddha’s preaching, proving both Siddhartha’s unrivaled arrogance and his inability to return the love and devotion that his friend bestows upon him unreservedly.

While Siddhartha's wasting of the love given to him by Govinda and his parents is in its own right a tragedy, it is not nearly as revolting as his absolute annihilation of the love given to him by Kamala, but especially the love his son, his only child, his namesake, is never given the right to feel for him. Shockingly, disgustingly, Siddhartha later has the awe-inspiring audacity to say to Govinda that "' It seems to me...that love is the most important thing in the world'" (147). Siddhartha finds his peace with nature, with the river, with the world he initially felt such repugnance for, but ultimately, this cannot possibly matter a single iota when it comes only from the deliberate, repeated forsaking of those that love and sacrifice for him. Siddhartha's happiness comes at the expense of his child, and this is inexcusable. A parent is supposed to love his or her child more than anything and everything in the world combined, but Siddhartha loves nothing and no one more than he loves himself, however confounding such may be. Siddhartha never gives his son, the young Siddhartha, any reason to trust him; rather, he gives him every reason to doubt him. He is never there for him or Kamala, and all the blame for Kamala's death and young Siddhartha's callous sense of entitlement traces back to Siddhartha. It is his abandonment of Kamala that causes her to be in the woods when she is bitten by the venomous snake, as it his abandonment that leaves his son to be raised without any sort of acknowledgement or understanding of a world where everything is not provided upon any given whim of desire.

Therefore, it is Siddhartha's own fault that his son leaves him, as he himself left his own parents. This, finally, brings about the pain that he has so long been deserving of, but Siddhartha quickly unburdens himself of the guilt and

shame, the torment of abandonment, because he believes it to be in his best interest, when in actuality, the only thing in his best interest is for him to finally, however belatedly, realize exactly what it is he has done and to repent, to beg forgiveness from his son. ““ Not in his speech or thought do I regard him as a great man, but in his deeds and life”” (148). Siddhartha’s life and the deeds that define it do not point to greatness. His selfishness kills the mother of his child, and it steals in the most egregious manner his son’s absolute right, not privilege, to his father. This is unforgivable. At no point in his life, throughout all his searching and wandering, his fasting and meditating, or any of his supposed “ awakenings” does Siddhartha realize the unparalleled value of a loving family.

Siddhartha consistently exchanges his family and the love it offers, the very emotion he considers to be “ the most important thing in the world” for himself and his own narcissistic tendencies. Ironically, he blunders in this too. He fails to accurately appraise the value of the self because he sees himself and his soul as the most important thing when the most important thing is family, when the most important thing truly is love, but not love of the self. ““ You show the world as a complete, unbroken chain, an eternal chain, linked together by cause and effect”” (32), says Siddhartha to Buddha, the so-called “ illustrious one.” Siddhartha says he understands what this means, but he is unable to realize that he is the cause of the effect of so much devastation. Ultimately, Siddhartha finds his peace and happiness as a ferryman, but he does not deserve to. The only thing he is deserving of is the understanding of what it means to abandon someone, and to realize that is

what he has done time and time again, most horrifically to his own child, if according to biology alone.