

# “The War does not Exist”. (Inner) Conflict in The House of Refuge by Willem Frederik Hermans

**Author :** Emilia de Feyter

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## Abstract

When the narrator of Willem Frederik Hermans' novella discovers The House of Refuge, he says: “The war does not exist (Hermans, 1952, 7)”. The following analysis demonstrates that in The House of Refuge, conflict does exist on several inter-related levels. On the one hand, there is the outer conflict of the war, which is inevitable and destroys the illusionist notion of order. This illusion of order could be represented as a utopia. Moreover, there are spatial oppositions, conflicting with each other: nature versus culture and dryness versus water. On the other hand, inner conflict disturbs the mind of the unreliable narrator, who struggles with the psychological conflict of the death drive and who has existentialist and absurd thoughts, who isolates himself from society, who tries to change his identity and who denies that the war exists. This modernist investigation on conflict contributes to the understanding of what soldiers went through during World War II. This analysis is therefore devoted to the recognition of the post-war work The House of Refuge in a broader context.

## Keywords

Willem Frederik Hermans, The House of Refuge, II World War, utopia

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