Beneath the Wheel (1905/1906), Hesse’s second novel, has everywhere been read as Hesse’s angry autobiographical depiction of the adolescent crisis that led him to break with his family and forsake his prestigious prep-school scholarship in order to devote himself to Literature, or as a searing critique of inhumane, authoritarian, and even proto-Fascist schooling practices in Wilhelmine Germany.

In "Novel Ideas," Vahlbusch demonstrates that neither reading can be sustained. Turns out that Beneath the Wheel is best read as a novel, and a pretty good one at that, about adolescent friendship, first love, and betrayal.