The Freemasonic Ritual Route in Goethe's 'Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre'

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"Des Maurers Wandel / Es gleicht dem Leben": The Freemasonic Ritual Route in *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*

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**ABSTRACT**


In the eighteenth century Freemasons developed an initiation ceremony which included progression along a ritual route. Goethe transformed this esoteric system into a device which lends structure and metaphorical substance to his last novel.

Ich wette, Freund Voland ließ da nicht einmal die Kirchenväter... wie... ich die Maurerreden in den deutschen Klassikern... immer übersprungen habe.

Mit einem ganz natürlichen Instinkt, lieber Dystra... Sie haben wahrscheinlich immer gefühlt, daß diese Maurerreden in der That Dasjenige, was wir an Herder und Goethe bewundern, nicht ausdrücken... Goethe vollends als Maurer hat sich im Großkophta selbst persifliert, wie er sich im zweiten Teil des Faust als Minister persiflierte. Der große allgewaltige Olympier, den wir in ihm bewundern, hat mit der Loge nichts gemein. Man zeigte mir einmal in Weimar Goethes Schurzfell; es hat mich nicht erbaut.

If this character in Karl Gutzkow’s novel *Die Ritter vom Geist* (1850–51) is right, there is little need for the present study. “So what,” he asks. We all know by now that Goethe was a Freemason. But didn’t he himself make fun of the whole business in his anti-Masonic Groß-Cophta? Obviously this is nothing to be taken seriously.

While there may be some truth to what Gutzkow’s character says - both proud Freemasons and zealous anti-Masons have waved Goethe’s Masonic apron as if its existence alone proved something - we still have no right to simply burn the apron. Rather than dismiss the Freemasonic texts as trivial, as an embarrassment, or as unenlightened hocus pocus, why not begin with the assumption that the text is perfect,¹ that the Freemasonic passages serve as context for the remaining text, and that understanding *Wilhelm Meister* depends on a careful reading of the very parts of the text Gutzkow’s “enlightened” character chooses to skip. Before undertaking this task, let us consult the novel’s own statements on how such passages should be read.

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One of the poems introducing the 1821 version of the *Wanderjahre* describes writing and reading the novel in terms of unearthing treasure, smelting metals, and coining coins:

Und so heb' ich alte Schätze,
Wunderlichst in diesem Falle;
Wenn sie nicht zum Golde setze,
Sind's doch immerfort Metalle.
Man kann schmelzen, man kann scheiden,
Wird gediegen, läßt sich wägen,
Möge mancher Freund mit Freuden
Sich's nach seinem Bilde prägen!1

Besides offering a delightful invitation to a plurality of readings, the poem presents a novelist/treasure hunter ("setzen" is both a metalurgical and a printing term) seemingly untroubled at the thought that his treasures may not prove to be gold. Why the unexpected modesty, we might ask. Doesn't the reader deserve gold? We can tentatively answer these questions with reference to a statement about alchemy and gold in Goethe's *Farbenlehre* and to lines from the first scene of the *Wanderjahre*.

Goethe describes alchemy in the *Farbenlehre* as "der Misbrauch des Echten und Wahren, ein Sprung von der Idee . . . zur Wirklichkeit . . . ." Mankind, he writes, desires gold (along with health and long life) above all else. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with such wishes – unless, that is, we fall prey to the alchemists' promise to turn these wishes into reality through supernatural means. Goethe contrasts this jump from idea to reality with "die höchste Bildung" through which our extravagant wish for Gold is tempered.3

The opening lines of the *Wanderjahre* likewise have gold as a theme. Wilhelm’s son Felix picks up a stone and turns to this father:

"Wie nennt man diesen Stein, Vater?" sagte der Knabe.
"Ich weiß nicht", versetzte Wilhelm.
"Ist das wohl Gold, was darin so glänzt?" sagte jener.
"Es ist keins!" versetzte dieser, "und ich erinnere mich, daß es die Leute Katzengold nennen."
"Katzengold!" sagte der Knabe lächelnd, "und warum?"
"Wahrscheinlich weil es falsch ist und man die Katzen auch für falsch hält." (HA, VIII, 7)

The gold of the discussion between Wilhelm and Felix (and of the poem and passage on alchemy as well) is unreal, or at least unattainable. Bildung – analogical Bildung like that given here – is the real treasure. Felix is left holding a worthless

stone, but he has had a lesson in simile. "Das will ich mir merken," he says. Although the analogy proves more important than the supposed gold, without the gold there would have been no analogy. The novel will prove to be full of "alte Schätze," treasures the reader must simultaneously suspect as fool's gold and draw on metaphorically.

The poem about the novel as treasure is deleted in the 1829 version. In its stead appear two scenes in which we again see the novelist as treasure hunter or the novel as treasure.

Early in the book, Fitz leads Wilhelm, Felix, and Jarno to a charcoal burner's where "eine wunderlich verdichtige Gesellschaft" gathers around. The next morning Jarno takes Fitz to task for his acquaintance with some of these men:

"Du bist überhaupt ein Schelm," sagte Jarno; "diese Männer heute Nacht, die sich um uns herum setzten, kannten du alle. Es waren Holzhauer und Bergleute, das mochte hingehen; aber die letzten hält ich für Schmuggler, für Wilddiebe, und der lange, ganz letzte, der immer Zeichen in den Sand schrieb und den die andern mit einiger Achtung behandelt, war gewiß ein Schatzgräber, mit dem du unter der Decke spielst." (HA, VIII, 41)

This last man, the most questionable, the one who writes signs in the sand and whom the others treat with a certain respect — this is the new embodiment of the poem's treasure-hunting novelist.

Jarno's discussion with Fitz continues, and we find that the treasure hunter has bought Kreuzsteine to help him find treasure (or, as novelist, to help him find the "alte Schätze" he needs as building blocks for his novel). Fitz describes the stones as "ein kostbares Gestein, ohne dasselbe läßt sich kein Schatz heben; man bezahlt mir ein kleines Stück gar teuer" (HA, VIII, 42). On one level, the Kreuzsteine are supposedly efficacious in supernatural undertakings; but on another level, these are natural metaphors the novelist must have to express the concepts he terms "treasures." In a letter to Zauper written while working on the Wanderjahre, Goethe says of nature that it can serve as a metaphorical key to self-understanding: "Die Natur, wenn wir sie recht zu fassen verstehen, spiegelt sich überall analog unserm Geiste; und wenn sie nur Tropen und Gleichnisse weckt, so ist schon viel gewonnen." In the novel Jarno speaks of the Kreuzsteine as such natural figures:

Man freut sich mit recht, wenn die leblose Natur ein Gleichniss dessen, was wir lieben und verehren, hervorbringt. Sie erscheint uns in Gestalt einer Sibylla, die ein Zeugnis dessen was von der Ewigkeit her beschlossen ist und erst in der Zeit wirklich werden soll, zum voraus niederlegt. Hierauf als auf eine wundervolle, heilige Schicht hatten die Priester ihren Altar gegründet. (HA, VIII, 35–36)

4 Felix immediately pulls out a kind of pine cone and asks what it is. Wilhelm's answer demonstrates his ability to extrapolate analogically ("eine Frucht... und nach den Schuppen zu urteilen, sollte sie mit den Tannenzapfen verwandt sein"); but Felix's reply shows that he still needs to learn the skill ("das sieht nicht aus wie ein Zapfen, es ist ja rund").

5 10 September 1823; Goethes Briefe, Hamburger Ausgabe in 4 Bänden (1967), IV, 90.
Others may use the *Kreuzsteine* to search for gold, but Jarno, understanding their true, metaphorical worth, goes so far as to exchange gold for information about the stones: ‘‘Nimm dein Goldstück’, versetzte Montan, ‘du verdienst es für diese Entdeckung’’ (HA, VIII, 35).

Jarno speaks of his study of geology in terms which again link the search for precious metals and reading a text: ‘‘Wenn ich nun aber’, versetzte jener, ‘eben diese Spalten und Risse als Buchstaben behandelte, sie zu entziffern suchte, sie zu Worten bildete und sie fertig zu lesen lernte, hättest du etwas dagegen?’’ (HA, VIII, 34). He continues his lecture much later in the novel and contrasts a fruitless reliance on the supernatural with rational inquiry:


Jarno finds metal in the earth (lead and silver, not gold!) because he has learned the language of the mountains. Although some people suspect that a divining rod (or *Kreuzsteine*, or esoteric lore, etc.) leads him to the ore, he explains that that belief keeps them from the very rational knowledge which would unlock the secrets of geology.

But if rationality is given such priority, why does Fitz, a superstitious boy of questionable character, have possession of the *Kreuzsteine*? And why does the novelist appear as a disreputable treasure hunter? Because the novel is full of ‘‘alte Schätze’’ which lend themselves to misuse as well as to metaphor. Without the treasures no metaphor, but without metaphor a fatal jump from idea to reality. In building his novel on an religious/occult symbolic foundation, the novelist works with an ambiguous, questionable, slippery medium. He indicates this and points his reader to a figurative reading by calling his own activity into question.

Fitz possesses the key to another treasure which likewise weaves together hermetic, tropic, and novelistic motifs. In the Riesenschloß, which Wilhelm and Felix visit the day after their stay at the charcoal burner’s (while Fitz has followed

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Cf. Goethe’s poem “Der Schatzgräber” (1798), in which a poor man tries to sell his soul for the magic formula which will lead him to “dem alten Schätze.” Fortunately (or unfortunately) for him, a “heavenly” messenger appears and counsels him to go back to work: “Graue hier nicht mehr vergebens! / Tages Arbeit, abends Gäste / Saure Wochen, frohe Feste! / Sei dein künftig Zauberwort” (HA, I, 265–66).
the lure of Jarno’s gold), Felix finds a mysterious little box: “Endlich erhob sich der Verwegene schnell aus der Spalte und brachte ein Kästchen mit, nicht größer als ein kleiner Oktavband, von prächtigem alten Ansehen, es schien von Gold zu sein, mit Schmelz geziert” (HA, VIII, 43). Felix describes how he found the box in the corner of a larger, iron box: “zuletzt habe er den Kasten zwar leer, in einer Ecke desselben jedoch das Prachtbürschelein gefunden. Sie versprachen sich beiderseits deshalb ein tiefes Geheimnis” (HA, VIII, 44). The box seems to be gold and thus promises that which the occult treasures hunter seeks.

But this is no normal box – it is the size of an “Oktavband” and explicitly called a “Prachtbürschelein.” The designations “Prachtbürschelein” and “Oktavband,” added in the 1829 version, and the treasure hunter, who first appeared in 1829 as well, accomplish within the novel what the original poem did outside the narrative; that is, they identify the novel as treasure and the novelist and reader as treasure hunters. The 1829 version of the Wanderjahre was indeed an Oktavband, making the identification of the novel with the box/Oktavband even more convincing.

The key to the box/book, found later in Fitz’s jacket, is depicted in the novel and has been linked by Emrich, in one of several readings, to Freemasonry:

Es wäre einer besonderen Untersuchung wert, einmal den Schlüssel, den Goethe im Roman abbilden ließ, auf seine Form hin zu überprüfen, wobei freilich höchste Vorsicht bewahrt werden muß. Der untere Schlüsselteil mit seinen ‘Haken’ erinnert auffällig an ein griechisches CH, und der obere geht wahrscheinlich auf Freimaurersymbole zurück (Quadrate mit drei Kreisen an den oberen Ecken, innerer durchkreuzter Kreis). Doch müßte eine solche Untersuchung sich vor eindeutigen Festlegungen und vor allem vor mystischen Auslegungen hüten.7

Ohly continues Emrich’s careful speculation with discussion of a book Goethe read in July of 1819: August Kestner’s Die Agape oder der geheime Weltbund der Christen. Kestner postulates a secret society of early Christians (with many Freemasonic aspects) through which Christianity supposedly achieved the unity and strength which enabled it to become a major religion. Comparing two secret signs depicted in Kestner’s book with the key in the Wanderjahre, Ohly concludes that Emrich was right in seeing in the key a combination of Christian and “Freemasonic” symbols.8 The key and the box/book have many functions in the novel, as Emrich points out;9 but if we focus on the Freemasonic aspects just discussed, we find the attempts to get at the secrets of the seemingly golden box analogous to the reader’s efforts to understand the novel with short-sighted reference to Freemasonry. When, for example, Felix turns the key with Freemasonic markings, in a fever to discover the mysteries within, the key breaks.

9 Cf. the quotations from Emrich in HA, VIII, 616–617.
responds only to a more studied hand. The fact that the box ultimately remains closed to Wilhelm and Felix manifests the enigmatic quality of the novel, or, more importantly, the fact that the message lies not in the spurious secret, but rather in the figures pointing to the secret. The only person to open the box, in the end, is the goldsmith. He who daily works with gold understands the secrets of the trick key; but he counsels amateurs to leave the contents of the box untouched.

To summarize then: the poem of the 1821 version compares the novelist and reader to treasure hunters and the novel to a treasure. In the 1829 version the explicit comparison gives way to a more subtle manifestation in the person of the writing treasure hunter and in the form of the box/book. The mystery promised is not the gold of supernatural expectations, but the more useful metals of allegory, metaphor, and the like. The keys to buried treasure and to the Prachtreullein are, respectively, the Kreuzsteine and the key depicted in the novel (whose form originated in a book on a secret society of early Christians, a supposed forerunner of Freemasonry). Used as occult objects, the two keys are of questionable value. But when we view them allegorically, they indeed open up new perspectives. Their power to do so comes in part from their origin in the mysterious, secret, irrational, questionable world Fitz knows, a world known also by many eighteenth-century Freemasons. In addition, both keys relate to the problem of Wilhelm’s and Felix’s education and to the reading of the novel (or education of the reader). We shall proceed now to unearth a series of motifs best understood in the context of Freemasonry and shall seek to understand them figuratively, hopefully sidestepping the attraction of esoteric gold.

II

On February 13, 1780, having recently returned from a trip to Switzerland, Goethe wrote a letter to the head of the Freemasonic lodge Amalia in Weimar, explaining that social inconveniences encountered during his trip had intensified a long-standing wish to become a Freemason.10 On the twenty-third of June of that same year he was taken into the lodge as an apprentice. Exactly one year later he was made a fellow, and on March 2, 1782, became a master mason. Writing to Kayscr on June 14, 1782, Goethe enthusiastically claimed that a sub rosa tour of lodge rooms hitherto closed to him had given him unbelievable knowledge of the secrets of Freemasonry: “Im Orden heis ich Meister das heist nicht viel, durch die iibrigen Säle und Kammern hat mich ein guter Geist extra-judzialer durch geführt. Und ich weis das ungläubliche.”11 During this year Goethe also became a member of the Illuminati, recruited along with Karl

10 Goethes Briefe, HA, I, 294. The facts concerning Goethe’s relationship to Freemasonry are well known, but for the purpose of our argument they are repeated here.
11 Goethes Werke, Weimarer Ausgabe (1889), IV, 5, 342.
August and Herder by the publisher and translator Bode. Within months, as the result of increasing quarrels between different Freemasonic systems, the lodge Amalia ceased operation.

In another letter to Kayser, several months after the closing of the lodge, Goethe showed early signs of distancing himself from Freemasonry:

Die geheimen Wissenschaften haben mir nicht mehr noch weniger gegeben als ich hoffte. Ich suchte nichts für mich drinnen, bin aber schon belehrt genug, was andere für sich drinnen suchten, fanden, suchten und hoffen. Man sagt: man könne den Menschen beym Spiel am besten kennen lernen, seine Leidenschaften zeigten sich da offen und wie in einem Spiegel; so habe ich auch gefunden, daß in der kleinen Welt der Brüder alles zugeht wie in der großen, und in diesem Sinne hat es mir viel genützt diese Regionen zu durchwandern.  

Consistent with his later use of Freemasonry, Goethe here views the fraternal world as a kind of microcosm of the larger world. The final aphorism “Aus Makariens Archiv” echoes this earlier concept of education through analogy: “Wer lange in bedeutenden Verhältnissen lebt, dem begegnet freilich nicht alles, was dem Menschen begegnet kann; aber doch das Analogie und vielleicht einiges, was ohne Beispiel war“ (HA, VIII, 486). Although failing to satisfy youthful desires for mystical wisdom (“das unglaubliche”), Freemasonry (like alchemy) provided Goethe with symbols, themes and structures for his literary endeavors.

In the following years Goethe expressed himself more and more negatively concerning the Freemasons and secret societies in general, writing, for example, in a letter to Karl August:


Goethe expressed this antagonistic view of Freemasonry dramatically in Der Groß-Cophta (1791).  

It is understandable that Goethe developed such a bad opinion of Freemasonry. In the middle years of the eighteenth century, the original institution, very much a product of the Enlightenment, turned to exoticism of many sorts. Freiherren von

12 15 March 1783; Goethes Briefe, HA, I, 422.
13 6 April 1789; Weimarer Ausgabe (1891), IV, 9, 101.
14 In the play a Cagliostro figure swindles members of the French nobility with promises of spiritual visitations, the opening of all of nature’s secrets, eternal youth, and constant health. He claims to have his secrets from ancient India and Egypt and belongs, he says, to a secret society of men scattered around the world. The Groß-Cophta leads his gullible followers through ritual dialogues, through ever higher levels until they reach his Egyptian lodge where the ultimate secret lies hidden. For the audience, the ultimate secret is obvious—it lies in the ability of a brilliant confidence man to dupe a public frantic for supernatural knowledge.
Hund’s establishment of the Strict Observance (in which the original three levels, apprentice, fellow, and master, multiplied, each succeeding level promising ever higher esoteric revelations) played an important role in the increasing disinterest and even hostility of men like Goethe. But even in these years Goethe drew on Freemasonry for his work.

Four years after the Groß-Copta’s negative depiction of Masonic-like secret societies, Goethe finished Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre, in which a similar society has a more positive, if highly ambivalent, influence on Wilhelm Meister. In these years Goethe also worked on a sequel to Die Zauberflöte, Mozart’s and Schick- ander’s Freemasonic opera – to be called Der Zauberflöte 2. Theil.

Goethe’s shifting relationship to Freemasonry took yet another turn in 1808, when, with his support, the lodge Amalia began functioning once again under a more rational system created by the Hamburg actor Friedrich Ludwig Schröder. For four years Goethe was fairly active as a Freemason; but in 1812 he asked to be relieved of all responsibilities vis-à-vis the lodge. Even after this date, however, he wrote occasional poetry for the lodge and participated in special occasions (e.g., the speech “Zu brüderlichem Andenken Wielands” which he gave in the lodge on the eighteenth of February, 1813; and the poem “Symbolum,” written in 1815 and first published in Gesänge für Freimäurer, Weimar 1816).15

III

Perhaps the most prominent feature of Freemasonry is its ritual, one aspect of which proves especially helpful in reading Goethe’s “Freemasonic” works. In an article called “The Architecture of the Lodges: Ritual Form and Associational Life in the Late Enlightenment,”16 Anthony Vidler points out the general belief of Enlightenment utopian writers that environmental form shapes man. Freemasonry, a kind of “lived utopia,” Vidler says, developed an initiation ceremony which gradually came to include progression along a ritual route from a point of entry into the lodge past various symbolic objects to a final station where the initiate stood before officers of the lodge. At first the routes were traced in chalk on the floor, but as the rituals became more elaborate various floor coverings were used. These coverings most often represented the type of the

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16 Opposition, 5, Summer 1976.
Masonic lodge – Solomon’s temple, and secondarily Egyptian temples and pyramids. As the actual ritual structures of the Egyptians were studied by Masonic iconographers, they were thought, Vidler writes, to have been “deliberately constructed to affect the succeeding states of mind of the aspirant by providing, as it were, a stage set for the initiation… The spacial organization of the initiatory sequence… becomes an agent of mental change.”

As increasingly occult Freemasonry spread through Europe, and as individual patrons of individual mystics emerged, new cultist lodges were established on secluded estates. Cagliostro, for example, built a lodge of “Regeneration” on the estate of the banker Sarasin near Basel in 1781. These “temples in the garden,” as Vidler calls them,18 represented an extension of the ritual routes into the landscape. A description of an initiatory sequence in such a “lodge,” given by the English mystic and novelist, William Beckford, and quoted by Vidler, provides a good example of the practice.

In a letter to his sister dated 1784,19 Beckford claimed to have been led by the architect Ledoux in a shuttered carriage through the streets of Paris to an outlying estate. Beckford was sworn to ask no questions concerning what he might see or hear. The two men got out before a stone wall, and, passing through gates, found themselves in a vast space occupied by wood-piles. Walking through a rude door in the largest of the piles, they entered a “gloomy vestibule, more like a barn than a Hall.” The next door led them into a “plain room like the chamber of a cottage… overlooking a little garden.” Passing through an apartment of better proportion and furnishing they then came into a “lofty square room” with more light, marble pilasters, and a sleeping cockatoo. A grand portal, its tapestry curtains open, invited them into a magnificent salon with a “coved ceiling, richly painted with mythological subjects.” In front of a fire sat a “grim-visaged old man” with “most vivid and most piercing eyes.” The old man suggested that he examine the works of art in the room, remarking that “they merit a deliberate survey.” Obeying, Beckford eventually came to an enormous bronze cistern filled with water in which he saw ghastly shadows. Hearing chanting from an adjoining room, all three men descended a stairway, passing into a tribune room from which they could see a large chapel in which a strange service was taking place. Here, Beckford writes, he faltered, and, in the words of the architect, “lost an opportunity of gaining knowledge which may never return.” If he had undergone a slight ceremony he might have asked any question with the certainty of answer. But, the moment gone, Beckford and the architect retraced their steps, guided through the woodpiles by an “impish looking lad with a lanthorn,” and found their way home.

It is easy to demonstrate that Goethe subscribed to the Enlightenment belief

17 Vidler, p. 87.
18 Vidler, p. 89.
that environmental form shapes man, and that he artistically ordered the architectural symbols of ritual routes “to affect the succeeding states of mind of the aspirants.” Take, for example, two stanzas from “Die Geheimnisse,” a fragmentary epic poem (1784/85) in which Bruder Markus is invited to enter into the secrets of the order:

“Du kommst hierher auf wunderbaren Pfaden”,
Spricht ihn der Alte wieder freundlich an;
“Laß diese Bilder dich zu bleiben laden,
Bist du erführt, was mancher Held getan;
Was hier verborgen, ist nicht zu erraten,
Man zeige dann es dir vertraulich an;
Du weißt wohl, wie manches hier gelitten,
Gelobt, verloren ward, und was erstritten.
Doch glaube nicht, daß nur von alten Zeiten
Der Greis erzählt, hier geht noch manches vor;
Das, was du siehst, will mehr und mehr bedeuten;
Ein Teppich deckt es bald und bald ein Flor.
Beliebt es dir, so magst du dich bereiten:
Du kommst, o Freund, nur erst durchs erste Tor;
Im Vorhof bist du freundlich aufgenommen,
Und scheinst mir wert, ins Innerste zu kommen.”

Here we have the architectural metaphor of passing through the first gate into the courtyard, and finally into the inner sanctum in search of ever greater knowledge. The phrase “Du scheinst mir wert, ins Innerste zu kommen,” will be repeated several times in the course of the Wanderjahre, as will the “wunderbaren Pfaden,” the paintings, the tapestry as a veil, and the successive gates or doors.

Goethe makes further use of such an architectural figure at the beginning of his “Einleitung in die Propyläen”:

Der Jüngling, wenn Natur und Kunst ihn anziehen, glaubt mit einem lebhaften Streben bald in das innerste Heiligtum zu dringen, der Mann bemerkt, nach langem Umherwander, daß er sich noch immer in den Vorhöfen befinde. Eine solche Betrachtung hat unser Titel veranlaßt. Stufe, Tor, Eingang, Vorhalle, der Raum zwischen dem Innern und Äußern, zwischen dem Heiligen und Gemeinen kann nur die Stelle sein, auf der wir uns mit unsern Freunden gewöhnlich aufhalten werden.

With this description of ritual architecture, used to begin the introduction of his new periodical, Goethe demonstrates how well the movement from outside to inside, from entryway to antechamber to inner sanctum, serves as a figure for a gradual process of education. The Propyläen (the entry gate to the temples of the Acropolis in Athens, and now the title of Goethe’s publication—meant to provide a forum, or rather Propyläum, for art-historical discussions) serves as an architectural figure for a station on the path of knowledge, whose end presumably lies in

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21 HA, XII, 38.
the temple of Athena. But it is not the mystical end which interests the man, as opposed to the youth. The man is content with moving along the path, with learning in the space between the inner and the outer, between the sacred and the profane.

This distinction between man and youth is similar to the definition of alchemy quoted above, "ein Sprung von der Idee, vom Möglichen, zur Wirklichkeit," for both alchemist and youth draw on true feelings but rush to false conclusions. Wisdom would eschew the mystery, would condemn the jump from idea to reality.

"Die Geheimnisse," based on Rosicrucian tradition (a rosy cross adorns the door of the monastery), and the introduction to the Propyläen, based on the architecture of Greek religion, belong tangentially in a discussion of Freemasonic architectural tradition, for Freemasonry borrowed freely from Egyptian rites, Eleusynian ritual, Solomon's temple, Rosicrucian lore, etc. But the poem "Symbolum" provides the most direct link between the Freemason's initiatory route and Goethe's thinking concerning the same:

Des Maurers Wandeln
Es gleicht dem Leben,
Und sein Bestreben
Es gleicht dem Handeln
Der Menschen auf Erden.

Die Zukunft deckt
Schmerzen und Glücke.
Schrittweis dem Blicke,
Doch ungeschreckt
Dringen wir vorwärts.

Und schwer und schwerer
Hängt eine Hülle
Mit Erfrücht. Stille
Ruhn oben die Sterne
Und unten die Gräber.

Betracht' sie genauer
Und siehe, so melden
Im Busen der Helden
Sich wandelnde Schauer
Und ernste Gefühle.

Doch rufen von drüben
Die Stimmen der Geister,
Die Stimmen der Meister:
"Versäumt nicht zu üben
Die Kräfte des Guten.

Hier winden sich Kronen
In ewiger Stille,
Die sollen mit Fülle
At the outset the poem proclaims a congruence between the development of the Freemason and the life of mankind, between his efforts and mankind's actions. As the Freemason moves along his ritual route he approximates symbolically the stages of life. He walks forward, even while unaware of what awaits him. In so doing he draws closer to a covering which hangs "heavy and heavier" with Ehrfurcht. The Mason contemplates God in the stars and death in the graves. Only then, after deep and serious feelings, can he pass on to the master who conducts the ceremony. The final exhortation is to action, to performance of good deeds, and a promise is made of reward to those who act. Again, we shall see this movement from Freemasonic symbol to action in the Wanderjahre. For the moment, however, let us simply note Goethe's explicit description of a Freemasonic ritual route as an allegory of life.

IV

In Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre (which preceded the final version of the Wanderjahre by more than thirty years) we find frequent reference to a kind of Freemasonry, to architectural pedagogy, and to the allegorical importance of the secret society — all of which are amplified in the Wanderjahre. The Tower Society, the organization whose members direct Wilhelm Meister's education in both novels, draws its name from a mysterious tower — part of what is described as "an altes unregelmäßiges Schloß mit einigen Türmen und Giebeln." An entire wing of this "wunderliches Gebäude," as it is called, remains closed to Wilhelm: "Zu gewissen Galerien und besonders zu dem alten Turm, den er von außen recht gut kannte, hatte er bisher vergebens Weg und Eingang gesucht" (HA, VII, 492-93).

Not long after Wilhelm realizes he has been excluded from these parts of the castle, he is taken aside by Jarno, who promises to show him the tower and introduce him to the secrets of its Society. The next morning, before sunrise, an initiation ceremony begins.

Jarno first leads Wilhelm from known parts of the castle to unknown rooms. A large, old door serves both actually and symbolically as an entryway into a new world. Inside a room once used for religious purposes, Wilhelm moves through a

22 HA, I, 340-41.
23 Trunz's notes in the HA point out the following Freemasonic allusions: "die Grade (schrittweise), der Teppich bzw. Vorhang (Hülle), der Stern, der Zufluch des 'Meisters vom Stuhl'; vielleicht auch die Gräber..." (HA, I, 658).
24 Ehrfurcht proves to be an important lesson of the Wanderjahre, whose ritual routes we shall describe later. The covering here, identified with Ehrfurcht, bears symbolic representations of the stars above and the graves below. Compare, from the Wanderjahre: "Ehrfurcht vor dem, was über uns ist," and "Ehrfurcht vor dem, was unter uns ist."
curtain from utter darkness to blinding sunlight. In this partially secularized space (a table covered with green cloth stands where once an altar stood), Wilhelm learns that members of the Society have carefully directed his education. They also introduce him to an extensive archive, to which he now, as an initiate, has free access. The Abbé gives him a Lehbrief to further instruct him; and the scene ends as Felix, Wilhelm’s son, appears and father and son move about the garden outside—Felix asking for the names of plants they see. Wilhelm somewhat lamely trying to teach him. This initiation ceremony, with movement through symbolic space as a major constituent, not only acts to further educate Wilhelm, but also marks the conclusion and the beginning of stages in that education.

In the irregular castle, in the tower, in the initiatory path (from room to room, through the large door and past the curtain to the brightly lit hall housing the archive, and finally in the garden), Wilhelm finds a symbolic architecture which acts to educate him. Most interesting here is the hall, which retains the stained glass and raised altar of a chapel, but which has been partially secularized. This new Tower Society stands on a mystical base, the symbols of which still have value even if final assumptions are no longer shared. But as the Lehbrief reiterates (in much the same language we quoted earlier from the Farbenlehre), impatience leads many to skip the progressive steps of education in an attempt to immediately grasp the mystery—“Die Höhe reizt uns, nicht die Stufen; den Gipfel im Auge wandeln wir gerne auf der Ebene” (HA, VII, 496). Finally, the Lehbrief, after warning against the “Word” and the “Sign,” describes an education by analogy, exactly the education the Wanderjahre thematicizes: “Der echte Schüler lernt aus dem Bekannten das Unbekannte entwickeln und nähert sich dem Meister.”

The architectural pedagogy of the Tower continues as the novel nears its end and Wilhelm travels to the Oheim’s estate. Having entered the courtyard, holding his sleeping son in his arms, Wilhelm “fand sich an dem ernsthaftensten, seinem Gefühl nach dem heiligsten Orte, den er je betreten hatte” (HA, VII, 512). The next morning, rising early, Wilhelm looks around the house which has so affected him: “Es war die reinstes, schönste, würdigste Baukunst, die er gesehen hatte. ‘Ist doch wahre Kunst’, rief er aus, ‘wie gute Gesellschaft: sie nötigt uns auf die angenehmste Weise, das Maß zu erkennen, nach dem und zu dem unser Innerstes gebildet ist’” (HA, VII, 516). This contrasts with the asymmetrical house of Wilhelm’s grandfather which originally held the art collection now in the Oheim’s more symmetrical dwelling place (cf. also the disordered home of the Tower Society). Later, while walking in the garden, Natalie introduces Wilhelm to the “Hall of the Past,” likewise an imposing architectural construction:

Sie führte ihn durch einen geräumigen Gang auf eine Türe zu, vor der zwei Sphinxen von Granit lagen. Die Türe selbst war auf ägyptische Weise oben ein wenig enger als unten, und ihre ehemaligen Flügel bereiteten zu einem ernsthaften, ja zu einem schauerlichen Anblick vor. Wie angenehm ward man durch überrascht, als diese Erwartung sich in die reinstes Heiterkeit auflöste, indem man in einen Saal trat, in welchem Kunst und Leben jede Erinnerung an
Tod und Grab aufheben... Alle diese Pracht und Zierde stellte sich in reinen architektonischen Verhältnissen dar, und so schien jeder, der hineintrat, über sich selbst erhoben zu sein, indem er durch die zusammen treffende Kunst erst erfuhr, was der Mensch sei und was er sein könne. (HA, VII, 539–40)

Thus both the house and the “Hall of the Past” are said to represent an architecture so pure that it acts to educate the attentive viewer, raising him above his present level of education, teaching him of the measure according to which his most inner self corresponds.

While undergoing this increasingly orderly architectural education in the company of mentors and friends, Wilhelm witnesses Mignon’s death and finds himself torn between Theresia and Nathalie. He becomes bitter about the Tower Society and the way its members have mechanically structured his life. When Jarno tells him “alles, was Sie im Turme gesehen haben, sind eigentlich nur noch Requien von einem jugendlichen Unternehmen,” Wilhelm cries out, “also mit diesen würdigen Zeichen und Worten spielt man nur... man führt uns mit Feierlichkeit an einen Ort, der uns Ehrfurcht einflöt... und wir sind so klug wie vorher” (HA, VII, 548), again the Ehrfurcht so prominent in the Wanderjahre. In answer, Jarno asks for the Lehrbrief and comments on various passages from it. He says that secrets, ceremonies, and grand words often attract young people with depth of character. The Society has kept its ceremonies, Jarno continues, to provide “etwas Gesetzliches in unseren Zusammenkünften, man sah wohl die ersten mystischen Eindrücke auf die Einrichtung des Ganzen, nachher nahm es, wie durch ein Gleichnis, die Gestalt eines Handwerks an, das sich bis zur Kunst erhob. Daher kamen die Benennungen von Lehrlingen, Gehilfen und Meistern” (HA, VII, 549). He continues to describe the archive they developed and finally says that because not all people are interested in their own education, some are held up and brushed aside with mystifications. The metaphor comes to seem real and thus becomes opaque.

Jarno here makes explicit what the secularized chapel depicted architecturally: that the original mystical impressions remain to point back to historical beginnings and thus to give order to the Society’s meetings, and to act to separate serious seekers of education from enthusiasts. Even more interestingly, he also explains the assumption of a craft by the Society and its transformation into an art for figurative purposes. Although he does not mention which craft, the parallel to masonry/Freemasonry is clear. In Freemasonry the skills and tools of masons lose their concrete functions and gain figurative significance. Or, another example of figurative transformation of craft to art: in the occult, alchemical, Freemasonic-related Gold- and Rosenkreuzer of the late eighteenth century, the actual Handwerk of alchemy was practiced (“die ersten mystischen Eindrücke”); but when this Handwerk is raised to an art, the transformation of metals becomes a metaphor for education. Raising the Handwerk to art, then, as the Tower Society has done, does not mean, as Wilhelm first thinks, that he is led into a place which
fills him with Ehrfurcht and then left with nothing, but rather, that he should come to the education he expects through the signs and symbols he sees, secularized or not. The Egyptian doorways, mysterious towers, and perfectly harmonious buildings serve not only as outward signs of Wilhelm's inward development – they are agents of the growth.

Through the "Handwerk... das sich bis zur Kunst erhob," through alchemy which becomes symbolic, through masonry that becomes Freemasonry, through architecture which becomes symbolic architecture, Wilhelm's education continues.

V

The first paragraphs of the sequel to the Lehrjahre immediately sound themes which alert the reader that Wilhelm's travels are meant to provide a figural education and that each stage along his ritual route is important. As one of the poems preceding the 1821 edition states: "Die Wanderjahre sind nun angetreten / Und jeder Schritt des Wandlers ist bedenklich."

The novel's first sentence places Wilhelm in meaningful surroundings: "Im Schatten eines mächtigen Felsen saß Wilhelm an grauer, bedeutender Stelle...." Felix's question, "Wie nennt man diesen Stein, Vater?" links the novel at its outset with the scene, immediately following Wilhelm's initiation into the Tower Society, in which Felix asks for the names of plants growing in the garden. Felix's questions and Wilhelm's answers – the first explaining the name "Katzengold" by analogy to cats, and the second identifying part of a plant as a fir-cone by comparison of its scales or bracts with those of better known fir-cones – show Wilhelm's ability to think analogically, begin to teach Felix to do the same, and awaken in the reader a sensitivity to figures of all sorts. Wilhelm and the reader are thrust even further into this figurative mode when Joseph appears carrying the Polieraxt and Winkelmaß of a carpenter (HA, VIII, 9) – cf. the Zirkel and Winkelmaß of the mason/Freemason – leading a donkey bearing a woman in red and blue with a baby. Wilhelm is, of course, astonished to find the "Flight to Egypt" become reality in this mountain setting.

Wilhelm sends Felix with this wonderful family, and, as the day comes to a close, climbs the peak to retrieve his papers and pack. Climbing ever higher he once again sees the sun, "das himmlische Gestirn, das er mehr denn einmal verloren hatte" (HA, VIII, 11). He writes to Natalia that the mountains he is about to leave behind will act as a wall between them. The last sentence of the letter, written just as he leaves the border house high on the mountain, depicts him as a man about to die (and thus to leave behind the world of the Lehrjahre and to undertake a new life). The next morning he will descend the mountain and find a valley in which lies the monastery of St. Joseph, under whose broken altar the

25 Also found in the Gedenkschrift (1949), VIII, 8.
Kreuzsteine were found. These motifs (mountain, sun seen setting several times, valley, monastery, and cross) are precisely those encountered in the first stanzas of “Die Geheimnisse,” where Bruder Markus ascends a mountain near the end of day, the sun appears again as he reaches the top, he “ist wie neugeboren” when he hears a bell, and he finds a valley in which lies a monastery with a rosary cross on its door. These striking parallels make it clear that the Rosicrucian/Freemasonic substance of “Die Geheimnisse” continues here in the Wanderjahre.²⁶

The half ruined, secularized monastery of St. Joseph is Wilhelm’s first stop after leaving the mountain top. Religious services no longer take place here, but a religious spirit still pervades the atmosphere. Depictions of the life of St. Joseph line the walls. Wilhelm voices his surprise at the congruence between the paintings and his host’s appearance, and receives the answer: “Gewiß, Ihr bewundert die Übereinstimmung dieses Gebäudes mit seinen Bewohnern, die Ihr gestern kennengelerntet. Sie ist aber vielleicht noch sonderbarer, als man vermuten sollte: das Gebäude hat eigentlich die Bewohner gemacht. Denn wenn das Leblose lebendig ist, so kann es auch wohl Lebendiges hervorbringen” (HA, VIII, 15).

With this statement we stand again in the realm of architecture and education. Here is a building which has “made” its inhabitants. Influenced by artistic representations of St. Josephs as a carpenter and of fine carving on Herod’s throne, the young man, who already bore the saint’s name, also took on his craft. As we noted, Jarno talked in the Lehrjahre about the initiation rites as a “Handwerk das sich bis zur Kunst erhob,” an art which, through its symbolic architecture and ceremonies, furthered Wilhelm’s education. In the case of St. Joseph the Second, the craft raised to art in the paintings has led him to choose carpentry as his vocation. Thus the craft has become art and the art leads back to the craft. The circle continues as the young man uses his carpentry skills, which he rapidly develops into an art, to rebuild and restore the chapel housing the paintings. The craft becomes art which educates to craft which produces art, and so on. As a result of his visit to the monastery then, Wilhelm and the reader are explicitly reminded of the role symbolic architecture plays in “making the man,” and of the role of the artisan/artist in making the work of art which makes the man.

After some conversation and a meal, Joseph finds Wilhelm worthy of further education: “Es ist billig… daß ich Ihre Neugierde befriedige… ich fühle, daß Sie imstande sind, auch das Wunderliche Ernsthaft zu nehmen, wenn es auf einem ernsten Grund beruht” (HA, VIII, 17). What is the serious foundation which allows a person to take the extraordinary appearance of Joseph and Mary seriously? Nothing other than Wilhelm’s ability, demonstrated in the Lehrjahre, to

²⁶ Cf. Truuz’s notes to “Die Geheimnisse”: “Manches, was in den Geheimnissen unausgeführt blieb, kam in den Wanderjahren zur Sprache: Verschiedene religiöse Wege, die alle letztlich zum gleichen Ziele führen; bildliche Darstellungen, die symbolisch eine Urreligion aussprechen; ein Kreis weiser Männer, der solches esoterische Wissen bewahrt und pflegt” (HA, II, 595).
recognize that no magic is at work here, changing idea to false reality, but rather that the paintings, the figures, have wrought such marvelous works. The real, satisfying, forming, educating magic lies in the paintings and the pedagogical treasures of the narrative.

As we have seen, Wilhelm’s experiences at the monastery make him once again aware of the power of architecture/painting to educate, of the progression from Handwerk to Kunst to Handwerk. Leaving the monastery, Fritz leads Wilhelm and Felix to Jarno. Jarno lectures Wilhelm at length (there are connections here to the Lehrbrieß on the alphabet of nature, on a craft which, through art, becomes figurative, and on the Kreuzsteine as natural figures. As night approaches they all follow Fitz “durch wundersame Pfade” (HA, VIII, 37) to the Kohlenmeister in the middle of the woods.

The night passes, and Jarno continues to lecture Wilhelm: “Wenn du es aber doch nicht lassen kannst und auf eine vollkommene Bildung so versessen bist, so begreiff ich nicht, wie du so blind sein kannst, wie du noch lange suchen magst, wie du nicht siehst, daß du dich ganz in der Nähe einer vortrefflichen Erziehungsanstalt befindest” (HA, VIII, 39). Wilhelm does not understand, so Jarno explains (using the Kohlenmeister as a metaphor – raising the product of craft to art) that there the wood is not completely burned, but rather partially burned in a confining environment, with the result that the wood/charcoal becomes useful. Wilhelm learns from this that limitation is necessary and that he should become skilled in a trade. While this pedagogy takes place, a mysterious group of men – including the treasure hunter – gathers around the Kohlenmeister, and the next morning Jarno accuses Fitz of being in league with them.27

Fitz and Jarno go their own way, and Felix and Wilhelm come to the Riesenschloß, a natural architectural wonder, where Felix finds the box/book already discussed. Fitz returns and leads them from the “geraden breiten, eingeschlagenen Weg” onto what seems a short-cut. They find themselves traveling rapidly downhill through a wood, “der, immer durchsichtiger werdend, ihnen zuletzt die schönste Besitzung, die man sich nur denken kann, im klarsten Sonnenlichte sehen ließ” (HA, VIII, 45). But such sudden vision achieved by taking the short-cut suggested by Fitz (the supplier of magic Kreuzsteine) proves false, for a deep ditch and a high wall separate them from the Oheim’s estate (cf. alchemy as a similar short-cut). Fitz has anticipated this, and cannot conceal his Schadenfreude when Wilhelm recognizes what has happened.

In order to avoid a long detour, Fitz next suggests that they enter the estate through vaults built to allow rain water from the mountains to enter the estate in an ordered fashion. Just as Felix insisted on seeing the Riesenschloß and entering its caves, even when Fitz had counseled against it, he again wants to enter the vaults:

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27 The charcoal burner’s trade, like the mason’s, is one long associated with secret societies. Cf. Italy’s Carbonari.
“Als Felix von Gewölbê hörte, konnte er vor Begierde nicht lassen, diesen Eingang zu betreten” (HA, VIII, 45). The three enter the vaults, climb down stairs, and find themselves now in the light, now in the dark. Suddenly a shot sounds and iron grates fall to imprison Wilhelm and Felix. Fitz escapes, leaving behind his coat, its arm caught in the fence.

Men from the estate appear and lead Wilhelm and Felix as prisoners up a circular staircase. At the top they find themselves in “einem seltsamen Orte; es war ein geräumiges, reinliches Zimmer, durch kleine, unter dem Gesimse hergehende Fenster erleuchtet, die ungeachtet der starken Eisenstäbe Licht genug verbreiteten ... es schien dem, der sich hier befand, nichts als die Freiheit zu fehlen” (HA, VIII, 46). Felix reacts violently to the restraining walls and the iron bars, beating on the strong doors with his fists. Wilhelm, seeing a seemingly enlightened inscription on the wall, tries to comfort the boy, but Felix immediately falls into a deep sleep.

An official enters the room, and after hearing Wilhelm’s story and seeing his papers, helps him carry the still sleeping Felix into a beautiful garden room where refreshments await them. When the boy awakens they walk to the castle, fronted by trees which form a “Vorhalle des ansehnlichen Gebäudes.” Inside the building, Wilhelm passes quickly through the vestibule, ascends a stairway and enters a main hall, seeing in each place certain paintings. The Hausmeister, “ein kleiner, lebhafte Mann von Jahren,” welcomes his guests, and asks them, pointing to the walls, whether Wilhelm knows the cities depicted there. Wilhelm replies, demonstrating a thorough knowledge of several of them. During the next two days Wilhelm finds his way into a gallery to look at portraits hanging there and finally is led by the Oheim into an inner room where he sees more portraits, relics, and manuscripts. “Zuletzt legte er Wilhelm ein weißes Blatt vor mit Ersuchen um einige Zeilen, doch ohne Unterschrift; worauf der Gast durch eine Tapentüre sich in den Saal entlassen und an der Seite des Kustode fand” (HA, VIII, 80). Wilhelm and Felix later leave the Oheim’s to travel to Makarie’s castle, and the route they trace will play an important role in a later phase of this discussion; but for now, let us review the route we have just described with William Beckford’s ritual route in mind.

Beckford describes (1) his route from Paris, (2) the wall of the estate, (3) the wood piles, (4) the pyramidal entrance, (5) the “barnish hall,” (6) the cottage and garden, (7) the antechamber, (8) the curtain, (9) the main salon with the grim-visaged old man who suggests that Beckford carefully observe the mythological paintings, layer, and fire, and (10) the chapel and tribunal. In Vidler’s schematization this appears as follows:
If we schematicize Wilhelm's route we find some remarkable similarities:

Wilhelm travels (1) the route from the Lehrjahre to (2) the mountains which act as a wall. The monastery of St. Joseph reminds him that the building makes the man. (3) the wood pile of the charcoal burner is a natural Erziehungsanstalt, and the Riesenschloß is nature's ruined temple with a secret at its center. (4) A vault serves as both an entrance and a trap, and from there Wilhelm and Felix walk up a spiral staircase to (5) a prison room. This environment, oppressive to Felix, gives way to (6) a garden room and then to (7) a natural vestibule surrounded by trees. Inside the castle father and son move through (9) a series of rooms with paintings on the walls. In the main hall "ein kleiner, lebhafter Mann von Jahren," meets Wilhelm and asks him about the paintings on the walls. Finally Wilhelm moves through the gallery to (10) the inner room with its treasures. He leaves through (8) a curtained doorway.

Beckford's and Wilhelm's routes have in common (1) a path to the estate, (2) a wall, (3) woodpiles, (4) a pyramidal entrance, (5) a barnish hall/prison room, (6) a garden room, (7) a vestibule, (8) a curtain, (9) a hall with paintings and an old man who recommends observation of them, and (10) an inner room or chapel in which the final disclosure is or is not made.

Despite the remarkable congruence, there seems to be no way that Goethe could have known Beckford's description of his initiatory journey, written as a letter to his sister. But while this specific case may not be the source for Wilhelm's pedagogical journey, it provides information concerning the substance of such ritual routes, transferred from the floor-drawings of Freemasonic lodges into the gardens and buildings of estates. It also gives us a context in which we can more fully understand the Wanderjahre.
VI

We have come a long way since our suggestion that Goethe may have used Freemasonic ritual to help structure his last novel. We learned first to treat whatever esoteric lore we found in the novel as possible fools-gold and then pointed out the allegorical value of Freemasonry, alchemy, Christianity, etc. After discussing Freemasonic architecture and ritual routes we found several works in which Goethe employed a similar architectural/pedagogical strategy. We then turned to the *Lehrjahre* and noted the initiation rites and architectural pedagogy of the Tower Society. A reading of early scenes in the *Wanderjahre* established that once again Freemasonic architectural symbols played a substantive role in the text. Finally we found a remarkable congruence between Beckford's description of an initiatory route and the path Wilhelm follows in the early pages of the novel. This last discovery has value primarily in leading us to examine closely the various routes Wilhelm follows in the course of the *Wanderjahre*. If we take the architectural details seriously, as elements in an educational sequence inspired by Freemasonry, we have a new basis on which to compare and contrast different stages in Wilhelm's journey. These stages have been interpreted in various ways in the past—a look at two such interpretations will put our work in a little broader context.

Ohly, for example, draws on the teachings about *Ehrfurcht* in the pädagogische Provinz to examine the *Kloster*, the *Riesenschloß*, the Oheim's estate, and Makarre's realm as representative of "Ehrfurcht vor dem, was über uns ist," "Ehrfurcht vor dem, was unter uns ist," "Ehrfurcht vor dem, was uns gleich ist," and "Ehrfurcht vor dem, was in uns ist" respectively, and then finally the pädagogische Provinz as the "die geistig reine Mitte." He is quite convincing, especially in his reading of the successive estates as symbolic regions, but in the end one has the feeling that the complexity of the novel calls for other perspectives as well. Why, for instance, should the pädagogische Provinz and its teachings be seen as the center of the novel? And why does the final region Wilhelm enters, that of the Tower Society, not enter into the scheme of things?

Wilhelm Vosskamp likewise considers several of the regions, this time within the structure of utopias. The Oheim's estate, the pädagogische Provinz, and the two groups of the Tower Society are convincingly considered as contrasting utopias. Vosskamp supports his argument with good textual analysis—for example, he notes that Wilhelm enters the Oheim's estate and the Provinz

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37 Cf. the description of how Wilhelm judges the paintings in the Provinz's octagonal hall: "Er betrachtete diese Bilder zuletzt nur aus den Augen des Kindes, und in diesem Sinne war er vollkommen damit zufrieden" (HA, VIII. 161).
through gates which set the utopias off from the surrounding countryside. He does not, however, mention the doors/gates of each of the other realms of the novel, which likewise set them off. We are left with the question: Why deal with only four regions and leave others undiscussed? Again, the system used to examine the novel proves only partially successful.

In what follows, we shall build on Ohly's and Vosskamp's (and others') attempts to analyze the successive regions along Wilhelm's route in his Wanderjahre. While our understanding of this complex novel will also remain woefully fragmentary, we hope to begin to approach a more comprehensive interpretation. The method will be that suggested by the comparison of aspects of the Wanderjahre with what we know about Freemasonic ritual routes; for as we compare the stages along Wilhelm's route we find the similarities which allow us to group the realms together and subsequently find ourselves able to note the differences which characterize the individual realms.

Putting aside for the moment the fictional and biographical realms Wilhelm enters through reading and hearing the Novellen and stories, we find the following stages in his journey: St. Joseph's monastery, Montan's mountain realm (including the Kohlenmeiler and the Riesenschloß), the Öheim's estate, Makarie's house, the pädagogische Provinz, the Lago Maggiore, and finally the estate on which the Tower Society has gathered. There are other short stops along the way (the old house in the city, for instance, where Wilhelm leaves the box/book), but in the interest of economy we shall not include them.

The following chart makes clear the congruity of the various routes Wilhelm takes, as well as the incongruities:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>path</th>
<th>door</th>
<th>guide</th>
<th>hall/paintings</th>
<th>worthy</th>
<th>curtain</th>
<th>archive treasure</th>
<th>garde</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WML</td>
<td>493 durch Galerien</td>
<td>493 alte Tür</td>
<td>493 Jarno</td>
<td>493 Saal, Kapelle Gemälde</td>
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<td>497 Teppich zum Licht</td>
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<tr>
<td>Joseph</td>
<td>15 Berg-Tal</td>
<td>14 offenes Tor</td>
<td>Joseph</td>
<td>14 Saal, Kapelle Gemälde</td>
<td>17 Neugierde befriedigen</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Kreuzsteine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montan</td>
<td>30 ohne Pfad 37, 42</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>33, 36 nicht</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>43 box \ book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oheim</td>
<td>44 steil oder breit</td>
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<td>Provinz</td>
<td>149 nach Vorschrift</td>
<td>154–161 Tor, Pforte Portal, Pforte</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lago M.</td>
<td>226 Berg-Tal</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>234 Reiseführer</td>
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<td>231 Pfeil zutraulich</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>239 Schmerz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tower Society</td>
<td>310 Karte quer durch Land 316</td>
<td>316 Schloss-tore</td>
<td>316 der Vogt</td>
<td>311 Saal Buchstaben</td>
<td>311 aufgenommen</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>316 Gastmahl Schmerz</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"Das Mauers Wandlein/ Englisch den Lohn."
We notice first that in every case the path to the respective estate is described. We also become aware that one region (Montan’s) may actually have three parts, for we see the travelers making their way to the peak where Jarno works, to the charcoal burner’s, and then to the Riesenschloß on another peak. The respective paths to these places are “ohne Pfad,” “wundersame Pfade,” and “beschwerlicher Pfad.”

Second, each estate is separated from the outside world by at least one wall through which a door leads. Exceptions: the Lago Maggiore and Montan’s realm. But entrance to the latter is gained when Jarno reaches his hand down to Wilhelm and lifts him up over the natural mountain wall.

Third, a guide (usually an old man) leads Wilhelm through the house or countryside to, fourth, a hall in which paintings hang. In each case Wilhelm studies the paintings. Sometimes he demonstrates his knowledge of the people or places depicted and thus wins the favor of his host, and sometimes the paintings are used explicitly as pedagogical tools. The various collectors are characterized by their collections as well. In Montan’s realm there are no paintings, but in their place we find the analogies he uses to teach Wilhelm. Wilhelm’s journey thus takes him to the paintings of the life of St. Joseph which so affect the modern Joseph and Mary, to the natural metaphors, the “letters of nature,” to the Oheim’s geographical representations and portraits (no painting with religious or mythical theme), to the historical paintings on Makarie’s walls, to the eight-sided hall of the pädagogische Provinz with its paintings from the Old and New Testaments, to the landscapes of the painter in Italy, and finally to the complete absence of paintings in the temporary lodgings of the Tower Society. Here the constancy of the repetition brings us to ask a question we would otherwise not ask. Why are there no paintings in this last region? One answer lies in the secret part of the castle in the Leihjahr. There, in the secularized chapel, instead of paintings, Wilhelm sees active figures from his past step through a frame. The men at the end of the Wunderjahre are likewise active men. Wilhelm’s education ends in the years immediately following the Lago Maggiore when he learns the trade of Wanderzelt, and now the absence of paintings signals that completion. To support this we might point out that after asking innumerable questions at each of the previous stages of his Wunderjahre, Wilhelm now, in the company of active men, of comrades from the Tower Society, is forbidden to ask questions. A second answer may be found in the letters Wilhelm sees in the Vosnael of the Wirtehans: “Ubi homines sunt modi sunt.” “Daß da, wo Menschen in Gesellschaft zusammentreten, sogleich die Art und Weise, wie sie zusammen sein und bleiben mögen, sich ausbilde,” so translates the narrator. In each succeeding realm Wilhelm has seen a different way of life, in each case strictly ordered and ruled by a specific world view. The paintings, along with various declarations of values, have given him insight into each. But now, at the end, we ask which realm is the final, the highest embodiment of Goethe’s thought. Or are we simply to find a
golden mean? On the contrary. The golden [!] letters leave Wilhelm free, leave the Tower Society free, to organize themselves as they will. Here we find no normative paintings—only various sorts of action.

Fifth, with amazing regularity Wilhelm gains permission to enter further into the marvelous and secret affairs of the respective hosts: "es wäre unhöflich, wenn wir Sie nicht tiefer in unsere Geheimnisse einführen," "es ist billig . . . daß ich Ihre Neugierde befriedige," "der Hausherr, zufrieden, daß der Gast eine so reich herangebrachte Vergangeneit vollkommen zu schätzen wüßte, ließ ihn Handschriften sehen," "wir dürfen Sie weiterführen," "dieser wird nun zu den Vertrauten gezählt," "der Gast sei angenommen." These statements lie at the heart of our assertion that Goethe makes use of the Freemasonic ritual route to complete Wilhelm’s education. A notable exception: Wilhelm repeatedly asks Montan for information about the mineral world so he can instruct Felix, and Montan repeatedly turns him down ("gib das auf"—HA, VIII, 36, 260). Montan gives several reasons for his refusal to initiate Wilhelm into the secrets of nature, but we may decide, in the end, that the "Buchstaben der Natur," nature’s archive, can only be opened by nature herself. This makes sense when we see the route approaching Montan’s cliff. We find Wilhelm climbing "ohne einen Pfad vor sich zu haben" (HA, VIII, 30).

Sixth, each realm has a secret, a truth revealed only to those found worthy of initiation. In the traditional ritual route (as in Solomon’s temple or the veil of Isis) the secret is covered by a curtain or veil. We find such curtains in several of the routes Wilhelm traverses. In the Lehrjahre he passed through a curtain to the bright light of the secularized chapel, the table/altar was covered with a green tapestry, and a curtain covered the empty frame. Before Wilhelm sees Makarie "eine grüner Vorhang zog sich auf." And in the pädagogische Provinz the depictions of Jesus’ death are kept veiled: "wir ziehen einen Schleier über diese Leiden." But the most interesting of the curtains/veils is the one Wilhelm passes through at the Oheim’s. Only after visiting the inner rooms where the Oheim keeps his treasures does Wilhelm go through a "Tapetentüre." There may be a veiled statement here about the worth of the Oheim’s highly rational and empirical way of life.

Seventh, what treasures does Wilhelm find as he passes into the various inner rooms? In the Lehrjahre he finds an archive, a Lehrbrief, and then, turning from the empty word as the Lehrbrief suggested, discovers his son. At St. Joseph’s, after being found worthy, Wilhelm hears Joseph’s story of how the building with its paintings made the man. The Kreuzsteine, once under the altar there, natural metaphors, represent another treasure. In the Riesenschloß the treasure is the box/book. The Oheim shows Wilhelm relics and manuscripts. At Makarie’s Wilhelm gains access to a very interesting archive (a collection of aphorisms, among other things) and learns the great secret about Makarie’s wonderful ties to the cosmos. The secret of the Provinz lies in the suffering of Jesus on the cross, a "Heiligtum
des Schmerzes.” Wilhelm does not enter. The emotional high point of the Lago
Maggiore scene lies in the suffering of the four as they contemplate leaving one
another’s company and remember, all too vividly, Mignon’s suffering. And
finally, with the Tower Society, Wilhelm takes part in a Gasteiml, often the end of
a traditional ritual route and the culmination of Freemasonic ceremony. Here too
the participants suffer deeply at the thought of parting, but like the four sufferers
at the Lago Maggiore, have been “eingeweiht in alle Schmerzen des ersten Grades
der Entsaigenden,” and pass through this potentially destructive mode to action.
As we list these treasures a definite pattern appears. Four (or five, if we include
Montan and his “Buchstaben der Natur”) of the first regions have archives at their
centers. The last three regions, however, share Schmerzen as their secret, Schmer-
zen overcome through Entsalung.

And finally, after all of these ritual routes leading to various central places and
secrets, the garden appears as the last stage of the journey. After his initiation into
the Tower Society Wilhelm takes Felix into a garden where they begin their
educations anew. The Wandermährn begin with Wilhelm and Felix in a natural
setting. After observing Joseph’s paintings Wilhelm goes out into a garden.
Montan’s realm is entirely natural. Wilhelm and Felix leave a prison room at the
Oheim’s and enter a garden room. After his miraculous dream on the Sternwarte
at Makarie’s Wilhelm goes into a garden. The Lago Maggiore is once again almost
totally garden. After the Gasteiml with the Tower Society, Wilhelm steps out
into the castle gardens and overlooks a broad valley. And as the novel ends,
Wilhelm and Felix once again lie in the arms of nature. No matter what secrets
each region conceals at its center, the ultimate treasures lie in nature.

A final note on the successive realms: it seems that Wilhelm’s stages alternate
between the natural, unbounded, and the artificial, bounded. He moves from the
mountain to the “unschlossenes Tal” of St. Joseph, from Montan’s peak where
he feels threatened to the “beschränkter Waldräum” of the charcoal burner, from
the Riesenpflege on a wild peak to the extraordinary order of the Oheim’s, from
the frightening openness of Makarie and her tower to the pedantic order of the
Provinz, and finally from the open Italian lake to the self-imposed order of the
Tower Society.

Until now we have traced Wilhelm’s various routes exclusively in the frame of
the novel. The Novellen strewn through the novel, as others have pointed out,
provide “wiederholte Spiegelungen” of motifs and actions in the frame. When we
find such mirroring of our theme in the Novellen it gives us one more assurance of
the productivity of our new perspective.

“Die Pilgernde Törin,” the first of the Novellen, is given to Wilhelm by

31 In the Provinz the only mention of a garden is in connection with a “Galerie… die, an
der einen Seite offen, einen geräumigen, blumenreichen Garten umgab. Die Wand zog
jedoch mehr als dieser heitere, natürliche Schmuck die Augen an sich” (HA, VIII, 158). I am
not sure how this fits into the scheme I have drawn here.
Hersilie to read during his stay at the Oheim’s. When the young woman in question is brought to Revanne’s castle, she proves her worthiness for such an environment through her reactions to the castle (“sie zeigt sich als eine Person, der die große Welt bekannt ist” HA, VIII, 54). After receiving refreshments she comments on the furniture, the paintings, the division of the rooms, and finally, in the library, shows that she knows good books. This, of course, mirrors almost precisely the process Wilhelm has just gone through with the Oheim (cf. HA, VIII, 49–50 and the pages after the story in which Wilhelm sees the Oheim’s manuscript collection).

In “Wer ist der Verräter?”, again given by Hersilie to Wilhelm, Lucidor finds himself at one point in a hermitage with a Chinese roof. There he sees hundreds of paintings on the walls which disclose the historical inclinations of the old man who lives there from time to time. Later he is led through “lange, weiträumige Gänge des alten Schlosses” to aGerichtssal in what was once a chapel. Locked in there, he finds an archive containing some of his own work. Next he is brought to a large hall where people await a festive announcement of his marriage. He flees into a garden where he finally, miraculously, finds the woman he loves. We immediately recognize considerable congruence between this story and the accounts we have described: the historical pictures on the walls mirror several halls, the movement through the castle hallways to an archive in a secularized chapel mirrors Wilhelm’s initiation in theLehrjahrsto an astonishing degree, and the final flight to the garden finds a parallel in the many final garden scenes already discussed.

“Das nussbraune Mädchen” contains nothing especially interesting in our context, but “Der Mann von fünfzig Jahren” provides us with a very interesting reflection of ritual initiation. The actor brings with him a “Toilettenkästchen über allen Preis,” which, with its promise of extended youth, mirrors theKäotchen Felix finds with its promise of a great secret. The way to the secret of youth, to the “höhere Geheimnisse,” to the “Geheimnisse für Eingeweihten” leads, the man is told, over “Stufen und Grade.” In the course of the story the man of fifty years loses a tooth and the arcane promise is called into question, just as we have questioned the gold of the book/book.

“Die neue Melusine” carries on the box/book/gold metaphor. We learn here the consequences of a passion for the secret (the box, the gold coins, and the gold ring). The metaphor of a little world in a box also deftly mirrors the box/book which is the novel. In the lines immediately following this story, Hersilie writes to Wilhelm about similar temptations she combats in the presence of the “Scharzkästchen”: “Wünschelrüntenartig zog sich die Hand darnach, mein bilschen Vernunft hielt sie zurück” (HA, VIII, 377).

“Die gefährliche Wette” and “Nicht zu weit” contain little of relevance for us, but the repeated mirrorings of the Novellen discussed give us added cause to consider the symbolic landscape and architecture in the context of Freemasonic ritual routes. When Theodore Mundt reviewed Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre in 1830, he said
that the novel is full of "Freimaurerische Geheimniskrämerei." We have established that Freemasonry may, indeed, have strongly influenced the paths Wilhelm and Felix follow; but in so doing we have found the influence to be anything but Geheimniskrämerei. The remnants of Freemasonry we see in the novel—primarily the initiatory route the Masons use—give us cause to examine closely the routes to and through the various regions Wilhelm visits. Far from engaging in esoteric/hermetic games, Goethes here raises the Handwerk to art. He builds on the foundation of Freemasonry a building whose successive rooms figuratively teach Wilhelm and the reader Goethe's sense of the meaning of life.


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