Fictions of Freemasonry: Chapter 4, Karl Gotzkow's Knights of the Spirit

Scott Abbott, Utah Valley University

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"The New Melusine" carries on the box/book/gold metaphor, illustrating 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 or book that is the novel. In the lines immediately following this story, HERSLIE writes to Wilhelm about similar temptations she combats in the presence of the "little treasure box": "like a divining rod my hand reached for it, my bit of reason held it back" (HA, VIII, 377).

The repeated mirrorings of these novellas, then, give added cause to consider the novel's symbolic landscape and architecture in the context of Freemasonic ritual routes. Only a few examples of such relationships have been provided, and much work remains in interpreting the various patterns that arise out of this perspective. We are, however, in a position to summarize our findings.

When Theodor Mundt reviewed Wilhelm Meister's Travels in 1830, he complained that the novel was full of "petty Freemason secrecy."²⁴ Freemasonry does, indeed, strongly influence the paths Wilhelm and Felix follow, but not esoterically. The remnants of Freemasonry seen in the novel, primarily the Masonic initiatory route, lead to a close examination of the routes to and through the various regions Wilhelm visits. Far from engaging in esoteric or hermetic games, Goethe here raises the craft to art. He builds on the foundation of Freemasonry a building whose successive rooms figuratively teach Wilhelm and the reader. With its repeated Masonic images, the novel works within a sign system often read as transcendentally significant; but it does so with care, with self-reflexivity, warning constantly that it is not an esoteric text, but rather a text drawing metaphorically on a rich esoteric tradition.

Schiller's Ghost-Seer revealed the power inherent in Masonic symbols and argued against an artistry that would promise absolute closure. Goethe too is concerned with false closure, but he also searches for a means to overcome the purely arbitrary. To solve the problem of arbitrariness he uses the traditional, productive signs of Freemasonry, and to solve the problem of false or premature closure he undercuts that motivation by delivering self-reflexive tropes where the reader expects more direct, "golden," disclosures. The Masons' route may be, as the poem "Symposium" claims, like life, but such figuration is not conclusive: "The secrets of life's path may not and cannot be revealed; there are stumbling-blocks over which every traveller must stumble. The poet, however, points out the place" (“From Makarle's Archive,” HA, VII, 460).

Twenty years after Theodore Mundt complained about the Freemasonic esoterica he thought he recognized in Goethe's last novel, Karl Gutzkow, a leading "Young German" and a friend of Mundt's, published a novel that likewise drew criticism for its use of Freemasonry. As opposed to Goethe, however, Gutzkow's focus was not on Masonic ritual in the interest of investigating natural and arbitrary figuration, but rather on Masonic politics, for The Knights of Spirit (Die Ritter vom Geiste, 1850–1851) is a response to the failed revolution of 1848 and subsequent reaction.

The plot of the nine-volume political novel turns around a block of apartment buildings once owned by the last member of an
order of Knights Templar. For several centuries the city (recognizably Berlin) and state have managed the property and enjoyed the resulting profits. Managerial policies, however, have led to deteriorating buildings and an increasingly bad life for the poor tenants. The reader is clearly meant to see the buildings as the state, the managers as government officials, and the tenants as oppressed victims.

Dankmar and Siegbert Wildungen, young, socially committed descendants of the original Knight Templar owner, find documents that indicate they have more right to these properties than does the government, and they file suit. While the suit goes on, forces of the reaction increase and political oppression grows. Finally frustrated in their attempts to work within the public sphere, the brothers establish a political secret society, the "Knights of Spirit," drawing inspiration from several earlier groups, including the Knights Templar, the Jesuits, and the Freemasons. In the end reactionary forces take control, and the Knights of Spirit face jail or exile. But as the ninth and final volume closes, they look toward the future, even in the face of extensive material losses, with enthusiasm based on their hard-won unity of spirit.

Gutzkow's choice of a secret society to represent his hope for the future would have gone unquestioned at the time of The Ghost-Seer or Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship, if not the later Travels. But in 1850 he received immediate criticism on the subject. Julian Schmidt argued, for example, that the correct avenue to political change lay in the existing political parties, not the romantic fantasies and secret societies "of intelligent but confused people." Less than a decade later, another critic, Robert Prutz, also found Gutzkow's use of a secret society untimely:

The idea of that sort of secret society, of a Freemasonry for the highest and most lofty purposes, was still quite natural to Goethe and Schiller and their humanitarian efforts: as indeed Freemasonry itself played its most influential role in that very time and—just think of Lessing and Herder—celebrated its most beautiful triumphs. For our time, however, a time of a most complete and unmitigated public sphere (Öffentlichkeit), these mysteries have lost their attraction and therewith also their importance.

Gutzkow would surely have taken exception to Prutz's assertion that they were living in a time of "a most complete and unmitigated public sphere," for he was subject to continual and intense censor-

ship. And both Schmidt's and Prutz's assertions that post-Enlightenment Freemasonry was literally passé are at least debatable.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENTS

In several senses, however, such critical reactions were predictable, for the century had seen important changes in both Freemasonry and the political situation. The number of Freemasons had increased steadily throughout the nineteenth century; but a list of nineteenth-century literary Masons—Freiligrath, Sealsfeld, Zschokke, Rückert, Börne, Auerbach, and Immermann—while impressive, hardly compares to the eighteenth-century brotherhood of Goethe, Lessing, Wieland, Kleist, Klopstock, Lenz, Herder, Claudius, Fichte, Moritz, and Forster. Findel admits in his History of Freemasonry (Geschichte der Freimaurerei) that the decade from 1814 to 1824 cannot be counted among the finest of German Masonry, and he later states that Freemasonic activity of the 1830s "does not seem to have found itself in a state of great prosperity."

Mundt's depreciation of Freemasonic esoterica in Goethe's novel suggests a possible reason for the decline: a negative reaction to esoteric, mystical, high-grade systems active at the time. Findel, with an alternate explanation, argued that political unrest in the years following the 1830 July revolution in France may have been the cause of decreased Masonic activity. The energies of individual Freemasons, he writes, were so taken up with attempts to change public conditions that they found little time to work to improve themselves in the lodges. Implicit in Findel's assessment is the availability of a public sphere in which Masons and non-Masons can work politically. Depending on just how open that public sphere really was, the politically progressive secret society as described by Koselleck and Habermas might or might not have been relevant. But whatever the cause, increased esotericism, increased opportunities for political action, or something else, Masons themselves felt the need to reform their brotherhood.

One of the most interesting and literally fruitful developments in early nineteenth-century Freemasonry was the reform attempted by Karl Christian Friedrich Krause, the philosopher whose thoughts on Masonic ritual are discussed in Chapter 1. In Krause's philosophical system humanity is seen as an intimately connected organic whole. To facilitate interaction within that whole, Krause proposes a worldwide league of humanity. He advances his views
in several works on Masonry, the most important of which is his two-volume study, *The Three Oldest Documents of the Craft of the Masonic Brotherhood* (Die drei ältesten Kunsturkunden der Freimaurer-briiderschaft, 1810 and 1813). To fulfill its promise as a precursor of the league of humanity, Freemasonry required a radical transformation, including dismantling the high-grade, esoteric system and abandoning secrecy in favor of public action. Like others, Krause sensed that a public sphere was now newly available. In the spirit of such openness, he published early Masonic rites in his book, rites he felt were more effective when recognized as arbitrary, as conveying no supernatural truth. Many contemporary Masons, however, still held these rites both sacred and secret; and for his troubles Krause was excommunicated. Later Masons, however, were so taken by the concept of Masonry as a league of humanity that the article on Krause in the *Internationales Freimaurer-Lexikon* goes so far as to suggest that he should be ranked with Lessing as a spiritual father of German Freemasonry. As we will see, Krause’s work made him an important model for Gutzkow’s Knights of Spirit, he appears as a character in Oppermann’s *Hundred Years* (Hundert Jahre) as well, and the “Kraussism” movement in Spain was another surprising witness of his influence.

For the time being, Krause’s proposals did little to change the actual Masonic institution. Responses to the proposals, however, reveal two emerging, opposing viewpoints in nineteenth-century Masonry which soon became as disruptive of the system as was the heated eighteenth-century opposition between Enlightenment and mystical Freemasonry. Krause, Findel, and others like them were politically and socially progressive and wanted their brotherhood to play a more open, direct role in developing a democratic and cosmopolitan society. Opposing Freemasons, however, placing heavy emphasis on the nonpolitical clause of Anderson’s *Constitutions*, opted for the supposedly nonpolitical positions of nationalism, absolutism, law and order, and exclusion of Jews from their lodges. These political differences were exacerbated by the revolutions of 1848 and 1849, which elicited strong feelings from both sides and which gave rise to Gutzkow’s novel. Articles published in two contemporary Freemasonic journals graphically illustrate this split in Freemasonry.

**Freemasonic Journals: Revolution and Reaction**

The Tyler in the East of Altenburg (Der Ziegeldecker im Osten von Altenburg), a monthly Freemasonic journal published by Bernhard Lützelberger from 1837 to 1847, was typical in its conservative political outlook. The 1845 (no. 2) article by Br. Beatus, “May the Freemason be a Worthy Chargé of the State,” is a good case in point; the author, as the title suggests, investigates various means through which the Masons can insure protection by enlightened German monarchs.10 During the uncertain events of 1848, the journal, now called *Fraternal Papers for Freemasons* (Bruderblätter für Freimaurer), makes no direct reference to the revolution. Until a visitor appears, it seems, neutrality is the safest policy. But in the first issue of 1849, with the revolution foundering, Br. Apel finds it both expedient and necessary to remind his brethren that Masonry and politics do not mix:

In the Constitution Book of the first grand lodge in London, printed in 1723, the following passage, well worth consideration, appears: “The Mason is a peaceful subject of the civil powers, wherever he dwells and works, and should never let himself be entangled in plots and conspiracies against the peace and the welfare of the nation, nor show himself to be disloyal to the authorities.”

This is the sort of response to political unrest one might expect from well-to-do and socially prominent Freemasons, even given the potentially explosive moral teachings they espoused in their lodges. But other Masonic writers saw in the changing times outward manifestations of their most cherished principles. The most telling of these is the series of articles published in the influential *Freimaurer-Zeitung* (Freemasonic Journal) in 1847 and 1848.11

The lead essay in the first number of the journal (January 1847), “How Do We Stand?” responds to concerns about decreasing Freemasonic influence and references “to the Freemasonic league as an aged, decrepit creation of early times.” Such attacks on the brotherhood come, the author argues, from the progressive political party, which sees in Freemasonry a supporter of aristocracy and conservatism, and from the ecclesiastical or reactionary party, which sees in Freemasonry a detestable source of rationalism. The essay then discusses the relationship between Freemasonry and the state: “[The league] does indeed awaken the love of freedom in its members; but besides that, it also nourishes a sense for order and
lawfulness and instructs its members to peacefully subjugate themselves to the existing order until their view proves itself and is taken up by the majority or by the representatives of that order." The author himself recognizes the tension between "the love of freedom" the brotherhood awakens in its members and the authoritarian regime they are bound to support. Nonetheless, attacked by the left and the right, hated by the church, and under suspicion by the state, Freemasonry is still, the essay concludes somewhat proudly, "sought by the middle classes and defended by the healthy sense of the people."

An essay in the second number of the Freimaurer-Zeitung, "That the Human Race May Become a Fraternal Chain!" (January 1847), written by the journal's editor R. R. Fischer, progressively addresses growing class distinction and economic deprivation brought on by industrialization and warns of possible revolutionary consequences. Masons, who in their lodges ritually unify the classes society divides, must work in their families, among their employees, in whatever circles they have power, to provide necessities and ensure opportunity for education and advancement. As Fischer sees it, many dedicated men can change social conditions; and they can do so without recourse to direct political action. There will be no revolution from below, he suggests, if the middle class reaches down and raises its brothers. The careful yet still progressive statements of Fischer and the author of "How Do We Stand?" (aimed at balancing the radical content of Freemasonry with the demands of states that have vested interests in limiting freedom and equality) give way, a year later, to more fiery rhetoric as the March revolutions are at their peak.

In late March 1848, the Freimaurer-Zeitung announced "The New World" in its lead article, an excited, optimistic appraisal of the situations in France and Germany during the ongoing upheavals:

Round about us there is a powerful impulse stirring and stretching and raising, the hour of the spirit has come; it wants to give birth to something new and grand, it wants to form the world anew... Oh, what sort of people would we be if we were to hide ourselves in our circles, as if we had heard and seen nothing, while our hearts are so full with what has happened!

Freemasons, the author continues, practice a free self-governance daily, recognizing no difference in class. Why should they not, then, rejoice when the French, and now the Germans, attempt to intro-

duce such a condition into the public sphere? Although the article repeatedly points to the spiritual role of Freemasonry in the events of the day and states that Masonry has no place in actual politics, the author clearly feels that men trained in the lodges have played important political roles in the movement toward greater freedom, a free press, the right to free association, a German parliament, and equal rights for all religious groups. He goes so far as to claim that the lodges are the "mineshafts... out of which the ore is won that now builds a new world." For more than a century Freemasons had claimed they had no need to resort to politics, that the education which took place in the lodges would produce (indirectly and non-violently) a better world. Now, it seems, years of work in the lodges has born fruit. In a time of reaction such claims will come back to haunt the Masons, whom rumors had already linked to conspiracies behind the American and French revolutions; but for this brief moment it seems that the democracy practiced and modeled in the lodges has become public reality. The author is ecstatic.

One May number of the journal continues this advocacy of revolutionary principles as it prints a call to action by the national lodge of France, claiming once again that the Freemasons, practicing freedom, equality, and brotherhood in their lodges, have prepared the way for the revolution that has reestablished these principles in public life. But as early as June the editor begins to distance his publication from revolutionary events, and by July the journal prints a speech by Br. Muhl of Trier who argues strongly against revolution and in favor of law and order, inner freedom, and even unabashedly for reaction. He compares the revolution to a dangerous storm and reprimands those who tend to extremes to satisfy their own passions and selfish desires. The Mason's task is clear, he continues. He must teach the "raw masses" to overcome the chains of sensuality and enter into the kingdom of spiritual freedom. Further essays in October and November continue to solidify this movement away from the revolution. They rail against insecurity, confusion, political agitators, pride, passion, sensuality, rabidity, lawlessness, party struggles, and violence. At the same time they champion law, order, virtue, unity, peace, comfort, and protection of property. Such unmitigated reaction is surely the basis of many negative political evaluations of nineteenth-century Freemasonry. But, as evidenced by the essays of March through April 1848, some Masons, however briefly, openly identified the aims of the revolution as their own.
THE CONSPIRACY THEORY

Whether nineteenth-century Freemasonry was in fact reactionary, revolutionary, or nonpolitical, the eighteenth-century perception of the order as a powerful conspiracy against the established powers of throne and altar lost none of its power as the new century progressed. The 1817 gathering of student fraternities at the Wartburg lent credence to this theory; and in 1819, when a fraternity brother assassinated Kotzebue, governments acted quickly to ban such fraternities. Public perception that secret societies were behind political unrest throughout Europe grew substantially when the Carbonari successfully concluded their 1820 revolution in Italy. After a later, unsuccessful putsch attempt in France, for example, the French attorney general Marchangy explained: "The present revolutions are . . . not innate, but learned, and this same lesson, running from north to south, explains the similarity of the aberrations. . . . The secret societies are the workshops of conspiracy." And Friedrich Schlegel pointed at Freemasonry as the source of revolution in his lectures on the Philosophy of History in 1828: "A society from whose bosom, as from the secret laboratory of Revolution, the Illuminés, the Jacobins, and the Carbonari have successfully proceeded, cannot possibly be termed, or be in fact, very beneficial to mankind, politically sound, or truly Christian in its views and tendency" (457).

In one of the most literally interesting variations on the conspiracy theory, the group of writers identified in the government ban of 1835 as "Young Germany" was seen as a potentially dangerous secret society. Eitel Wolf Dobert points out that while the "Young Germans" were certainly not a secret society, some of their assertions could have led governments to think so: Laube wrote of forming a party, Gutzkow suggested combining together in a conspiracy, and Mund wrote to Kühne that he wanted to convene these men who longed for a politically active league. Friedrich Engels wrote that Wuppertal textile merchants saw "Young Germany" as a secret society led by the conspirators Heine, Weinberg, and Gutzkow.

In the eighteenth century, conspiracy theories had led people to link Freemasons, Enlightenment philosophers, and liberal constitutionalists; but in the nineteenth century, such theories began to associate Freemasons with Jews and the democratic-socialist movement. Eduard Emil Eckert, a Catholic lawyer in Prague, published a pamphlet in 1852 arguing that the Constitution of the German Reich of 1848–1849 had been the product of a Masonic league of social democrats. And a "Call of Warning to Princes and Peoples" by a "German Patriot" published a few years later made similar accusations: Freemasonry and Social Democracy, or, Is Freemasonry, Along with Social Democracy, also Demonstrably Dangerous to Religion, State, and Society? People ultimately feared that these conspiring societies might be related to the communists, whose manifesto (1848) begins with the famous paragraph about current and widespread rumors that link every opposition party with a shadowy and dangerous conspiracy: "A specter is haunting Europe" ("Ein Gespenst geht um in Europa").

LITERARY FREEMASONRY FROM BÖRNE TO GUTZKOW

Gutzkow knew the general rumors of conspiracy, some of which were aimed at himself as one of the "Young Germans," and he had access to Freemasonry through his mentor Ludwig Börne, whose biography he wrote. Börne, a practicing Freemason and a powerful, political man of letters, felt a tension between his hopes for Freemasonry and actual practices; and in his speech "On Freemasonry" ("Über Freimaurerei," 1811?) given in his lodge "Zur aufgehenden Morgenröte" in Frankfurt, Börne questioned Masonry's secrecy, attacked contention between various lodges and systems, and characterized true Masonry: "It should give order to the entangled rights of life. . . . It destroys the separating wall erected by the prejudice between one person and another. . . . In this manner, my brothers, Masonry should act, thus it should be. But only seldom was it so, and it is not so. Enlightened practices of Börne's lodge were used by later propagandists as "proof" that Freemasonry was a Jewish front. Börne's Freemasonry surely played a role in Gutzkow's decision to feature a secret society in The Knights of Spirit. So too did the Masonic fictions of the years leading up to 1848. Since the late eighteenth century, to which time critics Schmidt and Prutz relegated productive fictional use of Freemasonry, novelists had continually returned to the themes and motifs of the fraternity.

In 1817 Achim von Armin published the first volume of his Guardians of the Crown (Kronentüchtchen), a novel in which a secret, powerful, and unscrupulous league of aristocratic knights plots to
depose Kaiser Maximilian of the Hapsburg monarchy and to reestablish one of the Hohenstaufen family on the throne. Opposing this conspiracy is a forward-looking league of democratic masons (or Freemasons, for they invite nonoperative, or speculative Masons into their lodges) complete with “verbal signs, greetings, and handshakes” (562) and with a sense for the power of solidarity (“Alone we are nothing, we must live in unanimity”). Fourteen years after Armim’s “political” use of Freemasonry, and two years after the final version of Wilhelm Meister’s Travels appeared, Ludwig Tieck published a story about the deleterious effects of Masonry: “The Miracle Addicts” (“Die Wunderstüchtigen,” 1831).25 Despite much praise for a true, enlightened Freemasonry like that in the first half of the eighteenth century, the aristocratic family of this story falls for the tricks of a self-styled emissary from a mystical branch of Masonry, a man with all the talents and attributes of Cagliostro or St. Germain. The novel tempers its characters with the philosopher’s stone, spirits, immortality, omniscience, unknown heads of powerful orders, Jesuit takeovers of Freemasonry, conversions of gullible princes to Catholicism through powerful emissaries, lodges of adoption for women, the unmasking of the first magus by a second, and more. It is the much embellished and trivialized story of Schiller’s Ghost-Seer, a portrait of pitched battle between enlightened and superstitious sects of Freemasonry near the end of the eighteenth century; and it ends triumphantly as all members of the family overcome “this sickness of miracle addiction.”26

In 1835 Karl Immermann, himself a Mason, finished a more substantial work, The Epigones (Die Epigonen).27 Along with a plot and characters drawn in part from Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship (Mignon = Flämchen, Natalie = Kermitie) he includes several secret societies as analogues of the Society of the Tower. In fact, the often quoted sentence from the novel, which expresses a generation’s frustration at following the literary giants of Weimar—“We are, to state the entire misery in one word, epigones”—is pronounced during an intriguing Masonic initiation ceremony.

Wilhelmi, counselor to the ruler of a tiny principality, feels that fate has dealt him less than his talents deserve and he has developed a sense for “the general inadequacy in the world. . . . Unsatisfied with everything he saw in reality, he built for himself a sort of dream world” (117). One night after several games of chess, Wilhelmi initiates Hermann, the novel’s young protagonist, into that dream world: “Thus I accept you, my brother, into the new degree which I hereby establish” (123). After they complete the business of setting up a reformed Freemasonry for the salvation of mankind, the two men, “knights of truth” (126), turn to good food and champagne, as is the Masonic custom. Under the influence, Wilhelmi begins to sing student songs, “in which, because they all breathed freedom, fraternity, and justice, Hermann, enflamed by the newly-won honor, joined enthusiastically” (126). As the night progresses the party grows wilder, and by morning they have wrought havoc in the once perfectly ordered study. Wilhelmi is so hung over that he cannot fulfill his morning duties. Clearly the new order of Knights of Truth set up to renew Freemasonry is an important fantasy, another creation of Wilhelmi’s dream world.

But the novel, which covers the years 1823–1835, identifies other secret societies as more than laughable relics of the past. Since the book burnings at the Wartburg by student fraternities, radical students have been involved in various political plots; but Hermann, except when drunk, has decided to oppose such youthful fanaticism. At one point he attends a meeting of students who have formed a radical men’s league (Männerbund). Disgusted by the demagogery, he pulls a pistol and gives the young men a lecture at gunpoint. Unfortunately for him, police arrive on the scene and mistake him for the gun-wielding leader of the demagogues. Only the intervention of Menon, a high government official, effects his release. Menon himself is later arrested as part of “a great conspiracy which was intent on the overthrow of the throne and on regicide. The most important men were supposed to be involved in the plot” (484). As befits such a man, Menon was raised by a former Jesuit and learned early that the end justifies the means (527). He fought for his country “when the great call of freedom rang through Germany” (527–528); and when that battle was lost, he decided that the existing order must be destroyed by an anarchy-sowing conspiracy from within.

Wilhelmi and Menon, then, are two men bitterly disappointed by both society and government. Their responses are anti-theitical. Wilhelmi is a man of thought, while Menon is a man of forceful action. They are related, however, by a similar reliance on a secret society as the vehicle for their plans. Wilhelmi’s inner-directed, nonpolitical Freemasonry corresponds well to the Masonry of his time; even his call to reform Masonry mirrors efforts in the real order. But Menon’s Jesuit-inspired conspiracy also reflects current conditions and fears. Assertions like that of Sammons—Menon
as a conspirator "is an ideological straw man, not corresponding to anything in social or political reality"—would seem unfounded. Politically subversive secret societies did exist during the mid-nineteenth century, and if they had not, the public's fear of conspiracy was a major factor in both social and political reality.29

Georg Büchner's Woyzeck (written in 1836, the same year The Epigones was published), movingly portrays those contemporary fears:

Woyzeck. Yes, Andres, the place is cursed. Do you see the bright strip over there in the grass where the mushrooms are growing now. In the evening the head rolls there. Someone picked it up once, he thought it was a hedgehog: three days and three nights, and he lay on shavings. Softly: Andres, that was the Freemasons! I've got it, the Freemasons! . . . It's happening behind me, under me. Stamps on the ground: Hollow, do you hear? everything hollow down there! The Freemasons.50

Hans Mayer sees in this overwrought fear of a Masonic conspiracy a concrete example of a larger worry "about the independence of human existence from conditions which lie outside us." Büchner sensed the 'monstrous fatalism of history' and its 'destructive' power already in his earliest Giessener time" (339). Freemasonry serves two opposite purposes in the face of such loss of control. On the one hand, as in The Epigones or Woyzeck, secret societies are seen as the insidious cause of chaos, manifestations of control, uncontrollable forces. But on the other hand, as in Krause's and Börne's hopes for Freemasonry, a league of morally determined men lend order to a disintegrating society.31

In 1842, the year the radical poet Ferdinand Freiligrath became a Freemason,32 Gutzkow traveled to Paris; and one of his Letters from Paris (Briefe aus Paris, March 29, 1842) describes a visit with George Sand, whose calls for women's emancipation from social and religious constraints had helped shape Gutzkow's Wally, the Doubter (Wally, die Zweiflerin). Sand's novel Consuelo, which appeared during that year and the next, and its sequel, La Comtesse de Rudolstadt (1843–1844), surely influenced Gutzkow's thinking concerning secret societies.33 Secret societies were, for Sand, instruments of political and social change. In the preface to an earlier novel, Le Compagnon du Tour de France (1840), translated into German as Isolde in 1850 (that is, just after the failed revolution and as the first volume of Gutzkow's The Knights of Spirit appeared), Sand describes secret societies as necessary champions of equality and emphasizes their historical role in bringing down empires.34

In Sand's work alone Gutzkow had ample contemporary literary precedent for the politically active secret society he introduced in The Knights of Spirit. And in the person of Börne, as well as in works of Tieck, Goethe, Immermann, and Büchner, he had a wide range of political and nonpolitical nineteenth-century examples as well.35 Add to these literary representations (1) the responses of historical Freemasons to the revolutions of 1848 (both conservative and liberal) and (2) the current conspiracy theories, and it becomes clear that those criticisms of The Knights of Spirit which relegate its pseudo-Masonic secret society to the eighteenth century must be seriously reconsidered. To argue, then, as did Schmidt and Prutz, that the subject belonged to Goethe's time and definitely not to the mid-nineteenth century, is to misread the historical and literary trends leading up to 1848. Freemasonry continued to figure prominently in world affairs at least through the end of the twentieth century (cf. the government scandal caused recently by the P 2 lodge in Italy); and Tolstoy and Thomas Mann would be just two of the novelists to make extensive use of Freemasonry in their works during the next century.

It seems clear that Gutzkow cannot be faulted for writing about Freemasonry. But his critics also express concern for how he uses secret societies in his novel. Herbert Kaiser, for example, echoes Schmidt's claim that Gutzkow would have done better to oppose the existing system with a political party:

After a first phase of the development of modern political parties was already almost completed through the revolution and its parliaments, Gutzkow does not only hold fast to the organizational form of pre-March (vormärzlicher) political secret societies, but depoliticizes and mystifies it to such a degree that it resembles the pedagogical Society of the Tower in Goethe's Wilhelm Meister much more than a republican league of the Metternich era.36

And Claus Richter contends that The Knights of Spirit are sadly typical of the apolitical liberal intelligentsia, that they substitute myth for political action.37 It is difficult to argue with either Kaiser or Richter. The Knights of Spirit are far from an ideal organization and can easily be faulted for any number of things. In fact, the novel as a whole is unwieldy and betrays the haste in which it was written. But the information just presented about the potent conspiracy
theory and contemporary use of Freemasons by French and German novelists gives us ample reason to ask why such a secret society stands at the center of Gutzkow’s novel, as opposed to why it should not do so.

**KNIGHTS TEMPLAR, JESUITS, FREEMASONS, AND CLUBS OF RIGHT AND LEFT**

Five actual historical and contemporary “secret societies” are presented in the novel as precursors of and inspirations for the Knights of Spirit: the Knights Templar, the Jesuits, the Freemasons, the reactionary League of Regret (*Reubund*), and political workers’ clubs. Early in the first volume Dankmar characterizes the Knights Templar, whose tradition he hopes to continue, and praises them as the inheritors of a rich tradition leading from India to Solomon’s temple and to Jesus Christ’s grave. They served an important role, he says, as an independent power between church and state. Armed with a grand, world-historical vision they performed glorious deeds and died as brave martyrs. Unfortunately, they lost their sense of historical purpose and eventually sank into gluttony and banality.

In Dankmar’s history, after the decline of Catholic and Protestant Templars, the Jesuit Order arose. The Jesuits’ main representative in the novel is Sylvester Rauffard, an egotistical, dangerous man who comes to Berlin from Paris to carry out a series of political schemes. If half of what Rauffard claims to have accomplished is true, and there seems to be no reason to doubt his assertions, then Dankmar’s admiration for Jesuit political power derived from a secret, hierarchical organization is fully understandable.⁴⁹

Acting as a foil to the Jesuits and continuing the tradition of the Knights Templar are the Freemasons, an admired but also satirized society. Schlurck, Gelbsattel, and Rauffard, three of the novel’s more despicable characters, are all Freemasons, as are the more likeable Harder, Rudhard, and Ackermann/Rodewald. Gutzkow’s assessment of contemporary Masonry can be characterized by noting that the first three are active Masons, while the latter three have distanced themselves from the order. Of Harder, for instance, it is said “that he is the head of all Masonic lodges of the country and is considered deeply knowledgeable about Masonic secrets” (II, 326). But the old man has not visited a lodge for ten years. At one point he complains about the development of what was once a vigorous

Enlightenment institution: “But to base this league so entirely on nothing, as it has now been brought low, to so utterly strip it of every connection with great historical ideas, and to transform it only into a kind of finer choral society, who wants to go along with that” (IX, 173–174).

According to Harder, then, Freemasonry has followed the course of the late Knights Templar, forsaking historical purpose for empty sociality and pleasures of the palate. There is also a decided turn to the mystical, as Schlurck describes: “We have two sects in Freemasonry, a rationally enlightened one and a mystical one. I have joined the mystical, dark one. . . . I want to call magicians, treasure hunters, those who conjure up the dead. Perhaps I’ll even become a Jesuit” (VIII, 137–138). But while Schlurck is attracted to this sort of Masonry, the more principled Rudhard says that he left the brotherhood specifically because of its growing mysticism (III, 457). Rudhard still defends the original Freemasonry as a highly rational anti-Jesuit institution (VIII, 293), and eighteenth-century Masonry also receives credit for acting charitably, for serving humanitarian causes, for giving impetus to culture, for furthering rationality, for helping men out of the bonds of religion and class, for preparing the “good” results of the French revolution, and for strengthening the sense of community among intellectuals (VIII, 293–296). But elsewhere Dankmar faults as much too general the seemingly uncontroversial goal of educating humanity: “The betterment of the world begins when one betters oneself, . . . such a doctrine necessarily degenerates into lassitude, thoughtlessness, epicureanism, . . . [the] destructive dry-rot on the invisible buildings of the Freemasons” (V, 286).⁵⁰ Harder echoes this description of political impotence when he refers to a lost opportunity forty years earlier, a time when Masonry had the chance to affect history meaningfully by setting out to transform itself and the world into a league of humanity, an opportunity raised by publication of Krause’s *The Three Oldest Documents of the Craft of the Masonic Brotherhood* (1810).⁵¹ Krause’s call for a more public working of Masonry, and especially his teachings about the historical necessity of a league of humanity, far outweighed, in Harder’s estimation, any technical mistakes he may have made. The forty intervening years have been politically difficult as absolutist oppressors and angrily partisan groups have fought for political control. Now, after 1848, a league of humanity is more necessary than ever.
Gutzkow's "Masonic Novel"

Two additional societies have arisen in the wake of the Knights Templar, Jesuits, and Freemasons. Both are more political than the weak Freemasons, but unfortunately, in the narrator's view, both are radical organizations. The first group consists of various workers' clubs with vague ties to Communism (VII, 485). The Knights of Spirit sympathize with them and their democratic principles (VI, 158–159), but find their politics too radical and step in to blunt their calls for revolution (VIII, 377). The second society is the League of Regret (Reubund), based on the historical League of Faithfulness (Treu Bund) founded in 1848 as an antidemocratic organization. Early in the novel Schurck speaks of the Reubund as a post-Masonic secret society with facilities for eating well. Dankmar, who places more emphasis on the political leanings of the order than on the quality of its food, blasts the Reubund for its servility in the face of growing reaction: "The League of Regret seems to me really one of the most hopeless offspring of a people which is exhibiting its total immaturity for political education" (I, 184). But later, as Dankmar contemplates the conversation he had with Schurck, he begins to wonder about the Reubund as a possible vehicle for his plans. Couldn't he infiltrate it and turn the bastion of absolutism into an antiabsolutist secret society?

A secret society as part of the battle against absolutism—this is a key idea for Dankmar. In this context, each of the five precursors to the Knights of Spirit has something to teach the new society. From the Knights Templar comes the continuity of ages. The Jesuits have an organization that produces political power. The Freemasons are an incipient league of humanity. The workers' clubs promote democracy. And even the Reubund is attractive as an organizational means to promote a political agenda.

THE KNIGHTS OF SPIRIT

Dankmar is amazed as he begins to realize how various societies have worked secretly to guide the course of history, or how history has progressed by using secret societies: "thine the secret societies were suddenly for him a secret nightside of society . . . who can follow the paths which the mole of the World-Spirit (der Maulwurf des Weltgeistes) digs for itself deep in the womb of the earth" (I, 205). Given the general political conditions of present and past centuries, Dankmar reasons, given the lack of opportunity for the public to influence government policy, given the immoral absolutism under which most people have suffered, is it any wonder that men would gather together to establish a secret, moral society, a private sphere in which alternative "levers of history" can be pulled? If the state enforces its power by arms, then several possibilities lie open to the opposition. One option, armed revolution, has just been tried, and it has been defeated, Dankmar feels, because of disunity. But with individual strength magnified by the shared purpose of many and with a secretly wielded moral lever political force may be exerted in a new way. In two long speeches—the first to friends as the new order is being planned, and the second a speech of dedication as the order is founded—Dankmar elaborates on his vision of the Knights of Spirit.

Spirit, he says, is the key. Unfortunately, people of the nineteenth century seem no longer to have a spiritual center for which they live. But there are a few concepts, simple and deeply grounded within each person, that people of all levels of intelligence can embrace. They need no other proof than that they give light and warmth. On the basis of these shared concepts the Knights of Spirit will be founded; and Dankmar predicts that given fifty years to work, his society will unify mankind. When he gathers his friends around him to found the society, each friend speaks of their shared desire for democracy; but as Dankmar points out before he begins his own speech, one has recommended immediate and vigorous action, one has suggested only a tentative experiment, and another wants to work peacefully within the existing system. Dankmar argues that before all else come unity and simplicity; and, he says, "we must forsake bringing forth positive creations and satisfy ourselves with promoting only the spirit in which they might grow up" (VI, 285). Any concrete ideal, Dankmar states, necessarily creates dissonance. But weak generalities are no help either: "And neither will I recommend that one be satisfied with generalities in the mutual exchange of ideas and plans, as are the Freemasons" (VI, 327). So what does Dankmar believe? For what ideas will his Knights of Spirit fight? He is not completely sure. "I want a league of men who relate their life, their nearest and most distant duties only to a single goal, the final victory of truths which are still, unfortunately, in question" (VI, 331). But then again he seems to have the necessary knowledge: "The truths are obvious, but thousands are avoiding them. The pages of history are open. People refuse to read them. We know the goal toward which humanity is steering" (VI, 331–332).
GUTZKOW’S “MASONIC NOVEL”

After this positive, if general, declaration of historical purpose, Dankmar waxes eloquent about the battles that could be won by several thousand people united together in the service of these well-known truths. But then he returns to his negative definition of the task: “It lies in the nature of a time which needs to clear away more than to build, that its truths are more negative than positive. The Knights of Spirit will be clearer about that for which they do not let themselves be used than about what they themselves want” (VI, 332–333). Although one cannot exactly describe the perfect temple of mankind, he says, parts of it can be approximated; and these include a free press and the right to work, the “fundamental right of all peoples.” Present conditions, Dankmar states, deny those rights, and he swears that his league will “clear things away, and quickly” (VI, 334). But even so, he claims that his ideas will not lead to conspiracy and revolt. As one Knight of Spirit tells a mob of angry workers, they should quit demonstrating and place their trust in the Weltgeist, working even then in silent, unknown ways (VIII, 379).

But there is another side to the matter as well. Although the Knights of Spirit eschew material solutions, Dankmar does not want to denigrate his organization “to a mere phantom of inflamed police imagination” (IX, 376). He knows how many people are being influenced by rumors and finds it advantageous during police interrogation to encourage reports about the Knights of Spirit: “He wanted to be the bearer of all the images of terror with which the enemies of freedom frighten themselves” (IX, 377). At least in rumor and for the police, then, the secret society is a revolutionary, even terrorist group. And some actions support such an assumption: Dankmar’s forcible rescue from prison; other “friends of the people” who unexpectedly find their ways out of prisons; early warnings of police searches; the monetary and moral support the order gives to those who lose their state jobs because of their insistence on personal autonomy (VIII, 190); and the growing number of deeds done under the neo-Masonic symbol of four dots. A scene late in the novel reinforces this active side of the Knights of Spirit.

With many of its members in exile, with their country ever more fully in control of reactionary leaders, and with the money they have won in court reduced to ashes, the group meets for its second great convection. A nameless young man speaks of the nonviolent ideals for which they strive: “The league of spirit, I sense it, will be entirely of the spirit. We cannot fight with golden weap-

ons. . . . The kingdom of God is within us” (IX, 533). But such selfless control has its limits, and the young man continues: “The spirit of this age cannot be gentle and still, you brothers! . . . the age of long-suffering brought no fruit for two thousand years . . . the dove may no longer be the symbol of the spirit! . . . Who can sleep? If finite nature wants the spirit too, to sleep, so let it be with a hand on the hilt of the sword. Act!” (IX, 534). He quickly returns to the assertion that ideas alone can change the world, but the threat has been uttered. However metaphorical his use of “sword” may be, political metaphors tend to reification; and the tone of frustration and rebellion struck here at the end of the novel is ominous.

As this speech demonstrates, the Knights of Spirit have created for themselves an ambiguous position. They decry violence yet carry the seeds of violence. They propound positive, progressive changes but refuse to specify their goals. They fault Freemasonry for its weak generality but finally propose only generalities themselves. And they oppose not only the existing system but also the various opposition parties. Along with Gutzkow’s critics, one is left wondering just why he set this secret society at the center of his novel.

WHY A SECRET SOCIETY AFTER 1848?

In the reaction following the failed revolutions of 1848, the tension between political reality and desires for democracy was greater than ever before, for Gutzkow and his fellows had briefly tasted the first fruits of direct political power. Their dreams of democracy had nearly become reality, only to disappear in a chaos of party strife and an overwhelming reaction. Given the new limitations on public political action (the state had proven its power even under considerable revolutionary pressure), should it be so surprising that Gutzkow, in his novel, turns to secret moral action? Knights of the barricade had failed to change the government, and in the aftermath Knights of Spirit again arise to pursue the same goal indirectly. Tactics developed during the Enlightenment are resorted to once again.13 Near the end of the novel, a Masonic historian, Dagobert von Harder, is cited concerning the recurring historical need for secret societies: “People have always fled from the ruling facts and their coercive alliances into a free, invisible alliance of higher truths” (IX, 316).
Besides the secrecy and the moral truth of the lodges, the tradition of secret societies weighed heavy in Gutzkow’s judgment. More than anything else, the Knights of Spirit seek to prove their right to carry on an honorable tradition. During and after the revolution of 1848 there were many accusations of selfishness and anarchy thrown at political parties and “mobs”—most strongly at the disturbing Communists. What right did any one person or party have to overthrow the existing order? What was the sense of exchanging one self-seeking government for another? In short, where was the legitimacy of the new? The secret society formed by the Knights of Spirit answers such criticism through its insistence on Erbrecht, the right to inherit.

Nearly all the novel’s many plot strands deal with inheritance in some way. Most important is the Wildungen’s inheritance from the Knights Templar, the right, in effect, to govern in the place of the caretaker state. At one point Dankmar states the issue forcefully: “now my own and my brother’s personal affair is formally a symbol of the question of our century... everything is about the right of a person, about the lasting power of the past” (VI, 242). And later he repeats that assertion: “my lawsuit has thus become an image of our age” (VI, 245). Dankmar’s suit challenges long-held beliefs and accepted rights on the basis of an alternate and even older tradition. He sets out to prove that he has more historical right to the property in question than does the city or state: “We too appeal to the same seal from which the state and the church, the general populace and the community derive their rights. We are demonstrating by means of a harsh example that laws and rights are inherited like an ‘eternal sickness’” (VI, 319). The order is to be a new one, founded “over and beyond the league of Freemasons” (VI, 286); but however new, the order’s genealogy, an inheritance proven by “documented historical facts” (II, 58), gives it legitimacy.44 As quoted earlier, Dankmar is sure his Knights of Spirit are playing a legitimately inherited role in the progressive unfolding of history: “The pages of history are open... We know the goal toward which humanity is steering” (VI, 331). As tools of the Wellgeist, the Knights of Spirit insist on the historical validity of their cause and continually emphasize their genealogy of spirit. Accused of radicality, selfishness, and illegitimacy, the proponents of the new order seek historical validity by focusing on their spiritual genealogy and calling attention to the illegitimacy of the present system.45 Gutzkow thus counters the specter of political arbitrariness in the same way Goethe countered symbolic arbitrariness—by turning to the tradition of Freemasonry and its predecessors.

While his Knights of Spirit try to balance political revolution and tradition, Gutzkow situates his novel on a related border: between literary tradition and revolution. Alexander Jung, in his Letters on Gutzkow’s Knights of Spirit (Briefe über Gutzkow’s Ritter vom Geiste, 1856),46 wrote that while critics have singled out Dankmar’s secret society as an object of scorn, the same was the case when Goethe published Wilhelm Meister (9); and Jung finds Wilhelm Meister’s Travels and The Knights of Spirit remarkably similar, in form as well as content.47 Gutzkow himself compared his novel to Wilhelm Meister: “I wanted, as it were, to write a political Wilhelm Meister, simple, natural, true-to-life.”48 A political Wilhelm Meister. Fifty years earlier Novalis found Goethe’s novel too prosaic, a Candi de aimed at true art, and set out to write a more poetic version. But Gutzkow finds that an updated Meister needs politics. By writing in and against the tradition of Wilhelm Meister, Gutzkow gains the force of a formidable precedent, one against which he can then play off his own ideas for political change.

Finally, and for me most significant, the novel’s Masonic secret society, whatever its literary and political tradition, powerfully affects public perception, provoking wild rumors: “The government is Pax said, has uncovered a bunch of dangerous plots. Foreign emissaries have arrived from Paris and America. There are the most exact indications of a developing new revolutionary movement” (VI, 197). The rumors obviously draw on the political phobias of the nineteenth century: “Unsettling enough was the tale of a great, secret league which reached into the furthest branches of all classes and which made the ground on which one daily walked unsafe” (IX, 86);49 “one spoke generally about a far-reaching league whose head no one knew, whose statutes were still unwritten, which would, however, arise more powerfully” (IX, 143–144).

Foreign emissaries of a new revolutionary movement, a monstrous secret society with tentacles reaching into all levels of society, unknown heads mysteriously leading the powerful society—these are not only the exotic requisites of the league novel but also the nightmares of contemporary political phantasy as well. Dankmar has no compunctions about feeding such perceptions, for they lend power to his order of spiritual Knights. And Gutzkow, despite his many critics on this score, finds in the league novel a ready-made literary genre through which to play on public paranoia.
so that his own sometimes vague hopes seem more attractive than the alternatives. The carefully established case for political legitimacy (and the illegitimacy of the ruling government), along with the repeatedly stated moderate position of the Knights of Spirit, are calculated to ease fears the novel feeds and to suggest a workable alternative to the various extremes—all while drawing immediacy from the actions of more radical conspiracies, real and supposed.

In the end Gutzkow himself admitted to certain narrative deficiencies in his novel. Nonetheless, there are good historical and literary reasons for Gutzkow to have portrayed such a secret society. Secret societies have traditionally acted as a secret moral (and thus political) force under repressive governments. Their long history lends an aura of legitimacy. And, most significant, a Masonic secret society weds a potent threat of conspiratorial overthrow with a mollifying Enlightenment tradition and thus plays on both sides of the public’s perception. In setting up this dual role, Gutzkow approaches politically what authors drawn to the semiotics of Freemasonry also found interesting: that the symbols of an eighteenth-century institution, as arbitrary (revolutionary) as their century demanded that they be, nevertheless had a long esoteric history to motivate (legitimize) them. Freemasonry, politically and semiotically, sits firmly on the border between tradition and revolution, the motivated and the arbitrary, the private and the public, and thus finds its way into a spectrum of German novels broad enough to include both Goethe and Gutzkow.

IN THE TRADITION OF GUTZKOW: OTHER POST-1848 NOVELS

In the decade following publication of The Knights of Spirit, two of Gutzkow’s “Young German” friends, Gustav Kühne and Theodor Mundt also wrote about Freemasons, as did Joseph von Rathewitz and Eduard Breier. The work of all four was influenced by Gutzkow and clearly mirrors current public interest in Freemasonry; together they provide an informative sequel to The Knights of Spirit.

Eduard Breier’s The Rosicrucians in Vienna (Die Rosenkreuzer in Wien, 1852), plays on the conspiracy theory that echoes throughout The Knights of Spirit. The Rosicrucians of the novel’s title prove bumbling and gullible men eager to follow a Mesmer, Swedenborg, St. Germain, Cagliostro, Schröpfer, or Lavater. An agent of the Illuminati enters this environment of intrigue and intense longing for mysteries; and through the efforts of the hundred Illuminati agents who serve him he appears omniscient and omnipotent. By propagating unrest and discontent he hopes to create political chaos to further the revolution; in this respect he resembles Menon in The Epigones, whose conspiratorial aim was likewise to create chaos leading to revolution. Personal greed gradually leads him away from his political goals; and in the end, as his scheme begins to go awry, three mysterious emissaries of the unknown head of the Illuminati arrive to punish him horribly for endangering their great political purpose.

The stated aim of Breier’s book is “enlightenment.” The narrator attacks, for instance, secret societies that paradoxically combine democratic goals and unknown heads; and superstitions of several sorts are set up for ridicule. But the novel itself feeds the very superstitions it supposedly attacks. A real Rosicrucian is left mysteriously holding the true formula for the philosopher’s stone. And when a prophecy “Cagliostro” makes about how three men will fare in the next year is miraculously fulfilled at the end of the novel, the reader is left with a sense for the confidence man’s real power. Finally, the reader must deal with the “fact” that unbelievably powerful emissaries of the Illuminati are somewhere out there undermining law-abiding monarchies for their own devious purposes. This theory of conspiracy is surely as destructive as any superstition the novel purports to disclose.

More substantial than Breier’s fiction is Gustav Kühne’s novel of 1855: The Freemasons (Die Freimaurer). Kühne was a student of Hegel’s, a close friend of Theodor Mundt, an acquaintance of Gutzkow, a leading “Young German,” the editor of several influential journals (his Europa published inflammatory works by several Vormrzt figures and then ran into trouble with newly repressive authorities after the revolution of 1848), and a prolific, if mediocre author of fiction. He was no more a Freemason than Gutzkow; but like Gutzkow he found in the brotherhood a possible way to realize one of his dreams, at least literally.

The Freemasons, set in the latter half of the eighteenth century, tells the stories of three men: an autocratic, fiercely orthodox Protestant ruler of a small German principality, his Italian son-in-law (a one-time Jesuit emissary and then Waldensian heretic), and a son of the Italian (who has a Waldensian mother, is raised by Jesuits, and then converts to Protestantism). The novel’s title comes
from the fact that all these men, despite their marked differences, are Freemasons. And this for a purpose. Kühne’s main concern in the novel is the religious strife that separates families and nations. The depictions of cruel Catholic suppression of Waldensians and Jews are stirring, as is the Protestant ruler’s heartless treatment of his daughter for having converted to Catholicism. Instances of religious bigotry abound in the novel and establish the need for Freemasonry’s palliative influence (or so it would seem). But complications arise as various lodges vie for power, and Freemasonry mirrors, rather than transcends, the sectarian religious strife. In the end, however, the Italian son-in-law, more optimistic than most readers will be, sees Enlightenment Freemasonry as a natural and positive response to the chaotic German political conditions and wishes for a continuation of the order, along with a more open, political institution (597).

The Freemasons follows The Knights of Spirit in depicting religious and political strife. Kühne places more emphasis on the former, Gutzkow on the latter. Both novels present a Masonic secret society that transcends the discord and also depict warring societies. The solution in both cases is a general, utopian, Kraussian, Masonic league of humanity.

A third novel about Freemasons, The Three Freemasons (Die drei Freimaurer), published in 1855 and 1856 by Joseph von Rathewitz (an author who, like Breier, has left almost no traces in literary history), directly addresses connections between Freemasonry and revolution, as one can already see from the subtitle: "Revelations from the Life and Deeds of the Same, Since the Year of the Revolution 1848. An Appendage to the Life and Deeds of the Jesuits; From Surviving Papers of a Deceased Freemason."53

In this novel Hugo, a young prison escapee originally arrested because of his role in the 1848 revolution, meets a wealthy Freemason, Meerfelds, who informs him of Freemasonry’s goals. The Masons do not support revolution, he says, but rather the peaceful building of the temple of freedom and humanity. They are secretly at work bringing about what he calls a moral “Masonic-Democracy.” In a discussion about the school for artisans the Masons support, Meerfelds speaks of revolution: “You know what I think about the revolution. I have always viewed it as a dangerous, epidemic sickness which spread through half of Europe and finally broke out in madness” (163). Once the novel establishes Freemasonry as a democratic but antirevolutionary society, Hugo is asked to join an

other secret society: the League of the Red Hearts. These men advocate the violent overthrow of the existing government, so Hugo, still impressed by Meerfelds’s gentle, humanitarian Freemasonry, refuses the offer. Under some pressure he finally attends a meeting; but during the meeting, held underground in the cemetery, he stands up for his new principles and must endure the most vile threats. When he continues to refuse to join, his opponents suddenly burst into cheers and welcome him into their “true Masonic league.” Together they sing Mozart’s “O Isis and Osiris” and contemplate various Masonic symbols, secure in the knowledge that they are no conspiratorial league against the state, but rather a group of loyally concerned citizens. The plot gradually veers toward Rosicrucian esoterica but finally ends happily for the downtrodden masses.

Like Gutzkow’s novel, The Three Freemasons combines Freemasonry and postrevolutionary politics. Like the Knights of Spirit, Meerfelds’s Freemasons advocate movement toward democracy through nonviolent deeds of spirit. But unlike Gutzkow (or Kühne, for that matter) Rathewitz evidences no desire to move beyond Freemasonry to a more openly political group. And like Kühne’s and Breier’s novels, The Three Freemasons is complete with an homage to the occult practices of Masonry’s Rosicrucian offshoots.

Although published in 1870, fifteen years after the others, Heinrich Oppermann’s Hundred Years: 1770-1870 (Hundert Jahre: 1770-1870) is a good postscript to the post-1848 Masonic novel. As a student Oppermann was influenced by Krause, whose philosophy he presented and defended in his Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Encyklopädie der Philosophie, 1844). Oppermann was politically active, and he contributed to two of Gutzkow’s journals. While writing his magnum opus he consulted often with Gutzkow, whose Knights of Spirit he saw as a perfect model for broad political fiction.54 Hundred Years, like the Knights of Spirit, is a huge novel in nine volumes, originally published serially in a newspaper. In one of the many plot strands an artist named Hellung returns to Dresden from slavery in Tunisia and under the influence of Krause’s philosophy becomes a Freemason. In another part of the novel a law student named Gottfried Schulz studies under Krause in Göttingen but has to leave the university because of his political activity. After the failed revolution of 1848, Oskar Schulz (Gottfried’s cousin) and Theodor Hellung (son of the artist) emigrate to the United States. Hellung travels on business to California with two of his Freema-
sonic brethren. Stopping in Salt Lake City, he reports on the Mormons, explaining their borrowings from Freemasonry by pointing out that their "main apostle," W. W. Phelps, was a student of Krause's in Göttingen. While Hellung is in the West, Schulz travels to the South on Masonic business. Pseudo-Masons come into the picture, Schulz must foil a murder attempt on himself, and finally Hellung and Schulz end up in a utopian colony in California. Krause and his league of humanity are even more important for Oppermann's novel than they were in the Knights of Spirit. Friesen points out that Krause's address to the combined Dresden lodges comes at the midpoint of Hundred Years (183) and that the doctrines taught there are carried to the United States, the land of freedom and promise, where western movement, as the Master of Hellung's Pittsburg lodge says, "makes possible the goal of a world-wide lodge."

Taken as a whole, these post-1848 Masonic novels reveal a common desire for unified political action. Freemasonry offers such unity, especially in the form foreseen by Krause. In addition, at least as late as the revolutions of 1848, Freemasons were still asserting that their principles were changing an absolutist system to bring about a society in which freedom and equality and brotherhood were the rule. And lurking in the background, the ever-powerful conspiracy theory offered a sense of urgency.

Goethe's and Schiller's use of the Freemasonry they found all around them at the end of the eighteenth century can hardly be second-guessed. By mid-nineteenth century, with historical Freemasonry now in a qualitative decline, Gutzkow's (and friends') return to Freemasonry was immediately questioned, not altogether fairly, as I have pointed out. One might expect, then, an end to serious literary portrayals of the brotherhood. Such an assumption could not be further from the truth, for in the semiotic systems and political possibilities explored literarily by Schiller, Goethe, and Gutzkow, Freemasonry embodies concerns that both include and transcend historical reality. Authors of the twentieth century evidence strong, continued interest in the institution raised to literary prominence in the previous two centuries.