Fictions of Freemasonry: Chapter 3, Ritual Routes in Goethe's Wilhelm Meister

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changes was that someone had planned them, that a secret society had conspired to radically alter the course of history. This is, of course, precisely what the Count von O. would have the reader believe about the altered course of the prince’s life, and his warnings concerning the Jesuitical and Freemasonic machinations of the Armenian and his friends take the same form as the conspiracy theory. The result is a false sense of knowledge, of closure, of satisfaction of desire.

The Freemasonry Biester and friends defended was a bastion of the Enlightenment, while the new, high-grade, Jesuit-inspired systems were seen as enemies. In Schiller’s story the Armenian and his coconspirators indeed use Freemasonry’s organization and semiotic system to disabuse the prince of Enlightenment ideals. But Schiller also exposes the conspiracy theory propagated by the narrators (and Biester), a theory that fixes blame on Jesuits and draws attention away from an even more acute problem: the prince’s (and more generally, eighteenth-century society’s) absolute need for closure, a need easily manipulated by artists and confidence men. Freemasonry may indirectly undermine an absolutist political system; but as Schiller demonstrates here, in its secrecy and gradually unfolding ritual, it also plays on a very human desire for closure. Such closure, politically speaking, is exemplified by the absolutist system the Armenian brilliantly reestablishes.

Setting out to write about an immoral, directly political use of art, Schiller found a perfect vehicle in the Freemasonry attacked in the Berlinische Monatsschrift, for it featured a symbolic system employed for political ends. By focusing on the use of such symbols, by identifying his narrators with the Masonic and Jesuitical confidence artists and thus calling art into question, by pointing to conspiracy theories as satisfying but empty solutions, by leaving his own work a fragment, and finally by turning away from “immoral art” for nearly six years to study and write philosophy and history, Schiller proved his dedication to the “republican freedom” of the reading public.

CHAPTER THREE

Ritual Routes in Wilhelm Meister’s Travels

Des Mauers Wandeln / Es gleich dem Leben.
—Goethe, “Symbolum”

Welch ein schönes Symbol des immerthätigen aber zugleich mit Gefahren umringten Lebens, sind diese Reisen mit dem auf die Brust gekehrten tödlichen Stahl.
—Karl Philipp Moritz,
Fragmente aus dem Tagebuche eines Geisterschers

Karl Philipp Moritz published his “Masonic novel” Andreas Hartknopf in 1786, the year before Schiller’s Ghost-Seer began to appear. Like the other authors who concern us here, Moritz was not primarily interested in holding up a mirror to contemporary Freemasonry, but found the fraternity a convenient vehicle for expressing other concerns: “The author of Andreas Hartknopf did not merely . . . choose the form of a novel to clothe certain concepts of Freemasonry, but the Freemasonic in his book is itself only clothing by which he wanted to disseminate . . . certain, still much misunderstood truths.” That precisely describes Schiller’s novel, which depicts high-grade Freemasonry because its paradigmatic ritual, like much art, denies a democratic arbitrariness and promises mystery and authoritarian closure. The Ghost-Seer is not about Freemasons, but rather the production of signs, and in this it is closely related to Wilhelm Meister, both the Apprenticeship and the Travels, for Goethe’s novels likewise use Freemasonry to examine arbitrary and natural figures.
A poem introducing the 1821 version of *Wilhelm Meister’s Travels* 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 eichen,  
Wird gedient, lässt sich wägen,  
Möge mancher Freund mit Freuden  
Sich’s nach seinem Bilde prägen!²

And so I raise old treasures,  
Most curious in this case;  
If [I] do not “count” them gold,  
[settle them out, metallurgically, so that gold  
remains; write or print them so they become gold]³  
They are still metals.  
One can smell, one can separate,  
Becomes pure, can be weighed,  
May many a friend joyfully  
Coin it himself in his own image.

Besides offering a delightful invitation to a plurality of readings, the poem presents a novelist *cum* treasure hunter seemingly untroubled at the thought that his treasure may not prove gold. The unexpected modesty can be tentatively explained by a statement about alchemy and gold in Goethe’s *Theory of Colors* (*Farbenlehre*). The alchemical search for gold, he writes there, is “the misuse of the genuine and true, a leap from the idea . . . to reality.” In Goethe’s opinion, there is nothing intrinsically wrong with a desire for gold, unless, that is, one falls prey to the alchemist’s promise to spring supernaturally from the idea to reality. To temper such an impatient desire for gold, Goethe suggests “the highest education,”⁴ an education thematized on the first pages of the *Travels*.

As the novel opens, Wilhelm’s son Felix picks up a stone and turns to ask his father:

“What is this stone called, Father?” the boy said. “I don’t know,” replied Wilhelm. “Is that gold that gleams in it so?” said the former. “It is not gold!” replied the latter, “and I remember that people call it fool’s gold [cat’s gold, *Katzengold*].” “Katzengold!” said the boy smiling, “and why?” “Probably because it is deceitful and people believe that cats too are deceitful.” (HA, VIII, 7)

The gold of the discussion between Wilhelm and Felix (and of both the poem and the passage on alchemy) is unreal or at least unattainable. Education—analogical education like that given here—is the real treasure. This disclosure leaves Felix holding a worthless stone, but he has had a worthwhile lesson in simile. “I will make a note of that,” he says.⁵ The exchange contains a second lesson as well, for although the discussion of names and analogy proves more important than the supposed gold, without the “gold” there would have been no analogy. The novel will prove full of similar “old treasures,” treasures the reader must simultaneously suspect as fool’s gold and use metaphorically.

The poem about the novel as treasure is deleted in the novel’s 1829 version. In its stead appear two scenes that similarly feature 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 “a peculiarly suspicious group” gathers around. The next morning Jarno takes Fitz to task for his acquaintance with one of these men: “the tall, very last one, the one who kept writing signs in the sand and whom the others treated with some esteem, was certainly a treasure hunter with whom you are conspiring.” (HA, VIII, 41). This last man is the new embodiment of the poem’s treasure-hunting novelist. In the poem the metals could be formed (or interpreted) at will; and here the treasure hunter writes his signs in the ever-shifting sand. From the beginning, then, it would seem that this novel thematizes the arbitrariness of language. But there is a second side to the problem as well.

Jarno’s further discussion with Fitz reveals that the treasure hunter has bought cross stones (*Kreuze steine*, chiastolite) to help him find treasure (or, as novelist, to help him find the “old treasures” he needs as building blocks for his novel). Fitz describes the stones as “a precious mineral, without it no treasure can be raised; I get paid very well for a small piece” (HA, VIII, 42). On one level, the cross stones are supposedly efficacious in supernatural undertakings; but on another level they are natural signs the novelist must have to express the concepts he terms “treasures.” In a letter to Zauper written while working on the *Travels*, Goethe says that nature can serve as a metaphorical key to self-understanding: “Nature, if we understand how to grasp it correctly, everywhere mirrors itself as an analogue to our mind; and if it only awakens tropes and similes, much is already won.”⁶ In the novel Jarno speaks of the cross stones as such natural figures: “One is rightly happy when lifeless nature
Brings forth an image of that which we love and honor” (HA, VIII, 35). Others may use the cross stones to search for gold, but Jarno, understanding their true metaphorical worth, goes so far as to reverse the process and exchange gold for information about the stones: “Take your gold piece, replied Montan, you have earned it for this discovery” (HA, VIII, 35). Nature does not produce magical signs that disclose supernatural gold; but it does bring forth signs that are more than arbitrary.

Jarno speaks of his geological studies in terms that link the search for precious metals and reading a text: “If, however, . . . I were to treat these very crevices and fissures as letters, if I were to try to decipher them, form them into words and learn to read them perfectly, would you have anything against that?” (HA, VIII, 34). He continues his geological lecture much later in the novel and contrasts a fruitless reliance on the supernatural with rational inquiry. Jarno finds the earth’s metal (lead and silver, not gold!), he claims, because he has learned the language of the mountains. Although some people suspect that a divining rod (or cross stones or esoteric lore) leads him to the ore, he explains that such superstition keeps them from the very knowledge that would unlock the secrets of geology. There is a natural language but not one composed of transcendental signifiers. One can uncover the metals of meaning, but the gold of mystery remains beyond language.

This explains why Fitz, a superstitious boy of questionable character, possesses the cross stones and why the novelist appears as a disreputable treasure hunter. For the novel contains “old treasures,” natural signs that lend themselves to both metaphor and misuse. On the one hand, without the treasures there is no figure. But on the other hand, failure to recognize the figure as figure results in a fatal jump from idea to reality. In building his novel on an occult symbolic foundation, the novelist works with a slippery medium. He indicates this and points his reader to a figurative reading by questioning his own activity.

Fitz possesses the key to another treasure that likewise weaves together hermetic, tropic, and novelistic motifs. In the Giant’s Castle (Riesenschloss) which Wilhelm and Felix visit the day after their stay at the charcoal burner’s (while Fitz has followed the lure of Jarno’s gold), Felix finds a mysterious little box: “the bold one [Felix] raised himself quickly out of the crevice and brought with him a little box, not larger than a small octavo volume, with a splendid, old appearance; it seemed to be of gold, decorated with enamel” (HA, VIII, 44). The apparently gold box thus promises what the young treasure hunter seeks. But this is no normal box: the size of an “octavo volume,” it is explicitly called a “splendid little book” (Prachtbüchlein). The designations “Prachtbüchlein” and “Oktavband,” added in the 1829 version (along with the mysterious treasure hunter), accomplish within the novel what the original poem did outside the narrative: they identify the novel (the 1829 version was indeed an octavo volume) as a treasure and the novelist and reader as treasure hunters.

The key to the box/book, found later in Fitz’s jacket, is depicted in the novel and has been linked by Wilhelm Emrich to Freemasonry. Friedrich Ohly builds on Emrich’s careful speculation while discussing a book Goethe read in July of 1819: August Kestner’s The Agape or the Secret World-League of Christians (Die Agape oder der geheime Weltbund der Christen). Kestner postulates a pseudo-Masonic society of early Christians through which Christianity supposedly achieved the unity and strength to become a major religion. Comparing two esoteric signs depicted in Kestner’s book with the key in the Travels, Ohly concludes that Emrich was right in seeing in the key a combination of Christian and “Freemasonic” symbols. The key and the box or book have many functions unrelated to Freemasonry, as Emrich points out, but in our context the fictional attempts to get at the secrets of the seemingly golden box are analogous to efforts to understand the “golden” novel through the esoterica of Freemasonry. When, for example, Felix, in a fever to discover the mysteries within, turns the key with Freemasonic markings, the key breaks. The fact that the box ultimately remains closed to Wilhelm and Felix manifests the enigmatic quality of the novel or, more important, the fact that the message lies not in a spurious transcendental signifier, but rather in the figures themselves. The only person to open the box, in the end, is the goldsmith. His daily work with gold teaches him the secrets of the trick key; but he counsels amateurs to leave the contents of the box untouched.

In summary, the poem of the 1821 version compares the novelist and reader to treasure hunters and the novel to a treasure. In the 1829 version that comparison gives way to the writing treasure hunter and to the box/book. The mystery promised is not the gold of supernatural expectations but the more useful metals of allegory and metaphor. The keys to buried treasure and the “splendid little book” are, respectively, the cross stones 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, or viewed as transcendental signifiers, the two keys are of questionable value. But when seen as tropes they may open up new perspectives. Their power to do so, however, comes in part from their origin in the mysterious, secret, irrational, questionable world Fitz knows, a world known also by many eighteenth-century Freemasons.

GOETHE AS FREEMASON

On February 13, 1780, having recently returned from a trip to Switzerland, Goethe explained to the head of the Freemasonic lodge Amalia in Weimar that social inconveniences encountered during his trip had intensified a long-standing wish to become a Freemason.11 On June 23, 1780, 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 Kayser 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: "In the order I am a Master, which means little. A good spirit led me, extracurricularly, through the remaining halls and chambers. And I know the incredible."12 It would seem at this point that the young man believes he has found the gold the older Goethe will disavow. During the next year Goethe also became a member of the Illuminati, recruited along with Karl 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 lodge closed, Goethe showed early signs of distancing himself from Freemasonry:

The secret sciences have given me neither more nor less than I hoped. I was searching for nothing for myself in them, but I am taught enough as I see what others sought, found, are seeking and hoping for in those sciences. . . . I have also found that in the small world of the brothers everything happens as in the large world, and in this sense, it has been very useful to me to pass through these regions.13

Consistent with his later use of Freemasonry, Goethe here views the fraternal world as a kind of microcosm of the larger world. In the Travels, the final aphorism "From Makarie's Archive" echoes this earlier concept of education through analogy: "Whoever lives long in significant social circumstances will experience—not everything that can happen to a person—but certainly the analogue, and perhaps something without parallel" (HA, VIII, 486). Although falling to satisfy youthful desires for mystical wisdom ("the incredible"), Freemasonry, like alchemy, provided Goethe with symbols, themes, and structures for his lifelong 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:

Jena was, as you know, threatened with a lodge . . . the idea of having a lecture given on the mischief of the secret society is excellent. I have also made a suggestion to the directors of the [Jena] Literary Journal, which they have accepted, which will seriously set back all secret societies. You will soon read it in print. It is good to publicly establish enmity between oneself and the fools and scoundrels.14

Goethe expressed this antagonistic view of mystical Freemasonry, and especially its notorious proponent Cagliostro, dramatically in The Grand-Cophta (Der Gross-Cophta, 1791).15 But even in these years when other men were seeking "gold" in secret societies and he was keeping his distance, Goethe still drew on the symbols of Freemasonry for his work.

Four years after The Grand-Cophta's negative depiction of secret societies, Goethe finished Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship, a novel whose secret society has a positive, if highly ambivalent, influence on the young hero. In these years Goethe also worked on a sequel to The Magic Flute (Die Zauberflöte), Mozart's and Schickaneder's Freemasonic opera, to be called The Magic Flute, Part Two (Der Zauberflöte 2. Theil).

Goethe's shifting association with 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 again 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; for example, on February 18, 1813, he gave the speech “Zu brüderlichem Andenken Wielands”; and he wrote the poem “Symbolum” in 1815, first published in Hymns for Freemasons (Gesänge für Freimaurer, Weimar 1816).  

**THE RITUAL ROUTE**

In “The Architecture of the Lodges: Ritual Form and Associational Life in the Late Enlightenment,” Anthony Vidler discusses the general belief of Enlightenment utopian writers that environmental form shapes the individual. Freemasonry, a kind of “lived utopia,” developed an initiation ceremony that gradually included 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 primarily represented the type of the 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 spatial organization of the initiatory sequence... becomes an agent of mental change” (87). This corresponds closely to the use of architectural and esoteric Masonic symbols to influence the prince in Schiller’s Ghost-Seer.

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 Saras in near Basel in 1781. Such “temples in the garden,” as Vidler calls them (89), represented an extension of the ritual routes into the landscape of the English garden, as discussed in Chapter 1. A description of an initiatory sequence in such a “lodge,” written by the English mystic and novelist William Beckford and quoted by Vidler, provides a good example of the practice.

In a 1784 letter to his sister, Beckford claimed to have been driven in a shuttered carriage by the architect Ledoux, the same man who drew plans for the pyramid in which Terrasson’s Sethos is tested, to an estate outside of Paris. Beckford was required to ask no questions concerning what he might see or hear. The two men left the carriage before a stone wall, and, passing through gates, found themselves in a vast space occupied by woodpiles. 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 bright, “lofty square room” with marble pilasters and containing 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 and passed 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 lantern,” and found their way home.

Like the men who designed this symbolic route, Goethe subscribed to the Enlightenment belief that environmental form shapes the individual. In fact, he ordered architectural symbols along ritual routes in several of his works “to affect the succeeding states of mind” of a character. Take, for example, “The Secrets” (“Die Geheimnisse,” 1784–1785), a fragmentary epic poem in which, at the outset, Brother Markus moves toward the dwelling of a Rosicrucian order by way of marvelous paths. He views mysterious signs and paintings and songs to know their meaning; and then, in the following lines, he is found worthy to know the secrets behind it all:

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:"
of the signs Faust hopes will afford him transcendence actually do so. Behind each sign stands another sign, not the absolute being he seeks. But the sign is not totally arbitrary either: “We have the ineluctable, deeply serious task which must be renewed daily: to grasp, as well as possible, the unmediated meeting of the word with what is felt, seen, thought, experienced, imagined, reasoned” (HA, VIII, 469).

As its title “Symbolum” suggests, Goethe’s best known Masonic poem directly addresses the problem of figuration, hinting at the possibility of transcendent meaning, but counseling the initiates to set aside their fascination with transcendence and focus rather on action:

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The Propyläen is thus a station on the path of knowledge whose end presumably lies in the temple of Athena. But the mystical end does not interest the man, as opposed to the youth; the man is content to move along the path, to learn in the space between the inner and the outer, between the sacred and the profane.

The youthful impatience depicted here is similar to the definition of alchemy quoted above: “a leap from the idea . . . to reality.” 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, for there may be no such reality: no gold, no mystical epiphany, no absolute transcendence of the mediating figure. The “truth” may lie in the sign itself, in that “space between inner and outer,” in the Propyläen: “The true is similar to divinity; it does not appear unmediated, we must guess it from its manifestations” (“From Makarie’s Archive,” HA, VIII, 460). As Nell Flax has recently pointed out in a discussion of Goethe’s Faust, none
Die Tätigen lohnen!
Wir heissen euch hoffen."
(HA, I, 340–341)

The Mason's travels
Resemble life,
And his efforts
Resemble the deeds
Of persons on earth.
The future shrouds
Pains and happinesses,
Step by step to the view,
Yet undismayed
We press forward.
And heavy and heavier
Hangs a veil
With reverence. Still
The stars rest above
And below the graves.
Observe them more exactly
And see, thus enter
Into the breast of the hero
Changing thrills
And serious feelings.
Yet from the other side call
The voices of spirits,
The voices of the masters:
"Do not neglect to exert
The powers of goodness.
Here crowns wind themselves
In eternal stillness,
Which are meant to reward
The active with fullness!
We bid you to hope.

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 symbolically approximates the stages of life. The covering that hangs "heavy and heavier" with reverence (Ehrfurcht), the veil bearing symbolic stars and graves, is a figure that, as figure, both veils and discloses. The initiate is asked to observe it; but, as he begins to be entranced by the symbolic depth, he is exorted by the spirits, by the masters (those supposedly in possession of the final secret, the absolute significance behind the signifiers) that although transcendence may be possible in another realm, for the present he should engage in good deeds.

These three examples of ritual routes in Goethe's work—"The Secrets," the Propyläen, and "Symbolum"—manifest an ongoing concern with esoteric architectural symbolism, ritual education, and figuration itself. These related topics find even broader expression in the two Wilhelm Meister novels.

THE RITUAL ROUTE IN THE APPRENTICESHIP

In Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship, which preceded the final version of the Travels by more than thirty years, several emissaries from the Society of the Tower direct Wilhelm's education while he simultaneously develops according to internal norms. Schiller immediately saw the need for such emissaries in Goethe's Bildungsroman:

The forces of the Tower, a higher understanding, working in secret, accompany him [Wilhelm] with their attention and without disturbing nature in its free movement, they observe and lead him from afar, guiding him to an end which he himself does not (and may not) sense. As gentle and light as this influence from outside is, it is still really there, and for the achievement of the poetic aim it was indispensable. An apprenticeship is a relative concept, it demands its correlatives... mastery, which is only the work of a matured and perfected experience.

It is not surprising that Schiller so aptly characterized this mechanism, for his novel served as a prototype for Goethe's work. A description of Jarno, for instance, one of the Tower Society's emissaries, reveals the flashing eyes of Schiller's Armenian, along with the Armenian's force of character that ambivalently attracts the hero he is sent to influence: "Large, bright blue eyes flashed out from under a high brow... Wilhelm... felt a certain inclination toward the stranger, although he simultaneously possessed something cold and repelling" (162). Unlike contemporary popular novelists who reproduced Schiller's Armenian because a powerful emissary was a good catalyst for an exciting story, Goethe, like Schiller, found the
Masonic ritual related to such a figure a key to investigating problems of artistic production.

The Tower Society draws its name from a mysterious tower—part of what is described as an “old irregular castle with several towers and pediments.” An entire wing of this “singular building,” as it is called, remains closed to Wilhelm until Jarno promises to show him the tower and introduce him to the secrets of its society. 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 curtain from utter darkness to blinding sunlight. In this partially secularized space (a table covered with green cloth stands where an altar once stood), Wilhelm learns that members of the society have carefully directed his education. They introduce him to an extensive archive to which he now, as an initiate, has free access. The Abbé gives him a document of indenture (a Lehrbrief) to further instruct him, and the scene ends as Wilhelm’s son Felix appears and father and son move about the garden outside; Felix asks for the names of plants they see, and Wilhelm somewhat lamely tries to teach him.

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 into the garden), Wilhelm is introduced to a symbolic, pedagogic architecture. The Tower Society, he is told, stands on a mystical base (the nonsecularized chapel), the symbols of which still have value even if final assumptions are no longer shared. But as the Lehrbrief reiterates (in much the same language quoted earlier from the Theory of Colors), impatience leads many to skip the progressive steps of education in an attempt to immediately grasp the mystery—“The pinnacle excites us, not the stairs; with the peak in view we like to walk on the level” (HA, VII, 496). Finally, after warning against an exclusive preoccupation with signs (“Whoever works merely with signs is a pedant, a hypocrite, or a dabbler”), the Lehrbrief suggests action and describes an education by analogy (exactly the education the Travels thematize): “where words are lacking, the deed speaks. The genuine pupil learns to explain the unknown from the known and draws nearer to the master.”

The architectural pedagogy of the Tower Society 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 “found himself in the most earnest, in his mind the most holy place he had ever entered” (HA, VII, 512). The next morning, rising early, Wilhelm looks around the house that has so affected him: “It was the most pure, the most beautiful, the most worthy architecture he had seen. True art, he called out, is like good society: it forces us, in the most pleasant way, to recognize the measure according to which and for which our most inner [self] is formed” (HA, VII, 516). This contrasts with Wilhelm’s grandfather’s asymmetrical house that originally held the art collection now housed in the Oheim’s more symmetrical dwelling place, and also the disordered home of the Tower Society. Later, while walking in the garden, Natalie introduces Wilhelm to the “Hall of the Past,” an imposing architectural construction with Egyptian motifs: “All of this splendor and decoration presented itself in pure architectonic relationships, and thus everyone who entered seemed to be raised above himself as he first experienced through the harmonious art what a human was and what one might be” (HA, VII, 539–540). 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, heightening the present level of education, teaching of the measure to which the most inner self corresponds.

While undergoing this increasingly orderly architectural education in the company of mentors and friends, Wilhelm witnesses Mignon’s death, finds himself torn between Therésia and Natalie, and grows bitter about the way the Tower Society has mechanically structured his life. In a key exchange about ritual and meaning, Jarno tells Wilhelm that “all the things that you have seen in the tower are actually only relics from a youthfull undertaking.” . . . ‘So we are only playing with these worthy signs and words,’ Wilhelm exclaimed. ‘We are ceremoniously led to a place that inspires us with reverence . . . and we are no wiser than before’” (HA, VII, 548). 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 “something lawful in our meetings. There were the first mystical impressions on the establishment of the whole, afterward it took on, as if through a simile, the form of a craft which raised itself to an art. Thence came the appellations apprentices, assistants, and masters” (HA, VII, 549). He continues to describe the archive they developed and finally says that, because not all people are in-
terested in true education, some are deliberately sidetracked through mystification. Exclusively literal understanding caused by the overwhelming desire for actual mysteries makes the symbol opaque for such people. Nonetheless, as represented also by the secularized chapel, the original mystery has continuing value, if only as symbol.

When Jarno describes the transformation of a craft into an art for figurative purposes, he does not mention which craft; but the parallel to Freemasonry, where the skills and tools of masons lose their concrete functions and take on figurative significance, is clear. Such a transformation of craft to art also occurred among the occult, alchemical, Freemasonic Gold- and Rosenkreuzer of the late eighteenth century. Many of them practiced the actual craft of alchemy ("the first mystical impressions"); but in some cases this craft was raised to an art, and the transformation of metals became a metaphor for education, a set of symbols that educates. Raising the craft 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 reverence and then is left with nothing, but rather, that he should come to the education he expects through the symbols he sees, secularized or not. The Egyptian doorways, mysterious towers, and perfectly harmonious buildings are agents of growth. Through the "craft... which raised itself to art," through alchemy which becomes Freemasonry, through architecture which becomes symbolic architecture, Wilhelm's education continues.

RITUAL ROUTES IN THE TRAVELS

The first paragraphs of the sequel to the Apprenticeship immediately sound themes that alert the reader that Wilhelm's travels are meant to provide a figurative education and that each stage along his ritual route is critical.27 The novel's first sentence places Wilhelm in meaningful surroundings: "Wilhelm sat in the shadow of a powerful cliff, an awful, meaningful place." Felix's question, "What is this stone called, Father?" 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—one explaining the name "Katzengold" by analogy to cats, and a 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 planing ax (Polieraxt) and square (Winkelmaß) of a carpenter (cf. the trowel, compass, and square of the mason and Freemason), leading a donkey bearing a woman in red and blue who carries a baby (HA, VIII, 9). Wilhelm is, of course, astonished to find the "Flight to Egypt" become reality in this mountain setting.

Wilhelm sends Felix with this odd family, and, as the day comes to a close, he climbs back up the peak to retrieve his papers and pack. Following a route that resembles the one in "The Secrets," Wilhelm climbs ever higher until he once again sees the sun, "the heavenly star which he had lost more than once" (HA, VIII, 11). In the hut 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 (thus leaving behind the world of the Apprenticeship and undertaking 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 cross stones lie. These motifs—mountain, sun seen setting several times, valley, monastery, and cross—are precisely those encountered in the first stanzas of "The Secrets," where Brother Markus ascends a mountain near the end of day, the sun appears again as he reaches the top, he "is like newborn" when he hears a bell, and he finds a valley in which lies a monastery with a rosy cross on its door. These striking parallels make it clear that the Rosicrucian and Freemasonic substance of "The Secrets" continues here in the Travels.28 These first stages of a ritual route in the Travels, recognizable as such in part by the comparison with the poem, expand into a more elaborate route that remarkably resembles the one described by William Beckford.

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 the new St. Joseph replies that the building has made the man:
Certainly, you marvel at the congruence between this building and its inhabitants whom you met yesterday. That congruence is, however, perhaps even more singular than one might surmise: the building has actually made the inhabitants. For when the lifeless is alive, its products can also be lively. (Denn wenn das Leblose lebendig ist, so kann es auch wohl Lebendiges hervorbringen).

(FA, VIII, 15)

Influenced by artistic representations of St. Joseph as a carpenter, the young man who already bore the saint's name also took on his craft. Jarno spoke in the Apprenticeship about the Tower Society's initiation rites as a "craft which raised itself to an art," 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 movement, like that in "Symbolum" and the Lehrbrief, is from action to symbol to action. The cycle continues to art as the young man uses his carpentry skills to rebuild and restore the chapel housing the paintings.

After conversing on this subject, Joseph finds Wilhelm worthy of further education: "It is right . . . that I satisfy your curiosity . . . I sense that you are capable of taking even the peculiar seriously, if it rests on a serious foundation" (FA, VIII, 17). The extraordinary appearance of Joseph and Mary rests on the serious foundation of the reciprocal relationship between craft and art, and Wilhelm can consider seriously the marvelous family because of his ability, demonstrated in the Apprenticeship, to recognize symbols where others might find the supernatural.

Wilhelm's experiences at the monastery make him once again aware of the power of architecture and painting to educate, and of the productive nature of the progression from craft to art to craft. The route he has traveled so far has been allegorically rich, with the details sketched here closely approximating a Freemasonic ritual route. After Wilhelm and Felix leave St. Joseph's, each step of their journey continues to be part of a route meant to educate the young journeyman and his son. They travel from estate to estate, and each separate stage repeats the basic sequence described by William Beckford. The journey from St. Joseph's to the Oheim's estate especially is structured as a Masonic ritual route.

First, Fitz leads Wilhelm and Felix to Jarno, and Jarno lectures Wilhelm at length (there are connections here to the Lehrbrief) on the alphabet of nature, on a craft that becomes figurative through art, and on the cross stones as natural figures. As night approaches they all follow Fitz "on wondrous paths" to the charcoal pile in the middle of the woods.

The night passes, and Jarno continues to lecture Wilhelm: "If, however, you cannot let it be, and if you are bent on a perfect education, then I do not understand how you can be so blind, how you are inclined to search forever, how you do not see that you are in the very close proximity of a splendid educational institution" (FA, VIII, 39). Wilhelm does not understand, so Jarno explains; by using the charcoal pile as a metaphor—again raising the craft to art—he describes the confining environment of the charcoal pile in which the wood only partially burns, becoming highly useful as charcoal. The lesson is of the powers of limitation and skill in a single trade. While this pedagogy takes place, a mysterious group of men, including the novelist/treasure hunter, gathers around the charcoal pile; and the next morning Jarno accuses Fitz of being in league with them.

Fitz and Jarno go their own way, and Felix and Wilhelm come to the giant's castle, a natural architectural wonder where Felix finds the box or book already discussed. Fitz returns and leads them from the "straight, broad, beaten path" onto what seems a short-cut. They find themselves traveling rapidly downhill through a wood, "which, becoming ever more transparent, let them finally see, in the most clear sunlight, the most beautiful property which one can imagine" (FA, VIII, 45). But the sudden vision achieved by taking the short-cut suggested by Fitz, the supplier of magic cross stones, proves false, for a deep ditch and a high wall separate them from the uncle's estate (cf. alchemy or transcendental signifiers as similar short-cuts). Fitz has anticipated this and cannot conceal his Schadenfreude when Wilhelm recognizes what has happened.

To avoid a long detour, Fitz next suggests that they approach the estate through vaults built to control rain water from the mountains as it enters the estate. Just as Felix insisted, in his youthful enthusiasm, on seeing the giant's castle and entering its caves, he again wants to enter the vaults: "When Felix heard about vaults, his desire drew him irresistibly into this entrance" (FA, 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. Fritz escapes but leaves his coat 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 a comfortable but barred room. An official enters the room, and after hearing Wilhelm’s story and seeing his papers, helps father and son into a beautiful garden room where refreshments await them. Next they walk to a castle fronted by trees, a natural “entry hall of the imposing building.” Inside the building, they pass quickly through the vestibule, ascend a stairway, and enter a main hall. Each separate space exhibits its own set of paintings. The master of the house, “a small, lively man advanced in years,” welcomes his guests and asks them, pointing to the paintings around the hall, whether Wilhelm knows the cities depicted there. Wilhelm’s reply demonstrates a thorough knowledge of several of them. During the next two days Wilhelm finds his way into a gallery where the old man shows him portraits, relics, and manuscripts. “Finally he laid before Wilhelm a white sheet, asking for several lines, but without a signature; then the guest found himself dismissed through a tapestry door into the hall, standing at the side of the archivist” (HA, VIII, 80). Wilhelm and Felix later leave the uncle’s to travel to Makarie’s castle, and the route they trace plays an important role in a later phase of this discussion; but for now, the route just described bears comparision with William Beckford’s ritual route.

Beckford describes (1) his route from Paris, (2) the wall of the estate, (3) the woodpiles, (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, laver, and fire, and (10) the chapel and tribune. Vidler’s schematization appears:

Wilhelm travels (1) the route from the Apprenticeship to (2) the mountains that 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 educational institution, and the giant’s castle 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 “a small, lively man of advanced age” meets Wilhelm and asks him about the paintings. 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 observing 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. Although this specific case may not be the source for Wilhelm’s pedagogical journey, it provides information concerning the substance of similar, contemporary ritual routes, transferred from the floor-drawings of Freemasonic lodges into the gardens and buildings of estates. It also provides a context in which the structure of the Wanderjahre can be more fully understood.
PARALLEL ROUTES IN THE TRAVELS

We began this discussion by pointing out that the esoterica present in the Travels must be treated as possible fool’s gold. Once that was understood, Freemasonry and alchemy could be mined for metaphorical meaning. After introducing Freemasonic architecture and ritual routes, several works were cited in which Goethe employed a similar architectural and pedagogical strategy. The Apprenticeship especially portrays the initiation rites and architectural pedagogy of a pseudo-Masonic secret society and does so, in part, to examine the production of symbols. A reading of early scenes in the Travels established that once again Freemasonic architectural symbols play a substantive role in the text and that this novel too self-reflexively deals with transformations of craft to symbol to craft. Finally, a remarkable congruence was found 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 to a close examination of the various routes Wilhelm follows in the course of the Travels. If the architectural details are taken seriously, as components of an educational sequence inspired by Freemasonry, there is 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 what follows in a broader context.

Ohly, for example, draws on the teachings about reverence in the Pedagogical Province to examine the monastery, the giant’s castle, the uncle’s estate, and Makarie’s realm as representative of “reverence for that which is above us,” “reverence for that which is under us,” “reverence for that which is the same as us,” and “reverence for that which is in us” respectively, and then finally the Pedagogical Province as the “spiritually pure center” (411–433). He is quite convincing, especially in his reading of the successive estates as symbolic regions; but in the end one feels that the complexity of the novel calls for other perspectives as well. Why, for instance, should the Pedagogical Province and its teachings be seen as the center of the novel?30 And why does the final region Wilhelm enters, that of the Tower Society, not fit into the scheme of things?

Wilhelm Vosskamp likewise considers several regions, this time within the structure of utopias.31 The uncle’s estate, the Pedagogical Province, and the two groups of Tower Society members are convincingly considered as contrasting utopias. Vosskamp supports his argument with solid textual analysis, noting, for example, that Wilhelm enters the uncle’s estate and the Province through gates that set the utopias off from the surrounding countryside. He does not, however, mention additional doors and gates that similarly set off the other realms of the novel. And why does he deal with only four regions and leave others undiscussed? Again, the system used to examine the novel proves only partially successful.

What follows builds on Ohly’s and Vosskamp’s (and others’) attempts to analyze the successive regions along Wilhelm’s route in his Travels. This essay too remains fragmentary, but it begins to approach a more comprehensive interpretation.

Putting aside for the moment the fictional and biographical realms Wilhelm enters through reading and hearing the various stories, the following stages make up his journey: St. Joseph’s monastery, Montan’s mountain realm (including the charcoal pile and the giant’s castle), the uncle’s estate, Makarie’s house, the Pedagogical Province, the Lago Maggiore, the scene of Wilhelm’s medical studies, and finally the estate on which the Tower Society has gathered. Chart 1 makes clear the congruities and incongruities between the various routes Wilhelm takes. The basic pattern consists of (1) a path leading to the estate or place of “initiation,” (2) an entrance, usually a door, gate, or vault, (3) a guide figure, (4) a large hall with instructive paintings on its walls, (5) an assurance that Wilhelm is worthy to proceed further, (6) a veil or curtain, (7) an archive or treasure room, (8) and finally a garden.

First, in every case the path to the respective estate is described. One region (Montan’s) may actually have three parts, for the travelers make their way to the peak where Jarno works, to the charcoal burner’s, and then to the giant’s castle on another peak. Descriptions of the respective paths to these places are “without path,” “wondrous paths,” and “difficult path.”

Second, most estates are separated from the outside world by at least one wall through which a door leads. The Lago Maggiore seems to be an exception.

Third, a guide (often an old man) leads Wilhelm through the house or countryside to, fourth, a hall with paintings or sculptures. 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. Wilhelm’s journey takes him
to the paintings of the life of St. Joseph which so affect the modern
Joseph and Mary, to Montan’s natural signs (the “letters of nature”),
to the uncle’s geographical representations and portraits (no painting
with a religious or mythical theme), to the historical paintings
on Makarie’s walls, to the eight-sided hall of the Pedagogical Province
with its paintings from the Old and New Testaments, to the
landscapes of the painter in Italy, to the instructive anatomical
sculptures, and finally to the complete absence of paintings in the
temporary lodgings of the Tower Society. This sequence of paintings
naturally sets up expectations of a meaningful pattern; and
although I fail to see the principle behind an overall ordering, let me
suggest several possibilities that might bear fruit.

An interesting pattern appears, for instance, when one
moves from beginning and end toward a center. Bracketing out, for
a moment, the final hall of the Tower Society where there are no
paintings (only letters), the first and last works of art (the paintings
depicting the life of St. Joseph and the anatomical sculptures) are
both examples of the cycle moving from art to craft to art. Moving
inward, the second pair consists of the natural settings of Montan
and the landscape paintings of the Lago Maggiore. Then, the
“nonreligious” paintings at the uncle’s find an opposite counterpart
in the mythological paintings at the Pedagogical Province. And
finally, the historical paintings at Makarie’s, along with the marvelous
natural signs of the stars, stand at the center of this series of
paintings, symmetrically surrounded by nonreligious/religious
paintings of the uncle/Province, by the nature/landscapes of Montan/Lago Maggiore, and finally by the paintings/sculpture linking
art to craft at St. Joseph’s and the medical academy. The centrality
of Makarie in this series of paintings focuses attention on her historical
paintings (mentioned in only two fleeting phrases) and on the
nonhistorical stars (described as ahistorical, as “always the same,”
yet manifesting day and hour through their “regular course”). Wilm-


Helm argues that the telescope which reveals Jupiter to him disturbs
the natural order, jumping from idea to reality in the alchemical
sense; but in his dream or vision he finds the pure gold of Makarie’s
ascension as a star: her chair “gleamed, gold, her clothing shone
sacerdotally” (HA, VIII, 122). The vision immediately gives way to
the real “star” of Venus and quickly to the reality of the morning.
The gold of this novel, found in a dream, is carefully preceded and
followed by more substantial “metals” and related by the astrono-
mer to the center of Wilhelm’s being, recognizable by its working,
its effects, its actions.
The scene depicts what one aphorism "From Makarie's Archive" states: "One does not do well to dwell too long in the abstract. Life is best taught through the living" (HA, VIII, 477). The green curtain opens for only a minute, then Wilhelm returns willingly, maturely, from the inner sanctum back to the Propyläen. The scenes at Makarie's estate are often seen as central to the novel, but as we have seen here, they take on added significance as the sequence of paintings structurally focuses attention on the events there. Finally, in this discussion of paintings, if there are paintings in the other regions, why are there none in the last one? One answer may lie in the pedagogical purpose of the earlier paintings. Wilhelm gains knowledge from the consecutive sets of paintings; and in one sense the education culminates when he learns the trade of surgeon (Wundarzt) with the help of the last set of artistic depictions. The absence of paintings thereafter signals that completion. After asking innumerable questions at each previous stage of his Travels, Wilhelm now, in the company of active men, of comrades from the Tower Society, is forbidden to ask questions. In place of the paintings, Wilhelm sees a Latin saying in golden letters: "Ubi homines sunt modi sunt" (That when people come together in society, the way and manner in which they wish to be and remain together will develop automatically). In each succeeding realm Wilhelm has seen a different way of life, in each case a life strictly ordered and ruled by a specific world view. The paintings, along with various related declarations of values, have given him insight in each case. But now, at the end, no realm is the exclusive, final, highest embodiment of Goethe's thought. The golden letters leave Wilhelm and the Tower Society free to organize themselves as they will. Here are no normative paintings—only various sorts of action. Here too the sign goes over to deed. If the gold of Makarie's chair gave credence to the idea of transcendence, the gold of these letters points directly to this-worldly deeds.

This brief discussion of possibilities revealed by the sequence of paintings is obviously inadequate and remains to be thought out more thoroughly elsewhere. But here it demonstrates how recognizing the various ritual routes can result in productive comparisons between the routes.

Fifth, with regularity Wilhelm gains permission to enter further into the marvelous and secret affairs of the respective hosts: "it would be unjust if we would not lead you deeper into our secrets"; "it is right . . . that I satisfy your curiosity"; "the master of the house, satisfied that the guest knew how to value a so richly evoked past, allowed him to see manuscripts"; "Do you wish to be my pupil? Let the guest be accepted." A notable exception comes when Wilhelm asks Montan for information about the mineral world so he can instruct Felix, and Montan repeatedly turns him down, "give that up" (HA, VIII, 36, 260). Montan gives several reasons for his refusal to initiate Wilhelm into the secrets of nature, but, in the end, the best answer is probably that nature's archive can only be read directly, without mediation; Goethe even rejected the use of many scientific instruments. As Wilhelm approaches Montan's cliff, then, he climbs "without having a path before him" (HA, VIII, 30).

Sixth, several realms have curtains or veils through which Wilhelm receives access to a treasure of some sort. In the Apprenticeship he passed through a curtain to the bright light of the secularized chapel, the table (previously an altar) was covered with a green tapestry, and a curtain covered the empty frame. Before Wilhelm sees Makarie, both in reality and in his dream, "a green curtain opened." And in the Pedagogical Province the depictions of Jesus' death are kept veiled: "we draw a veil over these sufferings." One of the more interesting of this series of curtains or veils is the one Wilhelm passes through at the uncle's. Only after visiting the inner rooms where the uncle keeps his treasures does Wilhelm go through a tapestry door. This may be a veiled statement about the relative worthlessness of the uncle's highly rational and totally empirical way of life.

Seventh, Wilhelm finds various treasures as he passes into the inner rooms. In the Apprenticeship he finds an archive, a Lehrbrief, and then, turning from the empty word as the Lehrbrief suggests, discovers his son. At St. Joseph's, after being found worthy, Wilhelm is rewarded by Joseph's story of how the building with its paintings made the man and of the fruitful give-and-take between craft and art. The cross stones, natural metaphors once under the altar there, represent another treasure. In the giant's castle the treasure is the box or book. The uncle 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 sculptor, a man thought by many to be a goldmaker (HA, VIII, 325), leads Wilhelm through rooms usually closed to others and teaches him, not alchemy, but a new approach to anatomy.
which again involves an exchange between craft and art. The secret of the Province lies in the suffering of Jesus on the cross, a "sanctum of pain" Wilhelm does not enter. Recognition of pain as the "treasure" here leads us to include as "treasures" the pains of two other realms as well. The emotional high point of the Lago Maggiore scene lies in the suffering of the four pilgrims as they contemplate leaving one another's company and remember, all too vividly, Mignon's suffering. And, with the Tower Society, Wilhelm takes part in a banquet, 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, they have been "initiated into all the pains of the first grade of the renunciants" and pass through this potentially destructive mode to action. Five, or six, if Montan and his "letters of nature" are included, of the regions have archives at their centers; the sculptor's is an anatomical archive. And three of the last four regions share pains as their secret, pains overcome through renunciation.

Eighth, in all these ritual routes leading to various central places and secrets, a garden regularly 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 Travels 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 uncle's and enter a garden room. After his miraculous dream on the observatory at Makarie's, Wilhelm goes into a garden. The Lago Maggiore is once again almost totally garden.32 Pristine Americas is projected as the best place for the anatomical sculpture. After the banquet 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, it seems, the ultimate treasures lie in nature. The exception to this is again the uncle's estate. There the garden appears early in the sequence that ends with the curtain instead of the archive. The uncle is thus further characterized as having an odd set of priorities.33

These eight stages on the ritual route provide eight related opportunities to gauge Wilhelm's progress throughout the novel, opportunities of which we have scarcely been able to avail ourselves as we have rushed to catalogue the routes. And even so, we have ignored large portions of the novel, most notably the novellas, for until now we have traced Wilhelm's various routes exclusively in the frame of the novel. The novel's various novellas, however, provide what Goethe calls "repeated mirrorings" of what takes place in the frame, including Wilhelm's ritual route.

"The Pilgrim Fool," the first novella, is given to Wilhelm to read during his stay at the uncle's. When the young woman in the story is brought to Revanne's castle, she proves her worthiness for such an environment through her reactions to the castle; "she shows herself to be a person who is acquainted with the fashionable world" (HA, VIII, 54). After receiving refreshments she comments on the furniture, the paintings, and 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 had just gone through with the uncle (cf. HA, VIII, 49-50 and the pages after the story in which Wilhelm sees the uncle's manuscript collection).

In "Who is the Traitor?" Lucidor finds himself at one point in a hermitage with a Chinese roof. There he sees hundreds of paintings that disclose the historical inclinations of the old man who sometimes lives there. Later he is led through "long, extensive passageways of the old castle" to a court room in what was once a chapel. 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 hall where he finally, miraculously, finds the woman he loves. There is considerable congruence between this story and the accounts described above: the hall with historical pictures mirrors several other halls, the movement through the castle hallways to an archive in a secularized chapel mirrors Wilhelm's initiation in the Apprenticeship, and the final flight to the garden finds a parallel in the many final garden scenes already discussed.

"The Man of Fifty Years" contains a rather extraordinary ritual initiation. The actor in the story brings with him a "priceless dressing case ("Toilettenkästchen"), which, with its promise of extended youth, mirrors the little box Felix finds with its promise of a great secret. The way to the secret of youth, to the "higher secrets," to the "secrets for the initiated" leads, the man is told, over "levels and degrees." In the course of the story the man of fifty years loses a tooth, and the arcane promise is called into question, just as the gold of the box or book has been questioned here.
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, Hersilie 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 mirroring 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 Freemasonic secrecy." 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 permit 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 "Symbolum" 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 Makarie's Archive," HA, VIII, 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