The Master’s Mask: Richard Wagner & Freemasonry

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There are people in the history of humanity who simply cannot be decisively labeled as adherents of this or that doctrine—it is almost as though they cannot be fully “tamed.” However, by their universal intuition, they definitely meet the most acute needs of the humanity’s collective soul and thus indirectly join the mission of such brotherhoods as the Freemasonic one.

“One is made a theosophist not by membership, but by one’s way of thinking,” Walther Klein wrote about the mystically tuned Austrian avant-garde composer Arnold Schoenberg. [1] We dare apply this formula, however arguable it might be, to Richard Wagner, the previous great reformer of German and European music before Schoenberg, only replacing the word “theosophist” with the word “Freemason.”

Due to the peculiarities of Wagner’s artistic concepts and way of life, he still remains one of the most debated figures in the history of classical music. Freemasonry is very rarely brought up in the discussions regarding the composer and his oeuvre. Nevertheless, it is often admitted that he was a very original mystic who in fact formed his own mystical system, vividly illustrated in his music dramas (or “stage consecration plays”, as he himself termed his crowning work, Parsifal) and performed as sacred rituals.

It seems that the most appropriate term for Wagner’s worldview and the set of principles and intuitions he employed in composition was coined by the 20th century’s Russian philosopher Alexey Losev. He called Wagner’s philosophical and artistic approach mystical symbolism. [2] Indeed, this mix of the evocation of Ancient Greek mysteries, Buddhist and Christian mysticism, and the ocean-deep mythological level underlying Wagner’s works cannot be adequately described without the use of the word ‘mystical.’ As testified by Wagner himself, he, from early on, perceived music as “a spirit, a noble and mystical monster.” [3]

While we see and, most importantly, experience Wagner’s operas, or “great unitarian artworks,” it is very hard to view them only in their outer appearance: we always feel an inherent mysticism lying in the basis of the extraordinary impact exerted on many of us by Wagner’s Gesamtkunstwerke.

The same is the case with Freemasonry: although its doctrines have been profoundly revealed in the recent decades and it is now possible for any layman to familiarize him/herself with the Freemasonic documents, testimonies, and other related information, the mystical core comprising the essence of this brotherhood cannot be grasped simply by studying these texts and images. In order to be really initiated into the fraternity, one has to directly participate in its mysteries and partake in a communion of sorts: otherwise the words of the doctrine remain but a hollow shell, however noble and well-meant they are.

In a book on Wagner’s mysticism, a member of the Washington, DC Wagner Society, John J. Pohanka, dedicates quite a lot of attention to the specific notion called The Wagner Moment. [4] This moment, known only to the true Wagnerians, is the point of actual initiation into the “Wagnerian mysteries,” that very communion without which one cannot be considered to be a true adherent of the Wagnerian “religion.” But while, in Freemasonry, the ceremony of initiation of a novice is conducted according to
centuries-old ceremonial rules, the “Wagnerian initiation” occurs almost spontaneously (although Wagner definitely used ageless universal mechanisms prompting such experiences): it comes from the inside of the listener, caused by the purifying effect of Wagner’s music—the ultimate goal of which is to awaken the “divine consciousness” in the listeners, by way of elevating their subconscious impulses through music to the highest possible level. In fact, it is almost like the Socratic method of elenchus exemplified in music, where the listeners, as participants of the “dialogue” unfolding on the stage, come to certain illuminations by way of a great internal work of questioning and answering, and of elevating their own subconscious feelings and conscious ideas. As postulated by the 14th c. Sufi mystic and poet Hafiz whose works Wagner first read in German in 1852 and by which he was enthralled, “the union of our own souls with God was possible and required only that we seek the answer within.” [5]

There are many testimonies of such mystical revelations occurring while participating in Wagner’s mysteries. Baudelaire famously described his feelings while listening to the overture to Lohengrin in Paris in his letter to Wagner (1860): “I remember that from the very first bars I suffered one of those happy impressions that almost all imaginative men have known, through dreams, in sleep. I felt myself released from the bonds of gravity, and I rediscovered in memory that extraordinary thrill of pleasure which dwells in high places.” [6] Then, the abovementioned Alexey Losev once wrote: “I knew the most intensive happiness when I stood at the [Orthodox] vespers service that lasted for several hours, and then I experienced the same happiness while listening to Wagner.” [7]

This comparison of Wagner’s music to a divine service is very telling, for it shows to what extent Wagner actually succeeded in founding his own “initiatory system” functioning through music. As John J. Pohanka writes, “For some reason Wagner’s music has impacted its audiences in a strange mystical type of way for over one hundred and fifty years. Not every listener, of course, is affected, but an astonishing number of them are.” [8]

The psychiatrist and philosopher Franz E. Winkler directly uses the word “initiation” in the description of Wagner’s Festspielhaus in Bayreuth, this point of “conjecture of two currents of culture – Ancient Greek mysteries and the mysteries of the New Christianity” [9]:

His detailed instructions for the interior, backstage, and orchestra pit, not to mention his stage directions, show his intention of producing an atmosphere in which music, words, and visual elements would speak to the heart, inducing a kind of “initiation” in those who came with an open mind. [10]

The Russian symbolist poet and philosopher Vyacheslav Ivanov, in his essay on Wagner’s connection with the Dionysian element, emphasized the role of the listener’s active participation in these initiations: “The crowd that gathered for the spectacle is mystically partaking in the elemental voices of the Symphony; and, since we come to Wagner’s sanctuaries not only to ‘contemplate,’ but to ‘create’ as well, we become perfect molecules of the orgiastic life of the orchestra. In this, we are already active, but active in a potential and latent way. The choir of Wagner’s drama is an esoteric choir.” [11] Wagner himself called this active participation sympathetic hearing which brings us into “a state essentially akin to that of hypnotic clairvoyance.” [12]
Now, it seems obvious that Wagner did want to exert a quite concrete influence on the listeners of his music dramas—or rather, the members of his “congregation.” But what religion did he belong to, and what deity was his virtual musical temple (as well as the real one he erected in Bayreuth) was dedicated to?

Wagner’s system of beliefs is by far not easy to define, for he often changed his views, falling under various influences. Once, in 1859, he signed a letter to a friend in Paris “Your grateful Buddhist”—and indeed, he was closely studying the Buddhist doctrine, in the wake of his 1854 acquaintance with the concepts of Schopenhauer, was a vegetarian, and even composed a prose sketch for a music drama based on an *avadana* (“a tale of heroic and miraculous acts performed by the Buddha in any of his incarnations”) called *Die Sieger* (*The Victors*, 1856). [13] At some point, he even wrote, in a letter to Liszt, that Christianity “was nothing but a branch of the venerable Buddhism.” [14]

On the other hand, in 1841, at an earlier stage of his life, as he was 27 years and living in Paris, he wrote this statement—which Pohanka calls Wagner’s “own version of the Apostolic Creed.” [15] Although it is pronounced by a character in a novel, this character is portrayed by Wagner almost as his alter-ego:

> I believe in God, Mozart and Beethoven [notably, both Mozart and Beethoven were Freemasons. – M.D.], and likewise their disciples and apostles; I believe in the Holy Spirit and the truth of the one, indivisible Art; I believe that this Art proceeds from God, and lives within the hearts of all illumined men; I believe that he who once has bathed in the sublime delights of this high Art, is consecrated to Her for ever, and never can deny Her; I believe that through Art all men are saved...” [16]

Then again, Wagner is best known to be more of a *mystical atheist*, however self-contradictory this statement might sound, who believed that “God” is the man himself and aspired for a new, consecrated humanity. At some point, he described the “Heavenly Father” as “no other than the social wisdom of mankind, taking Nature and her fullness for the common weal of all.” [17]

On the second thought, the contradiction inherent to this term, *mystical atheist*, is not that strong. For, on the esoteric level in both Christianity and Judaism, it is the human being who has to actively cooperate in the Divine plans and partake in the sanctification of both himself and the world. This is what Wagner’s most cherished dream was, and this is what he wanted to achieve through his music dramas—or “consecration plays”—a *New Humanity*, “the Brotherhood of Man,” [18] based on the love for the Art, universal compassion and affection.

He dreamt of the New Humanity and the *Art-Work of the Future* (in the same year as *Art and Revolution*, he wrote an eponymous extensive essay) that “must embrace the spirit of a free mankind, delivered from every shackle of hampering nationality; its racial imprint must be no more than an embellishment, the individual charm of manifold diversity, and not a cramping barrier.” [19] These ideas, expressed by Wagner in 1849, coincide surprisingly well with the Freemasonic ones; and it is only too sad that just two decades later, in 1869, Wagner would have completely forgotten his own words and published the notorious pamphlet against “the Jewry in music.”
Although, as exemplified above, his ideas often changed over time, sometimes even drastically, in all his artistic works (such spiteful pamphlets aside) Wagner was a true revolutionary. His aims, however, clearly transcended the merely social and material ones.

The revolution he longed for was definitely a spiritual one: he wanted to lay the foundations for the *humanity of the future*, whose consciousness would be based on ascended spirituality and which would be united by one religion derived from ancient mysteries, that of the *elevated human soul*. In Roger Scruton’s words, “Wagner was an artist with an agenda, and this agenda was nothing less than the *redemption of humankind...*” [20] Does this not coincide with the ultimate ideal of Freemasonry?

This is, however, only the most general level of connection that can be established between Wagner’s system of beliefs and the Freemasonic ideas, and a very speculative one at that. There are some much more direct threads stretching between the composer and the Freemasonic realm, which we will now examine.

**I. Imaginary Kiss of Consecration: Beethoven**

Throughout all his life, Wagner admired Beethoven beyond description. This fascination began back when Richard was a child and lasted to his very last days. Peter Bassett writes that “in the diaries of his wife Cosima, which cover fourteen years of Wagner’s life, there are more references to Beethoven than to any other person—not just any other composer, *any other person!*” [21]

In *My Life*, Wagner confessed that, as a teenager, he conversed with Beethoven and Shakespeare in “ecstatic dreams”:

I soon conceived an image of him [Beethoven] in my mind as a *sublime and unique supernatural being, with whom none could compare*. This image was associated in my brain with that of Shakespeare; in ecstatic dreams I met both of them, saw and spoke to them, and on awakening found myself bathed in tears. [22]

These two figures exercised such a profound influence on him that in his oeuvre, he “was striving to synthesize the achievements of Shakespeare on the one side and of Beethoven on the other. This was the idea underlying all his work—an idea that had arisen from profound insight into the mysteries of human nature. Herein he felt his call.” [23]

Of these two giants, it is only Beethoven, however, that is of interest to us in connection with Freemasonry. Although there are no direct proofs that he belonged to any lodge, there is still quite a lot of evidence that leads us to think that he indeed was a Brother (or at least a strong sympathizer):

Many of his friends and fellow musicians were masons and there are several references to Masonry in his voluminous correspondence. The Adagio of his Seventh quartet bears the superscription: ‘A weeping willow or an acacia over the grave of my brother’. Both Beethoven’s blood brothers were alive when this work was written and so these words probably had a masonic connection. Schindler, one of his biographers, mentions a handshake when visiting the composer: ‘...a grip of our hands said the rest’. A
song, ‘What is the Mason’s aim’, was written for the ‘Loge des Frères Courageux à l’Orient de Bonn’ and was published in 1806. [24]

It is notable that Wagner used to call Beethoven ‘Master’ and not only thought, but also wrote a lot about him: in 1840, he composed a novel “A Pilgrimage to Beethoven”, which Klaus Kropfinger calls “the first expression of Wagner’s Beethoven worship.” [25] There, he expressed his religious reverence for the Master, at the same time proclaiming his own views on the opera; thirty years later, in 1870, he also wrote an extensive essay “Beethoven.”

In “My Life,” Wagner confessed that he was especially enthralled by Beethoven’s 9th Symphony [26]—which is also his most ‘masonic’ one [27], for it expresses the longing for the universal Brotherhood of Men: “Alle Menschen werden Brüder…” (“All men shall become brothers…”). The initial measures of this symphony, revolutionary in its form and content, exerted quite a special influence on Wagner’s psyche, primarily because of the usage of fifths. This interval, which he first heard in an orchestra tuning up, had a special meaning for him: to Wagner, it sounded “like a greeting from the spirit world”: “When I was still almost a baby, the sound of these fifths, which has always excited me, was closely associated in my mind with ghosts and spirits.” [28]

No wonder that when he saw that Beethoven’s most mysterious symphony began with the fifths, he recognized it as a message for him to be deciphered:

Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony became the mystical goal of all my strange thoughts and desires about music. At the very first glance at the score, of which I obtained possession with such difficulty, I felt irresistibly attracted by the long-sustained pure fifths with which the first phrase opens: these chords, which, as I related above, had played such a supernatural part in my childish impressions of music, seemed in this case to form the spiritual keynote of my own life. This, I thought, must surely contain the secret of all secrets… [29]

In a sense, Wagner was right: the fifth indeed reflects “the secret of all secrets,” the mysterious musico-mathematical laws according to which the Universe is structured. The fifth is one of the three basic Pythagorean perfect intervals, allegedly found by the Master (Pythagoras) himself on the special device with one cord, the monochord: the octave, the fourth, and the fifth. The Pythagorean doctrine plays quite a large part in Freemasonry, and some Freemasons even like to trace the Freemasonic teachings back to Pythagoras himself: there exists the so-called Leland Manuscript entitled The Mystery of Maconrye, which is supposed to have been written in 1436 and was published in Frankfort in 1753, where Pythagoras is named Peter Gower, apparently because of a translation mistake, and is mentioned as one of the first Masonic brethren. [30]

So, perhaps what Wagner called “the spirit world” was actually the realm of the “music of the spheres”? This mysterious transcendent plane of reality was discovered by Pythagoras who claimed that the interaction of celestial bodies produces the eternal musical harmony, sounding on both the physical and metaphysical levels. Perhaps it is the echo of this divine harmony that Wagner discerned in Beethoven’s music, especially the 9th.
As Rudolf Steiner said in one of his lectures on Wagner,

The ‘Music of the Spheres’ spoken of in the old Pythagorean Schools was no mere figure of speech, in spite of what superficial philosophy may say. The Music of the Spheres is a reality, for there is a region of the spiritual world in which its melodies and tones can be heard. <…> To Richard Wagner the tones of outer music were an expression, a revelation of an inner music, of spiritual sounds and harmonies which pervade the created universe. [31]

Fig. 1: Ferdinand Georg Waldmüller, Portrait of Beethoven, 1823

For Wagner, not only the heavenly music that Beethoven produced was of special meaning, but also his very appearance. As part of an outright cult of Beethoven that Wagner developed in the course of his life, he used to keep a portrait of Beethoven in his room. In 1869, Wagner ordered a copy of the portrait of the composer by Ferdinand Georg Waldmüller (1823) that he considered “unaffected and real,” for Villa Tribschen. This painting was later installed in Villa Wahnfried, built by 1874 in Bayreuth—the town where Wagner’s aspirations to join a Masonic lodge were to be shattered:

…Wagner—the „real“ heir of Beethoven—yearned to possess his own “genuine” portrait of the composer. <…> …Beethoven’s physical appearance and even his facial expression were of such consummate interest to Wagner that he included references to them in “A Pilgrimage to Beethoven” and in Beethoven—literary images separated by thirty years. [32]

Thus, Wagner yearned to emphasize his own inherent connection with the Master. He never met Beethoven and therefore did not receive the actual “Weihekuss” (kiss of consecration) from the composer, so he composed this meeting himself, in the novel “A Pilgrimage to Beethoven”. For him, it was important to be allowed to the sancta sanctorum, to speak to Beethoven at least in fantasy. The
“kiss” in question was allegedly received in real life only by Franz Liszt, Wagner’s future Masonic friend and father-in-law. But “there was no Weihekuss for Wagner: neither from Beethoven, who died when Wagner was thirteen, nor from Carl Maria von Weber, who was acquainted with the Wagner family in Dresden. Nor was there anyone in Wagner’s life who would have spread such a story. So Wagner fabricated one.” [33]

The line of succession that Wagner yearned to belong to—Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven—was also a thoroughly Masonic one: Haydn’s and Mozart’s participation in lodges is well-known and proven, and Beethoven, as stated above, was most likely a Freemason as well, or at least a sympathizer. It was him, by the way, who in fact started this tradition of “self-initiation”, for he was the first to appoint himself as heir to Haydn and Mozart. In continuation of this tradition, Wagner became, in his turn, a self-appointed apostle of the Master he so venerated, quite in accordance with his creed proclaimed in the same period, the early 1840s, as he lived in Paris: “I believe in God, Mozart and Beethoven, and likewise their disciples and apostles…”

Mozart, whose association with Freemasonry has been thoroughly documented and analyzed, played a significant part in Wagner’s worldview, too. Wagner mentions him in My Life immediately after Beethoven as an early crucial influence:

It was at this time [the time of ecstatic dreams about Beethoven and Shakespeare – M.D.] that I came across Mozart’s Requiem, which formed the starting-point of my enthusiastic absorption in the works of that master. His second finale to Don Juan inspired me to include him in my spirit world. [34]

Indeed, from a very early age, Wagner seemed to be very discerning in terms of choosing whom to allow into his spiritual life and was very good at choosing only the true geniuses as his influences. At the same time, these very best (the Freemason Goethe among them, too [35]) most often turned out to be Freemasons. And it would not be too bold to suggest that Wagner possessed a certain inborn intuition that allowed him to make these choices. In proof of this, he once remarked to a friend: “I am convinced that there are universal currents of Divine Thought, and that anyone who can feel these vibrations is inspired, provided he is conscious of the process and possesses the knowledge and skill to realize them.” [36]

II. Masonic Connections Among Family & Friends

As is generally assumed, not only the genes, but also childhood impressions play a most important role in forming one’s personality. In the case of Wagner, the intuition discussed above might have developed in him due to the beneficial influence of his relatives that he experienced from the very start of his life. For it seems that he was surrounded by Freemasons from the very childhood.

First of all, Richard’s father Friedrich Wilhelm Wagner (whether he was the biological one, we still do not know for sure, but at least he was the then-husband of Richard’s mother, Johanna), who was a court official and had a deep passion for theater, belonged to the circles of Freemasons. [37] However, in just six months after Richard’s birth, he passed away because of the consequences of a wound he received in the 1813 Battle of the Nations near Leipzig.
Shortly thereafter, Richard’s mother married the friend of the family, the multi-gifted **Ludwig Heinrich Christian Geyer** (1779–1821), who was an actor, singer, poet, painter, and—a Freemason: he was a member of the lodge "Ferdinand zu Glückseligkeit" (Ferdinand to Blessedness) in Magdeburg. By the way, it was in Magdeburg where Wagner was the Kapellmeister since 1834 that he visited the free concerts arranged by the Ferdinand and Harpokrates lodges. Moreover, in 1835 he presented his overture “Zu den Feen” (“To the Fairies”, i.e. music dedicated to the spirits of nature, in fact) at the lodge premises is Magdeburg. [38]

In the seven years that Geyer got to be Richard’s stepfather, he apparently exerted considerable influence on the boy (in *My Life*, Wagner wrote that his earliest recollections of childhood were associated with his stepfather) and brought him into the magic world of the arts: painting, music, and theater. It is even debated that Geyer was his actual biological father [39]; hence Wagner’s long-lasting “identity crisis” expressed in such heroes as Siegfried and Parsifal who do not know who their actual father is and strive to discover it.

In *My Life*, Wagner related the following impression that accompanied Geyer’s death: as his (step?)father was lying on the deathbed,

in the next room my mother asked me to show her what I could play on the piano, wisely hoping to divert my father’s thoughts by the sound. I played ‘Ueb’ immer Treu und Redlichkeit’ and my father said to her, ‘Is it possible he has musical talent?’ In the early hours of the next morning my mother… she said, ‘He hoped to make something of you.’ [40]

Wagner definitely liked to emphasize such moments of ‘benediction,’ or ‘consecration,’ for he was not only a most talented composer and an original human being, but also a master of self-mythologization. "In the old Icelandic sagas, Francis Hueffner writes, the gift of prophecy conveyed in the moment of death is a common feature, and it is perhaps for that reason that Wagner has preserved the touching little story.” [41] This remark seems very to-the-point, only with a correction that this **moment of passing a divine gift** is present by far not only in Icelandic sagas, but also in many centuries-old tales and traditions across the globe.

Geyer, who did provide a very good starting point for Wagner and played a very important part in forming his personality, not only conveyed the symbolic “gift of prophecy” to his (step)son, i.e. the infatuation with the Arts and the universal talent, but also apparently left a lasting impression on the boy in terms of appearance. The famous beret that Wagner started wearing in 1867 can be seen, among other of its implications, as an **homage to Ludwig Geyer** whom Wagner apparently considered as his spiritual father. [42] As John Deathridge points out in his speech “Living with Wagner,” dedicated largely to the beret, the idea to wear it presumably occurred to Wagner as he was dictating his autobiography and recalling his beloved stepfather Ludwig Geyer who used to wear the same headgear. [43] The multi-talented Geyer can be seen wearing the beret in this self-portrait:
Wagner’s father and stepfather were not, however, not the only Freemasons nor were they the most high-ranking Freemasons in the family. The husband of one of Richard’s three sisters, Rosalie, Prof. Oswald Marbach (1810–1890, married to Rosalie in 1836—sadly, this marriage did not last long, for she died only a year after), “was one of the most important personalities in Freemasonry during Wagner's time, and in view of the Masonic aspects of [Wagner's] Parsifal, it is speculated that he learned much of Masonic ritual and ideas from Marbach.” [44] Having become a Freemason in 1844, he held the chair of the lodge “Balduin zur Linde” in Leipzig for 30 years and an honorary membership in over 50 other lodges.

Fig. 3: Commemorative medal of the lodge ‘Balduin zur Linde’, with an image of the lodge's Master of many years, Prof. Oswald Marbach, front side, 1910, Leipzig Museum of Local History
Another of Wagner’s renowned relatives, his father-in-law **Franz Liszt (1811–1866)**, was a Freemason, too. He applied to the lodge “Zur Einigkeit” (To Unity) based in Frankfort-on-Main on September 10, 1841 (although the original application letter written by him to his friend, Freemason Wilhelm Speyer, seems to have been lost [45]), and initiated only a week later. The period traditionally needed for considering such applications was thus considerably diminished, since he was in Frankfort only for a short period of time. [46] In February of the following year, 1842, he was also passed and raised to the second and third degrees in the lodge “Zur Eintracht” (Concord) in Berlin. [47] This information stems from the book by the renowned music historian Philippe A. Autexier who is famous for his research on Masonic composers.

![Fig. 5: Liszt, photo by Franz Hanfstaengl, June 1867](image1)

![Fig. 6: Liszt, photo by Pierre Petit, 1865](image2)

There exists, however, a confusion as per the exact dates of Liszt’s Masonic biography. In another source, namely an obituary from the *Freemason’s Journal* quoted by James Huneker (1911), we are given quite different information. Although the time intervals and the names of the lodges remain the same, the timeline given here differs considerably:

Brother Franz Liszt was admitted into the brotherhood in the year **1844** (*italics mine—M.D.*), at the Lodge ‘Unity’ (‘Zur Einigkeit’), in Frankfort-on-the-Main, by George Kloss, with the composer, W. Ch. Speyer as witness, and in the presence of Felix von Lichnowsky. He was promoted to the second degree in a lodge at Berlin, and elected master in 1870, as member of the lodge ‘Zur Einigkeit,’ in Budapest. Since 1845 he was also honorary member of the L. Modestia cum Libertate in Zurich. [48]

The dates given in yet another source, namely a paper by Bro. David Lewis from the Lyceum Lodge of Research, coincide with the ones stated by Autexier, but diverge from both of the above-quoted sources in terms of the date of Liszt’s promotion to the Master degree:
He was initiated in Lodge Zur Einigkeit (Unity) in Frankfurt-am-Main on September 18, 1841 where he satisfactorily answered the three required questions. He was passed to the second degree in Lodge Zur Eintracht in Berlin in 1842 and **two week later (as opposed to the year 1870, see above—M.D.)** was made a master mason in the same lodge, where he was made an honorary member. He was also an honorary member of Prinz von Preussen zu den drei Schwerten Lodge in Solingen and the Modeste cum Libertate Lodge in Zurich in 1845, where he played the piano for the members. He took up residence in Weimar where he joined the very prestigious lodge Anna Amalia zu den drei Rosen. He was also a member of Einigkeit im Vaderland in Budapest. [49]

Considering these discrepancies and lacking access to the actual originals of the admission and promotion documents from the lodges, the only thing that we can state with certainty within this paper is that Liszt was taken into the Masonic Brotherhood in the early 1840s (with most sources giving the year 1841).

As Lewis justly writes, “Liszt was a complex man who combined adherence to the Catholic faith and Freemasonry with flamboyant living…” [50] In this, the two musical geniuses who were bound both by artistic and, due to Wagner’s marriage to Liszt’s daughter Cosima in 1870, also by family ties, can be considered alike. As a passing remark of no scholarly value, but perhaps of certain symbolic significance, it could also be noted that they were both born on the 22nd, since this number has a special significance within Freemasonry as part of the sacred Qabalistic teachings about the structure of the world: Wagner in May, and Liszt in October. When we try to fathom the lives of such great men, even such numerical coincidences can be of great help to us as their interpreters.

The relationships of Wagner and Liszt that started with their acquaintance in Paris, as Wagner was living in very strained circumstances, were not always smooth, but always fruitful and beneficial for both musicians. When they first met, Wagner was struck by how contrary Liszt’s character was to his own (in spite of the superficial similarities stated above) and later admired the integrity that he met in his peer in an autobiographical sketch written in 1851:

*I met Liszt for the first time during my earliest stay in Paris, and at a period when I had renounced the hope, nay, even the wish of a Paris reputation, and, indeed, was in a state of internal revolt against the artistic life I found there. At our meeting Liszt appeared to me the most perfect contrast to my own being and situation. In this world, to which it had been my desire to fly from my narrow circumstances, Liszt had grown up from his earliest age, so as to be the object of general love and admiration at a time when I was repulsed by general coldness and want of sympathy. In consequence, I looked upon him with suspicion…* [51]

However, in spite of this suspicious and somewhat childish attitude on the part of Wagner, with a hint of envy, Liszt did his best to solve this one-sided conflict and make friends with Wagner. This thoughtful and caring approach (ideally, expected of each Freemason) was appreciated by Wagner:
He who knows the terrible selfishness and insensibility in our social life, and especially in the relations of modern artists to each other, cannot but be struck with wonder, nay, delight, by the treatment I experienced from this extraordinary man. [52]

The unusual closeness of these two men is further proven by Wagner calling Liszt his “second self”:

The very day when my personal danger became a certainty, I saw Liszt conduct a rehearsal of my Tannhäuser, and was astonished at recognizing my second self in his achievement. What I had felt in inventing this music he felt in performing it; what I wanted to express in writing it down he proclaimed in making it sound. Strange to say, through the love of this rarest friend, I gained, at the moment of becoming homeless, the real home for my art, which I had longed for and sought for always in the wrong place. [53]

Some authors extend this kinship so far as to claim that Wagner probably joined the same Lodge as Franz Liszt in the same year, 1841. This suggestion is raised in the paper “Wagner – An Enigma Answered” by Bro. G.C. Love of the Victoria Lodge of Research mentioned by Bro. Dennis Henney in his own paper on the Wagner subject. “This seems possible,” Henney writes, “especially since Liszt and Wagner were such close friends.” [54] Such statements, however entertaining and thrilling they may be, remain, however, only in the status of hypotheses, since there is no factual proof to support them.

But the fact that the two musicians were indeed very close is indisputable. There are even certain parallels in their religious development. While Wagner crowned his artistic life with the music drama visualizing the most sacred Christian mysteries (even if it was his own rendition thereof, by far not a canonical one), Liszt also came (back) to Christianity, joining a Franciscan order at a later stage of his life and becoming “Abbe Liszt,” although still remaining within Freemasonry and apparently continuing his Masonic works. As stated in the Masonic obituary quoted above: “If there ever was a Freemason in favour with Pope Pius IX it was Franz Liszt, created abbe in 1865 in Rome.” [55]

Generally, as David Lewis explains, the relations between the Church and Freemasonry were quite strained at the time, and Liszt’s really was a rare case of their reconciliation.

It was perhaps because of this unfortunate “clash of interests” that Wagner, with all his unusual and diverse beliefs (a certain mix of Buddhist and Christian mysticism, heavily drawing from Norse mythology and ancient Nordic mysteries), could not join the Craft.

The man who talked him out of applying bore a somewhat Faustian name, the Bayreuth banker and Freemason Friedrich Feustel (1824–1891) who was friends with the composer during the latter’s years in Bayreuth, 1872–1883.
Feustel was quite a high-ranking Brother, bringing the Grand Master of the grand lodge “Zur Sonne” (The Sun). It seems as if he first “lured” Wagner into being interested in Freemasonry, but then did not exert enough of his influence to help him fulfill his desire to be accepted into the Brotherhood.

By the 1870s, Feustel was apparently preoccupied with maintaining good relations with the Church. In 1847, he “proposed that the lodge abolish the restriction on non-Christian becoming members.” But, some 20 years later, when he had to decide what to do with Wagner who informed him of his desire to join the lodge “Eleusis zur Verschwiegenheit,” Feustel “suggested to Wagner that his admission to the lodge would strengthen the opposition of the Bavarian clericals if it was known he was a member of the Craft” and, sadly, talked him out of joining [56]. It would have been very interesting to see what could have changed in Wagner’s later oeuvre had he been admitted to the desired lodge, but we will never know.

In another source, a sketch of Wagner’s life written by a Masonic brother, the story is told otherwise: the exact reason of Feustel’s decision is not specified, and it is stated that Wagner could not be accepted because of some internal controversies in the lodge, the nature of which is not explained further. [57]

Bro. Dennis Henney from the Assiniboine Lodge #114 writes that Wagner did not apply not solely because of Feustel’s influence, but “on the advice of Freemasons, friends and associates.” [58] Unfortunately, nothing is certain here, almost like in the case of Liszt’s Masonic biography. Bastian Salier of the Leipzig lodge “Minerva zu den drei Palmen” (Minerva to the Three Palm Trees) describes this situation with “Wagner ban” as strange (“sonderbarerweise”) [59], and it is, indeed, very puzzling. For why would such an illustrious man as Richard Wagner be banned from entering a Masonic lodge?
Another reason that seems possible, and plausible, could be his awful character, with all his intemperance and the bad habit of radically changing views and opinions. For it is one of the basic demands in Freemasonry that a novice who wishes to join a lodge should first be tested during a certain period of time, and his good intentions, good will and temperance have to be proven. The final decision whether to accept or reject a candidate is taken by a special board summoned within the lodge:

At the time of receiving a petition for the degrees of Masonry, the Master appoints a committee of three, whose duty it is to make inquiry after the character of the applicant, and report good or bad, as the case may be, at the next regular meeting, when it is acted upon by the Lodge. Upon reception of the committee’s report, a ballot is had: if no black balls appear, the candidate is declared duly elected; but if one black ball or more appear, he is declared rejected. [60]

Perhaps not everyone was in favor of accepting such a controversial, whimsical figure in the rows of the Brethren. As is related in the encyclopedia “10,000 Famous Freemasons” (albeit with a cautious initial word “seemingly”), Wagner “informed Feustel of his desire to become a member of the lodge ‘Eleusis zur Verschwiegenheit’ in Bayreuth, but was advised not to submit a formal petition as there were members who reproached Wagner for his personal life.” [61]

Just to give the reader an idea of how intolerable Wagner could be as a person (not mentioning his general opposition to the “bourgeois morale”), it might be worthy to quote a short, but very telling story about his behavior told by Prof. Robert Greenberg in his lectures about the composer. [62] Once, Wagner once abruptly screamed in a company, simply to draw attention to his person, since no one seemed to have been listening to him at a party. This happened in the 1850s, when he was already in his forties.

III. Master’s Image: Masonic Traits in Wagner’s Appearance

Although, as we now see, Wagner was never actually accepted into a lodge, or at least we do not possess any documentation that would prove his membership as a Freemason, there is still a tangible affinity between his spiritual profile and the Freemasonic ideas. And not only spiritual: some of the characteristic traits that we now know as inherent parts of the “Wagner brand” also have Masonic overtones. The first, and the most prominent one, which has been abundantly used in caricatures as well, is of course Wagner’s famous beret. This is in fact the way we usually imagine him when his name is mentioned: a solemn face, silk and velvet clothes, and a big black cap covering his head, sometimes worn slightly on the side.

As far as is known, Wagner started to wear the beret in the year 1867, when he was already 54 y.o. So it was not any attempt to “stand out” coming from a young unfulfilled and pretentious man, but a definitive statement pronounced by a prominent musician who has already gained fame—the fame that was soon to change into almost religious reverence amongst many.

One of the first associations that comes to mind, especially if one studies esotericism and secret societies, is that this beret looks like the Master’s Hat. Such a hat can be worn by a higher initiate at a brotherhood’s gathering in order to emphasize his status.
The artist and researcher Zhenya Gershman, founder of the Project AWE, came up with a very interesting point in her analysis of Rembrandt’s alleged connections with a certain proto-masonic society. She suggests that the famous “artist’s beret,” later appropriated almost solely by the French and turned into a cliché, is not just an artsy piece of headgear. According to Gershman, this article has a much deeper meaning. As she wrote to me in a private letter exchange, “it occurred to me that we are looking at this with ‘wrong’ eyes. I think it’s the reason artists like Titian and Rembrandt insisted on self-portraits in hats. Later the French made it into a fashion statement that blinded historians. It comes from the guild rules—only the master can wear the hat. It is a **symbol of maturity and independence parallel to master of the lodge.**” [63]

In her article on Rembrandt “The Turn of the Key,” she provides a visual comparison of three images where George Washington (who is proven to have been a prominent Freemason), Rembrandt, and a figure from Duncan’s *Masonic Ritual and Monitor* demonstrating the initiate of the **Master of the Second Veil** degree. On all the three images, we see the same gesture: a hidden hand. But, more than that, in Rembrandt’s case, this typical Masonic gesture is combined with the alleged “Master’s” cap. Continuing the chain of comparison thus started by Gershman, we add one more person to this list and receive this remarkable collation:
In these two pictures, separated by some two centuries, the headgear and the hidden hand gesture, as we can see, are almost identical. The similarity in the two artists’ posture and attire is indeed striking.

As already mentioned, the potential esoteric significance of this beret is usually ignored, and the possibility of it indicating the participation in a certain secret brotherhood is only rarely brought up. For instance, in a commentary to one of Rembrandt’s self-portraits in the Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings, it is only pointed at the exoteric meaning of this article:

The beret worn by Rembrandt (like those worn by the putative pupils in the paintings listed above…) can be read as the quasi-old-fashioned artist’s attribute that was introduced by Rembrandt and adopted by his pupils and which later would be taken up by such artists as Richard Wagner and others in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century. [64]

However, personally we still adhere to the opinion that in the case of this hat, there is much more than meets the eye. But how and why did it happen that Wagner conceived the idea of starting to wear it, and what other implications it might have?

We have already mentioned that this thought might have occurred to Wagner as he was dictating his autobiography and recalling his stepfather Ludwig Geyer who wore such a beret (for what reason exactly he wore it, we do not now; possibly it had to do with his participation in the lodge in Magdeburg). The fullest overview of the hypotheses as to why Wagner wore the beret has been provided by the scholar John Deathridge. He listed many of the possible reasons that could bring Wagner to wear that famous black hat in an address given in 2013 at the WagnerWorldWide conference. [65] Unfortunately, in keeping with the general tendency stated above, Deathridge absolutely excludes the possible esoteric
motives that could have driven Wagner to this image change, emphasizing the political and patriotic ones.

But the practice of wearing such a hat might have some much more intriguing connotations. As Albert G. Mackey claims in the article on the Master’s Hat in his *Encyclopedia of Freemasonry*, “there is no craft practice in general and in Masonic practice in particular no custom more honored or more ancient.” [66] The tradition to crown outstanding people—artists, warriors, etc.—with special headgear goes back many centuries already, any such wreath, hat, or another article, bearing a symbolic meaning, indicates honor, authority, liberty, and superiority.

![Fig. 11: Georg Papperitz, Wagner at Bayreuth (A Reception at Wahnfried), 1882, Richard Wagner Museum Bayreuth](image)

“The Masons of ancient times,” writes George F. Fort in his *Early History and Antiquities of Freemasonry* (1881), “when regularly convened for work, and during the formal reception of a traveler, pursued their daily avocation and attended to usual Masonic demands, within closed portals, with covered heads.” [67] This description can be illustrated with a quite suitable picture of Wagner, at a reception in his Wahnfried House in Bayreuth, where he is portrayed by the artist Georg Papperitz as a) wearing the beret inside the room; b) being the only person in the room who wears headgear (indication of his Master status?); c) being in the company of at least two Freemasons: Franz Liszt and the unidentified man demonstrating the Master of the Second Veil hidden hand gesture.

However, in contrast to the medieval brotherhoods [68] and also to the later artists’ guilds (such as, for instance that of the 19th c. Dutch landscape painter Barend Cornelis Koekkoek and his disciples who all used to wear the characteristic “artist’s beret,” with no special distinction for the “master”), Wagner usually was the only one wearing the cap—not only because he was the only one extravagant enough to do so, but also probably because of the actual Master Status he acquired among his family and closest friends.
Here is a vivid example of this attitude: Nietzsche, in the times of his ardent love for Wagner, called him “(most) revered master” (Nietzsche to Wagner, Basle, January 2, 1872), and so did Cosima, in one of her responses to Nietzsche: “the master”. [69] One immediately recalls the tradition of the Pythagorean brotherhood, according to which Pythagoras was called by his disciples none other than “The Master,” and any possible controversies in the brotherhood were resolved by the Master’s decision only: “Ipse dixit” (“The Master said”).

Surrounded by such reverence, it is very probable that Wagner started to view himself as a true Master, both in the artistic and mystical sense (for, since his very childhood, he was very much inclined to the mystical side of things). Since, according to the known testimonies, he never actually joined any secret brotherhood and therefore could not be promoted by it to the Master degree, we are left to assume that Wagner “appointed” himself as such. Thus, he can be called a Master without a Lodge, or “an independent Master” in the class of his own.

The following picture from Humorist Blätter, Vienna, July 30, 1882 vividly illustrates this self-made image of the Master Artist:

![Caricature](image)

**Fig. 12: Caricature:**

Celebrating Parsifal premiere in 1882, Humorist Blätter, Vienna, July 30, 1882

At the banquet after the Parsifal performance hosted by the Meister, the singers celebrate the premiere. Wagner looks like an “Artist King,” being the center of the whole gathering. Other men, of whom there are three, are naturally not wearing any headgear—for who would contravene the Master? It would perhaps be considered a desecration. Fort, in the already quoted Antiquities of Freemasonry, proposes a hypothesis that in the ancient Masonry, the Masonic Master was viewed as a King: “Just when or where originated the custom of a Master wearing a hat as a sign of authority is an unsolved question. It is easy enough to ‘guess’ that it began from operative Masons of the Middle Ages aping the customs of the Court, and requiring the Fellows of the Craft to uncover before the Master Mason.” [70]

Another association appearing in one’s mind from looking at this caricature could be the Mystic Meal, on which Wagner is “presiding” like a master, raising the “sacred cup,” and the initiates (singers, in this
case) “eat from the tympanum and drink from the cymbals,” so to speak, like in the ancient Attis mysteries—which, according to some scholars, could have been precursory to the later Grail mysteries. [71]

Speaking of the Grail in the hat context (however surprising such a combination might seem at the first glance), we cannot deny ourselves the pleasure to entertain an idea that Wagner’s appropriation of the beret as his trademark headgear could be connected with his 1865 visit to Rennes-le-Château in the French region of Languedoc, which allegedly is the place where the Grail was safely hidden in 1244 (after the surrender of Montségur fortress). In the same year (1865), Wagner also wrote the detailed draft of Parsifal, although the idea first came to him much earlier, in 1848 (when it took the shape of a prose draft for Jesus of Nazareth). Deeply studying the mysteries of the Grail as an ardent researcher and mystic, he simply had to go to this remarkable place in France.

This pilgrimage of his may remind one of an old Roman tradition connected with the hat. In ancient Rome, if a slave wanted to be officially made a free person, he needed to travel to a special temple dedicated to the fertility goddess Feronia. Only there could he receive a special cap (pileus) as a symbol of his newly acquired freedom. [72] We do not know all the subtleties of Wagner’s inner life, and it is quite possible that before his pilgrimage to Rennes-le-Château, he might have felt as a “slave” to circumstances and other worldly limitations, and there, he finally received a certain kind of freedom—after which, just two years later, he felt an urge to wear a cap similar to the ones that former slaves used to wear in the Roman state. With the self-initiatory style peculiar to Wagner, it would not be a big surprise if it were true, nor too far a stretch. Besides, the Roman perception of this head article was shared by Wagner’s beloved ancient Germans: as stated by Fort, “ancient Germans shared the symbolism of this article with the Romans, who also regarded it as a type of freedom or as a release from servitude.” [73]

Finally, a remark on the possible political implications of Wagner’s famous beret: as Deathridge claims, it could be an expression of the national German revival during the wars of liberation against Napoleon and a demonstration of anti-French sentiment by imitating the Prussian militia in the 19th century, who fought against Napoleon wearing black berets. This seems plausible, considering the fact that Wagner’s father died after fighting in the Battle of the Nations. But the conclusions that could be drawn from this hypothesis should not be taken too far. After all, even in the 19th century’s German Freemasonry, nationalism was understood positively, as an expression of individual longing for virtuous collective unity. The German researcher Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, in his book on Freemasonry and civil society in the 19th century’s Germany, writes that “since the 1840s, the Masonic vision of constituting a moral-political order through improving individual virtue, civil society, and ultimately mankind had appeared to be realized through the nation. <…> Tocqueville as well as the lesser-known practitioners of nineteenth-century civil society regarded the nation as the great band connecting individuals to one another in a democracy.” [74]

Now, a few more words about the second possible token of Wagner’s involvement with Freemasonry or at least his appropriation of a Masonic image—the notorious Hidden Hand gesture. There are three possible explanations of Wagner’s appropriation of it, of which only one is connected to Freemasonry.
The first reason might have been Wagner’s patriotic sentiments: he could be seen with his hand half-hidden in the waistcoat already as he was a young man, so it is legitimate to assume that the gesture had more to do with his own beliefs than with an initiation into a Master degree of Freemasonry (unless, as some claim, he did secretly enter a lodge together with Liszt in 1841 and was immediately upgraded to Master, which seems highly doubtful). Patriotic connotations could be ascribed to this gesture for the reason that it was considered Napoleon’s trademark and his “quasi-military emblem,” [75] and the appropriation of this characteristic Napoleonic gesture could also mean, by extension, the symbolic appropriation of his power as an enemy.

The second possible motive could have been simply the norms of aristocratic behavior and posture common at the time. As Arline Meyer writes in her article dedicated to the specific genre of ‘hand-in-waistcoat’ portrait,

In 1738 Francois Nivelon published *A Book Of Genteel Behavior* describing the "hand-in-waistcoat" posture as signifying "manly boldness tempered with modesty." Meyer says that the hidden hand was a feature of some statues of the ancient Greeks and Romans and that later painters based their poses on classical models. The pose was recommended by certain classical writers as a useful posture for orators. Aeschines of Macedon (390-331 B.C.), an actor, orator and founder of a school of rhetoric, who wrote an important book on oratory, postulated that speaking with one's arm outside the toga was considered ill-mannered. A number of textbooks on oratory published in the eighteenth century, following Aeschines, recommended this gesture. [76]
And finally, here is the third, Masonic interpretation. The most frequently quoted source in connection with this gesture seems to be the book *Masonic Ritual and Monitor* written by Malcolm C. Dunkan in 1866, i.e. during Wagner’s lifetime. There, we find an illustration given in the chapter on the **Royal Arch, or Seventh Degree** in Duncan’s ritual and indicating the initiation to the Master of the Second Veil. [77] In the same context it is mentioned in another source, dated 1860, Richardson’s Monitor of Freemasonry, with an analogous illustration. [78]

In both books, the accompanying exhortation, based on Exodus 4:6, is similar:

Master of Second Veil—Three most excellent Masters you must have been, or thus far you could not have come; but further you cannot go without my words, sign, and word of exhortation. My words are Shem, Japhet, and Adoniram; my sign is this [thrusting his hand in his bosom]; it is an imitation of one given by God to Moses, when he commanded him to thrust his hand into his bosom, and taking it out it became as leprous as snow. My word of exhortation is explanatory of this sign, and is found in the writings of Moses, viz.: fourth chapter of Exodus:

and the Lord said unto Moses, Put now thine hand into thy bosom;—and he put his hand into his bosom; and when he took it out, behold his hand was leprous as snow, etc. (Duncan: 237; Richardon: 74).

Fig. 15: Specific gesture prescribed to the Master of the Second Veil, in: Duncan’s Masonic Ritual and Monitor (1861)

Fig. 16: Illustration to the procedure of initiation of the Master of the Second Veil, in: Richardson’s Masonic Monitor (1860)
As Gershman mentions in her “Turn of the Key,” in connection with Rembrandt’s hidden hand gesture, “the hidden fingers also represent an internal disposition of faith.” [79] Whether Wagner, by using this gesture, really wanted to demonstrate his adherence to the Masonic faith, remains unknown. But some of the Brethren still defend the opinion that it could have been true. For instance, Bro. Henney, arguing that Wagner could indeed belong to the Fraternity or at least was viewed as a Brother by the Freemasons, makes the following point:

Many events within Wagner’s life seem littered with strange interventions. We find him escaping creditors quite easily, or having homes made available to him in which to stay, we find a political revolt in which he was involved in Dresden where Wagner escaped with a price on his head. These suggest that he was either a Freemason or that his friends, family and associates divulged much of what Freemasonry was to him. Or, in view of his life, that Wagner was treated by his Masonic associates as if he were a Brother. [80]

This “as if” nicely defines Wagner’s position in relation to Freemasonry. Indeed, in his appearance and behavior, as well as in some of his key works whose ideas largely coincide with the Freemasonic ones, he appears as a natural-born initiate (forgive the oxymoron), or, in milder terms, a Freemason without Freemasonry. In this, he seems to us similar to another great German, the writer Herman Hesse, who appeared as a Freemasonic initiate without formally entering a lodge. [81]

Such artists seem to follow the direction towards the Eternal East, whether consciously or not, and oftentimes, they do not need any company on this path, due to their individualism and “otherworldliness.” Only, if Hesse seemed to actually be heading towards the East in his spiritual journey (see, especially, his short novel “A Journey to the East,” 1932, that was in fact a literary sketch for the much more extensive novel “The Glass Bead Game,” published in 1943), Wagner’s symbolic destination lay rather in the North, even in spite of his literal infatuation with the Eastern wisdom. As he wrote in the end of his outstanding novelette A Pilgrimage to Beethoven:

“We separated. I threw yet one yearning glance at Beethoven’s house and journeyed toward the North, in my heart exalted and ennobled.” [82]

IV. Masonic Overtones in Wagner’s Works: The Ring & Parsifal

The very distance that separates his villa Wahnfried and the Bayreuth Masonic Lodge “Zur Sonne”, which comprises just 350 m, testifies of at least a surprising geographical proximity. But it is not only about geography, it seems; for this closeness is also symbolic, and we cannot but feel this on an intuitive level. One can frequently encounter opinions expressed by both Freemasons and researchers in Freemasonry alike that, for instance, Parsifal is almost as much a Masonic opera as Mozart’s Magic Flute, with the hero Parsifal being quite similar to Tamino in his wanderings and initiations and Gurnemanz comparable to the figure of the wise Sarastro.

Don Michael Randel writes in the Harvard Dictionary of Music that although Masonic influence waned in the 19th century, “Beethoven and Wagner may have based (italics mine; no certainty, again. – M.D.) Fidelio and Parsifal in part on Masonic ideas.” [83]
Bro. Bastian Salier, in his report delivered at a lodge in Leipzig, lists the similarities which he feels exist between Wagner’s music dramas and Freemasonic ideas and rituals:

Because Wagner was interested in all things concerning freemasons and due to his contacts to Freemasons, the ideas and rituals of the Brotherhood were not unfamiliar to him. His knowledge becomes obvious in "Lohengrin" and "Parsifal". In both plays Wagner mentions an ominous temple. Moreover there seems to be a similarity between "Parsifal" and Mozart’s "Die Zauberflöte", which is a freemason opera. The two great temple feasts, the lovers’ meal in the first act and the funeral obsequies in the third act are similar to contemporary freemason rituals. Important events are beginning midday when the sun is standing high, or with other words when it is "high noon". In the same way the working schedule is uncovered in the freemasons’ temple the Holy Grail is revealed in "Parsifal". [84]

Another Brother, Dennis Henney, in writing about The Magic Flute, Beethoven’s Fidelio, and Parsifal, remarks: “On an intuitive level I believed them to be Masonic” and claims that this intuition is based on the vivid characteristic present in all three operas which identify them as essentially Masonic: “brotherly love, relief, and truth.” [85]

There is not that much of these three characteristics presented on stage in the large-scale tetralogy The Ring of the Nibelung (composed in the course of ca. 26 years, from 1848 to 1874), but it still contains some profound mystical ideas, some of which are akin to Masonic concepts – for instance, the Ring’s key message that it is only through self-renouncing love that the world can be redeemed.

This idea is expressed by Wagner in a mythological coating, whereby the different figures acting on the stage (Gods and heroes) represent certain principles and ideas, in the Platonic understanding. As Wagner himself wrote at the age of 27, “what Music expresses is eternal, infinite, and ideal; she expresses not the passion, love, desire of this or that individual, in this or that condition, but of Passion, Love, Desire itself...” [86]

Wagner, striving to find a way to redeem the world and initiate a new period of humanity’s consciousness, conveyed his world-redeeming messages through his art via the myth which he so appreciated as a timeless poetic medium: “The incomparable thing about the Mythos is,” Wagner wrote in Opera and Drama (1851), “that it is true for all time, and its content, how close soever its compression, is inexhaustible throughout the ages. The only task of the Poet was to expound it.” [87]

As Robert Greenberg says in his lectures, “Wagner understood implicitly that by employing myth and metaphor he could preach his gospel in a manner that would transform reality and thus transcend time and place.” Further, he claims—and we tend to agree—that Wagner would have most likely agreed with the following words of the 15th c. Florentine polymath Pico della Mirandola, resonating with the Freemasonic doctrine and practice:

It was the opinion of the ancient theologians that divine subjects and the secret Mysteries must not be rashly divulged… That is why the Egyptians had sculptures of sphinxes in all their temples, that is, to
indicate that divine knowledge, if committed to writing at all, must be covered with enigmatic veils and poetic dissimulations. [88]

Indeed, Wagner expressed this in roughly the same words, defending the secrecy and the symbolic form of transmitting the truly deep, esoteric knowledge: “I believe it was sound instinct which set me on my guard against an undue enthusiasm for making things clear, for I have come to the firm conclusion that to make my intention too obvious would get in the way of a genuine understanding.” [89] This approach seems very close to the Freemasonic one, which postulates secrecy and makes the Brethren decipher the hidden meaning of the complicated symbols that it offers both in words, attire, and images.

Wagner directly mentions such secret brotherhoods as the Freemasonic one, starting with the one founded by Pythagoras, in a very positive way in his mature work Religion and Art (1880):

> From of old, amid the rage of robbery and blood-lust, it came to wise men’s consciousness that the human race was suffering from a malady which necessarily kept it in progressive deterioration. Many a hint from observation of the natural man, as also dim half-legendary memories, had made them guess the primal nature of this man, and that his present state is therefore a degeneration. A mystery enwrapped Pythagoras, the preacher of vegetarianism; no philosopher since him has pondered on the essence of the world, without recurring to his teaching. Silent fellowships were founded, remote from turmoil of the world, to carry out this doctrine as a sanctification from sin and misery. [90]

The “progressive deterioration” of mankind is very vividly depicted in The Ring—again, on a symbolic plane. It is depicted through the controversies in the divine realm, where the gods, dwarfs, and giants live, and the hopeless attempts of the ruling god Wotan to find a way out of the approaching crisis by creating a truly free hero through whom he could operate and impose his will. In this, Wotan resembles the Egyptian god-operator Atom (Atum), who was created by the supreme god Ptah; Wotan-Atom “projects his creative will through his daughter Brunhilde who, according to Wagner himself, ‘is the true conscious redeemer,’ as opposed to Siegfried who turned out to be a mere toy in the hands of Wotan.” [91]

As Burton D. Fisher writes about this original turn of the plot, “Wagner’s original intent in Siegfried’s Death, which ultimately became the final work, The Twilight of the Gods, was that the sky god, Wotan, would receive the hero in Teutonic heaven (Valhalla) after redeeming the world by transforming it into a classless society. However, it became Brünhilde, an archetypal Wagnerian heroine, who redeems the world through the sacrificial suicide, eliminates the Curse on the Ring, and provides the prescription for a new world order (sic!—M.D.).” [92]

Notably, this new order is brought up also in connection with Parsifal by Henri Lichtenberger: “Parsifal is not only the destroyer of the cursed world, but, mainly, a founder of a new world order; he not only renounces and destroys the world, but he is a prophet of the great and glorious new life.” [93]

The issue of founding such a new order on the Earth, based on brotherly love and truth and expressed in the form of a classless society, seems to have occupied Wagner strongly throughout his life. Through his Ring, Wagner conveys this message through the actions of a noble female character who finally brings
deliverance (Erlösung) to the world. We, in our turn, as participants of this great four-part mystical and symbolical feast, experience a deep realization that only by way of renouncing everything and rejecting the world of illusion that we can realize our divine potential.

But Wotan also has his **moment of Illumination** in the course of the drama, namely in Siegfried, Act III, Scene 1. It occurs when he, too, realizes the necessity of renunciation and is expressed through the **Renunciation (Erlösungs) Leitmotif**, also called “The World Inheritance Motif.” Conversing with the spirit of the Earth, the all-knowing Erda, Wotan says: “Was in des Zwiespalt’s wildem Schmerze verweifelnd eins ich bechloss, froh und freudig führe, frei ich nun aus...” (What in my spirit’s fiercest anguish despairing once I resolved, glad and blithesome – freshly I bring on now to pass). For Wagner, this moment was of supreme importance. As Heinrich Porges relates in his *Wagner Rehearsing the Ring*, [Wagner] once characterized the spiritual significance of this theme (whilst still going on through the work at the piano) by the statement: ‘It must sound like the proclamation of a new religion’… Taken a shade faster the effect of the sudden illumination by which Wotan himself is overwhelmed is all the more powerful… Subsequently the performance of the whole scene must be imbued by this revelation of spiritual renewal. [94]

The deepest meaning of this scene, when Wotan is struck by a revelation, is explained by Franz Winkler thus: “When he, the proud ruler of gods and men, was faced with the superior wisdom intrinsic to the earth, he awoke to full recognition of his own responsibility in the curse against the Ring, and consequently to the knowledge that even a god may be tainted with guilt. He had discovered the existence of a **master plan of creation** that even the immortals could not defy with impunity.” [95]

As Alexey Losev claims in his Philosophical Commentary to the Ring, “Wotan’s doubts and instability represents us, the poor inhabitants of the Earth, and his fate is the history of the humanity, at times great and awe-inspiring, at times shallow and pathetic,” and the whole tragedy depicts the dialectic of the Absolute and the Abyss. [96]

We as the listeners of Wagner’s *Meisterwerk* may agree with this view or propose our own concepts of Wotan (for the depth of the drama allows for multiple interpretations). But he is not the only character, or entity, portrayed in The Ring. Of equal, if not of higher significance, are the forces of nature that represent the basic elements comprising the material universe and discovered back in the Antiquity: Water (the Rhine maidens), Fire (Loge), Air (Wotan and the gods), and Earth (Alberich and the Nibelungs).

As Losev writes, “the overture to The Rheingold and the whole scene ‘On the riverbed of the Rhine’ is a wonderful **musical description of cosmogony**. The famous intro, consisting of the sole Urzustand motive and being none other than an E flat major chord stretching over the span of 136 measures, provides a gradual build-up, as if portraying the appearance of the world’s existence from the Great Abyss, is crowned by the full revelation of this universal facelessness and 1-lessness—the gleam of the Rhinegold. It seems that in the concept of the Rhinegold, we have the heathen, **Platonic concept of the Ideas.**” [97]
Franz Winkler’s description of the same scene is closer to the Freemasonic concepts, and here we can even find a reminiscence of the Sacred Delta with the eye of God watching the world. He writes that the first scene of Rhinegold takes place in the world “hidden within or behind the element of water from which life originally emerged. The “Father” himself has withdrawn from his creation, but he has left behind “an eye of gold” which can still behold the master plan of that creation.” In Winkler’s view, this is “God’s supreme gift to the world,” called the philosopher’s stone by alchemists and the Holy Grail by Christian mystics. [98]

This E flat major arpeggio, depicting “nature’s absolute balance” before any individuation, represents the element of Water, and the whole tetralogy is based on the opposition and interaction of the elements, expressed not only in music, but also in color. Anastasia Siopsi, in her article on the influences of Ancient Greek spirit on Wagner’s music, claims that the “greenish twilight” described by Wagner in his stage instructions for the initial scene is opposed by “a red glow” that breaks out at the end of the Tetralogy. “Green is a supplementary color to red; thus, by being at the two ‘edges’ of the range of colors, they articulate by means of color the beginning and the end of the Tetralogy which is focused on the juxtaposition of two opposite-notions: of “nature” and of “civilization.” [99] This extremely interesting contemplation of Siopsi can be extended even further: combined, these complimentary colors produce black [100], the color of Cosmos and primeval matter—thus, Wagner’s Tetralogy in fact comprises the whole Universe: the four elements in their interaction, the god-operator Wotan controlling the reality, the unspoken-of and unseen Supreme Deity presiding over the whole creation, and, importantly, the very number of the parts in the Tetralogy—everything speaks of Wagner’s deep knowledge of Ancient wisdom going back to Pythagoras and even more ancient traditions like the Egyptian one that are of such crucial significance for Freemasons.

Interestingly, however, Wagner himself perceived his great work not so much as a tetralogy, but either as trilogy with an introduction (Vorabend). This points to the fact that, even more than the number four, Wagner structured his Ring on the basis of the number three. The first 136 measures of the Ring, as stated above, are played in the same key of E flat major, and we only hear the sounds of the triad: a perfect, unperturbed harmony. The usage of exactly this key, whether chosen by Wagner unconsciously or because of the sacred number symbolism, finds its echo in Masonic music. As Katherine Thompson writes in The Masonic Thread in Mozart, “The music of the Freemasons contained musical phrases and forms that held specific semiotic meanings. For example, the Masonic initiation ceremony began with the candidate knocking three times at the door to ask admittance.” [101]

But this primordial harmony based on the number 3 and representing the pristine, virgin state of the world is destroyed by the intervention of Alberich, the dark character who first longs for love but then switches to the lust for power. Immediately the key changes: the three flats get “cancelled” and substituted with one sharp—the E minor key.
In Parsifal, we find an analogous change: as Bro. Dennis Henney observed: Parsifal, feeling the “brotherly love” for the wounded Amfortas,

obtains the holy spear, guards it, and brings it back to heal Amfortas. I would now like you to listen to the Communion scene from Parsifal. It is of interest to note that Wagner here uses a key of three flats for the Temple music prior to Parsifal’s ejection. The key then changes to the key of C major which contains no sharps or flats and is referred to as the ‘common key.’ In other words, the key of the unknowing or un-initiated. You will remember that Mozart in The Magic Flute also used the key of three flats in connection with the Temple of Light. [102]

Notably, both the initial scene of the Ring, with all its musical and esoteric significance, and the whole idea of Parsifal were born in Wagner’s mind in the form of spiritual revelations.

The idea for the Ring overture music came to him in a semi-conscious state, as he was staying at an inn in La Spezia, Italy in 1853:

After a night spent in fever and sleeplessness, I forced myself to take a long tramp the next day through the hilly country, which was covered with pine woods. It all looked dreary and desolate, and I could not think what I should do there. Re-turning in the afternoon, I stretched myself, dead tired, on a hard couch, awaiting the long-desired hour of sleep. It did not come; but I fell into a kind of somnolent state, in which I suddenly felt as though I were sinking in swiftly flowing water. The rushing sound formed itself in my brain into a musical sound, the chord of E flat major, which continually re-echoed in broken forms; these broken chords seemed to be melodic passages of increasing motion, yet the pure triad of E flat major never changed, but seemed by its continuance to impart infinite significance to the element in which I was sinking. I awoke in sudden terror from my doze, feeling as though the waves were rushing high above my head. I at once recognised that the orchestral overture to the Rheingold, which must long have lain latent within me, though it had been unable to find definite form, had at last been revealed to me. [103]

Parsifal (1845–1882) was conceived by Wagner in its entirety (although he had already had a vague idea of it since 1845) in a semi-mystical state, on the holy Good Friday morning in April 1857:

…on Good Friday I awoke to find the sun shining brightly for the first time in this house: the little garden was radiant with green, the birds sang, and at last I could sit on the roof and enjoy the long-yearned-for peace with its message of promise. Full of this sentiment, I suddenly remembered that the day was Good Friday, and I called to mind the significance this omen had already once assumed for me when I was reading Wolfram’s Parsifal. Since the sojourn in Marienbad, where I had conceived the
Meistcrdnger and Lohengrin, I had never occupied myself again with that poem; now its noble possibilities struck me with overwhelming force, and out of my thoughts about Good Friday I rapidly conceived a whole drama, of which I made a rough sketch with a few dashes of the pen, dividing the whole into three acts. [104]

Again, the number three is present. Furthermore, it seems like Wagner, with his outstanding intuition, again grasped the deepest meaning of the Good Friday holiday, in its age-old esoteric significance. Considering that the idea came to him in Spring, as he was contemplating the jolly regeneration of nature, and that this drama he conceived was a rendition of the Grail legend, we may claim that he penetrated through the ages and pierced through the very core of ancient mysteries, such as those of Mithra and Attis. As Jessie L. Weston wrote in her deep Grail research, “after upwards of thirty years spent in careful study of the Grail legend and romances I am firmly and entirely convinced that the root origin of the whole bewildering complex is to be found in the Vegetation Ritual, treated from the esoteric point of view as a Life-Cult, and in that alone.” [105]

The connection between the Good Friday holiday and the sacred vegetation rituals is also emphasized by the anthroposoph Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925), who dedicated a whole series of lectures to Wagner’s connection with mysticism, including and especially Rosicrucianism. [106] In his 1907 lecture on Wagner and mysticism, he said:

The sight of the young plants revealed to him the mystery of the Holy Grail, the mystery of the coming-to-birth of all that is implicit in the image of the Holy Grail. All this he felt in connection with Good Friday and in the mood that fell upon him the first idea of Parsifal was born. Many things happened in the intervening period but the feeling remained in him and out of it he created the figure of Parsifal – the figure in whom knowledge is sublimated to feeling, the figure who having suffered for others, becomes ‘a knower through compassion.’ And the Amfortas-mystery portrays how human nature in the course of evolution has been wounded by the lance of defiled love. [107]

Not only the moment of the two drama’s birth through “mystical revelations,” but also the very process of composition—the whole way since the initial idea to the finished score—was extremely long, lasting for decades, and full of inner revelations for Wagner. It seems like he was himself going through the initiations his heroes experienced, and both Siegfried and Parsifal can be viewed as “projections” of Wagner’s inner life. Having finished a half of the second act of Siegfried in 1857, Wagner laid down his pen for nine years, writing to Liszt that he led Siegfried “into the beautiful forest solitude” and “left him under a linden tree and, with tears from the depths of my heart said farewell to him.” But when he returned, both Wagner and his Holem, Siegfried, who had spent nine years in that beautiful forest of probation, “his gear change is reflected with a blazing new creative energy; metaphorically, perhaps it represents Siegfried’s—and to an extent Wagner’s—rise to consciousness and awareness.” [108]

There are even more similarities and connections between these two major works of Wagner, The Ring and Parsifal. Some researchers even claim that they can be viewed as a continuing story, whereby Parsifal becomes a reincarnation of Siegfried on a higher level of consciousness, and Kundry, the reincarnation of Brünhilde, who has been, on the contrary, brought to a lower step by the previous actions of Siegfried and his unconscious betrayal of their holy love. Franz E. Winkler, for instance, claims that the Rhinegold
and the Holy Grail are ultimately the same substance. Describing how Wagner returned to the legend of the Grail after having already composed *Lohengrin*, Winkler writes: “Now he felt compelled to return to it, in order to trace how the divine substance represented in the Ring cycle by the Rhinegold has become the receptacle of divine love that later appeared to man in the form of the Holy Grail.” [109] Rudolf Steiner, in his turn, says that the two dramas represent the two consequent stages in the development of the humanity, from the ancient pagan complex of beliefs, mysteries, and rituals, to the True Christianity, the advent of which had been foretold by the initiates to happen after the twilight of the pagan gods. Indeed, in the very end of the last and gloomiest part of the tetralogy glimpses hope for a bright future, as Brünhilde announces before her death that the redemption of mankind is still possible:

May the gods perish with all their glory;  
May leaderless the world remain,  
Deprived of custom and law…  
The power of love alone  
Can bring salvation in joy and woe. [110]

However, this salvation, according to Wagner, was to unfold out of the official Church, for he longed for a new, transformed and ascended Christianity, where Christ, like in Freemasonry, would be the “corner stone” and the men, the “living stones” in the huge, magnificent spiritual building erected by the new Brotherhood of Men. He, like Goethe, preferred to remain “rather aloof from organized religion”; instead, these two genius artists “dedicated their lives to the neverending search for the spiritual meaning of existence.” [111]

It is known that Wagner, upon the recommendation of Schopenhauer, acquired and read the writings of Meister Eckhart, a 13th c. Christian mystic and agreed with Eckhart’s though that “God can be discovered within the self without the need to attend church.” [112] His attitude towards the church is vividly expressed in *Religion and Art* (1880):

Among the poorest and most distant from the world appeared the Saviour, no more to teach redemption as path by precept, but example; his own flesh and blood he gave as last and highest expiation for all the sin of outpoured blood and slaughtered flesh, and offered his disciples wine and bread for each day's meal:—‘’Taste such alone, in memory of me.’’ This the unique sacrament of the Christian faith; with its observance all the teaching of the Redeemer is fulfilled. As if with haunting pangs of conscience the Christian Church pursues this teaching, without ever being able to get it followed in its purity, although it very seriously should form the most intelligible core of Christianity. She has transformed it to a symbolic office of her priests, while its proper meaning is only expressed in the ordinance of periodic fasts, and its strict observance is reserved for a few religions orders, mote in the sense of an abstinence conducing to humility, than of a medicine for body alike and soul. [113]

The Freemasons do not belong to the official church either, and the reason why they founded their brotherhood outside of the confines of the official religion may be just that: in order to follow Christ’s teachings in its purest form and study and experience the most esoteric mysteries of the Christian faith. Although it is generally claimed by Brethren that Freemasonry is not a religion, it is still a spiritual union of men, the one that Wagner perhaps envisioned globally for the future mankind. As is written by
W. Bro. Kent Henderson regarding the nature and purpose of the Masonic Brotherhood, “Masonry is the activity of closely united men who, employing symbolical forms borrowed principally from the mason’s trade and from architecture, work for the welfare of mankind, striving morally to ennoble themselves and others, and thereby to bring about a universal league of mankind, which they aspire to exhibit even now on a small scale.” [114]

Arnold Schoenberg, the founder of Dodecaphony, one of the latest “musical religions” largely based on mystical ideas, claimed that “the laws of the man of genius are the laws of future humanity.” [115]

The laws that Wagner proposed for the future Brotherhood of Men seem astounding close to the goals pursued by Freemasons (which Wagner defined as “virtuousness in general” [116]). Whether he actually belonged to the Brotherhood, is in truth not that substantial. For, with the outstanding spiritual intuition he had—even if it sometimes failed him in national and political matters—he was able to catch the vibrations of the Divine Thought that unites all the most profound spiritual schools that the humanity has been able to develop. But most importantly, through his art, he conveyed these vibrations to the audience, which he made participants in the initiation mysteries. That was his largest gift to the world, and by the scale of this gift, he is indeed worthy of the honorary title of the Master.

Notes


[8] Pohanka, John J. Wagner the Mystic : 1


[14] Pohanka, John J. Wagner the Mystic : 49

[15] Pohanka, John J. Wagner the Mystic : 86

[16] The quote comes from Wagner’s novel “An End in Paris” (1841). CRWPW : 120


[18] Art and Revolution, CRWPW : 235


[26] Kropfinger has counted that Wagner recorded his earliest experience of Beethoven seven times in all and gives a chronological list thereof in *Wagner and Beethoven…*: 14-15

[27] It is, however, important to note that, in spite of the character of the text the music of the 9th is set to, Friedrich Schiller’s “Ode to Joy” (Ode an die Freude), this wasn’t and couldn’t be a specifically Masonic poem, for Schiller never was in the ranks of Freemasons. “I am neither a Freemason nor an Illuminate…” (Ich bin weder Freimaurer noch Illuminat…), he wrote in his „Letters about Don Carlos”. As the German researcher Otto Werner Förster claims, “Brother’ and ‘Brotherhood’ were popular, catchy words at the time and had nothing to do with Freemasonry.” Vide: Förster, Otto Werner. “Schiller, die Freimaurer und das Lied an die Freude” [“Schiller, the Freemasons, and the Song to Joy”; in German]. Online source: http://www.leipziger-recherchen.de/schiller-die-freimaurer-und-das-lied-an-die-freude/


[31] Steiner, Rudolf. Richard Wagner and Mysticism. Further, Steiner quotes Wagner’s own words from “A Pilgrimage to Beethoven” connected with this Music of the Spheres: “The instruments represent the rudimentary organs of Creation and Nature; what they express can never be clearly defined or put into words, for they reproduce the primitive feelings themselves, those feelings which issued from the chaos of the first Creation, when maybe there was not as yet one human being to take them up into his heart.” // CRWPW, A Pilgrimage to Beethoven.


[37] This fact is mentioned in two papers written on this topic by Freemasons, but in neither of them is it specified to which lodge exactly he belonged. Vide: M.S./F.-L.B., “Richard Wagner – sein Leben und seine Werke” [Richard Wagner – His Life and Oeuvre], internetloge.de, Hamburg, Germany [in German] (online source: http://www.internetloge.de/artszeit/mswagn.htm); Br. Salier, Bastian, “Richard Wagner und seine Beziehungen zur Freimaurerei” [Richard Wagner and his Associations with Freemasonry], website of the lodge “Minerva zu den drei Palmen”, Leipzig, Germany [in German] (online source: http://www.minerva-zu-den-drei-palmen.de/downloads/2007_01_10_Salier,Bastian_Richard_Wagner_und_seine_Beziehungen_zur_Freimaurerei.pdf).

[38] M.S./F.-L.B., “Richard Wagner – sein Leben und seine Werke” [Richard Wagner—His Life and Oeuvre], internetloge.de, Hamburg, Germany [in German]


[42] See, for instance, a passing reference to this here: “Der Stiefvater wird von Richard Wagner später als sein eigentlicher geistiger Vater bezeichnet“ (Richard Wagner would later call his stepfather his actual spiritual father.). In: M.S./F.-L.B., “Richard Wagner – sein Leben und seine Werke” [Richard Wagner – His Life and Oeuvre], internetloge.de, Hamburg, Germany [in German]


[50] Lewis, David, W. Bro. P.D.G.S.W. Ibid.


[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid.


[57] M.S./F.-L.B., “Richard Wagner—sein Leben und seine Werke” [Richard Wagner—His Life and Oeuvre], internetloge.de, Hamburg, Germany [in German]


[63] Email correspondence, Zhenya Gershman to Maria Danova, 2015. Also see Gershman’s wonderful articles on Rembrandt and the esoteric aspects of his life and art: “Rembrandt: Turn of the Key” and “Rembrandt: The ’I’ Witness,” both available online at: https://independent.academia.edu/zhenyagershman


[67] Fort, George F. *The Early History and Antiquities of Freemasonry* (1881). Quoted from the online source: http://www.masonicdictionary.com/hat.html#THE

[68] John Deathridge assumes that Wagner’s beret could have also been a testimonial to the 15th c. style of the Mastersingers guild and particularly Hans Sachs who wore such a beret (vide: Deathridge, John, “Living with Wagner,” 2013). These “Meistersinger,” about whom Wagner wrote an opera, are frequently viewed as the “initiates of the Middle Ages”; however, just how close to Freemasonry such medieval brotherhoods were, is hard to determine.


[70] Fort, George F. *The Early History and Antiquities of Freemasonry* (1881). Quoted from the online source: http://www.masonicdictionary.com/hat.html#THE


[73] Fort, George F. *The Early History and Antiquities of Freemasonry* (1881)


[78] Richardson, Jabez, A.M. *Richardson's monitor of free-masonry; being a practical guide to the ceremonies in all the degrees conferred in masonic lodges, chapters, encampments, &c. explaining the signs, tokens and grips, and giving all the words, pass-words, sacred words, oaths, and hieroglyphics used by masons. The ineffable and historical degrees are also given in full*. New York: Fitzgerald, 1860 : 74. Online source: http://www.themasonictrowel.com/ebooks/freemasonry/eb0348.pdf


[94] Quoted after: Pohanka, John J. *Wagner the Mystic* : 51
[95] Winkler, Franz E. For Freedom Destined…: 41.

[96] Losev, Alexey. Philosophical Commentary to the Dramas of Richard Wagner. Transl. from Russian.

[97] Losev, Alexey. Ibid.


[100] Notably, the study of color was started by such outstanding esotericist and scientist as Sir Isaac Newton who developed the first circular diagram of colors in 1666, and Goethe also engaged in color studies.


[105] Weston, Jessie L. From Ritual to Romance, Chapter XI

[106] The possible connection between Rosicrucianism and Freemasonry is thoroughly discussed in the article by Bro. John G. Keplinger: John G., Bro. “Rosicrucians and Freemasonry” // The Builder Magazine, January 1918. According to the hypothesis described by Keplinger that “Freemasonry was an outgrowth of Rosicrucianism,” the very term “Freemasonry” was first applied by the famous scholar and esotericist Robert Fludd (1574–1637) as a substitute for the previously used term “Rosicrucianism,” for it caused too much controversy as per its origins; the name of Freemasons derives from the mysterious House of God that the Rosicrucians allegedly used for their spiritual works and services. For no-one at the time could answer the question where that house was situated. Fludd answered to this question simply: that this building is a spiritual one (therefore there is no concrete address), “in which men are stones and Christ the corner stone.”


[112] Pohanka, John G. *Wagner the Mystic* : 48


