

BLAVATSKY, FREEMASONRY, & THE WESTERN MYSTERY TRADITION



The Blavatsky Lecture

by **John Algeo**

Professor Emeritus of English
The University of Georgia,
Athens, U. S. A.

The Theosophical Society in England
50 Gloucester Place, London W1H 4EA

**BLAVATSKY,
FREEMASONRY, & THE
WESTERN MYSTERY TRADITION**



John Algeo

The Blavatsky Lecture
delivered at the Summer School of
The Theosophical Society in England at the
College of Ripon and York St John, Ripon
28 July 1996

The Theosophical Society in England
50 Gloucester Place, London W1H 4EA

Copyright © 1996 by John Algeo

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any manner
including electronically without written permission
except for quotations embodied in critical articles or reviews.

BLAVATSKY, FREEMASONRY, AND THE WESTERN MYSTERY TRADITION

THE WESTERN MYSTERY TRADITION has been expressed in many forms: Kabbalah, Alchemy, Mythography, Rosicrucianism, and a myriad of other subtraditions, including Theosophy. We may not always view Theosophy as part of the Western Mystery Tradition because it lacks some of the characteristics typical of that tradition, such as ritual activity. Yet in a larger sense of the Tradition, Theosophy clearly has a place within it. The most influential form of the Western Mystery Tradition, however, in terms of the number of persons it has reached and the extent of its spread, is without a doubt Freemasonry, familiarly known as "the Craft."

Thirty-five years ago, T. H. Redfern delivered the 1961 Blavatsky Lecture, in which he examined the efforts at the last quarter of each century "to enlighten the people of the world about spiritual realities." In it he compared the Theosophical Society of the late 1800s with Masonic activity by the Count de Saint-Germain, Cagliostro, and Saint-Martin in the late 1700s and with Rosicrucian and proto-Masonic interests in the late 1600s. Theosophy and Freemasonry have thus been seen by Theosophists as comparable movements within the Wisdom or Mystery Tradition of the West.

Theosophy and Freemasonry have a number of points of contact also in the life and writings of H. P. Blavatsky. Several questions about these contacts merit consideration: First, what was Blavatsky's contact with Freemasonry, how much did she know about it, and where did she acquire that knowledge? Second, what are Blavatsky's attitudes toward Freemasonry and what does she say about it in her writings? Third, how does she use Masonic symbols and themes for her own purposes in her writings? And finally, why was Blavatsky drawn to Freemasonry and why have some Theosophists after her time felt a similar attraction?

THE HISTORY AND NATURE OF FREEMASONRY

The history of Freemasonry is obscure. Its official beginning is usually identified with the formation of the Grand Lodge of England in 1717, but Masonic Lodges clearly existed before that date. Suggestive, if vague, references to much older antecedents exist, for example, in the twelfth-century *Regius Manuscript*.

Recent research (by David Stevenson) indicates that in Scotland Freemasonic history can be traced back to the 1590s, when a national lodge system of stonemasons was organized. Its traditional lore—connecting the craft with Egypt, the Tower of Babel, Solomon's Temple, Hermes Trismegistus, and Euclid—was enriched by various Renaissance esoteric interests: Vitruvian architectural theory, Neo-Platonism, Egyptian hieroglyphs, emblem books, Hermeticism, alchemy, the Art of Memory (advocated by Giordano Bruno, among others), and eventually Rosicrucianism. The ultimate nature, practices, and origin of Freemasonry are, however, "occult" in the etymological sense of the word, "hidden."

Freemasonry has inferential, suppositional, legendary, mythological, and esoteric histories that trace it back to the cathedral builders of the Middle Ages, the Knights Templar, the temple builders of Rome and Greece, King Solomon and the builders of the Holy Temple at Jerusalem, the builders of the pyramids and the Tower of Babel, and the architects of the City of the Golden Gates in lost Atlantis. Freemasonry is a type of activity belonging to the cultural and spiritual tradition of the Mysteries. It can be viewed as a modern form of the ancient Mystery tradition.

Because Freemasonry is such a widespread and popular manifestation of the Western Mystery Tradition, with such mysterious but evocative origins, it could hardly have failed to attract the attention of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky. Indeed, given her own origins and family background, her connection with Freemasonry seems inescapable.

Modern Freemasonry developed and spread in the eighteenth century, a time supposed to be the Age of Reason and of Neoclassicism. However, every intellectual movement calls forth its complement, lest human culture and human intellect should become unbalanced through a one-sided development. So the late nineteenth century, the age of science and technology, was also the age of the occult revival and of Theosophy. Similarly, the rationalism and simplicity of the eighteenth century was balanced by the explosion of Freemasonry.

From its beginnings, modern Freemasonry has been a Janus-headed movement, looking in two directions. On the one hand, it is part of the Age of Reason, being strongly ethical in its religious orientation rather than theological, egalitarian and tolerant rather than dogmatic or sectarian, deistic rather than theistic, and rational rather than "enthusiastic" in the eighteenth century sense of that term, the equivalent in current idiom being "touchy-feely." On the other hand, Freemasonry's central ritual is based on a death and resurrection myth; it deals in symbols and allegories that speak to the unconscious rather than the conscious mind, and it is consciously part of the Mystery tradition that stretches back to Classical antiquity and around the globe.

Because of its two theoretical directions, it is not surprising that the practice of Freemasonry should also incline in two contrasting ways. On the one hand, "majority" or "official" Freemasonry, as dominated by the Grand Lodge of England, has made the Craft fit into the dominant social structures of society by emphasizing its rational, ethical, and social side. "Official" Freemasonry stresses fellowship, good works, and general moral upliftment.

Even within "official" Freemasonry, however, there have always been Brethren whose chief interest is the inner or esoteric side of the Craft. And their interest has often found expression in alternative Masonic rites, systems, and bodies. Part of the impetus behind the development of Scottish Rite Masonry was this alternative interest, although the Scottish Rite was quickly absorbed into "official" Freemasonry.

Alternative (sometimes dismissingly referred to as "fringe") Masonry has many faces and many stages of esoteric awareness, including links to the occult revival of the late nineteenth century. The period of greatest development of alternative Masonic rites roughly coincided with Blavatsky's travels and public work. As Küntz (11) observes: "The Golden Age of English Fringe Masonry was circa 1860 to 1890 when the prolific creation of new Grades or Rites took place."

In addition to alternative Masonic rites, which are regarded as supplements to regular Craft Masonry and therefore are restricted to persons who have already been made Masons, there have been other Masonic-like bodies that do not require their members to be Freemasons and some of which admit women as well as men. Notable among the latter have been the Order of the Golden Dawn and its offshoots and certain Rosicrucian groups, such as AMORC. With such bodies, however, we pass out of the realm of Freemasonry and into that of more recent esoteric ritual organizations.

A distinction often made within the Craft is between Operative Masons and Speculative Masons. That distinction, as Blavatsky was well aware, is usually taken to be between stonemasons, who construct physical buildings, and Freemasons, who construct spiritual ones or use the building trade as a mirror (Latin *speculum*) in which to see, albeit darkly, the hidden side of things. She, however, interpreted the distinction in another, contrasting (and typically Blavatskyan) way. Thus for HPB, Speculative Masons were those Freemasons who do not know the power of the Masonic Work and therefore merely speculate about it. Operative Masons were those Freemasons (especially the ancient and oriental ones) who know how to do the Work and are actively engaged in operating with the powers and energies behind the outer forms.

Another way of categorizing the varieties of Masonry is into Craft or Blue Masonry and additional or higher degrees. Craft Masonry comprises the first three degrees of Entered Apprentice, Fellowcraft, and Master Mason. They are the foundation and the

prerequisite of all other degrees. One may be a Mason with only these three Craft degrees and none of the others. One may not, however, take the other degrees without first being a Master Mason. The history of the additional or higher degrees is no clearer than that of Craft Masonry. Some of them are of French provenance, though attributed to a Scots origin (hence "Scottish Rite"), and thence exported to Britain and elsewhere.

The most widely worked of the additional degrees are probably Mark Masonry, Royal Arch Masonry, Knights Templar, and Rose Croix and other Scottish Rite degrees. These are so well established as to be part of "official" Freemasonry. Among the less common additional degrees and rather of an alternative nature are those of the Rites of Memphis and of Mizraim, various Rose Croix Orders (other than the Scottish Rite's Eighteenth Degree), the Ancient and Primitive Rite (with which Blavatsky had a connection), the Swedenborgian Rite, and the Egyptian Rite. The history of such alternative rites has been traced on the continent by Gérard Galtier and in England by Ellic Howe.

BLAVATSKY'S CONTACT WITH FREEMASONRY

Freemasonry was introduced into Russia in the first half of the eighteenth century (the date 1731 is traditional but uncertain), and by the mid point of the century, Masonic lodges were operating in Moscow, St. Petersburg, and elsewhere (Carlson 16–18). Russian Masonry was an upper-class, intellectual, and artistic movement with appeal to those who were unconventional. Catherine the Great, who ruled Russia from 1762 to 1796, was suspicious of the Craft. Esoteric movements that involve secrecy are always viewed dimly by totalitarian regimes, whether they be Franco's Spain, Hitler's Germany, or Stalin's or Catherine's Russia.

Catherine's grandson, Czar Alexander I, was better disposed toward the esoteric during the earlier years of his reign (1801–1825), but toward the end of his life, he came under the

influence of Orthodox churchmen antagonistic to the Craft. He followed their advice by outlawing all secret and esoteric groups, on the supposition that such organizations were breeding grounds for political unrest and revolution.

In Russia the supposition had some basis in fact, for on the death of Czar Alexander, an abortive revolt known as the Decembrist Uprising (because it occurred on December 14, 1825) attempted to overthrow the absolute rule of the Czar and replace it with either a constitutional monarchy or a republic. The would-be revolutionaries were idealists rather than practical plotters, so their revolt decisively failed. Some leaders among the Decembrists were heavily into esoteric activities, including Freemasonry, as well as literary and political Romanticism (Leighton). The ban against esotericism which anticipated the Decembrist Uprising had not eliminated Freemasonry but drove it underground and ironically may well have contributed to politicizing it.

Blavatsky's great-grandfather, Prince Pavel Dolgorukii, had assembled an extensive esoteric library, doubtless including an array of works on Freemasonry collected during the springtime of Masonry in Russia (Carlson 38-39). A. E. Waite (2: 19) identifies a "Grand Prince of Dolgourouki" as

A distinguished Russian military commander in the days of the Empress Catherine II. Also an important member of the STRICT OBSERVANCE.

The Rite of Strict Observance was founded or perhaps reformed by Carl Gotthelf, Baron von Hund, in 1754 (Mackey 730). One of its most interesting features was von Hund's attribution of his authority to *Superiores Incogniti* or Unknown Superiors (Mackey 341).

As a child, Helena would have had access to her great-grandfather's library while living in the home of her maternal grandparents, her grandmother being the daughter of the Prince. Of this library, Katherine Beechey (7) writes:

She came to know the strange library which had belonged to her great-grandfather on her mother's side, Prince Paul Vasilyevitch Dolgorouky, and was fascinated by it for it contained many hundreds of books on

alchemy and magic, on the Hermetic philosophy, on witchcraft and folklore and all the Russian country superstitions.

At that time, Helena also came to know Prince Alexander Golitsyn, a frequent visitor to her grandparents, who was famous for carrying on his own family tradition of devotion to the esoteric and Masonic. Indeed throughout her life HPB was intimately associated with Freemasons, from whom she could hardly have failed to acquire additional knowledge of the Craft to supplement what she had picked up in her great-grandfather's library.

Apart from her literary knowledge of the Craft, Blavatsky had two Masonic credentials, both from John Yarker, who was a leader in various alternative Masonic groups. One of those was the Sat B'hai and the other was the Rite of Adoption of the Ancient and Primitive Rite of Masonry. Blavatsky's contact with Yarker was by way of their mutual friend and colleague, Charles Sotheran, who had been active in the founding of the Theosophical Society and was credited by Laura Holloway with originating the name "Theosophy" for the Society (de Zirkoff, "Sotheran"; Gomes, *Dawning* 156-7).

Yarker himself gave an account of his issuing Blavatsky's certificates. In 1872 he had privately published a book entitled *Notes on the Scientific and Religious Mysteries of Antiquity; the Gnosis and Secret Schools of the Middle Ages; Modern Rosicrucianism; and the Various Rites and Degrees of Free and Accepted Masonry*. Sotheran made Blavatsky acquainted with that work, and HPB subsequently cited it approvingly in *Isis Unveiled* (2: 316-7, 374n, 376-7, 394). Sotheran also suggested to Yarker that HPB be given Masonic recognition. So Yarker (An account) sent her

the certificate of the female branch of the Sat Bhai (Seven Brothers, or seven birds of a species, which always fly by sevens); it was a system organized at Benares in India by the Pundit of the 43rd Rifles, and brought to England by Major J. H. Lawrence-Archer, 32°-94°.

Long after the events, Yarker (*Arcane Schools* 492) gave an account of the Sat B'hai and its relationship to the Theosophical Society:

THE SAT B'HAI. This is a Hindu Society organized by the Pundit of an Anglo-Indian Regiment, and brought into this country [the British Isles], about the year 1872, by Major J. H. Lawrence Archer. The name alludes to the bird *Malacocercis Grisis*, which always fly by *sevens*. It has seven descending degrees, each of seven disciples, who constitute their seven; and seven ascending degrees of Perfection, Ekata or Unity. Its object is the study and development of Indian philosophy. Somehow its *raison d'être* ceased to be necessary when the *Theosophical Society* was established by the late H. P. Blavatsky, which at one time at least had its secret signs of Reception.

Olcott considered the Sat B'hai certificate to be an inadequate recognition of HPB's merits, doubtless on good grounds, for at least the Western version of the Sat B'hai appears to have been largely a vaporous rite (Waite 2: 404-7; Howe). Olcott wrote Yarker "setting forth the very superior qualities of Madame to the certificate sent, and vouching that she was proficient in all masonic sciences" (Yarker, An account).

In August 1877, Yarker was given an honorary membership in the Theosophical Society and a gold jewel of the Egyptian crux ansata (which forms the center of the Theosophical seal) entwined with a green enameled serpent. In September 1877 *Isis* was published with the references to Yarker's book cited above.

The month after the publication of *Isis* (October), HPB wrote to her Russian colleague Alexander N. Aksakov:

I have received the degree of "Arch-Auditor" from the principal Masonic Lodge in India [presumably the Sat B'hai]. It is the most ancient of the Masonic Lodges, and is said to have been in existence B.C.

A few days later (October 28), she wrote to her aunt and confidant, Nadyezhda Andreyevna (who was only three years older) concerning a colony of Jews near Madras:

And not one learned man knows anything about this colony; only some of *our* people belonging to the Sat-Bhai Society fraternise with some of their Kabbalists.

Thereafter, in November 1877, Yarker sent HPB a certificate of the highest rank (Crowned Princess 12°) of the Rite of Adoption that had developed in France. HPB's diploma of Adoptive Masonry has been published several times. The degrees it confers upon HPB are eleven of the twelve degrees of *The Secret Rituals of the Adoptive Rite of Freemasonry*, which Yarker had translated into English, omitting from the diploma, probably accidentally, the eighth degree, Lady of the Dove.

The names of the degrees on HPB's diploma (preceded by the degree numbers of the *Secret Rituals* and followed by the degree names of that work in parentheses when they differ from those of the diploma) are as follows: 1° Apprentice (Adoptive Apprentice), 2° Companion, 3° Mistress, 4° Perfect Mistress, 5° Sublime Elect, 6° Scotch Lady (Dame Ecossais [sic for Écossaise]), 7° Grand Elect (Grand Elect, or French Dame), 8° (Lady of the Dove), 9° Chevalière de Rose Croix (Lady of the Rosy Cross), 10° Adonaite Mistress, 11° Perfect Ven. Mistress (Perfect Venerable Adonaite Mistress), and 12° Crowned Princess or Sovereign Mistress of the Rite of Adoption.

Despite some parallelism of names, these Adoptive degrees are not the regular degrees of Freemasonry. *The Secret Rituals* follow loosely the pattern of Masonic workings and adapt some Masonic symbols, but their content is quite different from that of the masculine degrees. For example, the Adoptive Third Degree of Mistress is completely lacking the central ritual action of the corresponding Masonic degree of Master Mason. Instead of a death and resurrection theme, it uses as motifs the Tower of Babel, Noah's ark, Jacob's dream and ladder, and Sodom and Lot's wife. The ladder motif is vaguely like a similar one in an advanced Scottish Rite degree, but differs in content.

Lodges of Adoption, whose place in the United States was taken by the Eastern Star, were a French attempt to provide for women relatives of Masons some ritual and social activity

comparable to Freemasonry. Mackey's *Encyclopædia* says that "Adoptive Masonry" is "only an imitation of Freemasonry, inasmuch as that it was a secret society, having a form of initiation and modes of recognition." The "Lecture or Discourse" of the twelfth and last degree of Yarker's Adoptive Rite (235-6) explains the motive for its establishment:

Lady Masonry differs in its symbols, but not in its doctrines, from those of the ordinary Masons; and is called Adoptive Masonry, or Masonry of Adoption, to show that the system has been adopted and ratified by the Masonic Grand Lodges. It was established with the aim of exculpating the Masons from the reproach that they excluded ladies from their meetings after the example of some of the ancient Initiates who made a virtue of Monastic Chastity. The ladies very justly said, "The Temples of religion are open to us, political assemblies admit us; the academies and schools of science call us; Masonry alone closes its doors against us. This is unjust and the persecutions to which Masons have been exposed in various countries is a proof of it; and there is no reason why we should desire that our husbands, parents and brothers, should enroll themselves under their banners."

The founders of Lodges of Adoption hastened to reply to this reproach and recognizing that friendly relations between the two sexes contributed powerfully to civilization, found means of establishing by religious law an association of ladies after the example of the ancients. The more lovely half of humanity is thus admitted to participate in a certain manner in Masonic Mysteries and the works of philanthropy which characterizes it.

By present-day sensibilities, the entire institution of Adoptive Masonry is patronizing. It is certainly dissimulating, in that women's participation "in a certain manner in Masonic Mysteries" was far from the fact. The Adoptive rituals are sentimental and moralistic; they have none of the content or power of actual Freemasonry.

Because the Masonic diploma Yarker sent HPB was written on a standard form, used for certifying various degrees of the Ancient and Primitive Rite, she may not at first have understood exactly what sort of honor had been given to her. In January

1878 her scrapbook includes this remark: "I have received from the Sovereign Grand Master General of the A. and P. Rite of England and Wales a diploma of 32nd Degree." It was in fact the first through the twelfth degrees of the Adoptive Rite the diploma conferred, not the thirty-second degree of the Ancient and Primitive Rite. However, the Yarker diploma does not number the Adoptive degrees, so without access to an Adoptive Rite ritual, which HPB probably did not have, there would be no way to know to which Adoptive degrees the names referred.

About the same time (early 1878), Blavatsky wrote her relatives in Russia in a joking if somewhat inaccurate vein:

Listen, Brethren! I am sending you something curious: the English Freemasons, whose head is the Prince of Wales, sent me a diploma, for my *Isis*. . . . That means I am now a "Mysterious Mason"! . . . I am expecting to be installed as the Pope of Rome for all my virtues. . . . I am sending you a clipping from a Masonic journal. As to the decoration, it is very beautiful — a ruby cross and a rose.

HPB's Masonic diploma became a minor controversy because masculine Masons doubted (in fact quite correctly) that she had received any of the regular Masonic degrees. Moreover, Yarker's Ancient and Primitive Rite was not representative of "official" Freemasonry and was certainly not headed by the Prince of Wales, but was itself already an alternative Rite and was therefore not accepted as regular by "official" Masons.

Despite the confusion implied in her scrapbook entry and letter, HPB seems to have come quickly to a realization of the situation. In a February 8, 1878, letter to the editor of the *Franklin* (Massachusetts) *Register* (CW 1: 307–8) commenting on criticisms by masculine Masons of the report of her diploma, she corrects the misimpression which even she seems earlier to have shared. She cites a passage from *Isis* (2: 394): "We are under neither promise, obligation, nor oath, and therefore violate no confidence" relating to "*Western* Masonry"; and she continues:

I have never taken "the regular degrees" in any *Western* Masonic Lodge. . . . Though I have nothing to do with American modern Masonry, and

do not expect to have, yet, feeling highly honoured by the distinction conferred upon me by Brother Yarker, I mean to stand for my chartered rights, and to recognize no other authority than that of the high Masons of England, who have pleased to send me this unsolicited and unexpected testimonial of their approval of my humble labours.

After her arrival in India, in a letter to Adelberth de Bourbon, HPB is more explicit and adopts an ironic tone about the degrees Yarker conferred upon her (*H.P.B. Speaks* 2: 2-3):

I belong to the Memphis Lodge of the Primitive and Accepted Rite of Adoption, for the others will not have women, unfortunate "she-females!" in their Lodges. . . . There is more knowledge of *real true* symbolism of things in the little finger of one of our Tibetan *Chabérons* or Indian *Yogins* than in all your Grand Lodges. Whenever I am in any danger — it is not by thrice lifting up my arms — *le joli geste à trois temps* [the pretty gesture three times] — and shouting to the Lord, my God "to help the Widow's Son" that I will expect real efficient help [an allusion to a Masonic sign]; but by using my knowledge of the powers of nature, by throwing a mesmeric "glamour" over my enemies. However as they have kindly named me from simple "Apprentice" up to a "Scotch Lady and a Crowned Princess of the Rose Croix" — (*excusez du peu* [just excuse me]!) — I must feel thankful and not be too hard upon them.

Blavatsky was too confident of her own abilities and too busy exercising those abilities to worry greatly about the sexual discrimination that she undoubtedly encountered in many aspects of life and which is ingrained in "official" Freemasonry. Her remark above about masculine Masons' rejection of "unfortunate 'she-females!' in their Lodges" is one of the very few explicit comments she makes on the subject. However, in *Isis Unveiled* (2: 388-91) she also quotes a long letter from Charles Sotheran, which ends with a prophetic call:

Speculative Masonry has much, too, within its ranks to do. One is to accept woman as a co-worker of man in the struggle of life, as the Hungarian Masons have done lately by initiating the Countess Haideck.

HPB died two years before the establishment of International Co-Freemasonry in 1893, but there can be little doubt that she would have sympathized with Annie Besant's entry into that Order and her vigorous extension of it to all parts of the British Empire.

It is fairly clear from this history that both of Blavatsky's Masonic certificates, that of the Sat B'hai and that of the Rite of Adoption of the Ancient and Primitive Rite, were degrees conferred "by communication," in this case honors given by correspondence rather than regular initiation. They look like tit-for-tat complimentary exchanges. The honorary nature of the certificates did not dampen HPB's pleasure at receiving them, though doubtless neither was she deluded as to their nature.

When, in her published writings, HPB distinguishes between Eastern and Western Freemasonry, it is possible that by "Eastern Masonry" she means the Order of Sat B'hai, but it is more likely that she is using the term "Masonry" loosely to refer to an esoteric brotherhood. The latter seems clearly the case when she says, "My Masonic experience — if you will so term membership in several Eastern Masonic Fraternities and Esoteric Brotherhoods — is confined to the Orient" (CW 1: 308). And similarly, continuing in her letter to Nadyezhda Andreyevna (October 29), she recounted an experience she had had some years previously with a Hindu lecturer on Buddhism, who appears to have been an emissary of the Mahatma Morya:

The Hindu left after giving us several dozens of names of Hindus in India, all Kabalists and Masons, but not of the stupid European and American Lodges, but of the Grand Eastern Lodge into which Englishmen are not admitted.

Whatever the actual origin of the Sat B'hai or Yarker's other Masonic rites, HPB would have found most compatible his view of the antiquity of Masonry, its connections with Eastern lore, its theosophical nature (in a general sense), and the relationship of ancient to modern Freemasonry (Yarker, *Speculative Freema-*

sonry and *Arcane Schools*). In his later work, Yarker continued to cite HPB favorably, and to incorporate various ideas from her writings into his own, particularly in the opening chapters of *The Arcane Schools*, which cite her and borrow extensively from her writings.

Although Blavatsky's direct involvement with Freemasonry was limited, her indirect connection, especially through friends and colleagues like George Felt, Stainton Moses, Henry Olcott, Albert Rawson, Charles Sotheran, and W. Wynn Westcott, who were active in the Craft, was extensive. As Joscelyn Godwin (281) observes:

Everywhere she was involved with Freemasonry, Oriental secret societies, occult fraternities, and with the spiritualists who constituted, as it were, the exoteric "church" from which doors opened to the more esoteric circles.

The network of Blavatsky's Masonic contacts has also been set forth by Paul Johnson, who shows that Freemasonry was a thread uniting many of the persons Blavatsky had or might have had contact with.

Apart from her personal contacts with Freemasons, Blavatsky was widely read in the subject of Freemasonry. The evidence for her familiarity with the literature of the Craft is partly the significant number of Masonic books in her library. We have no full list of books HPB owned or read, but we do know some of the works that passed through her hands. Beechey (8–9) writes:

A good many of the books in the New York library shared by H.P.B. and Colonel Olcott are now in what is called the "H.P.B. Library" in the Archives at the International Headquarters of The Theosophical Society at Adyar. Other books were added later, as can be seen from the date written inside, for she often added this when writing her name in the book. Altogether the H.P.B. Library comprises between three and four hundred volumes. They cover every kind of subject, for all her literary friends would present her with inscribed copies of their books, whether in prose or verse. Mostly, however, she concentrated on books on spiritualism, occultism and the occult arts, religions, the older ones

especially, theosophy, magic, the Kabbala, freemasonry and similar subjects.

An annotated catalog of works from the "H.P.B. Library" that can be reasonably presumed to have belonged to Blavatsky has been prepared by Michael Gomes. It includes the following:

Chintamon, Hurrischundra. *A Discourse on Aryans & Freemasonry*. Bombay, 1878.

Hyneman, Leon. *History of Freemasonry in England from 1567 to 1813*. New York: R. Worthington, 1878.

Ineffable Degrees of the Ancient & Accepted Rite. N.p.: n.p., n.d.
[This work, treating the fourth through the thirteenth degrees of the Scottish Rite, has an inscription indicating that it was a gift to HPB from Charles Sotheran.]

Kurzer Inbegriff von dem Leben und den Thaten des Joseph Balsami oder des sogenannten Grafen Cagliostro. Rome, 1871.

[Marconis, Jacques Étienne]. *Lectures of a Chapter, Senate & Council: According to the Forms of the Antient and Primitive Rite, but Embracing All Systems of High Grade Masonry*. Trans. John Yarker. London: John Hogg, 1882.

The Masonic Record of Western India (Bombay) 7 (November 1870): 281–320.

Procès de Joseph Balsamo surnommé le comte Cagliostro. Liege: J. J. Tutot, 1791.

Ritual of the Degree of a Chapter of Rose Croix. Peoria, IL: Sovereign Sanctuary, 33°, of Ancient and Primitive Freemasonry, According to the Rite of Memphis, in and for the Continent of America, 1867.

In addition, works in that library that may have belonged to HPB, but for which evidence is not now available because of rebinding, include these:

Hyneman, Leon. *Ancient York and London Lodges*. Philadelphia, 1872.

Taxil, Leo. *Le Mysteries de la franc-maçonnerie*. Paris.

From such evidence, it is clear that Blavatsky's knowledge of modern Western Freemasonry almost certainly came, not from initiation into it, but from her voluminous reading and from her contact with Freemasons.

BLAVATSKY'S VIEW OF FREEMASONRY

Blavatsky was ambivalent about Freemasonry, as she was about most Western institutions, including Christianity, Kabbalah, and science. Perhaps it would be more accurate to call her response discriminating, rather than ambivalent. She respected Truth wherever she found it, but despised pretentiousness, humbuggery, narrow-mindedness, and intolerance. She found Truth in the ancient and the Eastern more than in the modern and the Western, but honored it wherever it occurs.

So HPB spoke admiringly of ancient and Eastern Freemasonry and of those Western contemporaries who carry on the traditions she associated with the ancient and Eastern. But she was scornful of what she regarded as degenerate modern Western developments. One of her favorite modern Western Masons was Jean-Baptiste-Marie Ragon, of whom she has nothing but good to say. Among the targets of her criticism were Masonic *bons vivants*, today often known as knife-and-fork Masons. She sometimes combined roses and brickbats in one bouquet (*SD 2: 575*):

It is on the occult properties of the three equal lines or sides of the Triangle that Ragon based his studies and founded the famous Masonic Society of the Trinosophists (those who study *three sciences*; an improvement upon the ordinary three Masonic degrees, given to those who study nothing except eating and drinking at the meetings of their Lodges).

Blavatsky repeatedly expressed her scorn of modern degenerate Freemasonry, as contrasted with the ancient pure variety, for example (*Isis 2: 375*):

Let it not be imagined that we are influenced by personal feeling in any of our reflections upon Masonry. So far from this being the case,

we unhesitatingly proclaim our highest respect for the original purposes of the Order and some of our most valued friends are within its membership. We say naught against Masonry as it should be, but denounce it as, thanks to the intriguing clergy, both Catholic and Protestant, it now begins to be. Professedly the most absolute of democracies, it is practically the appanage of aristocracy, wealth, and personal ambition. Professedly the teacher of true ethics, it is debased into a propaganda of anthropomorphic theology. The half-naked apprentice, brought before the master during the initiation of the first degree, is taught that at the door of the lodge every social distinction is laid aside, and the poorest brother is the peer of every other, though a reigning sovereign or an imperial prince. In practice, the Craft turns lickspittle in every monarchical country to any regal scion who may deign, for the sake of using it as a political tool, to put on the once symbolical lambskin.

It is noteworthy that Blavatsky's criticism of Masonry for the hiatus between its democratic theory and its elitist practice was also the reason for Annie Besant's initial rejection of the Craft. Mary K. Neff recounted Besant's experience as she heard it directly from the latter in 1929. Neff reported that Besant said she had met "Mlle. [Marie] Deraismes at Paris, who told her of the recently formed Order of Universal Co-Masonry and invited her to join. She [Besant] refused, being a Socialist then, because princes and other aristocratic persons were members, and so 'it was not in her line.'" However a series of paranormal experiences, including a directive to "go to see Miss Arundale in London," brought Annie Besant into the Craft.

Although HPB generally scorned "official" Masonry, given a choice between Continental and Insular varieties, she preferred French to English practice. The Grand Lodge of England and the Grand Orient of France (the terms are roughly equivalent, both denoting the chief ritual bodies in their respective nations) fell out over the question of whether and how to talk about God in Freemasonry. Anglophone Masonry has traditionally required its initiates to profess a belief in God and conducts many of its activities in one or another of the names of God. In 1877, in an

anticlerical stand, French Masonry removed all such requirements and references (Redfern, *Theosophy, Freemasonry* 14). Because Anglophone Masonry regarded the centrality of the Great Architect of the Universe (one of the favorite Masonic names for God) as an unalterable landmark of Freemasonry, English-speaking Grand Lodges generally ceased to recognize the Grand Orient of France.

In this quarrel, Blavatsky's sympathies were firmly with the French. Her version of the disagreement was that French Masonry viewed the divine as an impersonal "Principe Créateur" or Creative Principle, whereas English Masonry was obsessed with a personal Jehovah or at least had mistaken the creative Logos or Demiurge under the appellation "Great Architect of the Universe" (*CW* 14: 260–1) for the ultimate principle of Reality. The French view was precisely that of Blavatsky herself (*Isis* 2: 377):

It is but recently that a majority of the Supreme Councils of the Ancient and Accepted Rite assembled at Lausanne, justly revolting against such a blasphemous belief as that in a personal Deity, invested with all human attributes, pronounced the following words: "Freemasonry proclaims, as it has proclaimed from its origin, the existence of a *creative principle*, under the name of the great Architect of the universe." Against this, a small minority has protested, urging that "belief in a *creative principle* is not *the belief in God*, which *Freemasonry requires of every candidate* before he can pass its very threshold."

Although HPB regarded a great deal in modern Masonry as degenerate, on the whole she had a friendly feeling for the Craft ("Roots of Ritualism," *CW* 11: 71–2):

Masonry, its paraphernalia and modern innovations (the Biblical Spirit in it especially) notwithstanding, does good both on the moral and physical planes — or did so, hardly ten years ago, at any rate [when the split between French and Anglophone Freemasonry occurred over the question of the treatment of God in the Craft].

If Blavatsky had reservations about the modern Craft, she had none about what she calls "ancient Masonry." She recognizes it as the continuation of the Classical Mysteries and the source of later Christian practice. She goes on to assert that the purpose of the Mysteries and so by implication also of ancient Masonry and of primitive Christianity was to perfect the human soul ("Roots of Ritualism," *CW* 11: 84, 87):

The ritualism of primitive Christianity — as now sufficiently shown — sprang from ancient Masonry. The latter was, in its turn, the offspring of the, then, almost dead Mysteries. . . . the object of the Mysteries was to re-establish the soul in its primordial purity, or *that state of perfection from which it had fallen*.

Because of that shared purpose, Blavatsky found the Classical Mysteries, ancient Masonry, and primitive Christianity, as well as Alexandrian Theosophy, to be all essentially the same thing ("Roots of Ritualism," *CW* 11: 92):

Primitive Christianity — being derived from the primitive Masonry — had its grip, passwords, and degrees of initiation. "Masonry" is an old term but it came into use very late in our era. Paul calls himself a "master-builder" [I Corinth. 3.10] and he was one. The ancient Masons called themselves by various names and most of the Alexandrian Eclectics, the Theosophists of Ammonius Saccas and the later Neo-Platonists, were all virtually Masons.

Even modern Masonry, however, held a special place in Blavatsky's regard, perhaps partly because of the large number of members of the Theosophical Society who were also Freemasons, but also because she recognized its affiliation with the Mysteries (*CW* 14: 279):

Masonic Initiation was modelled on that in the lesser Mysteries. The third degree was one used in both Egypt and India from time immemorial, and the remembrance of it lingers to this day in every Lodge, under the name of the death and resurrection of Hiram Abiff, the "Widow's Son."

Blavatsky distinguishes between both Eastern versus Western Masonry and ancient versus modern Masonry. For her, Eastern and ancient Masonry are the real thing; Western and modern, with some individual exceptions, are degenerate or bogus. Thus, after saying that her direct experience has been limited to Eastern Masonry, she adds (*CW* 1: 308):

But, nevertheless, this neither prevents my knowing, in common with all Eastern "Masons," everything connected with Western Masonry (including the numberless humbugs that have been imposed upon the Craft during the last half century) nor, since the receipt of the diploma from the "Sovereign Grand Master," [John Yarker,] my being entitled to call myself a Mason.

BLAVATSKY'S KNOWLEDGE OF FREEMASONRY

Whatever the origin of HPB's knowledge of Freemasonry — and it was certainly not through any association with Yarker's Adoptive Rite — there can be no doubt of her proficiency in the Craft. For the latter, we have the testimony of her contemporaries and the evidence of her own writings. Alexander Fullerton (37), the second General Secretary of the American Section, in a reminiscence circumspectly describes Blavatsky's familiarity with certain signs, tokens, and words:

H.P.B. had among her many acquisitions that of being a Mason. How a woman could be such one does not know, yet Col. Olcott shows that she possessed the diploma of a high Masonic Degree. One day when a number of persons were present the topic of Masonry came up, and she desired me to stand in the middle of the floor and unite with her in some function. I followed her instructions, volunteering nothing, and she whispered in my ear something to which I made no response. When the function was over I said that I was unable to tell what she had done, for the only Masonry I knew was that which I had received. She had, in fact, given with entire correctness a certain Masonic sign and password. I have always believed that she had experimented on me simply to ascertain whether I could keep a secret.

Fullerton's description strongly implies that Blavatsky had exchanged with him certain points pertaining to the degree of Master Mason.

The internal evidence from HPB's own writings also makes it clear that she had a command of much Masonic symbolism and practice. *Isis Unveiled*, especially volume 2, is full of allusions to King Solomon, King Hiram, and Hiram Abif; the arch with a missing keystone; whispering the master word ("mouth to ear, and the word at low breath"); obligations and penalties (about which she is fairly explicit); raising from the grave "by the strong grip of the lion's paw"; a candidate's symbolic age according to his initiatory degree; the pillars of Wisdom, Strength, and Beauty; the columns of the Temple at Jerusalem called Jachin and Boaz; the double triangles or six-pointed star and the five-pointed star; Masonic grips and signs of recognition and distress; the Ineffable Name or Word "long lost but now found"; widow's sons; the clothing of an entering apprentice, half-naked and slipshod; the lambskin and the cable tow; squares and Mason's marks; Masonic ciphers; buried vaults; and travelers.

Elsewhere she talks about the triple tau of Royal Arch Masonry (*CW* 2: 145); an unsheathed dagger, a skull, and the resurrection of a corpse (*Caves* 305–6); three, five, and seven steps (*SD* 1: 113n); the mallet as a Masonic equivalent of the swastika (*SD* 2: 556); the "gloomy north" (*CW* 11: 78); the "firing" of Masonic toasts (*CW* 11: 79). In view of the extensive and deep knowledge she shows of the Craft, it is hardly surprising that HPB felt impelled to disclaim any failure to keep vows of secrecy: "We are under neither promise, obligation, nor oath, and therefore violate no confidence" (*Isis* 2: 394).

Much of the eighth chapter of volume two of *Isis Unveiled* (2: 348–404) is devoted to a discussion of Freemasonry: its history, symbolism, and relationships to other groups. It is clear from her life, her discussion of the Craft, and her use of Masonic themes that H. P. Blavatsky was broadly and deeply conversant with Freemasonry.

THE SOCIETY AS A MASONIC BODY

The connection between the Theosophical Society and Freemasonry was, however, more than a partially overlapping membership and certain shared interests between Theosophists and some Freemasons. In the early days of the Theosophical Society, the Founders considered making it into or connecting it with an alternative Masonic body. Olcott is quite clear about such a connection (*Old Diary Leaves* 1: 468–9):

On the 17th April [1878] we began to talk with [Charles] Sotheran, General T., and one or two other high Masons about constituting our Society into a Masonic body with a Ritual and Degrees; the idea being that it would form a natural complement to the higher degrees of the craft, restoring to it the vital element of Oriental mysticism which it lacked or had lost. At the same time, such an arrangement would give strength and permanency to the Society, by allying it to the ancient Brotherhood whose lodges are established throughout the whole world. Now that I look back at it, we were in reality but planning to repeat the work of Cagliostro, whose Egyptian Lodge was in his days so powerful a centre for the propagation of Eastern occult thought. We did not abandon the idea until long after removing to Bombay, and the last mention of it in my Diary is an entry to the effect that Swami Dayānand Sarasvati [of the Arya Samaj] had promised me to compile a Ritual for the use of our New York and London members. Some old colleagues have denied the above facts, but, although they knew it not, the plan was seriously entertained by H.P.B. and myself, and we relinquished it only when we found the Society growing rapidly by its own inherent impetus and making it impolitic for us to merge it into the Masonic body.

William Quan Judge also remembered the early days of the Theosophical Society as Masonic-like. In response to a question about the recently formed Esoteric Section, he wrote (*Path* 4: 87–8):

In the first establishment of the T. S. other degrees than that of a mere diplomaed member were recognized, but no one save H. P. Blavatsky has had the authority to confer those degrees. She has now fully announced the first of those [the new ES], although during all these 14

years they have existed and included certain members who were also members of the T. S. . . . In 1875 H. P. Blavatsky directed a certain fellow of the Society to attend to the needs of all the members of the T. S. who were then called "entered apprentices" by her.

On February 7, 1878, HPB had written in Olcott's diary: "Package of Sat B'hai from Yarker" (CW 1: 407) and Boris de Zirkoff suggests that this may have been a copy of the Sat B'hai ritual, which was being considered for use as an admission ceremony for members of the Theosophical Society (CW 1: 435). On May 16, 1879, shortly after Blavatsky, Olcott, and Dayanand first met in person, the Arya Samaj leader wrote to Abner Doubleday in New York promising to send him "the manuscript of three ceremonial degrees based upon Aryan Masonry," but the promise was not kept (Gomes, *Dawning* 230, fn 25).

On the day following the reference to the Sat B'hai in Olcott's diary (February 8, 1878), Blavatsky wrote a cryptic entry concerning Olcott's return to New York: "Mol. [i.e., Moloney = Olcott] *home*, brings *grips* from Boston" (CW 1: 407). It is more likely that *grip* here refers to what *Webster's New World Dictionary* calls "any special manner of clasping hands by which members of a secret or fraternal society identify one another as such" than to a traveling bag or any other sense of the word.

Even before its foundation, the Society seems to have been conceived somewhat ambiguously as either a Masonic-like organization or a more esoteric association. In her notebook, probably early in 1875, HPB wrote: "M.: brings orders to form a Society—a secret Society like the Rosicrucian Lodge. He promises to help" (CW 1: 73). Later that year, however, she entered this in her scrapbook: "Orders received from India direct to establish a philosophico-religious Society and choose a name for it—also to choose Olcott. July 1875" (CW 1: 94). The conceptions of the Society implied in those two notes, "a secret Society" and "a philosophico-religious Society" parallel the Theosophical Society's actual later development into esoteric and exoteric sections.

THEOSOPHY AND FREEMASONRY: SHARED MEMES

Blavatsky's knowledge and use of Freemasonry are further attested by the fact that Theosophy and Freemasonry share certain concepts, symbols, themes, ideas, modes of behavior, attitudes, and so on. A recent, useful term for such shared cultural features is *meme* (pronounced to rhyme with *seem*), invented by biologist Richard Dawkins (the history and use of the term having been documented by John and Adele Algeo). A meme is "a unit of cultural information that spreads from mind to mind . . . the cultural analog of a gene." Memes range from great, comprehensive principles (evolution, relativity, and democracy) to trivial particulars (catchphrases such as Mandy Rice-Davies's retort, "Well, he would, wouldn't he?" or McDonald's golden arches).

The memes that Theosophy and Freemasonry share are numerous and significant, great and trivial. Many of them are not limited to these two movements but are the common inheritance of the Western Mystery Tradition or even all Mystery Traditions. However, the prominence of Freemasonry within the Western Mystery Tradition and the extensive attention Blavatsky pays to it warrant a consideration of their shared memes.

The following discussion makes no effort at being exhaustive, but is merely suggestive and typical. Moreover, no extensive effort is made here to document the expression of these memes within either Blavatsky's writings or Freemasonic use. However, those familiar with either will recognize the presence of the memes in them.

THE MEME OF "ANCIENT CYCLES"

The Secret Doctrine's Second Fundamental Proposition is that all history — whether human, planetary, or cosmic — is cyclical, extending backward into the mists of antiquity and forward to an inexhaustible future. Large and, for most readers, dense sections of *The Secret Doctrine* are devoted to the chronology of those cycles, involving inconceivably vast stretches of time. Blavatsky was especially scornful of Archbishop James Ussher's chronol-

ogy, which had the world created in 4004 BC, preferring the Hindu kalpas, yugas, and manvantaras, or at least the Greek eons. Her sacred chronology stretches even beyond much present-day speculation about the age of the universe.

Similarly, Freemasonry distinguishes between secular chronology as the E.V. or "era vulgaris" and the sacred A.L. or "anno lucis" (in the year of light). Somewhat ironically, the Masonic sacred chronology is arrived at by adding an Ussherian 4000 to the present date to arrive at the "year of light" (or of creation), thus the vulgar era year 1996 is the Masonic year of light 5996. However, the Masonic chronology is symbolic, not literal. It is a statement of the difference between sacred and secular time, not a mathematical equation for it. The conceptual difference is the same as that Blavatsky made and has the advantage of being a good deal easier to manipulate.

Closer to HPB's symbolic statement is that of John Yarker's Ancient and Primitive Rite, which gives the Masonic "year of true light" as an invariable 000,000,000, thus suggesting both a great stretch of time and incalculability. That is the sacred year on Blavatsky's Masonic diploma from Yarker. She makes a comment on the symbolism which might be taken to heart by those who try to unravel her own explications of the yugas (*SD* 2: 696):

No wonder if Pengelly confesses that "it is at present, and *perhaps always will be*, IMPOSSIBLE to reduce, even approximately, geological time into years, *or even into millenniums*." A wise word of advice from the Occultists to the gentlemen geologists: they ought to imitate the cautious example of Masons. As chronology, they say, cannot measure the era of creation, therefore, their "Ancient and Primitive Rite" uses 000,000,000 as the nearest approach to reality.

THE MEME OF "THE ARCHITECTS AND THE BUILDERS"

One of Blavatsky's major concerns, one might almost say obsessions, was a rejection of the concept of a personal God, the creator of the Universe. For her the Ground of Being is an

impersonal Parabrahm or Absolute, with no personal aspects, which does not create or fill an active role in the world process.

The active agents in cosmogenesis are the Dhyan Chohans, called by many other terms, including "builders." They build a cosmos according to plans contained in the divine mind, which is the thought of the Logos expressed in Mulaprakriti or Root Matter. The "creative principle" is not a personal god but works through a hierarchy of agents. That hierarchy includes the Logos, a kind of architect; Mulaprakriti, the substance principle from which the cosmos is made; and the hosts of builders, conscious and semiconscious forces in nature.

The three principal figures in a Craft Lodge are the representatives of King Solomon, the architect of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem; Hiram, King of Tyre, who supplies the materials from which the Temple is built; and Hiram Abif, the Master Builder, with his hosts of workmen. The parallelism between these three figures (Solomon, Hiram of Tyre, and Hiram Abif) and Blavatsky's Logos, Mulaprakriti, and Dhyan Chohans is striking. Even the terms used for them, architects and builders, attest that they are expressing a common meme.

THE MEMES OF "BROTHERHOOD" AND "FELLOW"

The First Object of the Theosophical Society has long been the formation of a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of humanity. The adept founders of the Society also made clear to A. P. Sinnett in their correspondence with him that their purpose in sponsoring the Society was that of creating a practical brotherhood. The concept of brotherhood is therefore central to the Society's origin, purpose, and existence. A related meme is the early use of the term "Fellow" for a member of the Society. For example, in *The Key to Theosophy* and elsewhere, a member is identified as "F.T.S.," that is, "Fellow of the Theosophical Society."

Freemasonry also places brotherhood, brotherly love, or fraternity at its core. The expression "The Brotherhood" is

sometimes used as a synonym for Masonry. As a widely used Masonic guidebook (Jones 282–3) observes:

Freemasons, in calling each other Brother, are following old guild and old operative practice, as well, of course, as basing themselves upon Biblical custom. . . . The Old MS. Charges of the English operative masons contain the injunction, “you shall call masons your Brother, or else your fellows, and no other foul names.” . . .

‘Brother’ is a common word in the language of the Bible, and, of the many classes of men there so called, the freemason is chiefly interested in those who have a community of nature, who are equals, and who have a natural affinity for one another. Freemasons are Brothers one of the other, inasmuch as they come into one or more of those categories, have all passed through the same ordeal of Initiation, have been made brothers of Hiram Abif, have been given particular modes of recognition, and have been taught the same philosophy.

THE MEME OF “CRYPTIC LANGUAGE”

Prominent in Blavatsky’s writings are references to a secret, sacerdotal language called Senzar. She says it was the original language of humanity and of the Stanzas of Dzyan, on which *The Secret Doctrine* is based. However, taking into consideration everything HPB says about Senzar, it becomes clear that it cannot be a normal form of human speech like English or Sanskrit or Swahili. It appears rather to be the system of archetypal symbols that are expressed in many ways: glyphs and emblems, allegorical stories, hieroglyphic wall paintings, geometrical figures, and so on (Algeo, *Senzar*).

Blavatsky in several places speaks of Senzar as a cipher or as cipher-like, for example:

Coulomb stole a “queer looking paper” and gave it to the missionaries with the assurance this was a cipher used by the Russian spies(!!) They took it to the Police Commission, had the best experts examine it, sent it to Calcutta[,] for five months moved heaven and earth to find out what the cipher meant and—now gave it up in despair. “It is one of your flapdoodles” says Hume. “It is one of my *Senzar MSS*,” I answer. I am perfectly confident of it, for one of the sheets of my book with

numbered pages is missing. [*Letters of H. P. Blavatsky to A. P. Sinnett* 76]

Not one of our Scientists is yet familiar [with], or even knows of the early hieroglyphic cypher, still preserved in some Fraternities, and named in Occultism the *Senzar*. [*SD* 2: 439]

Masonic ciphers were developed to serve several purposes. Quite practically, Brothers of the Craft need to know the ritual words and actions that are forbidden to be published or written in any way that noninitiates can read. Human memory being fallible, however, there was need for a cryptic way of recording the ritual. Consequently several devices were evolved for the purpose. At the simplest, initials were used, for example, T.G.A.O.T.U., which HPB cites and explains as "The Great Architect of the Universe." In addition, however, some simple ciphers were developed. HPB illustrates one of these in *Isis Unveiled* (2: 348) and explains it and others (2: 395–8).

Ciphers became a major meme in an alternative, quasi-Masonic body, the Order of the Golden Dawn, whose rituals and teachings were based upon a cipher manuscript of mysterious origin (Küntz). The Golden Dawn had an overlapping membership with the Theosophical Society and was an attempt to provide some "practical" esoteric work or spiritual discipline lacking in the Society until the foundation of the Esoteric School.

In addition to their practical use for recording ritual matters, Masonic ciphers are also a vehicle for expressing the meme of Secrecy, which holds a major role in Masonic practice.

THE MEME OF "DEGREES"

Although the meme of Degrees is not prominent in the history of the Theosophical Society, it has existed. A circular of May 3, 1878, says of the Society's organization: "Its Fellowship is divided into three Sections and each Section into three Degrees" (Ransom 546).

The Sections referred to in that circular are not the later geographical divisions into national societies, but hierarchical

ones instead. The first or innermost Section consists of the Masters. The third or outermost Section is of all members of the Society. The second or middle Section consists of members who have pledged service to the Masters through the Society. In the early days it consisted of chelas of the Masters, such as H. S. Olcott and W. Q. Judge, and of personal students of Blavatsky's. Later the middle Section was reformulated as the Esoteric Section of the Theosophical Society, and still later it was replaced by the autonomous Esoteric School of Theosophy.

The degrees within the Sections were never as prominent as the Sections, which were, however, in effect themselves degrees. The double structure of degrees within sections parallels one common in certain alternative Masonic rites, including those John Yarker was involved with.

Degrees are fundamental to Freemasonry. Craft or Blue Lodge Masonry consists of the three degrees of Entered Apprentice, Fellowcraft, and Master Mason. The Additional or Higher bodies include a large number of other degrees: thirty further degrees in Scottish Rite Masonry and more than ninety in some of the alternative rites.

Many of the additional degrees of Masonry are seldom or never actually worked, but the three Craft degrees are fundamental. All "higher" degrees require them, and they alone are sufficient to make a person a Freemason, the other degrees being merely add-ons. It is noteworthy and probably not accidental that the early division of the Society's Sections was also into three degrees.

THE MEME OF "HIDDEN ADEPTS"

For good or for ill, H. P. Blavatsky is responsible for the notoriety of Masters, "Ascended" or otherwise, in modern esoteric and New Age consciousness. Her Masters, however, were real flesh and blood human beings with distinct personalities, quite different from those plaster or plastic figures that popular treatments have substituted. Although realistically human, they also differ from the gurus typical of India in that they are not

accessible to would-be disciples in an ashram. They are thus in some sense "hidden."

"Official" Masonry lacks this meme, but it was an important feature in the Rite of Strict Observance (as "Unknown Superiors") and in a number of other alternative or quasi-Masonic bodies (as "Secret Chiefs"), notably in the Order of the Golden Dawn, which had an overlapping membership with the Theosophical Society (Howe).

THE MEME OF "HIERARCHY"

The organization of the Theosophical Society has historically been a combination of a political democracy and a spiritual hierarchy. Its chief officers, from Henry Olcott on, have been elected, although Olcott was "President for Life" and every international President of the Society except Jinarajadasa has died in office. Nevertheless, there is an election procedure even for the international President, as well as other officials. On the other hand, there has also often been a spiritual hierarchy recognized. Blavatsky was clearly at the head of that hierarchy during her lifetime, although her elected position in the Society, while she held it, was of considerably humbler stature. After Olcott and Blavatsky, Annie Besant combined the political and spiritual domains, being both democratically elected and generally recognized as a spiritual hierarch.

In addition to its own organization, the Society points to the hierarchy of the Adepts. That hierarchy is apparent from early references, such as KH's allusion to the Mahachohan as his "boss." In later generations and in spin-off movements, the concept of hierarchy became stronger and more specific.

Masonically, the meme of Hierarchy is a very strong one. Hierarchical structure is the norm within a Masonic Lodge, with a clear line of authority and the Worshipful Master at the top. It is also characteristic of the whole Order, with Lodges or other bodies subordinate to a Grand Lodge or a Supreme Council, or the like, ruled by a Grand Master, Grand Commander, or similar official.

THE MEME OF "INEFFABILITY AND SUBSTITUTE SECRETS"

The First Fundamental Proposition of *The Secret Doctrine* is that ultimate reality is ineffable "since it transcends the power of human conception and could only be dwarfed by any human thought . . . unthinkable and unspeakable." Consequently, any effort to comprehend or articulate the ultimate nature of things is a dealing in analogies, metaphors, or substitutes. This meme is made quite explicit in the Bowen Notes, in which Commander Robert Bowen [¶ 23] reports HPB as saying that study of *The Secret Doctrine* and the Western Path are a form of Jñāna Yoga:

This mode of thinking (she says) is what the Indians call Jnana Yoga. As one progresses in Jnana Yoga one finds conceptions arising which though one is conscious of them, one cannot express nor yet formulate into any sort of mental picture. As time goes on these conceptions will form into mental pictures. This is a time to be on guard and refuse to be deluded with the idea that the new found and wonderful picture must represent reality. It does not. As one works on one finds the once admired picture growing dull and unsatisfying, and finally fading out or being thrown away. This is another danger point, because for the moment one is left in a void without any conception to support one, and one may be tempted to revive the cast-off picture for want of a better to cling to. The true student will, however, work on unconcerned, and presently further formless gleams come, which again in time give rise to a larger and more beautiful picture than the last. But the learner will now know that no picture will ever represent the TRUTH. This last splendid picture will grow dull and fade like the others. And so the process goes on, until at last the mind and its pictures are transcended and the learner enters and dwells in the World of NO FORM, but of which all forms are narrowed reflections.

In Freemasonry, ultimate reality is symbolized by the Lost Word or Ineffable Name. In this, Masonry follows the Jewish tradition in which the name of God is unpronounceable. That divine name, the Tetragrammaton, consists of four consonants, YHWH. Hebrew was originally and is still ordinarily written with consonants only, the vowels being inferred. A system of diacritics, dots and lines written above and below the consonant letters, was invented by Jewish scribes, the Masoretes, after the

destruction of the Second Temple, for use in preserving the pronunciation of the Torah when there was fear that it might be forgotten during the diaspora.

However, the divine name had always been considered too holy for ordinary use, so its pronunciation was restricted to the High Priest, who articulated it only in the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement, and presumably passed it on to his successor. After the destruction of the Temple and the loss of succession to the priesthood, the pronunciation of "YHVH" was lost. That historical accident became a mystical symbol of the ineffability of the divine.

Jewish mysticism conducted a continuing search for the pronunciation of the divine name through gematria and notarikon, kabbalistic techniques of explication by cryptographic substitutions and permutations. And in Freemasonry, several of the degrees are concerned with a quest to find the Lost Word or Ineffable Name. Several of the higher or additional degrees are a repeated process of searching for that which was lost. Viewed from the outside, they may seem to be a childish repetition of promises of secrets, which are never redeemed. But symbolically they are a statement of exactly that repeated and repeatedly frustrated search for the perfect picture or understanding of the nature of things which ends only when "at last the mind and its pictures are transcended and the learner enters and dwells in the World of NO FORM, but of which all forms are narrowed reflections." All the pictures of the mind are but substitute secrets for the genuine secret, which is ineffable.

THE MEME OF "INITIAL NAMES"

Initial abbreviations began to be used quite early to identify figures within the Theosophical movement. Kuthumi and Morya are regularly "KH" and "M." Blavatsky and Olcott are often "HPB" and "HSO," and Blavatsky herself playfully distinguishes between her higher nature as "HPB" and her lower nature as "H. P. Blavatsky," as in the well-known inscription she wrote in her

copy of *The Voice of the Silence*: "H.P.B. to H. P. Blavatsky with no kind regards." Later Besant, Leadbeater, and Jinarajadasa were "AB," "CWL," and "CJ."

The Masonic use of initials for cryptographic purposes has already been alluded to. But in addition, Freemasons often use initials, not to hide, but as an efficient shorthand, much like the Theosophical use just instanced. Thus the names of officers are frequently reduced to initials: the Worshipful Senior Warden is "WSW" and the Director of Ceremonies is "DC."

THE MEME OF "INITIATION"

Early Theosophical practice had initiations with modest initiation fees and signs and passwords. Writing from India to Adelberth de Bourbon in the Netherlands in 1881, HPB was concerned that a new member should be properly received (*H.P.B. Speaks* 2: 5-6):

Now to Initiation. It is far better that Mr. van Stolk should go to England than to France for it. In France we have about 28 or 30 Theosophists but I do not believe that they have yet formed into a Branch. Leymarie was several times *initiated* et malgré cela [and in spite of that] Mr. Sinnett tells me when he came to Paris last May, Leymarie confused signs and pass-words and made a mess of it.

Such initiation early fell by the wayside, but a simpler form of initiation was long practiced and is still used by some Lodges under that term or alternatives such as "Welcoming Ceremony" or "Induction."

In addition, the meme of Initiation is closely associated with that of the Adept Hierarchy, and various initiations numbered from first to fifth (and somewhat beyond) are named and described in later Theosophical literature.

In Freemasonry, initiation is a major activity of Masonic meetings. Each degree of Masonry has its initiation ceremony, which brings the candidate into that degree and communicates the appropriate degree secrets.

THE MEME OF THE “LODGE”

The term *Lodge* has two applications in Theosophy. On the one hand, it has competed from quite early days with *branch* as a term for a local Theosophical group. On the other hand, it refers to an organization of adepts, being a synonymous expression for *The Brothers*.

In Freemasonry, *lodge* is the normal term for a local group, deriving from its earlier use for the stonemasons' workshop or meeting place. The Theosophical use was almost certainly derived from the Masonic precedent, although most contemporary Theosophists who use the term probably do not do so with any consciousness of its Masonic origin. It has become simply a normal term for a local Theosophical organization.

THE MEME OF “LOST LORE”

A recurrent meme in Blavatsky's writings is that humanity had at one time a common knowledge expressed in a common language, derived from teachers who have already passed through our stage of evolution and imparted the lore to early humanity for the benefit of the species. This knowledge, however, has been lost because of the unworthiness of human beings or the dangerous power it affords. A few adepts still possess the secret wisdom or *gupta vidya*, and under appropriate conditions it can be learned from them by those who prepare themselves to learn it.

The central myth of Masonry concerns the loss of certain secrets as a result of the death, at the hands of unworthy workmen, of the principal builder of the Holy Temple. All of Freemasonry is an effort to further the search for that lost wisdom and thus regain the genuine secrets of the Craft.

THE MEME OF “PLEDGES”

Latter day Theosophy has no pledges. The closest thing to a pledge is a statement by applicants for membership that they are

in sympathy with the Society's Objects. In earlier days, however, when entry into the Society involved a form of initiation, there may well have been also a pledge for the general membership.

Certainly the various special students that HPB undertook to guide, whether they were the "Inner Group" or the members of the Esoteric Section or others, subscribed to a pledge. An "Inner Circle" or "Inner Group" of the London Lodge was formed about 1884, pledged to "implicit confidence in the Mahatmas" (Jinarajadasa, letter 5). ES members took a pledge to their Higher Selves, which, as published in *Lucifer* by Archibald Keightley, was as follows (CW 12: 506):

1. I pledge myself to endeavour to make Theosophy a living factor in my life.
2. I pledge myself to support, before the world, the Theosophical movement, its leaders and its members.
3. I pledge myself never to listen without protest to any evil thing spoken of a Brother Theosophist and to abstain from condemning others.
4. I pledge myself to maintain a constant struggle against my lower nature, and to be charitable to the weaknesses of others.
5. I pledge myself to do all in my power, by study or otherwise, to fit myself to help and teach others.
6. I pledge myself to give what support I can to the movement in time, money, and work.

So Help Me, My Higher Self.

Similarly, the twelve members of HPB's Inner Group, part of whose purpose was to carry on her work after her death, took special pledges (Spierenburg 3, 27). Thus the pledge, although not an integral part of the Society's general activities, had a significant place in its inner life.

Pledges are, of course, a central feature of Freemasonry. They are taken on entering the Order, advancing to each new degree, and assuming any new office. The Masonic pledge is a punctuation mark demarking each transition of the Freemason within the Craft.

THE MEME OF “RELIGIOUS BUT NOT A RELIGION”

An often reiterated position is that the Theosophical Society is not a religion, although it is concerned with matters that are religious, as in the opening question-answer exchange of *The Key to Theosophy*:

Theosophy and its doctrines are often referred to as a newfangled religion. Is it a religion?

It is not. Theosophy is Divine Knowledge or Science.

Similarly, Freemasonry, although often charged (especially by the radical Fundamentalists) with being a religion, is clearly nothing of the sort, although it is concerned with religious and moral values. Also like Theosophy, Freemasonry often refers to itself as a “science,” that is, a form of knowledge or, perhaps more accurately, a way of knowing.

THE MEME OF “SECRECY”

Secrecy is a major meme in Blavatsky's Theosophy. Her magnum opus is *The Secret Doctrine*, which is an expression of the “Secret Science” (Gupta Vidya). Her writings contain “blinds,” which are intended to preserve certain secrets. The Stanzas of Dzyan were written in a secret, sacerdotal language. And so on. Present-day Theosophists sometimes forget what an important element secrecy was for Blavatsky. Moreover, for a time the Society itself was a secret body. A circular dated May 3, 1878, says, “At first The Society was an open body, but later it was reorganized on the principle of secrecy, experience having demonstrated the advisability of such a change” (Ransom 546).

Freemasonry is likewise an organization with secrets. The pledges that its members take are especially concerned with preserving the secrets of the Craft. Modes of recognition — signs, tokens, words — are secrets. And so on.

In both Theosophy and Freemasonry, the meme of Secrecy may seem curiously irrelevant and pointless. In fact, in neither group is there much, if anything, that can be called “secret” by

ordinary standards. A book like *The Secret Doctrine* published and sold as widely as possible hardly qualifies as a secret. The Masonic secrets have repeatedly been published and are available in any well-stocked library.

In both Theosophy and Masonry, however, the meme of Secrecy is a symbol or, in Christian terms, a sacramental reality. Both Theosophy and Freemasonry are concerned with the gnostic experience of an ineffable Reality. The real or genuine secrets are matters that cannot be communicated discursively or cognitively. They can be talked about, but they themselves cannot be stated.

The so-called secrets of both Theosophy and Masonry are symbolic substitutes representing a genuine reality that must remain secret because it is beyond words. For that reason, the meme of Secrecy is close to the inner heart of both Theosophical and Masonic experience.

THE MEME OF "SOLOMON'S SEAL"

The interlaced equilateral triangles, also known as Solomon's Seal, were early adopted by Blavatsky for symbolic purposes and appear prominently in the seal of the Society, enclosing an Egyptian ankh or crux ansata in its middle. The upward pointing triangle is often taken as representing spirit, and the downward pointing one, matter. Their interlacing represents the inextricable connection between spirit and matter in the world. Other symbolic meanings include the higher and lower principles, and similar interpretations. In the Theosophical seal, the enclosed ankh may represent life, the product of the interaction of spirit and matter.

Freemasonry makes prominent use of two star patterns. A five-pointed star is often seen in the East of the Lodge, recalling the Bethlehem star and the journey of the Magi. A six-pointed star, often with the letter "G" (or sometimes the Hebrew letter "yod") in its middle, may be hung in the center of the Lodge room to represent the centrality of the divine life. The Solomonic associations of the six-pointed star are especially appropriate for Freemasonry, since King Solomon is one of the central figures in

the Masonic drama, and interlaced triangles were widely used in the Middle Ages as a mason's mark, which was the means by which a stonemason identified his work (Jones 518).

THE MEME OF THE "TRIANGULAR DOTS"

In early correspondence from various of the Theosophical adepts, the initials of their names are sometimes followed by a pattern of dots, frequently triangular: ∴, as a kind of punctuation mark. Blavatsky often used it in the abbreviations for names of the adepts, for example, M.: for Morya (*CW* 1: 73 and many other places) and I.: for Ilarion or Hilarion (*CW* 1: 407). It was likewise used, doubtless as a joke between Blavatsky and Olcott, in a designation for the latter: "M.: Jun." (*CW* 1: 407).

The triangular pattern (sometimes of stars rather than dots) is also sometimes used in early ES documents, such as the appointment of W. Q. Judge as Blavatsky's representative in America (*CW* 12: 483), where it serves to mark the end of sections. Archibald Keightley used it after HPB's initials (*CW* 12: 484), and HPB also used it sometimes after her own initials (*CW* 12: 538, 570, 641, 643, 713). The triangular dots turn up in a variety of other places, including some of HPB's letters. Their use is puzzling to most Theosophists, for whom the device has no meaning.

The triangular dots, however, are a frequent feature of abbreviations in some branches of Freemasonry. One widely used commentary on Masonic practice (Jones 522) says of them:

In old masonic writings a triangle formed of three points or dots is sometimes used to indicate 'degree' — thus E.A.∴, M.M.∴. In French writings since about 1774 the triangle of dots may mean 'lodge' — thus 'de la L.:,' 'of the Lodge.'

The triangular dots as a mark of abbreviation are more frequent in French and French-influenced use than in "official" Anglophone Freemasonry. However, they are limited to neither old or French writings, nor to abbreviations of degrees or the word *Lodge*. They are also widely used with titles, such as Bro.∴

for "Brother," and with offices, such as R.:W.:M.: for "Right Worshipful Master." This last use is close to the early Theosophical use with names, especially as, within a Lodge, persons are addressed by the title of their office rather than their name.

The triangular dots are basically an honorific mark of abbreviation, that is, they are generally used in place of a period after an abbreviation of a term that might also be capitalized honorifically, specifically Craft degrees and titles, place name generics, chronological eras, and certain set expressions. Sometimes, especially for higher-degree titles, a double triangle is used, consisting of five dots, three at the base and two superior ones positioned above the spaces between the three lower dots.

The triangle is one of the most basic and pervasive symbols of Freemasonry. But apart from the general symbolic meaning of the triangle, the three dots have no more specific meaning for most Freemasons than they do for Theosophists. One authority who was both a Freemason and a Theosophist says that the origin of the dots was "first to disguise the meaning of any document that might inadvertently fall into the hands of a [non-Mason], and secondly, to keep up the atmosphere of secrecy, and serve as a continual reminder thereof, among the Brethren themselves" (Wedgwood 88).

THE MEME OF "WISDOM FROM THE EAST"

For Blavatsky the East is the source of all true spiritual wisdom. She sees the West as materialistic in science, in orthodox religion, in misdirected and misinterpreted spiritualism, and in values generally. There are spiritual currents in the West, but they have to flow uphill. The East is the natural home of true wisdom, enlightenment, and spiritual power.

Freemasons are in search of a wisdom that has been lost in the West. In Masonic symbolism, the West represents death and loss; the East, birth and life. The Masonic Lodge is oriented, that is, one enters it from the West and advances through it toward the East, which is the origin of Light. Masonic oaths are taken, as HPB points out (*CW* 11: 82) facing the East. Hermann Hesse's

Masonic novel *Morgenlandfahrt*, usually rendered in English as *Journey to the East*, captures well the Masonic meme of the East as the source of Wisdom and thus the goal of life's journey.

CONCLUSION

H. P. Blavatsky's attention to Freemasonry is not surprising. As observed at the beginning of this paper, it is in one sense the major expression of the Western Mystery Tradition and so could hardly have been ignored by her. A major concern of Blavatsky's was to show the universality of the Secret Doctrine tradition, under a variety of names and forms. The existence of Freemasonry, especially in its more esoterically inclined forms, was a significant confirmation of her thesis. But Theosophy and Freemasonry are also signally compatible and complementary.

A remarkably large number of prominent early members of the Society were Freemasons, generally associated with "official" Grand Lodges of the segregated masculine Order but with strong inclinations toward the esoteric. Henry Olcott, HPB's Theosophical twin, was such a one. He served in 1861 as Senior Warden of the Huguenot Lodge, No. 448 of the Grand Lodge of New York, and had been admitted in 1860 as a Companion of the Royal Arch, Corinthian Chapter, No. 159 also in New York ("H. S. Olcott as a Freemason").

After the international Order of Co-Freemasonry (Maçonnerie Mixte) was popularized among Theosophists by Annie Besant, Masonically inclined Theosophists generally, although not exclusively, gravitated to it. Notably, every international President of the Theosophical Society has been a Freemason, and all since Henry Steel Olcott, Co-Freemasons.

The overlapping interests of these two expressions of the Western Mystery Tradition attests to their compatibility, which can be seen in the shared memes discussed briefly above. That compatibility was discovered early and has persisted. For example, in the 1920s Roy Mitchell, one of the leading

Theosophists of Canada, published a series of remarkably insightful interpretations of Masonic practice from a Theosophical perspective, which were compiled into a book after his death. The English Theosophist T. H. Redfern also wrote *Theosophy, Freemasonry and Christianity*, analyzing fundamentalist Christian attacks of 1926 and 1951, which charged that "Freemasonry is simply Theosophy" and "has a remarkable affinity to Gnosticism." Redfern concluded:

The term "Theosophical Masonry" is more truly applied to those students, whether belonging to the masculine, mixed or feminine Craft, who pursue and endeavour to apply in their lives, the profound, vivifying and illuminating Gnostic truths towards which certain Masonic signposts point. [15]

The complementarity of Theosophy and Freemasonry is a factor of their respective focuses. Theosophy is, and has always been, primarily an intellectual activity. Typical Theosophical activities are lectures, classes, and study groups. That orientation goes back to Blavatsky herself, who said, in a passage from the Bowen Notes quoted above, that Theosophy is a form of jñana yoga, the yoga of knowledge, which uses the activity of the mind to transcend the limitations of the mind.

A frequent complaint is that Theosophy is more theory than practice. Theosophists who want something more by way of a spiritual practice or regimen have had to seek it elsewhere. A motive for founding the Esoteric School was to provide such a regimen, but being squarely in the Theosophical tradition, the ES has been largely jñana oriented, as can be seen from its early Esoteric Instructions now published in volume 12 of Blavatsky's *Collected Writings*.

Freemasonry, however, according to its own traditional definition, is "a peculiar [that is, particular] system of morality [that is, custom of behavior, way of life, or practice] veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols." That is, Freemasonry is a symbolic practice, not a body of teachings or a set of intellectual concepts. In this way, it is squarely within the tradition of the

ancient Mysteries, which Aristotle said were not concerned with knowing, but with experiencing and with being transformed by that experience.

Theosophy is all content; Freemasonry is all form. In Indic terms, Theosophy is a *darśana* and Freemasonry is a *sādhana*. Or in other words, Theosophy is a theory in search of a practice, and Freemasonry is a practice in search of a theory. They are complementary.

Because Theosophy and Freemasonry are not only complementary, but also compatible, they mesh well for those whose preferences incline toward both the Theosophical type of theory and the Freemasonic type of practice. Blavatsky herself recognize their harmony. One of the early rules of her Esoteric Section was the following (CW 12: 496-7):

18. No member of this Section shall belong to any other body, association, or organization for the purpose of mystic study or occult training, except Masonry and the Odd Fellows, if they so desire. But they must be as careful to guard the secrecy of this Section from Masons as they are to preserve the secrets of Masonry from Theosophists. The reason for this rule is so self-evident as to need no explanation.

The reason for a prohibition against membership in several organizations devoted to "mystic study or occult training" is the potential ill effect of mixing different methods of preparation. The exception of Masonry (and the quasi-Masonic Odd Fellows) is presumably because of the harmony between them and Theosophy, especially in the matter of "mystical study."

There appears to have been also, at least for a time, an exception for membership in the Order of the Golden Dawn, which might be regarded as a Masonic or at least quasi-Masonic body. However, the relationship between the Golden Dawn and more applied Theosophical para-organizations, such as the Esoteric School and Blavatsky's Inner Group, were frequently strained (Gilbert). Freemasonry does not provide a set curriculum of "occult training," and therefore is not incompatible with groups that do.

There are, of course, good Theosophists and good Freemasons who do not have an inclination in the direction of the other tradition, or who do not feel a need to balance esoteric theory and spiritual practice, at least in a way offered by the other tradition. The matter considered here is not one of moral imperative, but rather an explanation of why Blavatsky accorded a special place to Freemasonry among expressions of the Western Mystery Tradition and why some later Theosophists have followed the lead of her interest in the Craft.

Returning to the questions raised at the beginning of this study: First, it is clear that Blavatsky knew a great deal about modern Western Freemasonry. But it is also clear that her knowledge was derived from books, from her association with Freemasons, and possibly from other sources, rather than from initiation into Western Masonic bodies.

Second, she regarded modern Western Freemasonry, in its typical expressions, as degenerate. However, she also believed it to be derived from and originally an integral part of the Western Mystery Tradition.

Third, references to Freemasonry in her writings are many. She used Masonic symbols and themes (or memes, in current terminology) as part of her demonstration that the Wisdom Religion of Antiquity is still alive. In considering her use of such memes, however, we must recognize that many of them are common to the whole Western or indeed the universal Mystery Tradition.

Finally, Blavatsky was drawn to Freemasonry for several reasons. Many of her colleagues were Freemasons. But also the Craft fits well into her vision of a primeval tradition that manifests in many forms but is recognizably the same in all of them. Some later Theosophists have in part followed her lead, but they have adopted Freemasonry also because it complements the conscious techniques of Theosophy as a form of *jñāna yoga* by offering a structured form of ritual action appealing directly to the nondiscursive unconscious.

REFERENCES

- Algeo, John. *Senzar: The Mystery of the Mystery Language*. London: Theosophical History Centre, 1988.
- , and Algeo, Adele. "Among the New Words." *American Speech* 71.2 (Summer 1996): in press.
- Beechey, Katherine A. "Some Books That Interested Madame Blavatsky." *Theosophical Journal* 5.3 (May-June 1964): 7–10.
- Blavatsky, Helena Petrovna. "The Author of *Isis Unveiled* Defends the Validity of Her Masonic Patent." In *H. P. Blavatsky: Collected Writings* 1: 307–12. 3d ed. Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 1988.
- . "Cross and Fire." 1879. In *H. P. Blavatsky: Collected Writings* 2: 143–9. Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, n.d.
- . *From the Caves and Jungles of Hindostan*. Trans. Boris de Zirkoff. Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 1975.
- . *H. P. Blavatsky: Collected Writings*. 15 vols. Ed. Boris de Zirkoff. Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, various dates.
- . *Isis Unveiled: A Master-Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology*. 2 vols. 1877. Ed. Boris de Zirkoff. Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 1994.
- . "Letter of H.P.B. to Adelberth de Bourbon, the Hague, Holland." In *H.P.B. Speaks*, vol. 2, ed. C. Jinarajadasa (Adyar, Madras: Theosophical Publishing House, 1952), 1–9.
- . Letter to Alexander N. Aksakov, October 1877. Trans. Boris de Zirkoff, to appear in the *Collected Letters of H. P. Blavatsky*, ed. John Cooper. Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, forthcoming.
- . Letter to Nadyezhda Andreyevna Fadeyeva, October 28–29, 1877. Trans. Boris de Zirkoff, to appear in the *Collected Letters of H. P. Blavatsky*, ed. John Cooper. Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, forthcoming.

- . Letter to Russian relatives, early 1878. Trans. Boris de Zirkoff, to appear in the *Collected Letters of H. P. Blavatsky*, ed. John Cooper. Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, forthcoming.
- . *The Letters of H. P. Blavatsky to A. P. Sinnett and Other Miscellaneous Letters*. Ed. A. T. Barker. Pasadena, CA: Theosophical University Press, 1973.
- . "The Roots of Ritualism in Church and Masonry." In *H. P. Blavatsky: Collected Writings* 11: 62–101. Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 1973.
- . *The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion and Philosophy*. 1888. 2 vols. + index vol. Ed. Boris de Zirkoff. Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 1993.
- Bowen, Robert. "The Bowen Notes: The *Secret Doctrine* and Its Study." In *Getting Acquainted with "The Secret Doctrine": A Study Course*, 2nd ed., by John Algeo, 58–62. Wheaton, IL: Olcott Institute, Theosophical Society in America, 1995.
- Carlson, Maria. *"No Religion Higher Than Truth": A History of the Theosophical Movement in Russia, 1875–1922*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993.
- de Zirkoff, Boris. "Sotheran, Charles." In *H. P. Blavatsky: Collected Writings* 1: 526–8. 3d ed. Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 1988.
- Fullerton, Alexander. "Reminiscences of the Early Days of American Section T. S." *Theosophic Messenger*. 10.2 (November 1908): 33–42.
- Galtier, Gérard. *Maçonnerie Égyptienne, Rose-Croix, et Néo-Chevalerie: Les Fils de Cagliostro*. Paris: Editions du Rocher, 1989.
- Gilbert, R. A. *The Golden Dawn and the Esoteric Section*. London: Theosophical History Centre, 1987.
- Godwin, Joscelyn. *The Theosophical Enlightenment*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994.
- Gomes, Michael. *A Catalogue of Books Belonging to H. P. Blavatsky in the Archives of the Theosophical Society at Adyar*,

- Madras, India. Wisdom Tradition Books 2. Wheaton, IL: Olcott Institute, Theosophical Society in America, forthcoming.
- . *The Dawning of the Theosophical Movement*. Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 1987.
- "H. S. Olcott as a Freemason." *The Theosophist* 53, part 2 (August 1932): 478.
- Howe, Ellic. "Fringe Masonry in England, 1870–85." *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum* 85 (1972): 242–95.
- Jinarajadasa, C., ed. *Letters from the Masters of the Wisdom*. First Series. 6th ed. Adyar, Madras: Theosophical Publishing House, 1988.
- Johnson, Paul. *The Masters Revealed: Madame Blavatsky and the Myth of the Great White Lodge*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994.
- Jones, Bernard E. *Freemason's Guide and Compendium*. Rev. ed. Orpington, Kent: Dobby, 1994.
- Judge, William Quan. "Answers to Questioners." *Path* 4 (1889): 87–8.
- Küntz, Darcy, ed. *The Complete Golden Dawn Cipher Manuscript*. Edmonds, WA: Holmes, 1996.
- Leighton, Lauren G. *The Esoteric Tradition in Russian Romantic Literature: Decembrism and Freemasonry*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994.
- Mackey, Albert G. *An Encyclopædia of Freemasonry and Its Kindred Sciences*. 2 vols. Rev. ed. by Edward L. Hawkins. Chicago: Masonic History Co., 1921.
- Mitchell, Roy. *Through Temple Doors: Studies in Occult Masonry*. Calgary, Alberta: Blavatsky Institute, 1950. Originally published serially as "Occult Masonry" by "Matthew Gibson" in *The Canadian Theosophist*, 4.9 (November 1923) to 6.8 (October 1925).
- Neff, Mary K. Private paper, 1933.
- Olcott, Henry Steel. *Old Diary Leaves*. Vol. 1. Adyar: Theosophical Publishing House, 1895, reprint 1974.
- Ransom, Josephine. *A Short History of the Theosophical Society*. Adyar, Madras: Theosophical Publishing House, 1938.

- Redfern, T. H. *Getting Ready for 1975*. Blavatsky Lecture 1961. London: Theosophical Society in England, 1961.
- . *Theosophy, Freemasonry and Christianity*. Peace Lodge Papers No. 19. Hyde, Cheshire: Peace Lodge, The Theosophical Society, n.d.
- Spierenburg, Henk J. *The Inner Group Teachings of H. P. Blavatsky to Her Personal Pupils (1890–91)*. 2nd ed. with a historical introduction by Daniel H. Caldwell and Henk J. Spierenburg. San Diego: Point Loma Publications, 1995.
- Stevenson, David. *The Origins of Freemasonry: Scotland's Century, 1590–1710*. Cambridge: University Press, 1990.
- Waite, Arthur Edward. *A New Encyclopædia of Freemasonry (Ars Magna Latomorum) and of Cognate Instituted Mysteries: Their Rites, Literature and History*. 2 vols. Combined ed. reprint; New York: Weathervane Books, c. 1970 by University Books.
- Wedgwood, J. I. "Masonic Abbreviations and Some Points of Etiquette." *The Co-Mason* 7 (July 1915): 88–91.
- Yarker, John. An account of the issuance of Masonic diplomas to H. P. Blavatsky. *Universal Masonry* 1.4 (October 1910). Reprinted in *H. P. Blavatsky: Collected Writings* 1: 311–2. 3d ed. Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 1988.
- . *The Arcane Schools: A Review of Their Origin and Antiquity with a General History of Freemasonry, and Its Relation to the Theosophic, Scientific, and Philosophic Mysteries*. Belfast: William Tate, 1909. [A copy of this volume in the Wabash College Library, Crawfordsville, IN, has the signature of E. T. Hargrove on the flyleaf.]
- . A Masonic Diploma for the Rite of Adoption of the Ancient and Primitive Rite, issued to H. P. Blavatsky, November 24, 1877. Reprinted in *H.P.B. Speaks*, vol. 2, ed. C. Jinarajadasa (Adyar, Madras: Theosophical Publishing House, 1952), frontispiece; and in *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings* 1, opposite p. 305.
- , trans. *The Secret Rituals of the Adoptive Rite of Freemasonry*. Reprint Kila, MT: Kessinger, n.d.

———. *Speculative Freemasonry: A Historical Lecture upon the Origin of Craft and High Grade Freemasonry, and Showing the Great Antiquity of the Combined System*. Liverpool: Joseph Hawkins, 1883. Reprint Edmonds, WA: Sure Fire, 1988.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to the following persons for supplying information and for helpful comments: Adele S. Algeo, Allan Barns, John Cooper, Ted and Doris Davy, John Patrick Deveney, Michael Gomes, Elias Ibrahim, Lilian Storey, and W. D. TenBroeck. None of them, however, is responsible for the use I have made of their kind help. J.A.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John Algeo, Professor Emeritus at the University of Georgia, was Alumni Foundation Distinguished Professor of English there until his retirement to accept the presidency of the Theosophical Society in America in 1993.

Algeo has been a Fulbright Research Fellow and a Guggenheim Fellow at University College, the University of London, Visiting Professor at the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg in Germany, and seminar leader for English teachers in Jerusalem, Israel. Past President of the American Dialect Society and of the American Name Society, he is currently President of the Dictionary Society of North America.

Editor of *American Speech*, the journal of the American Dialect Society, for ten years, Algeo is the author of numerous academic books and articles dealing with the history of the English language, British-American differences, and current usage. He has also published on fantasy fiction. With his wife, Adele Algeo, for ten years he has coedited "Among the New Words," a quarterly column documenting additions to the English vocabulary. They are also collaborating on a dictionary of Briticisms. He is currently editing volume 6 of the *Cambridge History of the English Language*, treating the history of English in North America.

John Algeo has spoken for the Theosophical Society throughout the United States and in Australia, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, England, Finland, Germany, Israel, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Scotland, Spain, Sweden, and Wales. The author of the Quest book *Reincarnation Explored*, which has been translated into Dutch, German, Portuguese, and Swedish, he has published widely on a variety of Theosophical subjects, on the Bhagavad Gita (the great Hindu spiritual guidebook), and on fairy tales and fantasy fiction (including *The Wizard of Oz*) as archetypal expressions of the Ancient Wisdom.

Algeo is also president of the Olcott Institute, the educational arm of the Theosophical Society in America, for which he teaches a variety of courses, including during 1995–1996 a year-long course in the basic sourcebook of Theosophy, H. P. Blavatsky's *Secret Doctrine*. He is general editor of the series "Wisdom Tradition Books."

A 30° Mason, Algeo is a member of both the British and the American Federations of the Order of International Co-Freemasonry, Le Droit Humain, which admits women and men equally to the ancient and accepted Order of Masonry. His mother Lodge is St. Germain, No. 904, now in Surbiton, Greater London; and he is a Past Master of Atlanta Lodge, No. 583, in Atlanta, Georgia.

Algeo is listed in the 1995 and 1996 editions of *Who's Who in America*.

