

‘REFORMING THE WHOLE WORLD’
Masonic Secrecy and Treason in Eighteenth-Century Germany

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The secret societies active in Germany in the last fifty years of the eighteenth century developed higher degree systems which used the blue degrees of English freemasonry to their particular ends. They also nurtured political aims which for the most part echoed the principles of Enlightenment. Commonly regarded as masonic societies,¹ they imposed secrecy far more rigorously than was then customary for freemasonry in England. Here there were indeed secrets, the secrecy of signs and ritual, but, for all the spine-chilling nature of the vow of secrecy revealed by Samuel Prichard in 1730, freemasonry in England tended in other respects towards privacy rather than secrecy.² There were several reasons for this difference. Government and society had gradually grown more enlightened in the wake of significant events such as the execution of Charles I, the Civil War, the Restoration, and the Bill of Rights which, in 1689, strengthened religious toleration, limited the powers of the monarchy and increased the standing of Parliament.³ Germany, in contrast, right up to the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789, consisted of 300 or so kingdoms, loosely held together under the so-called German Nation of the Holy Roman Empire, each kingdom governed by the divine right of a monarch wielding absolute power over the lives of his subjects, the more progressive monarchs, however, like Frederick II King of Prussia, tempering despotism with humanity. The English custom of not discussing religion or politics in the lodge, which probably derived from the similar ruling of the Royal Society, while formally upheld in Germany, was not upheld there in reality.⁴ The lodges’ engagement with alternative politics, under absolutist government, necessitated a rigorous enforcement of absolute secrecy.

This paper is neither comprehensive nor definitive. Far more detailed analyses of secret societies have been published by French, German and American researchers.⁵ My aim is to illustrate, from the sources I have found, the extent to which the political machinations of Strict Observance and the Illuminati warranted the adverse judgements brought down upon them. References to other secret societies, such as the Eclectic Alliance, the German Union of Twenty-Two and the Benefactors (‘Die Evergeten’, occasionally given as ‘Die Euergeten’) will inevitably be sparse.⁶

Suspicious about Strict Observance were roused well before its formal closure at the Convention of Freemasons held in Wilhelmsbad in 1782. Secret documents published by Schröder in 1806, relating to the early years up to 1764, provide some justification for the doubts raised about the clandestine nature of its activities.⁷ Their claim that the operational planning for Strict Observance was modelled solely on the historical Templars is without foundation. The Templars' protection of pilgrims in the Holy Land and their adoption of the Rule of a spiritual Order are misleadingly presented as having been mere devices for distracting attention from the Templars' chivalric origin. Moreover, the eighteenth-century Knights of Strict Observance swore only the single vow of absolute obedience, not to the Pope but to unknown superiors, and they never took, nor had any understanding for, the earlier vows of chastity and poverty.⁸

Their plan of action, dated March 1755, marked a clear break from superiors in England.⁹ One of their aims was to infiltrate independent lodges and found new lodges financed by the Order. In order to preserve the Order's freedom of action from the ruling princes, the founding of institutions was recommended, particularly orphanages, since these were considered to be the most effective means of raising larger financial contributions from outside. As revenues increased, the orphanages could be extended to include instruction in the mechanical arts, the next step being to transform them into military academies. The orphanages, it was argued, would win the approval of the majority of people, those of the lower class. The military academies would attract the attention of those for whom orphanages were of little consequence and appeal to people of merit or of noble disposition. As soon as the military academies won the respect of important, high-ranking people, the time would have come to cultivate princes, from whom real privileges could be gained. Infiltration of government would bring the Order ever closer to achieving its aim of global influence. This insidious plan was later approved by the Grand Chapter. Any person found deviating from it would be judged a traitor upon whom Heaven and all proper-thinking brethren would exact revenge.

The Rule governing Novitiates stipulated that they be bound by the oath already sworn as 'Écossais'.¹⁰ It forbade them to divulge anything entrusted to them on pain of the same punishments to which Apprentices were subject. The Novice had the following obligations: to defend the laws of this Holy Order with his 'body, life, property and blood'; never to name any brethren in the presence of profane non-

members; never to harbour any desire to discover the location of the Order's supreme council; never to betray the locations of the Order's fortresses and assets (in so far as he might know them); to take part in campaigns whenever commanded to do so; never to strive for office; never to divulge the existence of the higher degrees to masons in lower degrees; never to enquire about the founding and fall of the Holy Order of Templars; to serve willingly on water and on land whenever commanded; to regard all brethren not of the Rule as profane, while ascertaining, with the utmost caution, their capacity for serving the Order; to inform the Chapter to which he belonged, or the nearest one, of any intention to marry, in particular of undertaking, in the event of dying unmarried, not to remove from the Order the lands he held in absolute ownership, nor allow members of his family to do so; and to deliver every year at the Feast of St. John an inventory of the revenues from these lands to his Chapter. Having attained the degree of Novice, he would be prescribed more important Rules, for the breaking of which no excuse would be accepted and punishments would be applied most rigorously. Draft proposals dated 22 May 1764 confirm that internal advancement was not based on merit, but on the amount of wealth promised to the Order.¹¹ Such calculated monetarism lends an air of credibility to the rumours which abounded of the secret assassinations of some members. Early deaths could quicken the transfer of property. No opportunity is lost to increase the Order's financial well-being.

In 1763, some years after Baron von Hund had established Strict Observance in Germany, Georg Friedrich von Johnson-Fünen (a Jew whose real name was probably Johann Samuel Leucht)¹² visited Jena. To masons of the Lodge of the Three Roses Johnson declared that he was in possession of greater powers than the Baron, having received them from the unknown superiors in Aberdeen, the seat of the Order of Templars revived by Aumont.¹³ The Baron thereupon acknowledged him as Grand Prior. Johnson soon made known his hostility to the Rosaic system, a variation of the Clermont system propagated in Germany and Holland by Philipp Samuel Rosa, and to the Lodge of the Three Globes in Berlin. He promised social rank, wealth and alchemical secrets to aspiring Knights in return for their handing over large sums of money. Early in May 1764 Johnson announced the general Convention in Altenberg, which Baron von Hund also attended. There Johnson faced demands for the reimbursement of the money paid out to him, but his response roused the Baron's suspicions. Under interrogation, Johnson was granted permission to ride to Jena and

return with papers proving his investiture of masonic powers. He never returned and was later arrested in Alsleben on 24 February 1765. With the permission of Duchess Governess Anna Amalia of Saxe-Weimar, he was imprisoned in the Fortress of the Wartburg in Eisenach, allegedly in the same room as Luther had originally occupied, where, ten years later, he died suddenly.

The driving force behind this harsh judgement was Jakob Friedrich Freiherr von Fritsch, First Minister of the State of Saxe-Weimar, at the time permanent Master of the Lodge of the Three Roses in Jena. Fritsch wanted the matter hushed up. Yet Johnson's actions had not occurred in the public domain but within a secret society governed by its own rules. The question arises whether Johnson's imprisonment, and possibly his sudden death, had been secretly commanded by the Order? Wilson believes that Anna Amalia sought to effect Johnson's pardon and release, but he also refers to her instructions to the prison-governor to deny this dangerous villain any opportunity to regain his freedom and all means of communication, including quill, ink and paper.¹⁴ Knowledge of how zealously the inner sanctum of Strict Observance guarded its secrets, and of the treasonable nature of its plans, lend a semblance of credibility to Johnson's letter of defence, copies of which he sent to Anna Amalia, Francis I of Austria (Holy Roman Emperor at the time), the Church Consistory and Duke Ferdinand of Braunschweig, among others.

In his letter Johnson protested his innocence, claiming that he had been arrested by the treacherous and tyrannical Templars, imprisoned without a hearing, and denied a trial or any other opportunity to defend himself.¹⁵ In prison, he was aware by the hour of the murders committed by them. The Templars had caused him to increase their revenues while he was in office, had wanted ever more from him, had stopped letters from reaching him and taken incorrect minutes in his presence. They had given him different names for public use and suppressed his real name. They had let it be known that he had been in prison, branded a criminal for armed robbery in Weimar and for kidnap, but he could prove how the Templars in Germany had used a variety of means to rid the world of many an honest man. They ran an extremely dangerous society well capable of shaking the thrones of the greatest monarchs. After the destruction of the Order in the fourteenth century, they had expanded throughout the world under the cover of freemasonry which, Johnson maintained, was entirely different.

Crowned heads and princes, argued Johnson, might become freemasons but they would never become Templars, the Order being intimately bound up with that of the Jesuits, although the common members would not know this, merely the General, the Provincial Leaders of the Jesuits and a few Rectors, the General being at the same time the Grand Chancellor and Grand Treasurer of the Templars. The Provincial Leaders were all Templar Grand Commanders for whom every Military Commander in Europe had to prepare a map of the territories under his command. Orders passed down from the Military Commanders to the Knights would remain unknown until the entire system came to light, Johnson regarding the Templars and the Jesuits to have been so skilfully interwoven as to make anything devised by Machiavelli merely child's play in comparison.

The Order had several thousand conspirators whom Johnson believed to be plotting the overthrow of all states and princes. They claimed to be a religious, military Order, as in their historical beginnings, but this served to conceal their other activities. Originally against the enemies of the Faith, they were now hostile to all enemies of the Order, that is, to all the 'profane' non-members, especially princes, because they had different policies and would not allow their subjects to know the 'natural freedom' with which the world began, nor to enjoy the right of using it. When a Templar was made, his oath bound him to going bravely into battle in defence of this freedom, and never to reveal anything of the Order's plans or affiliations on pain of disgrace, persecution, chastisement and even death.

Johnson explains how the the pillars of Wisdom, Beauty and Strength symbolised the distinguished, working and building Templars, the first making up the Order's Supreme Council, which represented all four territories of the world, and the second comprising the Military Commanders in all countries and states. The building Templars from all corners of the earth would, because of their number, have the power to carry out the Great Revolution. Johnson goes further. Revolution would be made all the easier because of the ignorance of monarchs who had no idea that the Templars still existed, nor that their number had multiplied a thousandfold since their supposed destruction. The lower and higher ranks of command in the monarchs' armies had been infiltrated by thousands of the Order's members, each wanting the Revolution, in which context it would be easy enough to use the common soldier against his own commanders once he had been granted the freedom to make himself richer and happy. What if cabinets and courts were overrun by the Order's keenest

zealots? Even the combined armies of Europe could not match the Templars who, in Europe, exceeded three million. They had more property and gold at their disposal than the combined potentates of Europe, whom they could overcome within a year, returning natural freedom to the human race. Johnson declares that he would not like to be in Baron von Hund's shoes when Frederick of Prussia discovered that some-one other than he commanded his troops.

Johnson declared himself to have been the one who foiled the Templars' design. His disclosures would be important to Her Royal Majesty. He could provide the Duke of Braunschweig with the knowledge of a fund sufficient to pay off all the debts of state. He offered his life as guarantor of the truth of his assertions, the secrets he possessed being the cause of his imprisonment. He had not been informed of his crime, nor of the reasons for being incarcerated alive, declaring himself a Christian, a free-born nobleman and officer, who had seen loyal service in Hungary and Italy under Charles VI, which he could prove, pointing out that he had also been in the service of Maria Theresia, two deceased Kings of Poland and a deceased Empress of Russia. A comparison of the broad historical dates with the sparse knowledge as yet known of Johnson's life strengthens the credibility of these assertions. Augustus II of Poland died in 1733 and Augustus III in 1763, while Peter the Great's daughter, Empress Elizabeth, reigned in Russia from 1741 to 1762.

Johnson's defence generally is prone to exaggeration and a lack of syntactical clarity. In these instances its credibility suffers. In others, he introduces information, the accuracy or near-accuracy of which is confirmed elsewhere. It is either an invention of considerable ingenuity based on knowledge gleaned from his unwarranted high office in Strict Observance or it is the honest account of a desparate and ailing prisoner whose physical and mental condition has inevitably deteriorated after seven years of solitary confinement. It is indeed tempting to accept Johnson's tragic predicament as an instancing of the dire punishments that could be imposed on any Templar who broke ranks. No record of a trial has been discovered. In any case, would fraud and the assumption of a false identity, had he been found guilty, have warranted what amounted to solitary confinement for life?

Two years after the Convention at Altenberg the Inner Order of Strict Observance, which made up the sixth degree, had two hundred and eighteen members. The Scottish degree (*écossais*) had already been added to the three traditional degrees and the fifth degree of Novice prepared candidates for the Inner Order. Clad in helmet

and armour, with a cloak in the style of the medieval Templars, and armed with a sword, the supplicant would be adopted by being dubbed a knight. In 1770 the seventh degree of 'eques professus' was added, which, because of its Christian-Catholic contents, increased the degree of religious exclusiveness and gave substance to the accusations of being infiltrated by the Jesuits.¹⁶ The Templar legend and especially the imitation of the Templars' organisational form served to disguise the Order's projects, one of which became the responsibility of Johann Bode, that of 'founding a new and independent state free of despotism and superior power'. Members' contributions and other enterprises were intended to provide sufficient income to purchase land near the Russian town of Saratov and found a colony there, this location now being preferred to the earlier alternative of Labrador in Canada. The project failed because members grew discontent at handing over so much money for a purpose which was withheld from them. Schüttler details the grounds by which the project would have been regarded as high treason: 'persuading subjects of the crown to defect, withdrawing money from the country and rejecting the present form of government with the intention of establishing independence on their own land, and with a constitution constructed on democratic lines.'¹⁷ The failure of the project and a sudden rise in membership now turned Strict Observance into little more than a club for anachronistic games of chivalry.

Adam Weishaupt, who founded the Order of the Illuminati in 1776, was critical of traditional freemasons who, in his opinion, were not able to raise themselves above the common herd and lacked unity of purpose. The Illuminati aimed to be more selective, Weishaupt advising that brothers could not expect to make real progress unless they had attained the degree of Master mason prior to admission. Extreme care was taken at each stage in order to achieve unity. Although practice differed markedly, Weishaupt argued that social rank or reputation was not a decisive issue and, somewhat ambiguously in the context of this allegedly egalitarian society, that the wise and better person governed without others being aware of the fact. He claimed that the guidance contained in the charges rendered oaths unnecessary, conveniently forgetting the oath taken for the Minerval degree.¹⁸ Munich became the centre and Baron von Knigge was recruited. Secrecy was imperative, each member being allocated an alias: Weishaupt was 'Spartacus', Knigge 'Philo', Munich 'Athens', Frankfurt 'Edessa', Hanover 'Tarsus'.¹⁹ Knigge now thought that he could bring about masonic reform through the Illuminati and in a letter of 23 November

1780 presented Weishaupt with the plans he had expounded earlier, including the idea of forming an inner circle of seven to nine members to manage the system, the 'areopag'.²⁰ In 1781 they met in Ingolstadt to work out the higher degrees, Knigge presenting the degree of 'Illuminatus minor' and Weishaupt his proposals for the 'Illuminatus major'. The first class of degrees was to contain the degrees of Novice, Minerval and 'Illuminatus minor', the second class, the masonic grades of Apprentice, Journeyman and Master, and the third, the mysteries of the Grand 'Illuminatus major' (or Scottish Novice) and Illuminati Leader (or Scottish Knight). The greater and higher mysteries were then to be worked out, those of Priest, Magus and Regent. Their main task was to form new basic organisations, so-called Churches of Minerva, to stimulate recruitment. The aim of Knigge's quasi-religious contributions was to fill recipients' hearts with enthusiasm for the cause and not frighten away those who were favourably disposed towards religion.

Knigge's ideas for reform revealed his predilection for the English model. He wanted to merge the different masonic systems, centring them on the blue degrees, all lodges undertaking to do so, whether they continued to offer higher degrees or not, being officially recognised as 'authentic'. Mention of the higher degrees or unknown superiors would be omitted from the blue degrees. Individual lodges would no longer send money to central office. A new statute-book would be written and the Master of a lodge would be elected by its members, their overarching directorate elected by the lodges. Higher degree masons would enjoy only the same privileges as those working the lower degrees.²¹ News circulated with immediate effect and a fruitful meeting was arranged with Bode, then one of the highest officers of Strict Observance. Suddenly, however, completely disillusioned with Weishaupt's lack of leadership, Knigge resigned from the Frankfurt circle of the Illuminati. Weishaupt, in the meantime, had won over Bode to his cause and Bode's subsequent negotiation of Knigge's severance quickly transformed their recent friendship into mutual hostility.

Knigge withdrew just in time to escape the persecution of the Illuminati. On 20 June 1784 Carl Theodor, Electoral Prince of the Pfalz and of Bavaria, after whom, ironically, lodges in Mannheim and Munich had been named, passed a decree banning 'unapproved and unreliable societies'.²² On 2 March and 16 August 1785 even stricter bans were issued against the Illuminati and the freemasons, which Carl Theodor regarded as one and the same. All lodges in Munich and Mannheim were closed. In 1787 the government published two volumes of the Order's *Original Papers*, albeit

only with the pseudonyms of members.²³ These contained several documents, calendars, some secret signs, forms filled in by new members, several letters, and the text of Weishaupt's speech to candidates for the degree of Illuminati Leader. Carl Theodor wanted further purges. In July 1788 the government publicly asked Knigge to explain himself. His response, published in September, entitled *Philo's Final Explanation and Reply to Different Demands and Questions put to him Concerning his Association with the Order of Illuminati*, is an honest account, which closes with his withdrawal from such activities.²⁴

Between them Weishaupt and Knigge had been particularly productive in generating progressive ideas about morality, society and politics, the former mostly in the cause of the Illuminati, the latter's thinking more widely disseminated later in his literary works. It is difficult to form any clear judgement about how treasonable Weishaupt's masonic work really was. The reason for this is not only the cloak of secrecy, but also the contradictoriness and ambivalence which distinguished the work that he later made public. Carl Theodor, undoubtedly persuaded to act against the Illuminati partly by the accusations of four defectors, Utschneider, Renner, Grünberger and Cosandey, persecuted the leaders and families of those involved so effectively that Weishaupt argued in defence of the Order that the Illuminati never abused *their* power to the extent of making people unhappy, dismissing them from office, reducing them and their families to poverty, forcing them into exile and wickedly allowing them no rest even in their new homeland.²⁵ Weishaupt frequently points out that revolution is not the aim of the Illuminati, rather the inner, moral perfecting of the self. Only in this way, so he argues, will enlightened reform come about and, echoing Lessing's argument, time and patience are needed.²⁶ Moral education, he contends, is far more effective in freemasonry than it has proved to be in literature. Literature only preaches morality, freemasonry puts morality into action.²⁷

On the other hand, the suspicion of treasonable thinking would have been raised by remarks which, in a different political reality, would seem no more harmful than expressing sympathy for the inevitability of change. He speculates how the first settlers of America must have found it impossible in such a vast country, so remote from home, to remain subjected for ever to their country of origin. A natural urge for independence and liberty would inevitably lead to a courageous decision to break away and live according to their own laws. Weishaupt supposes that the break will

come soon, suggesting that this tract may have been written before the American Declaration of 1776, and, although failing to distinguish between the different political realities of Gt. Britain and the continent, he states that, at home, the increasing and, some say, necessary oppression of the working classes by the standing armies and the opulence of the courts, heightened, on the one hand, by the despotic rule of government over better and nobler men and, on the other, by the foreseen advantages and the love of liberty and independence, will cause hordes of people to take their culture with them and emigrate.²⁸

Several other factors militate against the benign image of the Illuminati: the rigid imposition of secrecy, the fastidious selection of candidates for the higher degrees in particular, the existence of a secret plan, the declared wish of making princes and states redundant, the use of Latin or Greek names to conceal identities and the strategy of infiltrating all influential positions in society and government. The higher the degree, the more political it became, with the lower echelons kept entirely ignorant of the secret planning above them. The degrees of Scottish Novice and Scottish Master were as high as a candidate was allowed to progress while remaining ignorant of the Illuminati's secret plans for reform. Goethe and Karl August, Prince of Saxe-Weimar, were kept away from the real secrets and instead allocated administrative duties no higher than the level of Scottish Knight. As Knigge made clear: '(...) the Scottish degrees were not intended to contain anything from which the secret plan concerning the true intentions of the Order could be deduced (...)', adding in words which, unbeknown to him, were a testimony to Goethe's sense of duty as First Minister of State: 'If the man can do no better (meaning that he will not commit himself to the risks associated with secret political planning), he will remain simply Scottish Knight', and, indeed, Goethe never progressed beyond that.²⁹ It was the priests of the Greater and Higher Mysteries who presided over the real and secret store of knowledge, these consisting of the degrees of Priest and Regent. That of Regent was intended to be awarded very rarely and even then, as far as possible, only to people who were 'free and completely independent of princes'.³⁰ Furthermore, only those should be sought out 'who have often declared their discontentment with the customary human establishments and who long for the world to be better governed'. While the candidate considers his position in the solitude of an adjoining, darkened room, a dialogue is read out which stirs up revolution while ambivalently denying revolutionary intent.

Question: Who brought the slave in to us?

Answer: He came and knocked.

Question: What does he want?

Answer: He is looking for freedom. He also wishes to be freed from his bonds.

Question: Why does he not address himself to those who placed the bonds upon him?

Answer: They do not wish to free him, for they profit from his slavery.

Question: Who then made a slave of him?

Answer: Society, the state, the educational establishment, false religion.

Question: And he wishes to shake off this yoke, become a separatist, a rebel?

Answer: No! He wishes to take up the struggle, hand in hand with us, against the abuse of the constitution of the state, against the breakdown of morality, against the desecration of religion.³¹

Two of the many novels by Knigge, *The Literary Estate of Conrad of Sheepshead* (1791) and *Joseph of Wormfire* (1792),³² products of his experience with Strict Observance and the Illuminati, provoked an outcry because of their alleged incitement to revolution. The political principles articulated in them were certainly progressive even for the Enlightenment. Obedience should never be demanded in the name of an individual but only on the authority of the community as a whole. The form of government should not be changed without being approved by the majority, to whom government is accountable at every step. If government followed such principles, it need hardly fear revolution. Neither faith nor opinion may be subjected to force. It is an abuse of power to shackle the free examination of religious matters in writing and speech. It is not the business of government to prescribe a particular form of worship. No single religion may dominate another, and he takes the concept of religious toleration further than English freemasonry and Frederick of Prussia had done when he argues:

There can be no dominant religion: toleration is sinful, for to tolerate something is the presumption of a right to permit, where there is nothing to

permit. Imposing limitations of this kind will not promote the citizen's *temporal* welfare and his *eternal* welfare is beyond the remit of state institutions.³³

What the state can do, is to ensure that no religious systems are introduced which are inimical to good ethical behaviour, virtue or the civil peace. The babble of children and the howl of wolves, presuming the intention to be good, can also be pleasing to God, but only if it is the children who babble and the wolves which howl. Known today almost exclusively for his work on manners and the social graces, and for more than a touch of male chauvinism, Knigge's published works have not achieved lasting literary acclaim. While the internal organisation of these secret societies, the cells and cadres, served as models for the Ku Klux Klan and other underground movements, possibly for the SS and the Stasi too, Knigge's writing anticipated the future development of German public life in a positive sense, the liberating revolutions of 1848, and the human rights and freedoms associated with the democratization of Germany after 1945 and of the former lands of the German Democratic Republic after 1989.

Founded by the Protestant theologian and free-thinker, Karl Bahrdt, and imbued with rationalist thought, the German Union of Twenty Two made a considerable impact on the remnants of the Illuminati but, despite its laudable aims for the common good, it came to an early end with the publication in 1789 of a text which, the Union claimed, signalled their discarding of secrecy in favour of openness.³⁴ The critical notes referred to in the title *More Notes than Text* were added by Bode, but the way of thinking reflected in them is difficult to reconcile with the charge that it was through his influence that the Illuminati had conspired to bring about the French Revolution. Indeed the delivery of secret Illuminati documents to the Jacobins was believed to have been the reason for Bode's journey to Paris in 1787. The diary of his journey, recently published for the first time by Schüttler, contains no hard evidence of this despite his undoubted support for the idea of political equality.³⁵ Schröder declared Bode wholly innocent, explaining his real concern as being with the infiltration of the Order by Jesuits.³⁶ However, a document published in Vienna by Alois Hoffmann, who in 1792 had already denounced Prague as a dangerous centre of masonic conspiracy, argued that the Illuminati had indeed been involved and it was their ideology which had acted as the catalyst. The French may have brought spine-

chilling terror to these events, but the ideas behind it came from Germany, specifically from the Illuminati. It cited a reference in the *Berlin Monthly* of 1785 to a group of freemasons called the 'Philaleten, Chevaliers bienfaisants' or 'des Amis réunis' which underwent massive change in 1788 when the 'chevaliers bienfaisants' became the 'chevaliers malfaisants', and the 'amis réunis', the 'amis ennemis'. The author charges two Germans who came to Paris at that time (he undoubtedly had Bode in mind) with being involved with the Illuminati's grand project which aimed 'to reform the whole world by giving an entirely different shape to the constitutions of state and religion that had served mankind hitherto, to make dispensable and to abolish all princes and priests as the true villains, to establish natural and general equality among men (it only *implied* that women were to be included in this), and to replace Christianity with a religion based on philosophy'.³⁷

The distinctive feature which, so the author believed, bound together the Illuminati and the Revolution was that this was the first instance in history when ambitions for reform went beyond the state and were intended for the whole world. Such ambitions were indeed contained in the secret plans of the Illuminati, as they were in those of Strict Observance before them, but ignorance of the limitations already imposed on the British monarchy in 1689 and of the separation of church and state which characterised the new United States after 1779, diminishes the credibility of the claim that the French Revolution too aimed to make a global impact. Nevertheless, the common ground of bringing about general freedom and equality, doing away with the tyranny of kings and princes, powerfully suppressing the priesthood, attacking Christianity and replacing it with a religion based on philosophy, was evidence enough, in the author's mind, of collusion.

The denunciation of the Illuminati published by Hoffmann, virulent though it seemed in the immediate post-Revolution context of Vienna 1793, came at a time when the Order of the Illuminati was already a spent force. Like the German Union, a new Alliance of Benefactors (the 'Euergeten'), founded in 1791 and dedicated to moral and ethical action, sought to benefit from the demise of the Illuminati.³⁸ The confiscation of papers relating to a secret internal court set up by the founders of the Benefactors roused the suspicions of the Prussian authorities who mistakenly thought they had uncovered a secret club conspiring to foment revolution. Its leaders were arrested in Breslau in 1796 but granted their freedom soon afterwards. This action brought the Prussian *Edict of 1798* into being, in which Frederick William II forbade

participation in secret societies on pain of severe punishment. The Three Globes, The Grand National Lodge and the Royal York Lodge of Friendship, that is, the three Prussian mother-lodges and all their affiliated lodges, were excepted, but all other societies and associations were banned, the activities of which were considered to be directed against the state, or which exacted obligations sworn on oath to unknown or known superiors, or demanded secrecy about mysteries which were promised to be revealed, or which used secret, mystical hieroglyphs to achieve some named intention. Any attempt to act against the citizens' obligations to the state was to be reported immediately to the police and a list of all affiliated lodges and members handed in each year. No-one was to be adopted under the age of twenty-five.³⁹ Effectively the *Edict* made law of Knigge's own retrospective criticism of secret societies: 'They are all, admittedly not all in the same degree, but all, without distinction, both useless and dangerous.'⁴⁰

NOTES

¹ Mackey, however, writes of Illuminism having been 'confounded (...) with Freemasonry, although it could never be considered as properly a Masonic Rite.' Albert Gallatin Mackey, *An Encyclopaedia of Freemasonry and its Kindred Sciences*, ed. and revised by Edward L. Hawkins, 2 vols (New York and London: The Masonic History Company, 1914). I, 346.

² Samuel Prichard, *Masonry Dissected* (London: Wilford, ³1730), pp. 6-7: '(...) no less Penalty than to have my Throat cut, my Tongue taken from the Roof of my Mouth, my Heart pluck'd from under my Left Breast, then to be buried in the Sands of the Sea, the Length of a Cable-rope from the Shore, where the Tide ebbs and flows twice in 24 hours, my Body to be burnt to Ashes, my Ashes to be scatter'd upon the Face of the Earth, so that there shall be no more Remembrance of me among Masons'.

³ *Magna Charta; or, The Great Charter, obtained from King John by the People of England (...) to which is added an authentic copy of the Bill of Rights* (London: S. Rousseau, 1810).

⁴ James Anderson, *The Constitutions of the Free-Masons, containing the History, Charges, Regulations, etc. of that most Ancient and Right Worshipful Fraternity* (London: Hunter, 1723), p. 50. John Robison, *Proofs of a Conspiracy against all the Religions and Governments of Europe, carried on in secret meetings of Freemasons, Illuminati and Reading Societies* (Edinburgh and London: Creech, Cadell and Davies 1797), p. 12.

⁵ For example: Vernon L. Stauffer, *New England and the Bavarian Illuminati* (New York: The Columbia University Press, 1918). René Le Forestier, *Die templerische und okkultische Freimaurerei im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert*, 4 vols, translated from the original French edition of 1970 by Paul Schötz and A. Schwaab (Leimen: Werner Kristkeitz, 1989). Richard von Dülmen, *Der Geheimbund der Illuminaten. Darstellung, Analyse, Dokumentation* (Stuttgart / Bad Cannstatt, ²1977).

⁶ This paper draws on a chapter of my forthcoming book on freemasonry, human rights and literature, in which German secret societies are treated more fully. All translations from the German are my own.

⁷ Friedrich Ludwig Schröder, *Materialien zur Geschichte der Freymaurerey seit der Wiederherstellung der großen Loge in London, 5717* (Rudolstadt, 1805/06), pp. 225-313.

⁸ The Templar's oath of chastity extended to avoiding female company altogether, the oath of poverty to not being found dead with coin about his person, and not being allowed to carry or keep money without permission. See: D. F. Münter, *Statutenbuch des Ordens der Tempelherren* (Berlin: 1794), Part I, pp. 143-70.

⁹ Schröder, op. cit: Appendix 1, pp. 225-39: 'Vortheile des hohen Ordens und fürnehmlich des deutschen Herr-Meisterthums hinfert beobachtet werden können, welcher von dem ersten Gros-Capitel zu Unwürde ist ausgearbeitet worden.'

¹⁰ Ibid: Appendix 4, pp. 248-50: 'Regel eines Noviziaten von der strengen Observanz.'

¹¹ Ibid: Appendix 12, pp. 271-81: 'Ohnmaßgebliche Vorschläge, den Hauptplan des hohen Ordens betreffend, auf Befehl entworfen und zu weiterm hochgeneigten Ermessen übergeben von dem Ritter vom Diamanten Canzler der Provinz und dem Ritter vom Pfau Präfekto zu Rittersfelde.'

¹² There are various and varying accounts of Johnson's activities, their common thread being the adverse judgement of him as a fraudster. For example, Carl Bröcker, *Die Freimaurer-Logen Deutschlands* (Berlin: Königliche Buchhandlung, 1894), pp. 125-26; Mackey, op. cit: I, 371; *Internationales Freimaurer-Lexikon*, ed. by Eugen Lennhoff, Oskar Posner, Dieter A. Binder (München: Herbig, ²2000), p. 438f: *Johann Joachim Christian Bode, Journal von einer Reise von Weimar nach Frankreich. Im Jahr 1787*, ed. by Hermann Schüttler (München: ars una, 1994), p. 42.

¹³ Mackey reports the legend of Aumont having been Molay's successor as Grand Master and, as a result of his actions, called the 'Restorer of the Order of Templars'. The tradition states that, after the dissolution of the Order, Aumont fled with seven other Templars to Scotland disguised as operative masons. There, under another name and in secret, they founded a new Order: 'and to preserve as much as possible the ancient name of Templars, as well as to retain the remembrance of the clothing of Masons, in which disguise they had fled, they chose the name of Freemasons, and thus founded Freemasonry. The society thus formed, instead of

conquering or rebuilding the Temple of Jerusalem, was to erect symbolic temples.’ Mackey, op. cit: I, 86.

¹⁴ W. Daniel Wilson, *Unterirdische Gänge: Goethe, Freimaurerei und Politik* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 1999), p. 32f. Wilson cites Franz Carl Endres’ opinion (in *Goethe und die Freimaurerei* [1949], pp. 49-58) that Anna Amalia tried in vain to have Johnson pardoned, and dismisses Wernekke’s entirely justified claim (in *Goethe und die Königliche Kunst* [1905], p. 189) that Johnson had tried to gain her favour by revealing the Order’s secrets and thus win his pardon. Wilson does not seem to have consulted the secret documents published by Schröder.

¹⁵ Schröder, op. cit: Appendix 14, pp. 288-313: Johnson schrieb in seinem Gefängnisse (...).

¹⁶ Johnson was not the only one to believe that freemasonry had been infiltrated by the Jesuits. See, for example, Knigge’s *Beytrag zur neuesten Geschichte des Freimaurerordens – in neun Gesprächen*, pp. 219-21, in *Adolph Freiherr von Knigge. Ausgewählte Werke in zehn Bänden*, edited by Wolfgang Fenner (Hannover: Fackelträger, 1991-1996), VII (1994), pp. 195-275. *Adolf Freiherr von Knigge. Aus einer alten Kiste. Originalbriefe, Handschriften und Documente aus dem Nachlasse eines bekannten Mannes*, ed. by Jörn Garber (Leipzig: Kollmann, 1853, reprinted Scriptor, 1979), which also lists Knigge’s *Über Jesuiten* (1781), *Neueste Beiträge zur Geschichte der Jesuiten* (1781), *Briefe eines Reisenden, Jesuiten-Gift usw. betreffend* (1781). Nicholas de Bonneville, *Einerleyheit der vier Gelübde des heiligen Ignaz und der vier Grade in der Freymäurerey des heiligen Johannes. Der Schottischen Maurerey Zweiter Theil*, transl. by Johann Joachim Christoph Bode (Leipzig: Göschen, 1788).

¹⁷ Schüttler, op. cit: pp. 43-45.

¹⁸ Cf., *Das verbesserte System der Illuminaten mit allen seinen Einrichtungen und Graden*, ed. by Adam Weishaupt (Frankfurt / Leipzig: Grattenauersche Buchhandlung, 1787), p. 72: ‘Eidschwüre sind bey uns überflüssig. Auch keine Versicherung bey Ehre wird abgefordert, und diese Mittel müssen keine andere, als die uns, schon ohnehin, obliegende Pflichten sein.’ Weishaupt, *Der ächte Illuminat oder die wahren, unverbesserten Rituale der Illuminaten* (Edessa, 1788), pp. 44-45.

¹⁹ Fenner: ed. cit: X, 200f.

²⁰ Mackey, op. cit: I, 76, 378.

²¹ Fenner, ed. cit: X, p. 212.

²² Ibid: X, 212-223. Bröcker, op. cit: p. 146.

²³ *Nachtrag von weitem Originalschriften welche die Illuminatensekte überhaupt, sonderbar aber den Stifter derselben Adam Weishaupt, gewesenenen Professor zu Ingolstadt betreffen, und bey der auf dem Baron Bassusischen Schloß zu Sandersdorf, einem bekannten Illuminaten-Neste, vorgenommenen Visitation entdeckt, sofort auf Churfürstlich höchsten Befehl gedruckt, und zum geheimen Archiv genommen worden sind, um solche jedermann auf Verlangen zur Einsicht vorlegen zu lassen.* Zwo Abtheilungen (München: Lentner, 1787).

²⁴ *Philo's endliche Erklärung und Antwort, auf verschiedene Anforderungen und Fragen, die an ihn ergangen, seine Verbindung mit der Orden der Illuminaten betreffend* (Hannover: Schmidt, 1788). Fenner, ed. cit: X, p. 226.

²⁵ Adam Weishaupt, *Apologie der Illuminaten* (Frankfurt / Leipzig: Grattenauerische Buchhandlung, 1786), p. 54f.

²⁶ Cf., *Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. Werke*, edited by Herbert G. Göpfert (München: Hanser, 1979), Lizenzausgabe für die wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 8 volumes (Regensburg: Pustet, 1996), VIII, 480, the fifth dialogue of the *Gespräche für Freimaurer*.

²⁷ Weishaupt, *Apologie der Illuminaten*, ed.cit. pp. 89-90. 'Secret instruction penetrates the soul more effectively, instruction, the real originator of which is unknown, imparted by men whom we completely trust and respect, in a place far removed from all distraction, at a time when we feel such need for instruction as has been imperceptibly aroused within us (...), so exactly tailored to our powers of understanding at that particular time, imparted in the presence of men admired by us for their similar disposition, in ceremonial stillness, presented as the means of realising the aim of our most ardent wishes (...).

²⁸ Adam Weishaupt, *Größere Mysterien, Erste Klasse. Philosophi. Weltweise*. In Schüttler, op.cit: pp. 361-94.

²⁹ *Die neuesten Arbeiten des Spartacus und Philo in dem Illuminaten-Orden, jetzt zum erstenmal gedruckt, und zur Beherzigung der gegenwärtigen Zeitläuften herausgegeben* (1794), pp. 13-14.

³⁰ Ibid: pp. 114-15.

³¹ Ibid: pp. 119-220.

³² *Des seligen Herrn Etatsraths Samuel Conrad von Schaafskopf hinterlassene Papiere*; von seinen Erben herausgegeben (Hanover: Ritscher, ²1792). This novel first appeared in 1791. Fenner, ed. cit: VIII, 31-91. *Josephs von Wurmbrand, Kaiserlich abyssinischen Ex-Ministers, jezzigen Notarii caesarii publici in der Reichsstadt Bopfingen, politisches Glaubensbekenntniß, mit Hinsicht auf die französische Revolution und deren Folgen* (Hanover: Helwig, 1792). Fenner, ed. cit: VIII, pp. 93-169.

³³ Ibid: p. 138f.

³⁴ Johann Joachim Christoph Bode, *Mehr Noten als Text oder die Deutsche Union der Zwey und Zwanziger, eines neuen geheimen Ordens zum Besten der Menschheit*, Aus einem Packet gefundener Papiere zur öffentlichen Schau gestellt durch einen ehrlichen Buchhändler (Leipzig: Göschen, 1789).

³⁵ Schüttler: ed. cit.

³⁶ *Adolf Freiherr von Knigge. Aus einer alten Kiste* (1853, ²1979), pp. 188-89. Schröder encloses a copy of a defence of Bode in his letter of 25 February 1795 printed by Wieland in the *Teutscher Merkur* 18 January 1795, which remarks that, if any defence of Bode is needed,

there is ample evidence of his innocence in the diary of his journey to Paris in 1789. Wieland adds his own support for Bode. The letter concludes with Schröder's words: 'Ich kenne dies Journal, so wie Bode's geheimste Schriften – nicht ein Gedanke von dem Angeschuldigten ist in ihnen zu finden. Sein Steckenpferd war die Jesuitenriecherei, diese suchte er auch den französischen Brüdern zu beweisen'.

³⁷ *Wiener Zeitschrift*, ed. by Leopold Alois Hoffmann (Wien: Hartlische Buchhandlung, 1793), V, pp. 145-58. 'Ein wichtiger Aufschluß über eine noch wenig bekannte Veranlassung der französischen Revolution (Mitgetheilt von zuverlässiger Hand)'.

³⁸ *Internationales Freimaurer-Lexikon*, ed. by Lennhoff, et al: p. 283.

³⁹ *Ibid*: p. 243. Mackey: I, 255.

⁴⁰ Fenner, op. cit: VI, p. 382.