

Women and Freemasonry

in France and Germany

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Discovering women's initial involvement with Freemasonry is similar in its complexity to the task of discovering the origin of Freemasonry itself: both histories are cluttered with scholarly refutation of the residual experts' theories and facts. There are, for example, theories for at least 12 different sources of modern Freemasonry; some are as old as the Patriarchal religion, ancient Pagan Mysteries, or the Temple of King Solomon, while others pinpoint the origin later in history, placing it in the Middle Ages, and still others in the eighteenth-century.¹ Likewise, arguments for the origin of women in Freemasonry range—not so widely by date, but by location—from Ireland, to Russia, to France, to England (although, a characteristically strict observance of the constitution of the Grand Lodge of England has freemasons and Masonic scholars of the region rolling their eyes at the notion).²

¹ Mackey, Albert. "Origin." *An Encyclopedia of Freemasonry and its kindred sciences: comprising the whole range of arts, sciences and literature as connected with the institution*, 1921 ed. Kila, MT.: Kissinger Pub. Co., 1992.

² Ibid "Adoptive;" and Conder, Edward. "The Hon. Miss St. Leger and

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The intent of this paper is not to discover or summarize the debate on the origins of either institution. The objective is to shed light on women's views of themselves and their role in society in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-centuries in Western Europe. This will be illustrated by examples of women's involvement in and influence on Freemasonry in France and Germany. The origins of women's involvement with Freemasonry will be discussed, therefore, only in an effort to display the above-mentioned objective, not to make a statement in the debate regarding the introduction of women into Freemasonry.

To demonstrate women's views of themselves and their role in Western European society, this author will look at the motivations for the introduction of women into Freemasonry, the thriving French Lodges of Adoption, the effect those lodges had on German women and Freemasonry, and finally, records of speeches and minutes of various lodge meetings in Germany during the period. The appellation, "adoption," was originally obtained because male Masonic lodges would "adopt" quasi-Masonic, French-speaking organizations for men and women. Eventually these were recognized as Masonic lodges in France, and were known as "Lodges of Adoption" (Burke and Jacob 515).

Motivations for the introduction of women into Freemasonry

Freemasonry swept through Europe and much of the western world during the eighteenth-century. European Freemasonry was "a symbol of [the] Enlightenment and the public sphere" (Bullock 275). Masonic lodges came to be associated with

Freemasonry." *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum* 8 (1825): 16.

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enlightened ideals, such as “cosmopolitanism, relative equality for the literate and prosperous, secular fraternity, and humanitarianism” (Jacob, *Exits* 251). The members were characterized to be coveting intellectual stimulation and principles of tolerance and improvement. These Enlightenment values also provided fertile ground for “a dramatic rise in the number of groups and organizations involving women” during the same period (Burke, *Freemasonry* 283).

In the eighth volume of *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum*—somewhat of a freemasonic journal containing lodge pro-ceedings, papers, essays, reviews, etc.—an account is offered of the supposed first woman freemason, Miss St. Leger (Conder 16-23). There is some uncertainty in the record: “Although these different accounts vary considerably in the description of the manner in which Miss St. Leger witnessed the secret ceremonial carried on in the Lodge, the main fact of her being made a Mason remains undisputed.” The detailed account has her accidentally learning about the proceedings of a meeting while in an adjacent room to this Irish lodge and thereafter being made a Mason. The date of her initiation is unclear but a range of eight years—between 1710 and 1718—is given. Ms. St. Leger later married Richard Aldworth Esq. and was known as the Hon. Mrs. Aldworth. The Apron she wore regularly at lodge meetings was later displayed and became a cherished possession of her ancestors.

E. L. Hawkins’ article about Adoptive Masonry from a later volume of the same journal calls 1717 the year of the “Revival of Free Masonry,” but does not mention women’s involvement until “about the year 1730” (Hawkins 6-9). The article ascribes the institution of female Freemasonry to France, but admits to

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“not [knowing] who was its inventor.” Janet M. Burke and Margaret C. Jacob’s article, *French Freemasonry, Women, and Feminist Scholarship*, shows evidence of gender integration among lodges in the 1740s and 1750s, but Burke elsewhere admits it probably began in the late 1720s and early 1730s (Burke and Jacob 515; Burke, *Freemasonry* 283). This more recent scholarship portrays feminist sentiment and Enlightenment ideals as the motivation for women’s involvement in Freemasonry as opposed to the earlier, Ms. St. Leger account of women’s haphazard initiation into the institution. *An Encyclopedia of Freemasonry*, written by Albert Mackey, coincides with the view that France initiated Masonic gender integration and he adds that it was not simply established there, but that it was “a product of the French mind.”³

Burke and Jacob’s above mentioned article is rigorous in bringing to light how the involvement of women in French Freemasonry was indicative of feminist sentiments and female autonomy. They write in a “partly rehabilitative, partly polemical” manner in an effort to correct a feminist scholarship that has portrayed the women involved with Freemasonry as “victims of male systems of subordination” (Burke and Jacob 517). The scholarship they rebut is outdated. Using French and Dutch records discovered since World War II, Burke and Jacob show how proceedings of lodges in France (mostly Parisian) and the Netherlands refute an oppressive report of women’s stature in society during the period. Many of the same scholars who painted women Freemasons with drab submissiveness

³ Mackey. “Adoptive.” Albert Mackey was a freemason and scholar of Freemasonry who wrote several books on the institution. This dictionary is highly regarded as a comprehensive account of the history and dealings of the institution.

recognized female participation in French salons as a symbol of the Enlightenment.

Parisian salons “constituted enlightened female participation and leadership.”⁴ The feminist culture of the French Enlightenment was characterized by the women in these salons. The majority of the prominent figures in these circles were upper-class, if not members of the aristocracy. The popularity of the Lodges of Adoption grew quickly in these circles as the lodges were “an example of the new sociability among elites in France” (Burke, *Freemasonry* 283). Masonic lodges were one of the many elements that composed the original European public sphere (Burke and Jacob 515). Female integration into masonry was a natural consequence of an apparent French Enlightenment “pressure from women to venture increasingly into the public arena” (Jacob, *Exits* 251).

The French Lodges of Adoption

The feminist sentiment which motivated women’s introduction into Freemasonry is displayed in the records of the French Lodges of Adoption. The “uniting sentiments of kinship, friendship and love” in the fraternity of the Masons attracted the upper-class enlightened women of the period, and the setting became a platform for the propagation of their ideals (Burke, *Freemasonry* 284). In the archives of a Lodge of Adoption in Dijon it is recorded, “Oh my sisters! How sweet it is for me to pronounce this name! How sweet it is for me to form new ties with you, or to bind more tightly those which already unite us”

⁴ Burke and Jacob, 518. A comprehensive account of women in the French salons, as also a critical examination of possible affects of the salons on female masonry, is given in Goodman’s *The Republic of Letters*.

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(Burke, *Enlightenment* 256). This desire for unity, and also independence, gave these women a deep sense of sisterhood and loyalty.⁵ Enlightenment concepts of liberty and equality were fostered in the lodges. Pride in these ideals coupled with deep friendships—bonds so tight, Burke exclaims women “converted to” friendship—produced a form of eighteenth-century feminism. In the lodges of Adoption “they were taught to understand their rights as women and demand them from the world dominated by men” (Burke, *Freemasonry* 285).

A few lodges were explicit in expressing strong feminist sentiments. The high degree of Amazonnerie Anglaise was awarded to some sisters in an adoptive lodge known by the appellation, Order of the Amazons (Burke and Jacob 532). The ceremony was to be conducted only by a woman—“the Queen of the Amazons”—in the face of the tradition that the male Grand Master lead all adoption rituals. The Queen initiated both sisters and brothers in the lodge and shouted commands at them both. Women were called on to “recognize the injustice of men, to throw off the masculine yoke, to dominate in marriage, and to claim equal wealth with men, among other things” (Burke and Jacob 532). These increasingly more common feministic ideals determined the course of Female Freemasonry in the latter part of the eighteenth-century.

The history of Adoptive Freemasonry is divided by the

⁵ Burke, *Freemasonry* 287. Burke here cites the example of “the deep sense of friendship” and “sisterhood” between Marie Antoinette and Marie-Therese-Louise de Savoie-Carignan (the princesse de Lamballe, Superintendent of the Household of the queen, and a female mason). She also quotes Marie-Therese saying, “I will sacrifice everything for the queen,” just prior to her being imprisoned and executed, calling this loyalty a characteristic of female masons.

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French Revolution into two periods. The two significant characteristics that distinguished post-revolution Lodges of Adoption from pre-revolution were, first, the shift of women into more dominant roles within the organization, and, second, women's "dedication to charitable works in both the inner lodge and the public sphere."⁶ First we will look at women's roles in conducting and altering Masonic lodges and rituals before examining the sisters' propensity for and dedication to charity.

In post-revolutionary adoptive masonry "the women were now even more in charge within their organization than they had been earlier" (Burke, *Enlightenment* 255). This fact has only recently (latter part of the twentieth-century) been discovered and reported by Adoptive Freemasonic scholarship, though, a broad female dominance in adoptive lodges has yet to be conceded as a uniform opinion. Formerly, most scholars of Freemasonry were Masons themselves and carried somewhat of a bias against female participants and their influence in the lodges. In addition, these scholars had access to fewer of the records of lodges than the more recent scholars of the field. These old school scholars speak of "meaningless rituals to mollify" the women, and a lack of autonomy for the female participants (Burke and Jacob 520, 529). Burke rebuts, "[M]ale masons who favored the admission of women had invested a great deal of time, money, and personal prestige in sponsoring and supporting women's lodges," making it "farfetched and unrealistic to picture them cynically pulling out a meaningless

⁶ Burke. "Leaving the Enlightenment: Women Freemasons after the Revolution." 258. Regarding women's growing role in the lodges, the first instance of women conducting their own ceremony was in the Netherlands in the Loge de Juste in 1751 (see Burke and Jacob. "French Freemasonry, Women, and Feminist Scholarship." 521.)

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ceremony to keep the women quiet” (Burke and Jacob 530).

Masonic rituals were and are preformed as a means of transferring knowledge in a symbolic manner. Important concepts conveyed in ceremonies and initiations were preformed by both the men and women in a similar, and, in some cases, exactly the same manner. The sisters were performing “meaningful” rituals, at least from their own point of view—which viewpoint is most important when speaking of one’s inferred conceptual understanding of symbolic things. The rituals conveyed knowledge and were, thus, meaningful to them. Women were even creating new and significant rituals of their own while also standing up for and maintaining the solemnity of old rituals.

In the forum, *Exits from the Enlightenment*, it is recorded in a footnote how “the illustrious brothers of Voltaire’s lodge not only had to give up a ritual they had written for a special lodge of adoption initiation ceremony, but they had to explain to the furious women their audacity in changing the ritual in the first place” (Burke, *Enlightenment* 263). The women’s fervor in maintaining a standard is interestingly compared with the liberties they would soon take in changing rituals themselves. By the end of the eighteenth-century “the ceremony for the first three degrees, always the most orthodox and unchanging, was now run almost totally by the women” (Burke, *Enlightenment* 258). With women advancing into leadership positions in the lodges, the female masons began making subtle changes in wording and placed focus on different parts of the initiation events. The changes may have been “a quest for innovation,” or, in some cases, an effort to change perspectives in the lodges (Burke, *Enlightenment* 260).

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An example of such a change was the interpretation of what occurred in the Garden of Eden. Freemasonry has always been closely tied to religious sentiments, especially from the Judeo-Christian tradition. At the turn of the nineteenth-century, these religious overtones were increasingly felt in Masonic rituals—and plainly so, in the case of the women—when compared to the earlier concentration on Enlightenment concepts (Burke, *Enlightenment* 257). For both men and women Freemasons, returning to the purity of the Garden of Eden has been a symbolic aspiration. Just after the height of Adoptive Freemasonry, records show a strong push to negate the viewpoint that Eve was responsible for the calamities of earth. Songs were written and plays produced—by male Freemasons—praising Eve and pardoning “the fellow who damned us” (Burke, *Enlightenment* 259).

Burke labeled the beginning of post-revolutionary Adoptive Freemasonry as “an incipient type of feminism,” citing the advent of women “creating higher degrees for themselves” (Burke, *Enlightenment* 256). Women conducted their own ceremonies and soon had “their own building and separate treasury” (Burke and Jacob 530; Burke, *Enlightenment* 258). In several instances female responsibility had grown—women were in charge within their own domain.

The female masons’ participation in charity may also be indicative of feminist expression. During post-revolution Adoptive Freemasonry, records of lodge meetings and writings about the institution seem to couple service and charity with the sisters’ spirit of independence. Works of charity were as frequent in the early stages of the Lodges of Adoption as they were in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-centuries, but the motivation was different. In pre-revolution Adoptive

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Freemasonry the concept of charity was “based on the principle that humanitarian concern was the pinnacle of the Enlightenment experience” (Burke, *Enlightenment* 256). Enlightenment ideals like equality, liberty and fraternity were all circumscribed by and linked through charity. Later, women mason’s works of charity were no longer done with male Freemasons, “but on their own and for reasons seemingly unrelated to the ideals of the Enlightenment” (Burke, *Enlightenment* 259-260).

A combination of forces induced female Freemasons to continue their charitable acts after the revolution. Thomas Haskell’s book, *Capitalism and the Origins of the Humanitarian sensibility*, speaks of a wave of humanitarianism that enveloped the western world during the eighteenth- and nineteenth-centuries in connection with the rise of capitalism (Burke, *Enlightenment* 262). Also, “the deep emotion and individualistic sensitivity of Romanticism” influenced the Mason’s inclination to charity. Leading female figures during the revolution “urged women to find their public place in work on behalf of the deserving poor” (Burke, *Enlightenment* 262). Many of the poor in France were left in devastating circumstances after the revolution. Charity was the mission of the women Masons. They had a responsibility for those who fell on hard times. The network of poor-relief institutions was inadequate (Burke, *Enlightenment* 262). With an air of independence, the women Masons took on the self-proclaimed task of aiding the dependent. Their charitable concerns became central and even began to replace the symbolic rituals that once were their focus.

The greatest increase of female masons coincides historically with a growing popularity of Freemasonry in France. Hundreds of women joined the Lodges of Adoption in the

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latter-part of the eighteenth-century (Burke and Jacob 515). Where the Masonic society once was characterized by elites, it began to be more inclusive: “women from other classes were becoming sisters and rising even into officers’ posts.” (Burke, *Enlightenment* 258). This broadened membership was a cross-section of the French female population. Records of this society serve as a historical barometer—the lodges were “an interesting microcosm in which to assess the new place of women in society” (Burke, *Enlightenment* 255).

The Lodges of Adoption are like windows partially disclosing women’s outlook and position in Western European society, the view is not comprehensive. An all-encompassing assessment of such a broad topic would require a structure more like the pyramid at the Louvre—several windows and a larger scale. Nevertheless, in the Lodges of Adoption we clearly see, in accord with the spirit of the Enlightenment, a rising feminism; a platform for women to express themselves; a venue for feminine unity. There was great respect between women and the male participants of these lodges—in most instances both valued the opposite sex and sought equality. Women enjoyed leadership over both men and women while maintaining admiration and kinship. This was not always the case: in some Lodges of Adoption women expressed contempt towards men and, similarly, the majority of conventional Masonic lodges had men in opposition to the Adoption movement. Nevertheless, the very existence of such a movement is evidence of a new feminine perspective. Women were assuming a new role in the public sphere.

French influence on Germany and Europe

How did these sentiments exhibited in Adoptive Freemasonry

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influence women and masonry in bordering Germany? Freemasons were spread throughout Europe, and although there was uniformity of practices and characteristics—both in terms of the lodges and members—there existed varying motivations for devotion to masonry. French and German attitudes differed in the eighteenth-century, and specifically during the revolution. While the Lodges of Adoption did not saturate Germany during the period, they did permeate the border and, on a larger scale, the new feminine perspective influenced Germany and German women.

Many of the German Freemasonic writings of the time recognize the existence of the Lodges of Adoption but do not acknowledge them as sanctioned by the Masons. In an *Überblick über die Geschichte der Freimaurerei in Deutschland*, the by-product of Freemasonry is mentioned—the “*Adoptionsorden, die auch Frauen aufnahmen*”—but it is promptly categorized as an Order “*die die Freimaurerei äußerlich nachahmten, inhaltlich aber nichts mit ihr zu tun hatten*” (Endler and Schwarze 16). Winfried Dotzauer’s compilation, *Quellen zur Geschichte der deutschen Freimaurerei im 18. Jahrhundert*, is a catalog of transcripts, speeches, letters, commentary, etc., from and about German Freemasonic lodges. It is divided into sections such as organization, the degree system, etc., to display the development process of Freemasonry in Germany and the roll the institution played in society (Dotzauer 5). A telling segment about adoptive masonry displays the by and large outlook of German masons:

Der “Chemin du bonheur” [way of happiness] ist ein typisches Produkt des Gedankens der sog. Adoptionsmaurerei, der Mitbeteiligung von Frauen in der Freimaurerei. Er gibt die Abschilderung der Aufnahme von Frauen in den

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Grad des Lehrlings, Gesellen und Meisters. Das Papier zeigt, wie schwer es dem Geist der Zeit fiel, die Frau emanzipatorisch in der öffentlichen Gesellschaft zu akzeptieren, der sich die Logen als Geheim-Gesellschaften doch immerhin näher befanden als die Familien. Neben einem z.T. geradezu ängstlichen Streben, auf die fraulichen Eigenschaften Rücksicht zu nehmen, konstatiert man sozusagen unfreiwillige Demonstrationen des ausschließlichen Zuschnitts der Freimaurerei auf Männer, indem die aufnahmewilligen Frauen systeminhärent in delikate Situationen—wenn auch in allen Ehren—gebracht werden müssen, berücksichtigt man die damalige galante, aber auch zugleich empfindliche Etikette.

Die Logenerziehung zielt auf Gottes- und Nächstenliebe, die Eigenliebe wird verbannt, geschlechtliche Liebe nicht direkt angesprochen. Lebensbaum und Apfel wollen auf die Welt des Weibes zugeschnitten scheinen, dem der Vorwurf nicht vorenthalten wird, daß durch es die Menschheit in Sünde gefallen sei. Nicht ohne geschlechtsspezifische Anspielungen erscheinen Strumpfband, Kuß und Peperoni. Die Handlungen der Frauen müssen von der Raison erhellt sein. Nachdem Eigenliebe und Vorurteile besiegt sind, kann Gleichheit unter den Freimaurern herrschen. (Dotzauer 178)

The overall German disapproval and lack-of-recognition of Lodges of Adoption may stem from different inherent nationalistic motivations for Masonic devotion. Margaret Jacob summarizes Robert Beachy's studies which describe German lodges as "sites for the expression of regional or national feeling, for a retreat from the cosmopolitan ideals of their eighteenth-century founding," as opposed to the French spirit of liberation and equality displayed both in the revolution and by the feminine movement (Jacob, *Exits* 251). Beachy's article portrays German masonry as distancing itself from the universalism of the

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Enlightenment and cosmopolitan rhetoric so as not to be associated with the French revolution. “But...ironically, German Masons grew increasingly politicized as they became more defensively apolitical.”⁷ Still, the politicizing of German lodges had more to do with their borders and pride in the *Vaterland* than the political agenda of women who liked the idea of admittance into a male organization.

Though not widespread, the Lodges of Adoption did pierce the border. Robert Beachy spoke of at least two “female lodges or lodges of adoption in the German speaking world in the late 18th or early 19th century (Stendal and Braunschweig),” but he added, “I believe both were French language lodges” (Beachy, email).⁸ Scholarship on German Adoptive masonry has timidly admitted to some presence of lodges but the picture is not all together clear.

“Officially, Masonry was closed to women,” Burke writes. “Yet in France...a number of lodges opened their own mixed-gender affiliates” (Burke, *Enlightenment* 255). In spite of official conventions, France saw the popularity of female masonry grow so great that by 1774 the Lodges of Adoption were recognized as official Masonic lodges (Burke, *Enlightenment* 256; Burke, *Freemasonry* 283). This recognition never came in any other country, including Germany, as the population of female members was never large enough to warrant or force change; but perhaps the influence and presence of European women with

⁷ Beachy 270. Beachy discusses (267) how there were two schools of thought within secret societies regarding the revolution, some for and some against. He also goes into detail on differing political views of German Masonic lodges (270-1).

⁸ Margaret Jacob referred to Robert Beachy as the “expert on things Masonic and German.” (Email to the author. 08 October, 2002.)

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motivations similar to the French female masons was underrepresented by Masonic scholarship.

Before looking at German examples of women's freemasonic involvement that has often been overlooked, it is instructive to note an analogous situation with Adoptive masonry and scholarship in Russia. In *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, an article on Russian Political Freemasonry attributes the origins of its own institution to France and even states that "its organizational structure was derived from the *Grand Orient de France*" (Smith and Norton 498). Though this displays the obvious influence of French Freemasonry on Russia, it should be noted that this type of Russian masonry was at its height one hundred years after the peak of Adoptive Masonry in France. Despite this time lag, however, it is reported that in Russia there was an "irregular Freemasonry which had abandoned most ritual and admitted women" (Smith and Norton 498). Such lodges were never recognized by the Constitution of the Grand Lodge of Russia, but their presence displays lasting French influence and feminist sentiments. Scholars of Russian Freemasonry downplay the influence of these lodges and yet we hear from Margaret Jacob that our knowledge of women's Freemasonry "may someday be complemented by what remains unexplored, remarkably not in France but in Russia" (Jacob, *Exits* 252).

German examples of female involvement in masonry are also prevalent. The Lodge in Braunschweig, mentioned by Beachy above, is described in an Austrian publication, *Hochgrade der Freimaurerei*, in more detail and in connection with other lodges. "In Deutschland hatte man seit den fünfziger Jahren statt der *Adoptionslogen die Esperance-logen*" (Lachmann and Schiffmann 235). There were other mixed-gender lodges; they simply went by a

different designation. The book speaks of a lodge founded in 1757 in Hamburg and the *Bruaunschweig* lodge in 1763. “*Sie bestanden aus Maurern und Nichtmaurern und hatten 2 Grade unter einem Großmeister und einer Großmeisterin.*” The following section of the book is subtitled “*Andere gemischte Orden jener Zeit,*” and lists German cities and dates through the latter part of the eighteenth-century where other such mixed-gender quasi-Masonic orders were established. The same book discusses the growth of adoptive lodges in France in terms of the number of degrees of advancement within the lodges, stating that after 1774 adoptive lodges reached ten, and then compares this mark to the German mixed-gender lodges which “*hatte aber nur 3 Grade bis zur Meisterin*” (Lachmann and Schiffmann 235).

Albert Mackey describes the French influence on the continent with regards to Lodges of Adoption: “...they speedily spread into other countries of Europe—into Germany, Poland, and even Russia.”⁹ Germany reacted with haste to the idea of Adoptive masonry, according to Mackey. The exchange of ideas was communal. French lodges also implemented rites from German lodges (Burke and Jacob 526). It was natural that an institution as large as the Lodges of Adoption would affect a neighboring country. If only by virtue of a shared border, the Lodges of Adoption would have an effect on Germany: one example is the Lodge of Adoption in Strasbourg, where both the city and lodge have gone through oscillations of nationality by the shifting German/French border (Burke, *Enlightenment* 257).

There are similarities in how Masonic sentiments were expressed in the respective countries. It is significant to note

⁹ Mackey, “Adoptive.”

likenesses of expression in the form of songs and poetry. In France, “women sang and recited poetry...on the same platform with the men” (Burke, *Enlightenment* 259). Likewise in Germany, a poem written by Anna Louisa Karschin was put to music and sung at an annual meeting of a lodge in Berlin (Gerlach 48-49). The poem is a tribute to the nobility of the Freemasonic institution. She aggrandizes the Masonic attribute of rationality in their worship and way of life, and the charitable acts of the institution: “*Vernunft und Menschenliebe sind / Die Königinnen eures Schmauses. / Ihr forscht nach, wo ist ein arm verwaistes Kind / Und wo das Haupt des ärmsten Hauses?*” (Gerlach 48-49). Karschin further writes that the masons went about perfecting themselves, becoming similar to their Maker, while always shunning any glory ascribed to them. Female participation in mixed-gender lodges, extending often to women taking on a conducting role, increased in both countries during the end of the eighteenth-century.

A changing female role at the close of the eighteenth-century

The distinct form of feminism initially displayed in France and also observed in Germany was not the lone sentiment expressed by women of the institution. A greater pride in domesticity is recorded in the French lodges at the turn of the century (Burke, *Enlightenment* 257). Values seemed to shift from overtones of female liberation to an emphasis on maternal love and fidelity to husbands. Women and men both spoke of the role of women as mothers and as the familial focal point. Such attitudes were made manifest chronologically later in the lodges, and, relatively soon thereafter, the presence of the Lodges of Adoption diminished (Burke, *Enlightenment* 262). In discussing this new domesticity,

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Burke contends “that the women in their organization had lost some of the gains they had made earlier” (Burke, *Enlightenment* 257). Whether she is referring to this new domestic sentiment being coincident with failure to perpetuate the Lodges of Adoption, or whether she is speaking of a deteriorating or subsiding feminism in general, is unclear. It is also, for this author, unimportant. Most significant is the fact that changes among women in French society, and specifically within mixed-gender lodges, correspond chronologically to a new outlook for German women.

On the first day of January, 1801, Ignaz Aurelius Feßler spoke at a Grand Freemasonic lodge in Berlin in a meeting titled, *Fest der Humanität* (Gerlach 370). The title of his address was, *Über die Bestimmung und Bildung des weiblichen Geschlechts*. Feßler was a professor (of theology, Oriental languages, and history), a freemason, a priest, and a legislator. Soon after he converted to Lutheranism he “contracted an unhappy marriage, which was dissolved in 1802,” after ten years.¹⁰ This speech about the calling and role of women was given at the close of his apparently difficult and endured marriage. Those gathered at the lodge for the quasi-Masonic meeting were male Freemasons and their wives, mothers, or daughters (Gerlach 379).

While proclaiming that society had made significant progress in finding the path to a compassionate life and embarking thereon, Feßler discussed “*der höhere Beruf des weiblichen Geschlechtes*.” He began with a poem that praised women as the thread or braid of a heavenly rose in the tapestry of earthly life, saying that gentle persuasiveness (an attribute of women that

¹⁰ *The 1911 Edition Encyclopedia*. 1911Encyclopedia.org. 03 May, 2003.

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ought to be coveted), though not conventional, would erase conflict and riotousness (Gerlach 371). “*Das Weib soll ihre erhabne Bestimmung erkennen, würdigen und achten.*” What is the calling that women ought to fulfill with respect to men and humanity?

...soll das Weib in dem Manne die Menschlichkeit hervorrufen, sein Gefühl der Beduerfnisse zur freien Selbsttätigkeit erheben, in das unregelte Spiel seiner Kräfte Ordnung und Harmonie bringen, seine Schöpfungen den Formen der Schönheit anpassen und seinen Charakter durch das aufgedrückte Siegel der Humanität vollenden.

The Freemasons and their female guests were told that there was a “magic” associated with this gender that would bring joy and harmony to the soul; order, beauty, tolerance, and joy are the four essential points in the female realm, according to Feßler. But the relationship between men and women was to be equal. “*Nicht der Mann, nicht das Weib, sondern der in beiden vereinigte und vollendete Mensch soll die Natur beherrschen, soll wirken, damit etwas werde, soll ordnen und verschönern, was geworden ist?*” (Gerlach 373). If pride overcomes society, there will never be nobility in leadership, poised characters in citizens, order and harmony in the world, nor freedom, “*solange das Weib unter uns und nicht neben uns steht.*” The progress of humanity was dependent upon the relationship between men and women, as also the successful implementation of the characteristics evident in women into society. There was to be fidelity and mutual respect between the sexes, and whatever station in society one found oneself, these attributes were to govern actions.

In both the French and German cases, the vast majority of

<http://20.1911encyclopedia.org/F/FE/Fessler_Ignaz_Aurelius.htm>.

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women did not think of themselves as subordinate when in a familial, domestic role. They were content in the responsibility of living by the attributes Feßler described. The ideals of Freemasonry—mutual respect between sexes and integrity in personal character—coincided with this, not necessarily new, but, newly propagated societal view.

The institution of Adoptive Freemasonry served as a platform for expression and an enclave for friendship among European women. These women established a more vocal and involved place in society than they had previously held. This institution, which first had large impacts in France, spread in its influence to other European countries, including Germany. Shortly after the turn of the nineteenth-century, however, the institution of Adoptive Freemasonry subsided and a feminism that continued to exist in varying degrees in the future was less prevalent than the traditional widespread female domesticity.

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