

## Masonic Secrets in and Brown's The Lost Symbol

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### ABSTRACT

This research delves into the Masonic secrets embedded within Dan Brown's novel "The Lost Symbol," particularly as they relate to Washington D.C.'s enigmatic history. The study centers on Freemasonry symbols depicted in the novel and seeks to uncover their deeper meanings by analyzing real-life counterparts. The primary aim is to disclose the second-order meanings of these symbols, thereby unraveling the myths associated with Freemasonry, especially the so-called "lost symbol." Employing Roland Barthes' semiology perspective, this research reveals how Masonic symbols, as described by Brown, are interwoven with Washington's iconic monuments. The analysis focuses on symbols such as the House of the Temple, the Apotheosis of Washington, the Pyramid, the Circumpunct, and various Masonic working tools. By interpreting these symbols through both their first-order (denotative) and second-order (connotative) meanings, the study aims to reveal the myth behind the lost symbol. The findings indicate that the Masonic secrets are indeed hidden within the Washington Monument and the Capitol Building, specifically in the House of the Temple, where Masonic rituals are conducted, and the Capitol Rotunda, which is rich with concealed Masonic lore. The ultimate Masonic secret, as portrayed in the novel, is the "Lost Word," symbolized by the phrase "Laus Deo" (Praise God), inscribed atop the Capitol. According to Masonic beliefs, this symbol holds the power to unlock profound secrets, guiding them towards their ultimate objective: the establishment of a New World Order. Through the lens of second-order meaning, the myth of the lost word is interpreted as a celestial symbol, representing the promise of new beginnings and the transition from night to morning, as envisioned by the Masonic forefathers who designed the U.S. Capitol.

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**Keywords:** Freemasonry, Masonic Secrets, Symbol, Washington D.C., Lost Word

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### INTRODUCTION

Human societies have long been shaped by myth and religion, with myths often being perceived as conveyors of absolute truth. These narratives, deeply intertwined with sacred history and philosophical thought, provide guidance and direction to societies. According to Van Peurseun, "Myth is a story that gives certain guidance or direction to the society (Sutrisno & Sunarto, 2024). Such stories, in the form of symbols, present an image of goodness and badness, life and death, sin and sanctification, heaven and hell." Myths are closely linked to mystical matters and represent stages in human efforts to understand divine existence (Fatima & Gaurav, 2024).

In societal contexts, according to Hiebert et al., (2024) myths function as systems of belief, often giving rise to religious doctrines that can shape ideological groups. These groups may become isolated from mainstream society, driven by a sense of participating in a sacred mission

to transform the world. Members of such secretive societies dedicate their lives to following the teachings of their leaders, often moving covertly yet spreading their influence across nations.

In contemporary times, the fascination with secret societies has been extensively discussed in literature and media. These brotherhoods, often shrouded in mystery, are governed by esoteric doctrines and engage in hidden activities known only to their members. Among the most prominent of these is Freemasonry, a secret society that has persisted since the 17th century (Orock & Geschiere, 2024).

Freemasonry is one of the world's most enigmatic and controversial groups, boasting a vast and diverse membership across multiple countries (Adams & Adams, 2024). Despite extensive historical records, speculation continues to swirl around the Masons, particularly regarding their closely guarded secrets. These secrets are passed down through generations, with Masonic teachings rooted in the philosophical exploration of human reason and the supernatural. Over time, the Masons developed a sacred body of knowledge, expressed through rituals and symbols, which they believe holds the key to hidden wisdom (Heindel, 2024).

The symbolism of Freemasonry is particularly rich and varied (Brunet, 2024), encompassing icons such as the Pyramid, the All-Seeing Eye, the Square and Compass, the Apotheosis of Washington, the House of the Temple, and the Circumpunct, among others. These symbols are believed to encode the power necessary to achieve the Masons' ultimate goal: the creation of a New World Order.

Given the profound symbolism associated with Freemasonry, this study aims to analyze the representation of Masonic secrets within Dan Brown's novel "The Lost Symbol". Specifically, it seeks to uncover how these secrets are intertwined with Washington D.C.'s dark history. Utilizing Roland Barthes' semiology perspective, the research will examine the first-order (denotative) and second-order (connotative) meanings of the Masonic symbols presented in the novel, with a focus on revealing the myth of the "lost symbol" (Barthes, 1967).

In light of the above considerations, this study is titled "Masonic Secrets in Dan Brown's The Lost Symbol Viewed from Roland Barthes' Semiology Perspective."

### **Theoretical Basis**

This section outlines the theoretical foundation used to explore the Masonic secrets and Freemasonry symbols in Dan Brown's *The Lost Symbol*, focusing on Roland Barthes' semiological system to uncover the myth behind the "lost symbol." Additionally, it discusses the concept of Freemasonry, particularly within the context of American Masonry.

#### **1. Roland Barthes' Semiology**

Roland Barthes, a prominent figure in the French school of structuralist semiotics, introduced an approach to analyzing signs that involves the dual concepts of denotation and connotation (Iskanderova, 2024). Although initially applied to photographic images, Barthes' method extends beyond language, asserting that any mode of communication can be subjected to semiological analysis. According to Barthes, images contain two layers of meaning: what is represented (denotation) and how it is represented (connotation). Denotation is more concrete and straightforward, while connotation involves more complex, abstract ideas (Barthes, 1972).

In this research, Barthes' semiology is employed to analyze the Masonic secrets and symbols in 'The Lost Symbol' (Brown, 2009). The denotative meaning represents the first-order signification, while the connotative meaning, or second-order signification, unveils the underlying myth associated with each symbol. By examining both levels of meaning, the research aims to reveal the hidden significance of Freemasonry's symbols, particularly in relation to the myth of the lost symbol.

According to Barthes in his seminal work 'Myth Today', every sign consists of a signifier (the material form) and the signified (the mental concept it represents). The mental representation, as Barthes notes, is subjective and varies from individual to individual, each of

whom organizes and classifies concepts differently. This study applies Barthes' semiological system to analyze both the first-order and second-order meanings of Freemasonry symbols, as interpreted through the lens of Masonic belief (Bennett & McDougall, 2013).

## **2. The Semiological System**

Barthes' semiological system extends the analysis of signs to encompass cultural artifacts, ideologies, and myths. He defines myth as a type of speech, albeit not just any type; "language needs special conditions in order to become a myth" (Barthes, 1972). Myths, according to Barthes, are deeply rooted in human history and do not arise naturally. They are intentionally crafted and can be altered or even destroyed depending on the context in which they exist. Myths contribute to the creation of ideologies, with the primary function of myth being the naturalization of concepts or beliefs.

Barthes posits that a denotative sign, which consists of both signifier and signified, can transform into a connotative sign. While denotation relates more closely to the literal or natural meaning, connotation involves the second-order significance, which Barthes associates with ideological functions. Connotations, or myths, serve to express and justify dominant societal values by naturalizing history into accepted truths (Iskanderova, 2024).

In the context of this study, the myth embedded within Freemasonry symbols is considered the hidden content or message that Masonic society believes to be true. Barthes' approach to myth as a process of signification is employed to analyze how these symbols, through their connotative meanings, reveal and perpetuate the dominant values of Freemasonry.

Given this theoretical framework, the research seeks to uncover the hidden meanings, or myths, embedded in the symbols of Freemasonry, with a particular focus on the 'lost symbol' as depicted in Dan Brown's novel. By revealing these myths, the study will analyze how Freemasonry's symbols, rooted in their sacred teachings, embody and convey the society's beliefs and ideologies.

## **METHOD**

### **1. Research Method**

This research employs a descriptive analysis method. According to Whitney (1960), the descriptive method involves a fact-finding process accompanied by a correct interpretation of the data (Zhou & Shalley, 2024). Best (1982) further defines descriptive research as an approach that seeks to describe the object or subject under study in a manner that accurately reflects reality (Wahyuni, 2024).

The descriptive analysis method is particularly suitable for this study as it allows for the systematic examination of information and facts. By describing and interpreting these elements accurately, the research aims to provide a clear and comprehensive understanding of the Masonic secrets depicted in Dan Brown's *The Lost Symbol*. This method involves the use of quotations and detailed reporting to support the analysis, ensuring that the interpretation aligns with the underlying reality of the subject matter.

In essence, the descriptive analysis method facilitates a deeper exploration and presentation of the Masonic secrets within the novel, enabling the researcher to uncover and interpret the hidden meanings and symbols as they relate to the broader context of Freemasonry.

### **2. Technique of Data Collection**

#### **a. Library Research**

The first step in the data collection process involves conducting comprehensive library research. This method allows the researcher to access a wealth of references and information crucial for supporting the analysis. Libraries provide access to various books, academic

journals, and other relevant materials that can enrich the research and provide a solid foundation for the study.

#### **b. Reading Comprehension**

Reading comprehension is a critical technique in this research. The researcher engages in close reading of the primary text and relevant literature to decode linguistic symbols and reconstruct them into meaningful wholes as intended by the author. This technique emphasizes not just the ability to read, but the understanding and interpretation of the material, which is essential for accurate analysis.

#### **c. Internet Sources**

In addition to traditional library research, the researcher utilizes internet sources to gather data. The internet is a valuable resource for accessing a wide range of references, including articles, academic papers, and other digital resources that may not be available in the library. This approach ensures that the researcher has access to the most up-to-date and comprehensive information needed to support the analysis.

### **3. Technique of Data Analysis**

#### **a. Classification**

The first step in the data analysis process involves classification. The researcher systematically categorizes the data collected from various sources, including books, articles, and websites. This classification process is crucial for organizing significant points related to the research questions and helps streamline the analysis by focusing on the most relevant data.

#### **b. Interpretation**

Following classification, the researcher engages in interpretation. This technique involves analyzing and interpreting the classified data to uncover deeper meanings within the text. By interpreting relevant quotations and contextual information, the researcher is able to extract key messages and insights that address the research questions.

#### **c. Explanation**

After interpretation, the explanation technique is employed to articulate the findings clearly. This step involves providing detailed explanations of the analyzed data, including text, quotations, meanings, and messages that are directly related to the research questions. The researcher uses this technique to clarify and support the interpretations made in the previous step.

#### **d. Conclusion**

The final step in the data analysis process is drawing conclusions. Based on the analysis and interpretation of the data, the researcher formulates conclusions that encapsulate the findings of the study. These conclusions provide a comprehensive answer to the research questions and summarize the key insights gained from the analysis.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This chapter delves into the exploration of Masonic secrets and Freemasonry symbols as depicted in Dan Brown's *The Lost Symbol*, particularly in the context of Washington D.C.'s shadowy history (Brown, 2009). The researcher employs Roland Barthes' Semiological perspective to uncover the second-order meanings, or myths, embedded within the novel's depiction of Masonic symbols.

### **Masonic Secrets**

This section examines the portrayal of Masonic secrets in *The Lost Symbol*, as experienced through the journey of Robert Langdon, a Harvard symbologist and the novel's central character. Langdon's adventure begins with a mysterious invitation, supposedly from an assistant of Peter Solomon—head of the Smithsonian Council, Master of the Freemasons, and Langdon's close friend. This invitation draws Langdon into a web of secrets hidden within Washington D.C., involving ancient Masonic rituals conducted by the novel's antagonist,

Mal'akh, who seeks to ascend to the rank of Master Mason. The analysis will focus on these secrets as depicted in the novel, particularly the rituals and symbolism used by Mal'akh in his pursuit of power.

### **1. Rituals of the Freemasons**

Dan Brown introduces Freemasonry in *The Lost Symbol* through a detailed depiction of a Masonic ritual that Mal'akh undergoes to become a Master Mason. This ritual is symbolically rich and central to understanding the novel's thematic concerns. The following quotation from the novel illustrates the importance of these rituals:

*"The secret is how to die. Since the beginning of time, the secret had always been how to die."* (Brown, 2009:17)

Through the lens of Roland Barthes' Semiological perspective, the researcher interprets the first-order meaning of this sentence as a literal statement about the process of dying (Barthes, 1967). However, the second-order meaning, or myth, within the context of Masonic belief, reveals a deeper understanding: the secret of life and death. In Masonic tradition, the initiate exists in a liminal state between life and death. To become a Freemason, the initiate must undergo three degrees of initiation, each symbolizing a moral life devoted to the principles of brotherly love, relief, and truth. These degrees also serve as a safeguard against betraying Masonic secrets, a theme echoed in the following passage:

*"...he had begun the journey adorned in the ritualistic garb of a medieval heretic... and his mind began replaying all the dire warnings he had been given on his journey, threats of terrible consequences if he ever shared the ancient secrets."* (Brown, 2009:20)

In this analysis, the researcher uncovers how Dan Brown presents Masonic rituals through the character of Mal'akh, who undergoes the initiation process to attain the thirty-third degree—the highest level in Freemasonry. The novel describes this journey through the lens of Masonic initiation, which Mal'akh must complete to become a Master Mason. The process involves obtaining three symbolic degrees: Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft, and Master Mason.

The ritualistic journey that Mal'akh embarks on is not just a series of ceremonial acts but a profound transformation, symbolically representing his passage through life, death, and rebirth within the Masonic tradition. Each degree attained by Mal'akh is laden with symbolic meaning, contributing to the broader myth of Freemasonry as a secretive and powerful society with deep historical roots.

### **2. Masonic Secrets in Washington D.C.**

In this section, the researcher uncovers the hidden Masonic secrets embedded within the architecture and history of Washington D.C., as depicted in *The Lost Symbol*. The analysis will focus on the significant buildings in Washington D.C. that serve as repositories of Masonic wisdom, as well as the city's dark history and its connections to the Founding Fathers of America.

The U.S. Capitol Building, situated majestically at the eastern end of the National Mall, is a prime example of this secretive Masonic influence. Pierre L'Enfant, the city's designer, described the location as "a pedestal waiting for a monument." The Capitol, with its massive 16-acre footprint and 541 rooms, is a testament to neoclassical architecture, meticulously designed to echo the grandeur of ancient Rome. These Roman ideals were deeply inspirational to America's founders as they shaped the laws and culture of the new republic. The significance of these influences can be further understood through the following excerpt from the novel:

*"The world's largest and most technologically advanced museum is also one of the world's best-kept secrets. It houses more pieces than the Hermitage, the Vatican Museum, and the New York Metropolitan combined. Yet despite its magnificent collection, few members of the public are ever invited inside its heavily guarded walls."* (Brown, 2009:43)

This quotation emphasizes that many of Washington D.C.'s buildings, including the U.S. Capitol, are not merely governmental or cultural edifices. They are, in essence, spiritual centers that house and protect the secret knowledge and rituals of the Freemasons. The Capitol, for example, is not just a symbol of government power; it is a Masonic site, with its structure, art, and symbols all pointing to the deep influence of secret fraternities in shaping the U.S. government. The features and design elements within each room of the Capitol serve as physical representations of Masonic principles and beliefs.

One such building highlighted in the novel is the museum located at 4210 Silver Hill Road, just outside Washington D.C. This massive, zigzag-shaped edifice, composed of five interconnected pods, each larger than a football field, is described as a mysterious and alien world. Its bluish metal exterior barely hints at the strangeness within—a six-hundred-thousand-square-foot space containing a "dead zone," a "wet pod," and over twelve miles of storage cabinets. For the general public, a museum is a place for collecting and displaying artifacts. However, for Freemasons, it is akin to a "Chamber of Reflection," a room designed for meditation on one's mortality. These chambers are cold and austere, encouraging Masons to reflect on the inevitability of death, which in turn provides valuable perspective on the fleeting nature of life. The "dead zone" mentioned in the novel symbolizes death itself, serving as a shrine that inspires Masons to contemplate how best to lead their lives on Earth.

The hidden Masonic secrets in Washington D.C. are not only about symbolism but also about the protection of powerful locations within the city. These locations are believed to hold the potential to change the world, guarded by secret codes known only to the Masons. One of the central elements in the novel is the concept of an ancient portal hidden somewhere in Washington D.C., a key to accessing the Ancient Mysteries. This is highlighted in the following passage:

*"Peter Solomon believes the Ancient Mysteries are real. They are accessible through some kind of portal hidden in Washington D.C. He understands metaphorical symbolism, which is something his captor apparently does not."* (Brown, 2009:119)

The "Ancient Mysteries" refer to a body of secret knowledge accumulated over centuries. In the novel, it is suggested that this knowledge enables its practitioners to unlock powerful abilities within the human mind (Heckethorn, 2024). The enlightened Adepts who possessed this knowledge swore to keep it hidden from the masses, considering it too potent and dangerous for anyone who had not undergone Masonic initiation.

The Masonic belief, as depicted in the novel, is that there is a hidden room within the U.S. Capitol that houses this ancient portal. While the idea of a literal portal is presented metaphorically in the novel, it serves as a symbol of the transformative journey one must undertake to achieve enlightenment. Portals and doorways are common symbols representing rites of passage, and in Masonic tradition, they signify the journey toward uncovering the deepest Masonic secrets and realizing one's true potential. The novel's protagonist, Robert Langdon, a Harvard symbologist, frequently discusses this metaphorical portal, emphasizing that it represents a spiritual rather than a physical journey—a passage toward enlightenment and self-discovery.

### **Freemasonry's Symbols**

Freemasonry is often perceived as a secretive society, cloaked in mystery and enigma. However, as Dan Brown illustrates through the character of Robert Langdon in *The Lost Symbol*, the Masons are not so much a "secret society" as they are a "society with secrets" (Brown, 2009). Masonry does not promise salvation, adhere to a specific theology, or attempt to convert individuals. In fact, discussions of religion are strictly prohibited within Masonic lodges. Freemasonry is inclusive, welcoming men of all races, colors, and creeds into a spiritual fraternity that is non-discriminatory. However, becoming a Mason requires passing through

uncommon and symbolic initiation rites. Essentially, Freemasonry is a system of morality, veiled in allegory, and expressed through symbols.

In this section, the researcher will explore the symbolism within Freemasonry as depicted in Washington D.C., focusing particularly on the "lost symbol" and its mythological significance.

### **1. Myth of The Lost Symbol**

In this part, the researcher delves into the Freemasonry symbols presented in *The Lost Symbol*, seeking to uncover the second-order meanings—myths—associated with these symbols. Through Robert Langdon's journey, which begins with an invitation to unlock an ancient portal hidden within the Capitol buildings, the researcher examines the "lost symbol" and its deeper, mythological significance.

### **2. The Lost Symbol**

The researcher investigates the "lost symbol" by analyzing the symbols found on the capstone, which is essential to solving the Pyramid's codes and uncovering the great secrets of Freemasonry. Through the kidnapping of Robert Langdon and Katherine Solomon, the narrative unfolds, revealing the symbol that has been lost and interpreting its second-order meaning as a myth.

### **3. The Lost Word**

The "lost symbol" is ultimately revealed to be an inscription consisting of seven symbols that can be arranged into words. By examining these seven symbols, the researcher seeks to reveal their second-order meaning and uncover the "Lost Word," as depicted in the following quotation:

*"More startling, however, was the knowledge that this capstone's ultimate peak, the zenith of this obelisk, was crowned by a tiny, polished tip of aluminum—a metal as precious as gold in its day. The shining apex of the Washington Monument was only about a foot tall, the same size as the Masonic Pyramid. Incredibly, this small metal pyramid bore a famous engraving—Laus Deo—and Langdon suddenly understood. This is the true message at the base of the stone pyramid." (Brown, 2009:653)*

The quotation above illustrates how the "Lost Symbol" is intrinsically connected to the "Lost Word." According to legend, the Lost Word is not merely a metaphor but a tangible reality. It is said to be inscribed in an ancient language and has been concealed for ages. The Word is believed to hold unfathomable power, accessible only to those who can truly comprehend its meaning. Despite the passage of time, the Word remains hidden, and the Masonic Pyramid is believed to possess the ability to reveal it.

### **4. The Unveiled Symbol**

*Laus Deo* is a well-known Latin phrase meaning "Praise God" (Morris, 2024). At first glance, this phrase might be interpreted as a simple expression of reverence or devotion to God. However, in *The Lost Symbol*, *Laus Deo* holds a deeper, hidden significance, especially within the context of Freemasonry. The phrase was inscribed on the tip of the Washington Monument in script letters only one inch tall—visible only to those who know where to look. This small but powerful inscription represents the final code of the Masonic Pyramid, accessible only to a worthy Master Mason.

Freemasons believe that this final code, embedded in the legendary Masonic Pyramid, guides them to America's great obelisk—the Washington Monument. This obelisk, symbolizing ancient mystical wisdom, rises toward the heavens at the heart of the nation (Blacker & Loewe, 2024). The worthy Master Mason, who has kept the great Masonic secrets at the top of the U.S. Capitol, is believed to witness the transition from night to morning, symbolizing enlightenment and the dawn of a new day across America.

Freemasons traditionally laid cornerstones in which they sealed meaningful objects. One of these was the Lost Word, which was buried by Masonic forefathers in the cornerstone of the

Washington Monument during a full Masonic ritual. The Masons understood the true power of this Word. As the narrative suggests, the Mason who comprehends the Ancient Mysteries and the secrecy of the Masonic Pyramid gains tremendous power—the power of man becoming God. This concept revolves around the belief that the mysteries are ultimately about discovering the divine within oneself, or man as a god. The following quotation from the novel supports this interpretation:

“Katherine said, ‘God is very real—a mental energy that pervades everything. And we, as human beings, have been created in that image. Our physical bodies have evolved over the ages, but it was our minds that were created in the image of God. We learn that to resemble God, it’s our minds.’” (Brown, 2009:659)

This passage suggests that the promise of man becoming God lies in the understanding of the mind's true potential. Once humans begin to harness this power, they will gain enormous control over their world. They will be able to design reality rather than merely react to it. This concept aligns with Masonic mantras such as “gather what is scattered,” “bring order from chaos,” and achieve “at-one-ment.” These ideas reflect the belief that the power of human thought grows exponentially when shared and cultivated by multiple minds. Consequently, nothing remains hidden; everything will eventually come to light. The following quotation illustrates this idea:

“As the rays of sunlight strengthened, the golden glow engulfed the entirety of the thirty-three-hundred-pound capstone. The mind of man . . . receiving enlightenment. The light then began inching down the monument, commencing the same descent it performed every morning. Heaven moving toward earth . . . God connecting to man.” (Brown, 2009:669)

In the second-order meaning, the word "heaven" symbolizes the divine connection established at the top of the U.S. Capitol, a place built by the forefathers of Freemasonry to witness the transition from night to day. This cyclical process symbolizes the continuous renewal and enlightenment that comes with each new day. The phrase "God connecting to man" suggests that the divine is not an external force but rather an inherent potential within humans. This potential enables them to create, bring order from chaos, and exert control over the world. These are the reasons why Masons see themselves as having a divine duty to shape and create various aspects of life, assuming a godlike role in the process.

## CONCLUSION

Dan Brown’s *The Lost Symbol* intricately portrays Masonic secrets through the narrative of Masonic rituals and symbols. The journey to becoming a Mason is depicted as a transformative process, beginning with the first degree, The Entered Apprentice, progressing through the second degree, Fellow Craft, and culminating in the Master Mason's extraordinary ritual, especially the exalted thirty-third degree. Brown reveals the significance of Freemasonry’s symbols by anchoring them in key locations, particularly within Washington, D.C. The Washington Monument and the Capitol Building are depicted as places steeped in Masonic tradition, housing symbols that represent the profound teachings of the Freemasons. Among these symbols, the lost word “*Laus Deo*”, meaning “Praise God,” stands out, inscribed at the pinnacle of the Washington Monument. In the novel, this phrase is not merely an invocation of God but a representation of human potential—the ability to create, to bring order from chaos, and to shape the world. The “heaven” atop the U.S. Capitol symbolizes a place where enlightenment and new beginnings are continually reborn, reflecting the Masonic belief in the power of human thought and the cyclical nature of progress. Through the exploration of these symbols and their connection to America's founding, Brown illustrates how Freemasonry intertwines with the nation’s history, offering a narrative that merges myth, symbolism, and historical fact to suggest that the secrets of the Masons are deeply embedded in the fabric of the United States.



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