

R. STEPHEN DOAN
Liberal Arts and
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Liberal Arts and Sciences and the Regius Poem

My President's Column in the last issue of *Philaethes* [Volume 72, Number 2 • Spring 2019] raised two questions from reader Mel Johnson of Connecticut. His questions were triggered by my reference to the Regius Poem from the 1390s. Below is a commonly quoted translation of the portion of the Poem which generated Mel's questions:

Many years after, the good clerk Euclid
Taught the craft of geometry full wonder wide,
So he did that other time also,
Of divers crafts many more.
Through high grace of Christ in heaven,
He commenced in the sciences seven;
Grammar is the first science I know,
Dialect the second, so I have I bliss,
Rhetoric the third without doubt,
Music is the fourth, as I you say,
Astronomy is the fifth, by my snout,
Arithmetic the sixth, without doubt,
Geometry the seventh maketh an end,
For he is both meek and courteous,
Grammar forsooth is the root,
Whoever will learn on the book;
But art passeth in his degree,
As the fruit doth the root of the tree;
Rhetoric measureth with ornate speech among,
And music it is a sweet song;
Astronomy numbereth, my dear brother,
Arithmetic sheweth one thing that is another,
Geometry the seventh science it is,
That can These be the sciences seven,
Who useth them well he may have heaven
separate falsehood from truth, I know.

Mel asks: Why does the Regius Poem list the Seven Liberal Arts and Sciences in a different order than in our ritual? They are the same three and four grouping (the Trivium and the Quadrivium) but in different order within each group.

	Trivium	Quadrivium
Regius Poem	Grammar, Dialect, Rhetoric	Music, Astronomy, Arithmetic and Geometry
Thomas Smith Webb's <i>Freemason's Monitor or Illustrations of Freemasonry</i>	Grammar, Rhetoric, Logic	Arithmetic, Geometry, Music and Astronomy

Mel also asked why the word Dialect is used in the Regius Poem instead of Logic.

Guest columnist James Lincoln Warren, a most erudite Past Master of my lodge, provides the following answers:

First Question: Why the Regius Order

The Regius Poem uses the original order for the Trivium, but as far as I can tell, the poet's own order for the Quadrivium.

In the Trivium, grammar was necessary to form meaningful speech, logic for rational construction of argument, but rhetoric for conveying the combination and conclusions of the first two. Later, logic was placed higher than rhetoric, because it dealt directly with Truth (of which more anon below).

The Quadrivium has had different orderings through the ages, starting with the Pythagoreans (although the term "quadrivium" doesn't show up until the 6th century), who divided it into halves, one dealing with quantities (arithmetic, music) and the other with magnitudes (geometry, astronomy). The Neo-Platonist Proclus also followed that ordering. In *The Republic*, Plato listed the order as arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, music, according to the sequence in the dialogue, but arguments can be made that the order is not implicit, because Plato almost always gets dragged into the discussion whenever the order is considered.

From the 18th century onward (probably much earlier—the metaphor of arithmetic=birth, geometry=life, music=death, astronomy=heaven seems strongly scholastic rather than Enlightenment to me, although I don't know its origin), the order we use in our ritual was pretty well fixed—although even in the 20th century, the order varies, depending on how the progression is conceived and who's making the argument and why.

I think the Regius poet arranged them for his own purposes, but that's a SWAG (scientific wild "a!!" guess). I think music was moved to fourth place because the poet identified it with rhetoric, which immediately precedes it. He seems to have regarded astronomy as simply being about counting things and arithmetic as establishing identities, i.e., equations. But Geometry, now. First of all, being the seventh makes it the most elevated, which suits his purpose in establishing it as the highest science. But even more significantly, the translation cited above left out an important line, finishing the penultimate couplet that closes the excerpt provided:

Gemetré the seventh syens hyt ysse,
That con deperte falshed from trewthe y-wys.

Which in Roger Baxter's (Master of Quatuor Coronati Lodge in the 1920s) 1923 Modern English version is rendered:

Geometry the seventh science it is,
That can separate falsehood from truth, I know.

The "I know" translation of "y-wys" is, IMHO [in my humble opinion], awkward, because (1) it's inaccurate, and (2) it spoils the rhyme. "Y-wys" is Middle English for "in this wise", which back then was idiomatic for "in any case," at least according to Eugene Vinaver's tail-end glossary for Malory's works on my bookshelf (which isn't the three-volume scholastic version, I have to admit, which I could not afford when I bought it over 40 years ago—it's the single-volume one he prepared for general readers, although it's still in Middle English). Awkwardness notwithstanding, the point is that in the couplet, Geometry is identified as the science that separates the false from the true—which I think is a shot across the bow at the 1425 law against Masonic Assembly. He's saying that Freemasons are more truthful than their accusers and more capable of detecting deception.

Second Question: Why Dialect Instead of Logic

"Dialect" = "Dialectic" = Logic

Here's the appropriate OED [Oxford English Dictionary] entry for "dialect":

dialectic n. 1. *Obs.* 1551 T. Wilson *Logike* (1580) 2 b, Logike otherwise called Dialecte (for thei are bothe one) is an Arte to trie the corne from the chaffe.

R. Stephen Doan, FPS
President

Masonic Education Events

September 7, 2019
Alexandria Lodge of Research and Study 2's Quarterly Meeting
5:30pm
Grand Rapids Masonic Center
233 Fulton Street East
Grand Rapids, MI
<https://www.alexandralodgeofresearch.org>

September 7, 2019
Esoteric-con
San Pedro Masonic Lodge
1640 W. 9th Street
San Pedro, CA 90732
<https://www.keepersoftheword.net/esoteric-con>

September 14, 2019
New Jersey Lodge of Masonic Research and Education 1786
10:00am
Hightstown-Apollo Lodge #41
535 N. Main Street
Hightstown, NJ
<https://njlore1786.com>

September 14, 2019
Tennessee Lodge of Research
Unicoi Lodge, #681
Unicoi, TN
Progress TBA
<https://tnlor.org>

September 17, 2019
Vermont Lodge of Research
Progress and Location TBA
<https://vermontlodgeofresearch.com>

September 17, 2019
Northern California Research Lodge
7:00pm
San Francisco Scottish Rite Center
2850 Nineteenth Avenue
San Francisco, CA
Progress TBA
<https://ncrl.info>

September 21, 2019
Texas Lodge of Research
Progress and Location TBA
<https://texaslodgeofresearch.org>

September 23, 2019
Missouri Lodge of Research Fall Truman Lecture
7:00am
Grand Lodge Annual Communication
Columbia
<https://molor.org>

October 5, 2019
3rd Annual Northwest Masonic Conference
9:00am-4:00pm
Kenton Lodge #145 GLO
8130 North Denver Avenue
Portland, OR 97217
<http://esotericmasonry.com/>

October 26, 2019
Pennsylvania Academy of Masonic Knowledge
Fall Symposium
Freemasons Cultural Center - Masonic Village
1 Masonic Drive
Elizabethtown, PA
Progress TBA
<https://pamasonicacademy.org/meeting>

November 19, 2019
Northern California Research Lodge
7:00pm
San Francisco Scottish Rite Center
2850 Nineteenth Avenue
San Francisco, CA
Progress TBA
<https://ncrl.info>

September 18-20, 2020
Quatuor Coronati
2020 Conference
Freemasonry on the Frontier...
The Grand Lodge of Massachusetts
186 Tremont Street
Boston, MA 02111
<https://www.quatuorcoronati.com/2020-conference/conference-programme/>

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