



**Internet Lodge 9659**  
**United Grand Lodge of England**  
**Province of East Lancashire**  
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**Short Papers Competition 2007**

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**Paper 15/2007**

**Title** **Diversity in Freemasonry**  
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Brethren, why do we as Masons, place so much value on, and make so much effort to “Visit” another Brother’s Lodge? Is it simply the friendship, camaraderie and enjoyment that we experience? Perhaps, we search for further meaning in our Masonic understanding, or is it the *esprit de corps*, of shared experiences and challenges, and the collective difficulties we strive to overcome, in mastering the challenging ritual? For many Freemasons, visiting is about observing and enjoying different interpretations of the ritual, seeking new perspectives and looking for variance in the delivery of the ceremonial. Coupled to this, is the undoubted pleasure of examining the structure of the Temple, its layout, its ornamentation and its symbols.

The diverse symbols, we observe, are predominantly architectural, celestial and spiritual in character and are an interesting amalgam of many traditions. Alongside this imagery, there exists, with a close and curious parallel, the literature of the ritual. Both carry a rational content inside their artistic form. The images are essentially allegorical, being regular, uniform and orthogonal in nature - whilst the literature, reflects a fondness for the technical, using an old and archaic vocabulary. There is a distinctive operative-craft bias in the text, which is interspersed with ungainly and odd sounding phrases. And yet, this archaic and obtuse literature, is quite remarkable - it is at one, prosaic, profound and poetical in its descriptive form.

Brethren, we have a most interesting juxtaposition: uniformity and regularity in the allegorical images we find in the temple; contrasted to a style of literature, drawn from diverse styles and forms. And yet Brethren, despite the obvious irregularity, there is coherence to the content, and we marvel at how the literature and ritual can vary from the ungainly to the graceful.

Brethren, is irregularity so unusual in Freemasonry and should diversity be condemned? Perhaps, you may think, the ritual should reflect the same uniformity and orderliness of the imagery? Brethren, I would suggest not, (as Tom Paulin, 2001, reminds us in "Thomas Hardy") - in architecture cunning irregularity is both the norm and of enormous worth, for example in visiting a local church we may discover that the carved leafage of some capital or spandrel strays out of bounds with its mouldings; or that the enrichment of a string-course in the building is not accurately spaced, or there was a sudden blank in a wall, where a window was expected from formal measurement.

And so within the ritual of Freemasonry, we find the unforeseen and unexpected, the text stresses principle rather than structures syllable. It overlays the Masonic symbols with poetic texture, rather than poetic veneer. We find that the precision of the tracing board is counterpoised by the Masons individual mark.

Brethren, herein, I would suggest to you, lies a key value in “Visiting” another Brother’s Lodge. Not only are we challenged by the different symbols we see, and the ritual we observe, but we learn that diversity and individual interpretation, is the norm in Freemasonry, it is fundamental to the Craft, and to us, as individuals, in promoting our daily advancement in Masonic knowledge.

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