

The Mystic Tie – The Language of Tying and Untying

*A presentation on March 23, 2014 by Joi Grieg
at the “At a Perpetual Distance: Universal Freemasonry and Its Historical Divisions” conference
organized by the Roosevelt Center for the Study of Civil Society and Freemasonry*

I'd like to thank Liberal Arts Lodge #677 for hosting this event, the Roosevelt Center for the Study of Civil Society and Freemasonry for organizing it, and those who have assisted me with references and suggestions on this topic. I'd also like to welcome members of the Craft, researchers and students, and those interested in Freemasonry.

I am delighted to be here and share with you some preliminary research I've done on the language of inclusion and exclusion that binds or distances one from Freemasonry, particularly for those who are Freemasons.

Before I begin, I'd like to share a story that could be true or be an allegory that I think will illustrate some key points:

At the Information Processing Interagency Conference, known to regular attendees as IPIC, in March, 2008 in Orlando, Florida, a man invited several from across the country he considered successful and moral business development professionals in government sales. At the table were six, five men and one woman. The dialogue ranged widely and, at one point, talked about commission potential, or for those who are unfamiliar with this term, money matters, and things clearly got off-track. One of the individuals said, “Perhaps it would be better if we left our metals outside.” At that instant, they looked at each other and realized perhaps that some or all of the others were also masons. After a bit of silence, one man said he would happily do that and he was a Prince Hall Mason. The others started to discuss their lodges, with two in Grand Lodges participating in the Council of the Grand Masters of Masons in North America (CGMMNA), one in a European Grand Orient that was adogmatic and allowed women as visitors to sit in their lodges, and the women, in a feminine Obedience. The host, hearing this, shared that his father and grandfather had been masons while he, himself, was not. It had never occurred to him that his guests might be Freemasons. He just wanted them to meet each other. The discussion continued with the Maryland Prince Hall Brother and the Grand Lodge of Maryland Brother discussing Maryland's recognition of Prince Hall that began in 2003, followed by a joint proclamation in 2005 and a lodge from each jurisdiction meeting together as a tyled lodge in 2008. They then looked at the woman and asked how she could be a Mason. She shared the history of women and Freemasonry including the upcoming 100th anniversary celebration of the Order of Women Freemasons in the UK in June, 2008 as well as how there were many women Masons in countries like France and Mexico. The man from the European Obedience mentioned that while he couldn't 'sit' in tyled lodge with the other men there, he was glad to be in their company. The warmth and connection of the five, who didn't know each other prior to the dinner, was quite evident. No grips, passwords, tokens or other Masonic communication, as they are often called, were used. And, following that meeting, the guests stayed in contact and found opportunities to work together.

For me, this exemplifies the Mystic Tie, that connection that touches each Mason and binds them to each other, sometimes even when they can't sit together in Lodge. It is a term that, for many, that exemplifies the universality and connectedness of Freemasonry.

For those, like me, who are not expert in philosophy, sociology or linguistics, there is a good body of literature and knowledge about how 'I' becomes 'we', on social inclusion and exclusion, and how language contributes to or interferes with this bonding. In the time remaining, I will use

a few references to summarize these concepts and then apply these to language associated with Freemasonry.

In the book, *Hegel and the Other* (2005), author Phillip J. Kain describes in straightforward language Hegel's theories how "I" becomes a "we" where there is a, "complex, collective awareness - the attitudes, behavior, vision, practices, consciousness, and aspiration of a culture."ⁱ Part of this deals with how the individual identifies with and distances from what they perceive as "the other."

David Cannadine, a historian, in his book, *The Undivided Past: Humanity Beyond Our Differences* (2013), looks at human solidarity by looking at the impact of religion, nation, class, gender, race, and civilization in bringing humanity together or separating them, particularly in what he calls, "the great game of "us versus them".ⁱⁱ An interesting illustration about co-existence was about two approaches to accommodation between Catholics and Protestants in the 1578-1620 time period: one was "clandestine churches" ("schuilerk") where Catholics and Protestants worshiped together and the other, "simultonkirche" which were buildings that Catholics and Protestants could share yet separately practice.ⁱⁱⁱ The first approach violated authority rule yet seemed to work as an open secret at the local level and the other, a method that allowed coexistence in a way that didn't violate authority rule.

Crossing linguistics and sociology, there is an area of study called, 'the language of inclusion and exclusion' and it looks at the categorizations, words and phrases used that highlight distinctions between in-groups and out-groups.^{iv} Often, the work is specific to a topical area like nationality or gender. Within the literature, there appears a pattern for the in-group to continuously update the terminology with the intention to mostly exclude or, more rarely, include by using language highlighting distinctions between the groups again with a binary logic of "us versus them."

With this background, let's move to applying this to the language of Freemasonry. The term, 'the Mystic Tie,' was popularized in 1786 by the Scottish poet and Freemason Robert Burns in his farewell to the Brethren of Saint James Lodge in Scotland:

Adieu! a heart-warm fond adieu;
Dear brothers of the mystic tie!
Ye favorued, ye enlighten[d] few,
Companions of my social joy;^v

Albert Mackey, known for his many Masonic books, published a book with this title in 1867, which stated, "That sacred and inviolable bond which unites men of the most discordant opinions into one band of brothers, which gives but one language to men of all nations and one altar to men of all religions, is properly, from the mysterious influence it exerts, denominated the mystic tie;..."^{vi} Chris Hodapp stated that this mystic tie, "mythically and symbolically binds its members to millions of brethren around the globe, spanning the centuries. This bond is what allows two strangers to meet on a street in a foreign land and greet each other as though they've known each other all their lives..."^{vii} This may occur on an individual basis even without the express approval of each individual's jurisdiction as illustrated in the story we began with. Phrases like brethren, the Craft and the Mystic Tie are viewed as inclusive and serve to bind Freemasonry.

When individuals are part of jurisdictions that recognize each other, they permit Masonic acknowledgement of each other and, in most cases, allow them to sit together in a tyled Lodge.

When words like 'recognized' and 'regular' are used, many feel included and part of the in-group. These words convey claiming and legitimizing as do terms like 'brethren'.

There was an essay titled, "I Am Regular" by Brother Karen Kidd, which won a UGLE award in 2007, that began with:

I am Regular.

I know this to be true, though I've heard otherwise. That because various Masonic jurisdictions (such as the United Grand Lodge of England, the US Malecraft Grand Lodges and etc.) are not in amity with my jurisdiction, and because I'm a woman, I can't **possibly** be Regular. I've also been counseled that, slander though this be, I should take it in good part and be grateful my Malecraft brethren speak to me at all.

And yet I know myself to be Regular because the Ritual and Masonic jurisprudence say that I am. So I am.^{viii}

As this illustrates, what is regular for one may not be for another so this word, while inclusive, may warrant some caution.

Let's move to the term 'profane.' In Mackey's Masonic Dictionary, it is stated, "the original and inoffensive signification of profane is that of being uninitiated; and it is in this sense that it is used in Freemasonry, simply to designate one who has not been initiated as a Freemason."^{ix} It was used in ancient times and simply meant, "Outside the Temple" and later was used in the Old and New Testaments of the Bible, becoming the base of the word 'profanity' used in English. A number of Masonic jurisdictions have moved to use the words uninitiated or non-Mason to avoid the feelings of stigmatization or rejection that may be felt.

The term 'clandestine' in Freemasonry dates back to 1784 and has a specific Masonic definition. According to Mackey, it is "One made in or affiliated with a clandestine Lodge." which is, "A body of Freemasons or of those improperly claiming to be Freemasons, uniting in a Lodge without the consent of a Grand Lodge..."^x Usage of the term may be defined in a jurisdiction's Constitution, Code, or other rules. As an example, the Code of the Grand Lodge of Iowa gives the following definition: "A *clandestine* lodge is one without a Dispensation, Charter, or Warrant from a recognized Grand Lodge."^{xi} So, for some Freemasons, usage of this term may be mandated by their jurisdiction. Incidentally, the word's origins go back to Latin and the original meaning was secret or hidden. It is still used that way in a number of communities and critics of Freemasonry, along with conspiracy theorists, may apply the word 'clandestine' to Freemasonry as a whole.

The Phylaxis Society has a Commission on Bogus Practices. This has a very specific focus related to Prince Hall; however, the terms bogus and clandestine are used interchangeably by some Freemasons. Most Masonic dictionaries do not include an entry for the term. The word itself is generally attributed to the late 18th century to a machine to make counterfeit money. Some Freemasons refer to organizations that offer degrees or other Masonic materials that bear little or no resemblance to materials legitimately transmitted as 'bogus' and there may be broad agreement that this is an appropriate derisive term.

Let's move to three additional terms: 'cowan', 'intruder', and 'eavesdropper'. Cowan is defined as one with unlawful Masonic knowledge; an "intruder" is one with neither knowledge nor secrets, and an eavesdropper as one who intentionally or unintentionally became aware of

Masonic knowledge.^{xii} Another way to state this is they refer to unintended transmission or intentional deception about one's status in Freemasonry. Sadly, it may include those who unknowingly followed what they thought was a Masonic process that none or almost none recognize. Like the term 'bogus', many within Freemasonry may agree these are appropriate terms that exclude. .

There is some use of the term 'irregular'; however, there is variance in how this term is understood. As an example, in Maine's Constitution^{xiii}, this refers to a situation where a Mason was not legally constituted for a specific ceremony in a lodge with a charter that is recognized. It can be cured by healing the candidate with the approval of the Grand Master in a regularly constituted Lodge. Others use the term interchangeably with clandestine or don't use it at all.

Unaffiliated and nonaffiliated may also be used. In some jurisdictions, they are viewed as the same. In others, there are differences such as a nonaffiliated Mason is one who ceased to be a member of a Lodge for a reason other than suspension or expulsion.

The California Masonic Code refers to those belonging to lodges not recognized as unrecognized Masons and states that, "California Masons may engage in any activity with an unrecognized Mason so long as they do not share..."^{xiv} specific information. The term 'unrecognized' is generally seen as neutral and inclusive.

As this conference discusses division and the distance from universal freemasonry, perhaps this material will support that language is a key component in the perception of inclusion and exclusion. Within Freemasonry, there are a breadth of terms that tie Freemasons together and others that untie them. There are choices that have been made such as California's use of 'unrecognized' as contrasted with others that have Constitutions or other rules requiring the use of 'clandestine' to those Masons that are not in jurisdictions theirs recognize. Each of us here, within the Obligations that may have been taken and/or the values each has, also has the choice to use inclusive language that ties Freemasons to each other and all of humanity and, for those who are Freemasons, to that Mystic Tie. Likewise, there is the choice to untie those connections and use "us versus them" language where it relates to Freemasonry, religion, gender, or whatever each sees as "other." As you are at this conference, many of you likely support or, at least are interested in, universal Freemasonry and humankind without divisions.

As mentioned, this is preliminary research and your comments and feedback are welcome.

ⁱ Phillip J Kain, *Hegel and the Other* (State University of New York Press: Albany, 2005), 2.

ⁱⁱ David Cannadine, *The Undivided Past: Humanity Beyond Our Differences* (Knopf: New York, 2013). 4.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid. Paraphrased from 46.

^{iv} Edited by Marlou Schrover and Willem Schinkel, *The Language of Inclusion and Exclusion in Immigration and Integration* (Routledge: Oxford, 2014), paraphrased from introductory materials and related articles.

^v Robert Burns, "The Farewell To the Brethren of St. James' Lodge, Tarbolton", Complete Works, attributed to 1786 and n.d. in this format, <http://www.robertburns.org/works/114.shtml>.

^{vi} Albert G. Mackey, *Encyclopedia of Freemasonry and Its Kindred Sciences* (McClure:Philadelphia,1917), 588.

^{vii} Christopher Hodapp, *Freemasons for Dummies, 2nd Edition* (John Wiley & Sons: Hoboken, 2012), 62.

^{viii} Karen Kidd, "I Am Regular, " Internet Lodge Lodge 9659 Short Papers Competition 2007, <http://www.internet.lodge.org.uk/component/edocman/?task=document.viewdoc&id=163>.

^{ix} Albert Mackey, Mackey's Encyclopedia of Freemasonry. as quoted in the masonicdictionary.com at <http://www.masonicdictionary.com/profane.html>.

^x Ibid at <http://www.masonicdictionary.com/clandestine.html>.

^{xi} Grand Lodge of Iowa Masonic Code, electronically available at <http://grandlodgeofiowa.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/IowaMasonicCode.pdf>, 35.

^{xii} Summarized using multiple sources.

^{xiii} Maine Constitution and Standing Regulations, Section 120, found electronically at <http://www.mainemason.org/resources/constitution/glconstitution2.asp>.

^{xiv} California Masonic Code, Interpretation of Section 409.020 of the *California Masonic Code*. 222 found electronically at www.calodges.org/no551/CaliforniaMasonicCode2012.pdf.