

The Pythagorean Puzzle of Patrick Lyon

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Among the best-known products of early nineteenth-century American art are John Neagle's portraits of Pat Lyon at the Forge of 1825-26 and 1829 (Figs. 1 and 2). Works that launched their then-novice artist into distinction as a portraitist, the twin versions of Pat Lyon have since become emblems of their period.¹ With increasing frequency they appear in surveys of American art history as evidence, even in portraiture, of a development towards a less idealized, more veristic realism, a realism whose sources are the legible signifiers of everyday (one might say democratic) experience.² Corollary to this thesis is the opinion that the iconography of Neagle's portraits of Lyon, like that of many contemporary American works, is largely self-evident, a matter merely of the correct identification of their major features and of the narration of their story.³ The viewer is encouraged to accept the works at face value: their apparent secularization and individualization of subject matter would seem to preclude any significant artistic reliance upon a repertoire of iconographic convention. The concealment of an important symbolic program would appear to be least likely of this simple, stalwart, ruddy blacksmith who so crisply commands the viewer's attention.

American art, however, can still provide unexpected surprises. The twice-executed *Pat Lyon at the Forge* is among these, for, when more thoroughly investigated, it proves to possess iconographic dimensions that complicate, if they do not indeed contravene, any literal interpretation.

Originally commissioned by the sitter on 4 November 1825, the first full-length version of *Pat Lyon at the Forge* was completed by December, 1826 (Fig. 1).⁴ To replace the original, which Lyon had sold to the Boston Athenaeum in 1828, a second full-size version was commissioned and com-

pleted in 1829.⁵ The story of the commission of the original version, while famous, bears repeating:

In commissioning the full-length, life size portrait of himself, Lyon said, "I wish you, sir, to paint me at full length, the size of life, representing me at the smithery, with my bellows-blower, hammers, and all the et-ceteras of the shop around me." Neagle was fearful that Lyon did not know the expense of such a large picture. . . Mr. Lyon replied, "D— the expense!" Lyon gave him the money and added, "I wish you to understand clearly, Mr. Neagle, that I do not desire to be represented in the picture as a gentleman—to which character I have no pretension. I want you to paint me at work at my anvil, with my sleeves rolled up and a leather apron on."⁶

There were several lengthy delays in the execution of the first of the two portraits, the longest of which seems to have been caused by professional jealousy. Bass Otis, Neagle's former teacher and current competitor in the Philadelphia art market, had raised questions to Lyon concerning Neagle's competence.⁷ Otis perhaps had reason to doubt Neagle's ability for this particular commission, and not solely because he was the more experienced artist. Otis, because he had been raised in a smithing family and had already painted an *Interior of a Smithy* (Fig. 3), must have felt that the Lyon portrait was a particularly sympathetic commission for his own talents.⁸

Otis's objections only led Neagle to pursue the completion of the work with even greater efforts. The artist, until then almost wholly ignorant of the tools and practices of blacksmithing, set about to measure everything in Lyon's shop, including the sitter.⁹ The number and variety of preparatory sketches for the completed work indicate Neagle's zealously

¹ The definitive article to date on *Pat Lyon at the Forge* is R. R. Patrick, "John Neagle, Portrait Painter, and Pat Lyon, Blacksmith," *Art Bulletin*, xxxiii, 1951, 187-92. A second, not dissimilar account of the work appears in J. H. Powell, *General Washington and the Jack Ass*, South Brunswick, N.J., 1969, 213-51.

² Patrick, "Neagle," 192; O. W. Larkin, *Art and Life in America*, New York, 1960, 126-27; J. T. Flexner, *The Light of Distant Skies: American Painting, 1760-1835*, New York, 1969, 192; H. E. Dickson, *Arts of the Young Republic: The Age of William Dunlap*, Chapel Hill, N.C., 1968, 35-36; W. D. Garrett, P. F. Norton, A. Gowans, and J. T. Butler, *The Arts in America: The Nineteenth Century*, New York, 1969, frontispiece and 206; R. Lyles, *The Art Makers of Nineteenth Century America*, New York, 1970, 235-36. But compare F. Haber, "American Mythologies in Painting. Part III: Discovering the New Landscape of Technology," *Arts Magazine*, xlvii, 1972, 32, where Haber argues that the portraits of Pat Lyon are highly idealized.

³ Larkin, *Art and Life*, 133-35; Garrett, et al., *Arts*, 201-02.

⁴ M. Lynch, "John Neagle's 'Diary,'" *Art in America*, xxxvii, 1949, 83-84. This, the Boston Athenaeum version, is signed, however: "J. Neagle 1826 & 7," indicating that the artist worked on it after the date he indicated in his ledger as that of its completion. This additional work on the first version of the portrait may have been done in preparation for the exhibition of the picture at the Boston Athenaeum in 1828.

⁵ The Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts portrait is signed: "John Neagle pinxit—Philad. 1829." Patrick Lyon died in the same year on April

15. It was Lyon who had lent the original version of the portrait to the Boston Athenaeum for their 1828 exhibition; they then purchased it from him for the sum of \$400. M. M. Swan, *The Athenaeum Gallery, 1827-1873*, Boston, 1940, 17, 35. See also H. W. Henderson, *The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and Other Collections of Philadelphia*, Boston, 1911, 112-13, for additional information.

⁶ T. Fitzgerald, "John Neagle, The Artist," *Lippincott's Magazine*, 1, 1 May 1868, 480; W. Dunlap, *History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States*, New York, 1969, II.2, 375, provides a truncated version of the same conversation.

⁷ J. Sartain, *The Reminiscences of a Very Old Man, 1808-1897*, New York, 1899, 193. Compare, however, Lynch, "Neagle's 'Diary,'" 83-84, which indicates that most of the major delays in the completion of the work were caused by Neagle's commitments to other patrons, specifically to some seventy other portraits executed between the time of Pat Lyon's commission and that of its completion.

⁸ Otis's *Interior of a Smithy* (Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts) was exhibited for the first time in 1811 as a view of "a Foundry in New England." G. Hendricks, "A Wish to Please, and a Willingness to be Pleased," *American Art Journal*, II, Spring, 1970, 18 and 15n.

⁹ Lyon was "five feet six inches and three quarters in his boots": Lynch, "Neagle's 'Diary,'" 83. Fitzgerald, "Neagle," 480, describes Lyon's derision of Neagle's ignorance of blacksmithing.

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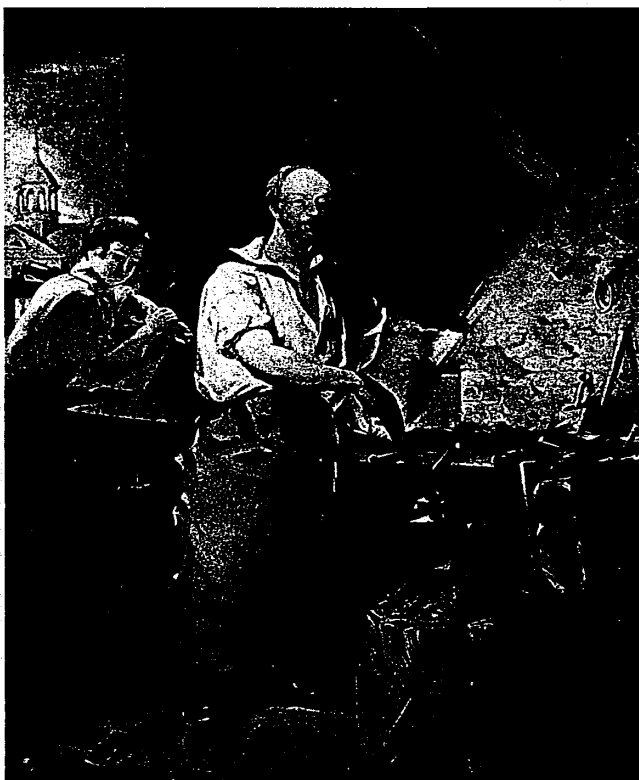
1 John Neagle, *Pat Lyon at the Forge*, 1825–26, oil on canvas, 93 × 68". Boston, Museum of Fine Arts (courtesy Museum)



2 John Neagle, *Pat Lyon at the Forge*, 1829, oil on canvas, 94½ × 68½". Philadelphia, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (courtesy Academy)



3 Bass Otis, *Interior of a Smithy*, ca. 1815, oil on canvas, 50½ × 80½". Philadelphia, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (courtesy Academy)



4 John Neagle, *Pat Lyon at the Forge*, 1825 or 1829, oil and pencil on paper, 18½ × 13½". Philadelphia, Historical Society of Pennsylvania (courtesy Historical Society)



5 John Neagle, *Patrick Lyon*, 1825, oil on canvas, 21 × 16½". Philadelphia, Historical Society of Pennsylvania (courtesy Historical Society)



6 John Neagle, oil sketch for *Pat Lyon at the Forge*, 1825, oil on canvas, 9¾ × 8". Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (courtesy Academy)



7 John Neagle, sketch for the painting, *Pat Lyon at His Forge*, 1825, wash drawing on paper, 7¾ × 6½". Boston, Athenaeum (courtesy Athenaeum)

systematic approach to the commission. In addition to a detailed compositional sketch in oil and pencil on paper, these preparatory studies include a fine portrait study of Lyon's head, a rapidly sketched study in colors "for arrangement and general effect," and a "first thought" for the whole composition in wash drawing (Figs. 4 through 7).¹⁰

Neagle's labors also reflect the importance which Patrick Lyon attached to the portrait, for, as many writers have pointed out, the portrait was the last of many acts in Lyon's campaign of self-vindication.¹¹ The story of Lyon's arrest and imprisonment on suspicion of robbing the Bank of Pennsylvania, and of his successful suit to recover damages from the bank for false imprisonment, is familiar enough as to require no lengthy exposition.¹² Its main points, however, will prove useful in interpreting both Lyon's statements at the time of the portrait's commission and various features of the iconography of the portraits.

Lyon, born in London of Scottish parents in 1769, arrived in Philadelphia in 1793 after having already attained the rank of master smith in Edinburgh.¹³ He quickly came to be recognized in Philadelphia as an exceptionally talented craftsman, as a blacksmith, a locksmith, and a hydraulic engineer. He was also remarkably literate, having studied the works of Euclid, Newton, and, as a special avocation, Lavater the physiognomist.¹⁴

His wife and daughter died in 1797 from yellow fever, and when that plague struck Philadelphia again in 1798, Lyon fled the city, on 28 August, in the company of his apprentice, Jamie McGinley. Despite Lyon's efforts, Jamie also died of the fever on 4 September.¹⁵ Meanwhile, on the night of 1 September the Bank of Pennsylvania, then located in Carpenters' Hall in Philadelphia, was robbed of over \$160,000.¹⁶ As Lyon had constructed the doors and their locks for the bank, and had also re-installed them in Carpenters' Hall when the bank moved to that location, the blacksmith immediately became the prime suspect.¹⁷ Lyon, on hearing this accusation, walked back to Philadelphia and turned himself in, fully expecting that when his story was heard he would be cleared of the charges. Instead, he was imprisoned in the Walnut Street jail in lieu of \$150,000 bail. His incarceration could not have occurred under more humiliating and dangerous circumstances, since yellow fever had broken out among the prison's inmates.¹⁸

Two months later the true criminals had been captured and the bulk of the stolen money recovered from them. Nonetheless, Lyon was forbidden release, largely because the bank officers found it difficult to believe that such an ingenious locksmith would not have played an essential part in the robbery.¹⁹ It was not until 15 December that Lyon finally obtained his release and even then he remained under sus-

¹⁰ Lynch, "Neagle's 'Diary,'" 83–84; Patrick, "Neagle," 190–91. Fitzgerald, "Neagle," 480, states that the first sitting for the portrait resulted in "a mere head, to try the likeness."

¹¹ The liveliest, and most accurate account of Lyon's personal campaign is provided by Powell, *Washington*, 213–51.

¹² Besides Powell's account, more or less full accounts of Lyon's experiences are given in Patrick, "Neagle," 189; Dunlap, *Arts of Design*, II.2, 376; and, most important, by Lyon himself in P. Lyon, *The Narrative of Patrick Lyon*, Philadelphia, 1799, 14f.

¹³ Powell, *Washington*, 221.

¹⁴ Fitzgerald, "Neagle," 480; Powell, *Washington*, 221–22.

¹⁵ Powell, *Washington*, 222, 228–30.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 223–24; Patrick, "Neagle," 189.

¹⁷ Powell, *Washington*, 224–26. Lyon had objected, when the bank proposed the re-use of the doors and locks in the Carpenters' Hall location, that the doors and their locks were unfit for re-installation. He nonetheless installed them there at the bank's insistence.

¹⁸ Powell, *Washington*, 231–40.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 244–45.

picion as the bank refused to withdraw its charges against him.²⁰

Only when Lyon himself brought a countersuit against the bank in 1805 for malicious prosecution and false imprisonment, and was rewarded \$12,000 damages by the court, were his reputation and trade vindicated.²¹ Between his release and countersuit, Lyon had published an account of his adventures, in which he defended both himself and his class. His statements, in *The Narrative of Patrick Lyon*, published in 1799, are crucial to the interpretation of his portraits:

It is an observation I long have made, that the great when they have power, will often make a wrong use of it, and that those who are inferior in rank, have very little chance of justice when opposed to them. . . . And what a horrid thing it is for an innocent man to suffer for another's guilt—the horror of such a thing, none but an innocent man can feel.²²

I have often observed the death of a great man, (and often a great villain), deplored as a national loss; while the ingenious mechanic has been laid by on the shelf as of no advantage to the nation. But I would ask, which are the greatest benefit to a nation, drones or bees? If then the ingenious mechanic is suffered by a nation to be neglected, it must be a loss to such a nation, in the effect produced by such neglect—to improve in arts, manufactures and sciences has been eagerly pursued by the most Gothic and barbarous nations in the world, and should the enlightened and improving Americans withhold their support and encouragement . . . examine what will be the ultimate consequences to the nation.²³

And when those *gentlemen*, who are so great in the world's eye, leave this world and the bell tolls their funereal knell, honours they cannot rationally boast of, and all their grand speculations die with them: while on the other hand, my works will be durable and ornamental, and probably my works and my principles, may not so soon be forgotten as those of the *gentlemen* above alluded to.²⁴

By 1825, Patrick Lyon had seen his "mechanic's" station recognized, but he had transcended it. The ingenious mechanic was no longer a blacksmith but a prosperous businessman, propertied and socially established—in short, a gentleman by all definitions other than his own.²⁵ Yet he demanded,

for reasons that should now be obvious, that he be portrayed not as a gentleman but as the blacksmith of 1798, pausing cheerfully but only momentarily from his work at the smithy. Aside from this obvious anachronism, which presumed public familiarity with his adventures, the only other direct reference in the painting to Lyon's tribulations would seem to be the portrait of the Walnut Street jail, which appears through the window behind the head of the apprentice.²⁶ Strong, virile, hard-working, self-reliant, Neagle's Lyon, in either of its life-size versions, embodies the virtues of the class of mechanics with which its subject identified himself.

But what of innocence and ingenuity, those key qualities in Patrick Lyon's self-portrayal? And what of the fact that, as several recent critics have pointed out, Neagle incorporates definite, although paradoxical, signs of gentlemanliness in these portraits of a sworn anti-gentleman? Lyon's pose itself, harmoniously and lightly balanced, his left hand on his hip, his right wrist flaccid despite the Herculean dimensions of his forearm, bespeaks a century or more of studied nonchalance, of privilege and of freedom from manual tasks (Figs. 8 and 9). Neither Lyon's shoes, with their polished buckles, nor his white broadcloth shirt, freshly laundered and unstained, compose the costume of a blacksmith in the midst of his labors. It is, as J. H. Powell has astutely pointed out, "a masquerade" to which its viewers are knowing parties. The anti-gentleman is after all a gentleman; his former state "prophesies" the fruit of his labors and ingenuity.²⁷

As the man, so too the craft he practiced. By 1825 Lyon was in charge of a flourishing fire-engine factory, whose products were renowned for their quality. The one-man-plus-lone-apprentice operation of which Lyon is portrayed as the master is pre-industrial, unspecialized, monadic, and increasingly obsolete in an urban economy. Lyon's is an environment symbolic of a golden age of personal initiative and personalized product, and yet it is also the logical precursor and life-giving force to ever more advanced stages of industrial organization.²⁸

Another problematic aspect of the interpretation of *Pat Lyon at the Forge* is the presence in the 1829 version, and in one of the preparatory sketches (Figs. 2 and 4), of certain objects that do not appear in the portrait of 1825-26. The most prominent of these later inclusions is the awkwardly placed board that appears in the lower right-hand corner of these two works. On this board there appears a piece of paper on which a geometrical diagram is delineated (Fig. 10). This dia-

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 245-46.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 248-49. The amount of damages Lyon recovered was recorded in the catalogue entry for the portrait at the 1828 Athenaeum exhibition: Swan, *Athenaeum*, 37-38.

²² Lyon, *Narrative*, 3.

²³ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁴ Powell, *Washington*, 250.

²⁵ Patrick, "Neagle," 189; Powell, *Washington*, 216-17.

²⁶ Patrick, "Neagle," 190; Fitzgerald, "Neagle," 481; Dunlap, *Arts of Design*, II, 2, 376.

²⁷ Cf. Powell, *Washington*, 215; Haber, "American Mythologies," 32.

²⁸ Haber, "American Mythologies," 32, also makes this point, but argues that Lyon is portrayed both as a member of "a royal or wealthier class," and as a "small businessman." I would argue that it is the personalization of the craft role that is crucial, and that the gentlemanly aspects of Lyon's pose are consciously ironic. Even as early as 1774, Philadelphia's metal-working trades were split up into highly specialized divisions, and the general smith was to be found only in more rural settings: C. Bridenbaugh, *The Colonial Craftsman*, Chicago, 1961, 85.



8 Thomas Gainsborough, *The Blue Boy* (Jonathan Buttall), ca. 1770, oil on canvas, 70 × 48". San Marino, Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery (courtesy Library)

9 Robert Feke, *Portrait of Brigadier General Samuel Waldo*, ca. 1748–50, oil on canvas, 96¾ × 60¼". Brunswick, Bowdoin College Museum of Art (courtesy Museum)

gram is the forty-seventh problem of the first book of Euclid, that is, the general proof of the Pythagorean theorem.

Ransom Patrick, in his article on the portraits of Pat Lyon, suggests that the presence of the diagram may be interpreted in several ways. First, its appearance in the second version and its absence in the first may be the result of the fact that the second version was specifically commissioned by Lyon for his personal use and, unlike the original portrait, it seems never to have been intended for public exhibition. Consequently, Lyon may have insisted on the inclusion in the later work of certain details that carried associations or meanings he preferred to exclude from the more exposed original.²⁹

Patrick also hypothesizes that the diagram itself may have had one of several meanings for Lyon: "It may well mean nothing more than the intention to indicate Lyon's knowledge of Euclid, for he taught Euclidean geometry to his apprentices. Another possible interpretation is that inasmuch as he was a Mason, and this particular diagram figures in the Masonic ritual, he wanted to call attention to that fact. Or taken in connection with the picture of the prison, it may indicate his personal beliefs in the truths and certainties of mathematical principles as opposed to the transitory character of human actions."³⁰

Although it is certainly true that Lyon was proud of his

mathematical knowledge and believed in the durability of its truths, neither of these explanations of the diagram's presence sufficiently accounts for the exclusion of the diagram in the original portrait.³¹ If, in including the diagram, Lyon wished to underscore his mathematical talents, it is more likely that he would have done so in the work intended for public display. On the other hand, since the diagram's presence adds a discordant note to the composition, it may have been excluded from the exhibited work on aesthetic grounds.

The most likely explanation for the discrepancy between the two portraits lies in the connection of the geometrical diagram with Masonic rites. At the time of the commission and execution of Lyon's portraits, that is, between 1825 and 1829, the entire body of American Freemasons had come under severe political attack. Suspected as a secret society whose true political allegiances were concealed (and therefore probably subversive), they were also accused of conspiracy, sacrilege, and even murder. Many local and state elections of the period, especially in New York and Pennsylvania, were won almost solely on the anti-Masonic stance of the victors.³² Although no good Mason would have agreed with the low opinion of his society, neither might he have wished to display badges of his membership with the same openness that had characterized the era of Washington and LaFayette.³³

²⁹ Patrick, "Neagle," 192.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ See notes 14 and 24.

³² J. C. Andrews, "The Antimasonic Movement in Western Pennsylvania,"

Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine, xviii, 1935, 255–66, points out that the most virulent Antimasonic agitation occurred between 1826 and 1836. Cf. A. Creigh, *Masonry and Anti-Masonry*, Lodgeton, Ky., 1856, 80–109.

³³ Andrews, "Antimasonic Movement," 259; Creigh, *Masonry*, 84.

It is thus perhaps understandable that a diagram that could be interpreted as a symbol of Masonic allegiance would be excluded from a portrait that its sitter intended as a public emblem of his righteousness, whereas the same sitter could well have asked that the potentially controversial symbol be included in the family copy of the same work as a record of his Masonic association.

Pythagoras, the inventor of the theorem that bears his name and the first to diagram it, was revered by Freemasons as a patriarch of their society.³⁴ Like Freemasons, the followers of Pythagoras were members of a secret society that communicated its sacred lore through arcane signs and symbols. At the heart of their wisdom, of their program of initiation and instruction, was the treasured revelation of *cosmos*, that is, of a universal order whose understanding was attained through knowledge of the true principles of measurement and numerical relations.³⁵ The general proof of the Pythagorean theorem came to be seen by Freemasons as the summation and ultimate demonstration of Pythagorean wisdom. As a geometrical figure alone, it was aesthetically and intellectually beautiful, but it was also the key to the "solution of all mathematical, mechanical, and philosophical knowledge."³⁶ More particularly, it was used in Masonic lodges "to teach the brethren the value of the arts and sciences, and that, by patience and perseverance, they may, at last, be able to make some discoveries, which shall enable them to render a most important service to the community."³⁷

The diagram's presence in the second version of the portrait thus not only instructs the knowing viewer that Pat Lyon is an initiate into the mysteries, but also suggests that the knowledge thus gained "in the craft" is one source—if not *the* source—of that ingenuity and skill, both artful and scientific, by which Lyon had rendered such continuing service to Philadelphia.³⁸ It might indeed be said that the lessons of Lyon's trials, as he himself explained them, had rendered the greater service to the community by forcing it to recognize and respect the worthiness of craftsmen in a town dominated by "gentlemen."

The presence of one concealed symbol suggests the possibility of others. One of these was spelled out by Lyon

in the terms of commission, the lambskin apron that is the fundamental Masonic costume. Its symbolism is easily ascertained in any of the published accounts of Masonic ritual: "The lamb has, in all ages, been considered as an emblem of innocence. . . . He, therefore, who wears the lamb-skin as the badge of masonry, is thereby reminded of that purity of life . . . which it is absolutely necessary for those to observe, who expect to be admitted into the grand lodge above."³⁹

It is easy to believe that Lyon, intimately familiar with Masonic symbolism, would have leapt at the opportunity to add a further "proof" however disguised of his innocence. The general point of the portraits was made, *prima facie*, while their cryptographic program was intentionally legible only to fellow initiates, for whom Lyon's hieroglyphic speech must have been a source of secret delight and admiration.

James Hardie, in *The New Free-Mason's Monitor* of 1818, wrote that "freemasonry deals in hieroglyphics, symbols and allegories, and to be qualified to reveal their meaning, a man must know more than a mere nominal mason."⁴⁰ Such master Masons must also possess spotless characters, following Pythagoras' own precepts. Insistence upon secrecy was a precaution against vulgar exploitation of sacred wisdom: "Of the goods of knowledge nothing would be communicated to him whose soul has not been purified, for it is not permissible to deliver that which has been won with so much travail to every passer-by."⁴¹ As Hardie proclaimed it, the direct implication of such principles is that "a good mason and an honest man are synonymous terms."⁴²

The most masterly conceit of the portraits' iconographic program is concealed in their composition. For example, if one were to take the diagram in the second version of the portrait, enlarge it, and place it in the same plane as the picture surface, superimposing it on the figure of Patrick Lyon (Fig. 11), a striking resemblance between the lines of the diagram and those of the painting's composition becomes immediately apparent.⁴³ The correspondence between the two "diagrams," however, is not *quite* convincing. Several major compositional axes remain unaccounted for, and a tempting hypothesis seems defeated at the moment of its conception. But what if one were to *reverse* the diagram, prior to superimposing it (Fig. 12)? The correspondence is then nearly

³⁴ Creigh, *Masonry*, 67; A. G. Mackey, *A Lexicon of Freemasonry*, Philadelphia, 1858, 386; J. Hardie, *The New Free-Mason's Monitor*, New York, 1818, 76–77.

³⁵ S. K. Heninger, Jr., *Touces of Sweet Harmony: Pythagorean Cosmology and Renaissance Poetics*, San Marino, Cal., 1974, 22–23, 29; C. J. De Vogel, *Pythagoras and Early Pythagoreanism*, Assen, 1966, 163–66.

³⁶ F. M. Duffy, *Original Thoughts; or, Freemasonry Demonstrated through the Medium of Geometry*, Nashville, Tenn., 1858, 16–17. On the symbolism of the triangle generally, J. Chevalier, et al., *Dictionnaire des symboles*, Paris, 1969, 768–69, espec.: "Outre son importance bien connue dans le Pythagorisme, le triangle est alchimiquement le symbole du feu." As such, it is also appropriate to the art of smithing: cf. notes 46 through 48.

³⁷ Hardie, *Monitor*, 152.

³⁸ Cf. Patrick, "Neagle," 192.

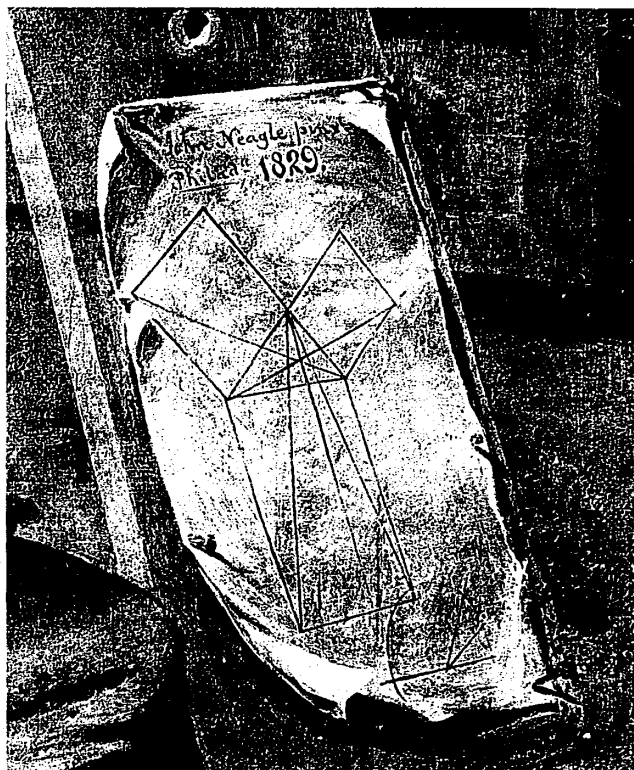
³⁹ J. L. Cross, *The True Masonic Chart*, New York, 1851, 15.

⁴⁰ Hardie, *Monitor*, 158.

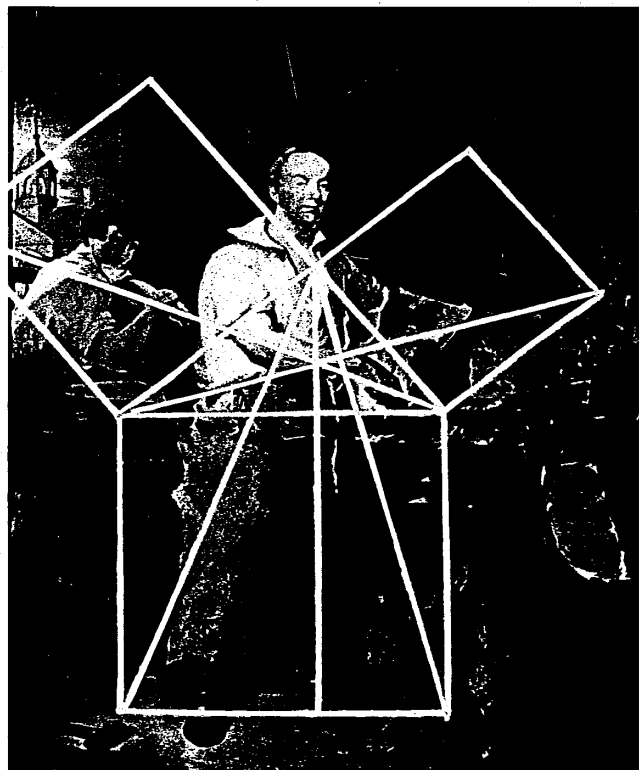
⁴¹ Jamblichus, *De vita pythagorica*, Amsterdam, 1707, 62–63. This translation is taken from H. Rahner, *Greek Myths and Christian Mysteries*, London, 1963, 39.

⁴² Hardie, *Monitor*, ix.

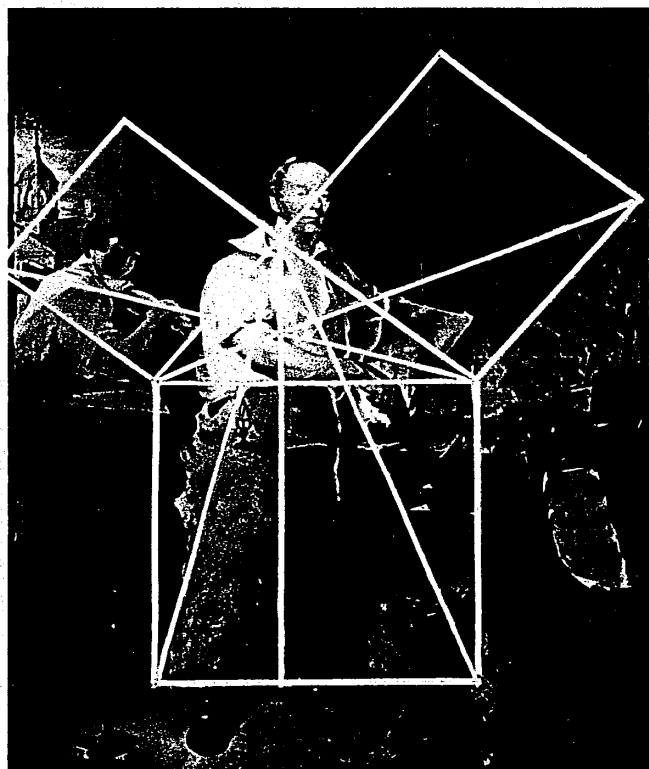
⁴³ This demonstration, and the one which follows, works for either version of the portrait. The diagram used in Figures 11 and 12 is taken from R. Simson, *The Elements of Euclid*, Philadelphia, 1811, 49, both because it closely parallels the diagram in the 1829 portrait and because Simson's book was in use in Philadelphia at the time of the portraits' commission.



10 Detail of Fig. 2



11 Fig. 2 with superimposed diagram of Pythagorean theorem



12 Fig. 2 with diagram superimposed in reverse



13 Joseph Wright of Derby, *The Blacksmith's Shop*, 1771, oil on canvas, 50½ × 41". Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon Collection

exact. In those instances where the compositional lines of *Pat Lyon at the Forge* are not directly overlaid by those of the superimposed demonstration of the Pythagorean theorem, they are consistently arranged to parallel the lines of that diagram.

The pose of Patrick Lyon at his forge, from our point of view, is the mirror-image of Pythagoras' demonstration. From Lyon's point of view, however, and not ours, the diagram is displayed correctly. Metaphorically speaking, Pat Lyon presents himself as the very personification of Pythagorean wisdom. If one recalls that what is presented to the viewer is not only Patrick Lyon "as he is," but also Patrick Lyon as the representative and honest Craftsman, it follows that it is, of course, the Craftsman—mason or ingenious mechanic—who is the appointed bearer, beneficiary, and benefactor of the secrets of the craft.

The final level of the portraits' iconography, that of Patrick Lyon as Vulcan at his forge, was first suggested by William Dunlap: "Patrick Lyon, who having made a fortune by his industry as a blacksmith, and ingenuity as a locksmith, chose to have his portrait painted in the costume of Vulcan, with all the paraphernalia attendant upon his fiery occupation."⁴⁴

Dunlap's presumption of his readers' familiarity with this iconographic precedent suggests strongly that both Lyon and Neagle recognized and intended the analogy. Although no document exists to support such an interpretation, Neagle could have become familiar with the conventional elements of such subjects through his study with Bass Otis, whose *Interior of a Smithy* of ca. 1815 appears to exploit seventeenth-century Dutch paintings of Vulcanic subjects (Fig. 3).⁴⁵ Yet even more striking are the parallels between the portraits of Pat Lyon and those of the blacksmiths in Joseph Wright of Derby's *The Blacksmith's Shop* of 1771 (Fig. 13), which had been engraved by Boydell and could thus have been available to Neagle in his preparation of *Pat Lyon at the Forge*.⁴⁶ *The Blacksmith's Shop* is particularly attractive as a possible source for Neagle's painting; there are several features in Wright of Derby's work, the articulation of interior space, lighting, costume, and pose, that appear to have inspired the American painter. Several writers have commented upon Wright of Derby's own reliance upon more obviously mythological scenes of Vulcan at his forge and, if only indirectly, Neagle's paintings draw upon these influences and their referents.⁴⁷ But it was not necessary for Neagle to have known any specific pictorial precedent, because any monumental figure of a muscular blacksmith, surrounded by

hammer, anvil, pincers, and bellows, and poised against the fiery glow of a forge, naturally invoked the Roman deity in an age when Classical mythology was still requisite to a gentleman's education.

The portraits' reference to Vulcan introduces another complex of symbolic associations. Vulcan-Hephaistos was not only a blacksmith, but one of the Olympian gods, matchlessly skilled in his craft and fabricator of many wondrous inventions. His mastery of the art of transforming matter into useful and ornamental objects is a marvellous—and enigmatic—gift.⁴⁸ He who makes such marvellous things is he who knows how to make them, who understands their secrets, and hence seems to operate upon them as if by magic.⁴⁹ Vulcan-Hephaistos, like the Biblical Tubal-Cain, is also a master instructor, who, by teaching his secrets to mankind, effects the advent of civilization.⁵⁰ Pythagoras is, in this respect, one of Vulcan's mortal counterparts, able to make other men understand the concealed mysteries of the cosmos.

Patrick Lyon, another of Vulcan's mortal representatives and a follower via Freemasonry of Pythagoras, was renowned for the beauty and technological ingenuity of his inventions.⁵¹ Legendary, too, was Lyon's prowess at solving the mysteries of locks that no other Philadelphia locksmith could decipher. In fact, it was exactly this talent that led to the bank officers' suspicion that Lyon must have been involved in the otherwise inexplicable robbery.⁵² Even after Lyon's vindication in the courts, his abilities inspired remarks that recalled the old stigma. Charles Buck, in his memoirs, relates a story of a personal encounter with Lyon's skills in 1805 or 1806. Buck had brought to Lyon a chest to which he had lost the key: "Mr. Lyon said he could open the lock, but the chest must be brought to his shop, with which I had to comply, and to my astonishment, what no one else could undertake was performed in a few minutes. He bored a small hole, gave a slight touch, and the lock sprang open. It was an old-fashioned German lock with 6 or 8 bolts to spring up and down, right and left, and proved to me that to a skillful hand, no lock of any kind can be of much security."⁵³

Lyon was also a noted teacher whose apprentices were as thoroughly grounded in mathematical principles as in the art of smithing.⁵⁴ His talents in this regard are at least as evident in the education he provided his own portraitist, for it was surely Lyon, and not Neagle, who invented the complicated iconographic program of the portraits.⁵⁵ Both artist and viewer are thus the intended initiates into the

⁴⁴ Dunlap, *Arts of Design*, II.2, 375.

⁴⁵ Compare the Otis to the Dutch works discussed in B. Nicolson, *Joseph Wright of Derby, Painter of Light*, London, 1968, I, 50–53, in connection with Wright's forge pictures. See also footnote 47.

⁴⁶ Nicolson, *Wright of Derby*, I, 237.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, I, 51; F. D. Klingender, *Art and the Industrial Revolution*, London, 1968, 49–54.

⁴⁸ W. H. Roscher, ed., *Ausführliches Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie*, Leipzig, 1886–90, I.2, 2035–74.

⁴⁹ This interpretation is derived from M. Eliade, *The Forge and the Crucible*, New York, 1962, 101–02. Cf. Heninger on Pythagoras' reputation for sorcery: Heninger, *Touches*, 31.

⁵⁰ A. Nicoll, ed., *Chapman's Homer*, New York, 1956, II, 592–93; A. O. Lovejoy and G. Boas, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity*, Baltimore, 1935, 199–200; Eliade, *Forge*, 96, 102.

⁵¹ Fitzgerald, "Neagle," 480; Powell, *Washington*, 217, 222; Swan, *Athenaeum*, 37–38.

⁵² Fitzgerald, "Neagle," 480–81; Powell, *Washington*, 222, 241–43.

⁵³ C. N. Buck, *Memoirs (1791–1841)*, Philadelphia, 1941, 106.

⁵⁴ See footnotes 14 and 31.

⁵⁵ Nor does anything of Neagle's later work exhibit comparable iconographic subtlety, e.g., the portraits of *William Strickland* (1829, Yale University Art Gallery) or *Henry Clay* (1843, Union League, Philadelphia), to name two of the more ambitious works. Cf. M. Fielding, *Catalogue of an Exhibition of Portraits by John Neagle*, Philadelphia, 1925.

mysteries of which Lyon is the master. Lastly, Lyon may have known, too, of a fourth parallel between his life and those of Pythagoras and Vulcan. Crippled Vulcan had been cast out of Olympus and abused by Mars; according to some of his biographers, Pythagoras was cruelly slain in Crotona by hostile townsmen.⁵⁶ Given the extraordinary care evidenced elsewhere in the planning of Lyon's portraits, it does not seem at all unlikely that Lyon could have known, and meant to imply, these confirming links in his ingeniously heroic alliance.

Thus, in one of the more painstakingly conceived portrait commissions in American art, Pythagoras and Vulcan are joined in Lyon, who is thereby doubly the personification of wisdom, that is to say, not only in the secrets of the blacksmith's, and geometer's, craft, but as well in those of the cosmic order on which the craft relies and by which it is given justification. By such means, *Pat Lyon at the Forge*, however deservedly celebrated it may be as a sign of a growing national interest in portraying ordinary men in their ordinary environments, is also an ambitious—if somewhat belated—resurrection of the *exemplum virtutis* of Neoclassicism.⁵⁷

At the same time, in so completely subordinating the natural recording activity of the brush to a highly conceptual geometrical diagram, the portraits of Patrick Lyon foreshadow a similar conceptual bias in later nineteenth-century American painting, which, as Barbara Novak has noted, involves "the importance to the American artist of the mechanical sciences . . . and of the machine as a tool and as a model for the incorporation of certain mensurational exactitudes into the work of art."⁵⁸

For the scholar of American art, the discovery of complex Masonic imagery in Neagle's *Pat Lyon at the Forge* clearly suggests an avenue of further research into the frequency and significance of similar imagery in other American paintings. Since many patrons and artists were practicing Freemasons even during the height of the society's persecution, it is highly probable that instances other than the portraits of Patrick Lyon will be found in American art that show the use of Masonic rites and symbols to articulate concealed levels of meaning.⁵⁹

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⁵⁶ De Vogel, *Pythagoras*, 22–23; Heninger, *Touches*, 32. Cf. Panofsky's analogy between the martyrdoms of Vulcan and Prometheus: E. Panofsky, "The Early History of Man in Two Cycles of Paintings by Piero di Cosimo," *Studies in Iconology*, New York, 1962, 55–56.

⁵⁷ Following Robert Rosenblum's definitions: R. Rosenblum, *Transformations in Late Eighteenth Century Art*, Princeton, 1970, 50–106.

⁵⁸ B. Novak, *American Painting of the Nineteenth Century*, New York, 1969, 108–09.

⁵⁹ See my discussion of David Gilmour Blythe's *Lincoln Writing the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863–64* (Carnegie Institute Museum of Art): B. W. Chambers, "David Gilmour Blythe (1815–1865): An Artist at Urbanization's Edge," Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1974, 188–99. An intriguing parallel to Neagle's portrait of Patrick Lyon is to be

found in the French painter Jean-Baptiste Regnault's *L'Homme physique, l'homme moral et l'homme intellectuel* of about 1810–15 (Brest, Musée des Beaux-Arts). This latter work, a monumental self-portrait that is also a Masonic allegory, and in which appears the geometrical demonstration of the Pythagorean theorem inscribed on a tablet at the artist's feet, was included in the recent exhibition, "French Painting 1774–1830: The Age of Revolution" (Réunion des Musées Nationaux, Paris, The Detroit Institute of Arts and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, *French Painting 1774–1830: The Age of Revolution*, Detroit, 1975, Catalogue No. 151, pp. 581–83, ill. on p. 220). Regnault's painting, however, seems not to have been exhibited publicly in the artist's lifetime, and remained in his possession until his death in 1829. It is thus quite unlikely that this work could have exercised any direct influence on the conception of Neagle's portrait of Lyon.