Talking Politics:
The Substance of Style from Abe to "W"

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PRICKLY PARADIGM PRESS
CHICAGO

Prickly Paradigm Press, LLC
5629 South University Avenue
Chicago, Il 60637

www.prickly-paradigm.com

ISBN: 0-9717575-5-0
LCCN: 2002115993

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper.

The Dash to "Message" in the Age of Telegraphy

Of course in the 1860s the media cycles so essential to "message" worked at a slightly slower pace than ours. No remote-location videocamera broadcasting. Events (even stenographic transcripts of speeches) could be reported to headquarters via telegraphy, and then circulated by newspapers and magazines and such. Editorially shaped, they circulated by print dissemination of news and opinion about them. Lithographic images of events and personalities, broadsides, and cartoons and caricatures were an essential part of mass print media. (Cartoons really came into their own, in fact, in the 1860 and especially 1864 campaigns.) Adjusting for this, we can learn much about the enduring substance of style from how Mr. Lincoln's only fitfully successful "message" got a new birth at Gettysburg—and defined him just in time for the impending ("North"-only) 1864 presidential election cycle!

It was no big deal that Mr. Lincoln—a savvy politician from frontier beginning to martyred end—did, in fact, shift in the weight he accorded to specific "issues" over the course of his political career. Circumstances demanded no less. The biggest issue was, of course, slavery, which had been driving apart the sectional interests of the country for several decades. (It was the elephant in the Republican Party's tent.) By dominating political parties, sectional interests competed to capture for themselves the newer

Plains and Prairie territories opening up to Euro-American settlement. How to Americanize and domesticate the frontier became one of the fronts for the slavery issue. Year after year, a series of Congressional tugs-of-war cycled around it. These struggles strained the very fibers binding the country together. Religiously inspired, evangelical moralists whipped up sentiment for abolition of slavery on the one side, even as their equally pious counterparts on the other side scripturally affirmed the justness of perpetuating it.

In his own political self-alignment, first Whig and then Republican, Lincoln came out clearly against slavery, but stopped far short of the religious fervor of those on the Abolitionist extreme. As a rising Illinois politician in mid-century, he became very visible on the national stage by his 1858 senatorial run against Stephen A. Douglas. Publicly, Lincoln fashioned his pro-Union arguments in the more strictly Constitutionalist terms that would see and call the Democratic Party's—and especially Douglas'—poker-game legislative tactics over the new territories. He advanced these issues as fronts for the *sl*-word (uttering which too clearly in the 1858 Illinois race against Stephen Douglas—and perhaps sounding too much like the Abolitionist extremists—may well have been a factor in Lincoln's loss). Lincoln was clearly on record as what we would term today a "white supremacist"; nonetheless, he committed himself at minimum to contain slavery territorially as an embarrassment of long standing, and certainly to sanitize the new Western territories from it. Ultimately, he argued, this

would attenuate its economic grip everywhere and thus, in the end, serve the Union to be rid of it.

The crisis deepened, of course. The various political maneuvers hardened the determination of the two great sectional interests. One side formed the Northern and Midwestern manufacturing economy, wage-labor-based, with its agricultural and extractive hinterlands. The other side was the Southern agrarian plantocracy, plantation-centered and based heavily on racially marked slave labor and various forms of indenture.

After all the decades of thrust and parry in the skirmishes over slavery, at issue ultimately for Lincoln were the sacred and, for him, transcendent and irrevocable Union and its national constitutional processes. To what degree could the several states and territories go their separate ways with respect to property rights, rights of seizure, and rights of legal nullification and even secession? In a noticeably sectional election in November 1860 Lincoln became, in effect, the Northern and Pacific Coast President. (He got 2.48% of the votes in Maryland, 1.13% in Virginia, and 0.93% in Kentucky, for example, and otherwise none south of the Ohio River.) So, however lawyerly were his Daniel Webster-like arguments for maintaining the Union in response to the crisis—reviewed ever so carefully in his first Inaugural Address on 4 March 1861—by the time he was sworn into office the course had been prepared for descent into civil war with the secessionist Confederacy.

Only with hostilities under way do his highly public communications recognize that the Civil War

was *de facto* about two regionally based economic systems, one of them based on slave labor and therefore repugnant to the idea of America that Jefferson's Declaration had argued in 1776 and that Madison's Constitution had formed into "a more perfect union" in 1787. This has certainly become central to Lincoln's most enduring "message."

Of course, he eventually acknowledged the Abolitionists' moral argument that condemned slavery altogether. He even embraced it *de jure*—viz., the Emancipation Proclamation announced in late 1862 and other measures. Lincoln was reelected in 1864 as a Union victory was just a matter of time, and his second Inaugural Address of 4 March 1865, a month before his Good Friday assassination, is a pietistic preachment on this theme of slave labor, strategically downplaying the sectionalism of moral indignation. With profound, biblical phrasing Lincoln sees slavery and its resulting war as a plague visited on all of American humanity by a classic Old Testament God. He concluded with his humble Christian call for his countrymen's "malice toward none" and "charity for all" in "achiev[ing] and cherish[ing] a just and lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations." Amen. A prayer come straight out of the liturgy!

In such a turn of phrase, we glimpse one of the hallmarks of Lincoln's "message." It was consistent all during his rise to political prominence, even though it became more majestically embellished and most widely appreciated only in his martyrdom: he was, Christ-like (assassinated on Good Friday!), the very embodied recapitulation of the narrative—the

word made flesh—of American civic morality. "Out of the very earth, unancestried, unprivileged, unknown," as Boston Brahmin James Russell Lowell had termed him, Lincoln the autodidact frontiersman had matured into the plain-speaking, practical Evangelical Christian preacher of and for this special nation's indissoluble, transcendent moral unity "under God." He, the natural Everyman of American soil, was ultimately to save America from itself—that is, from the wicked, unjust ways into which at least some of the brethren had fallen—through his own determined self-sacrifice.

For many people, then, Lincoln embodied in his life—as he does more universally in the everlasting civic life that is his death—the true American voice. It is a voice that, in his turn, Carl Sandburg was both to characterize and to recapture for a later generation: a sacred voice of civic plain-spokenness, inspired with Christian reason and able to articulate with conviction what is right and what is wrong in the world around it. Plainness, that anti-high-church virtue of so much of American Evangelical Protestantism, means also not being carried away by pomp of occasion or of high office in institutions of power. In our civic life, later generations have revered Lincoln for these embodied qualities, as they have also liked Harry Truman and Ronald Reagan for the same reason (whatever trouble they have had with "Give-'em-Hell" Harry's style of its expression).

The downside of this "message," at least for the rational elites, is the kind of anti-intellectualism that Richard Hofstadter traces to the Great

Awakenings and the mid-nineteenth century Evangelical denominationalisms. The sometimes fiery preacherly talk associated with them led ordinary people into irrationality: merely "feeling" God's presence in exuberant manifestations. But this provides to many a template for the effervescence of participation in the civil religion to which Lincoln at his "message" best still calls us. A mystical patriotism of feeling, called forth in spectacle by virtuoso deployment of verbal and other presentational styles.

Lincoln's actual physical voice was not an orator's; it was apparently somewhat thin, reedy, and relatively high-pitched. He was, if not actually uncomfortable in extemporaneous speaking, not at what he thought to be his best on such occasions. As President, he demurred from a great many such requests—even on the evening before the Gettysburg triumph—preferring to read aloud from his carefully composed and reworked written texts or even having them read out for him. And after a speech was delivered, he closely managed its editing and transmission in print. In his younger days he was known to hover over telegraph and newspaper desks whence emanated the texts to be circulated to his public.

It is clear that Lincoln was something of an intellectual, if only self-taught in the craft aspects of the gentlemanly arts of the well-bred still easily mistaken for deep thought. Even so he managed to constitute a "message" of the quintessential American—the forthrightly plain spoken rail-splitter, honest and direct; this voice speaks with a knowledge of the sacred texts of both Christian and civil religion. He

came to inhabit this "message" of America that he himself, along with the press, was able to fashion.

When spoken, Lincoln's best prose was the oral poetry of plain style. As "message" its style resonated with ministerial and liturgical language even more than with the famous declamations of Daniel Webster, Henry Clay and other orators that Lincoln, among many, studied. The style was the currency of all the quintessentially American Protestant sects and denominations making up the very voting publics in the northern and border states. Wishfully projecting, contemporaries marveled at how Lincoln spoke in simple prose—like Shakespeare, it was said, and like God's Word in the King James and later, even plainer English-language Bibles. These texts are the emblems of enduring "Englishness" of culture that the minimally educated would know of, even if they did not know them. Lincoln was appreciated for composing his texts with what people identified as "Anglo-Saxon" words, rather than in complicated, Greco-Latinate words and phrases. Many people of the time were already jittery about immigrants and newly acquired Western populations, let alone about African Americans. Lincoln's "message" to them must have been a soothing racial balm, it is clear, as much as he himself carefully addressed the time-bomb issue of race. In crisis, the simpler "Anglo-Saxon" heritage of America, welling up from a mythic era even before the country's founding moment, rescues—preserves, sustains, gives new birth to—the nation. Under God.

Death and Life at Gettysburg

And of all of the sacred Lincolniana, The Gettysburg Address, once memorized by generations of elementary school children, has become the most hallowed text in America's civil religious canon. It epitomizes the voice of Lincoln, and hence the voice of America itself. It was a peak moment of Lincoln's "message," crafted to be such, a kind of apotheosis of his political life for which he has been evermore remembered. Professional scholars of rhetoric may revere his second Inaugural; us plain folks have internalized The Gettysburg Address. As it alludes to and quotes the Declaration of Independence, so even the Pledge of Allegiance was altered in turn to quote it ("...[one] nation, under God..."); and the three now constitute a recitational triad, an integral series of great moments of the people's rhetoric.

Why? Let's look at this text, and at the very occasion of its first delivery, the dedication ceremony of the national cemetery on the site of the famous battle. In retrospect, myths have grown up around both text and occasion that reveal why this was a magical moment in political "message"ing. The Gettysburg Address has become what we might call a "eucharistic" text of American identity. In the Eucharist of a Christian church service, our symbolic incorporation (eating and drinking) of Christ's transubstantiated "Body and Blood" ritually results, contrariwise, in our *being* incorporated *into* His body and blood made corporate on earth, the fellowship and institution of the

church. (Lincoln actually plays upon this Eucharistic *chiasmus*, the figure of the cross, as upon Christ's—and all Christian, let alone Hellenic—martyrdom, in his speech.) Similarly, for generations Americans have re-read and re-cited The Gettysburg Address like a creed; in this, we reaffirm and transformatively renew and enhance our own incorporation into the American nation-state.

It is almost embarrassing to speak of this 270-odd-word text as an "address," though Lincoln did, indeed, "address" his audience at that sad place on 19 November 1863. It was only a little over four months since the Battle of Gettysburg had concluded on the 3rd of July that year. (Note: it was a series of attacks by the Confederate forces that the Union had repulsed just in time for the 4th of July, whose sacred text is—the Declaration of Independence!). The principal orator of the day was Edward Everett—Senator, Ambassador, Harvard president; Ralph Waldo Emerson's role-model—whose spellbinding, classically Hellenic funeral oration of two-plus hours the world has little noted nor long remembered. (Everett, the main act, took the lead in printing his oration as a pamphlet in early 1864, with the President's remarks as part of the additional material. The Everett text is accessibly reprinted as Appendix III.A. in Garry Wills' 1992 best-seller, *Lincoln at Gettysburg* [Simon & Schuster].)

By contrast, the President's "dedicatory remarks" (as the program listed Lincoln's address) constitutes a ritual poem so perfectly "on message"—even beyond the ritual space in which it was recited—

that once the larger public could read the transcript in the next-day's newspapers, it began to steal Everett's thunder. (How ironic, too! This was for a second time: in his oration Everett declared that he himself had been misguided in a politics of appeasement before the 1860 election—having run against Lincoln as the Vice-Presidential candidate of the Constitutional-Union Party, the party advocating any compromise whatsoever to get the Rebels back from the brink!)

But Lincoln knew a "message" opportunity when it presented itself. He had sought to be present at the solemn gathering, since he understood more than anyone how mired he was in political controversies relating to the first foundering, then merely stumbling Union military campaign, to his having suspended *habeas corpus*, to the unfair and unpopular military draft, to widespread war profiteering, and to a runaway economy, among other difficulties. General Meade's 4th of July non-loss at Gettysburg, and close upon it General Grant's brilliant success at Vicksburg, were, by contrast, important to re-emphasize in late 1863. There was a blistering firestorm of criticism in the opposition and foreign press, "Honest Abe," "Uncle Abe," "Father Abraham" images notwithstanding on the part of loyal media. Lincoln sensed how precariously perched he was in relation to the upcoming 1864 elections in which one of his former commanding generals, George McClellan, was already sure to be the Democratic candidate, and his own cabinet member, Salmon P. Chase of Treasury, was vigorously angling—only one among many—to supplant him as the Republican one. (Neither appeared at

Gettysburg, though both had been invited by the sponsoring multi-state "Board of Commissioners for the Soldiers' National Cemetery at Gettysburg.")

The cemetery dedication was shaping up as a very Republican event, orchestrated by the prominent Republican head Commissioner, Judge David Wills of Gettysburg, in a state of a very loyal Republican Governor, Andrew G. Curtin. In fact, sensing that this was the equivalent of what today we term a "photo op" in front of a friendly audience, some of the press criticized it as nothing more than a campaign show, "Patriotic Gore," indeed! Still, only a rather offhand invitation came to Lincoln at the beginning of November: asking him, as Chief Executive, to make "a few appropriate remarks" after the main funeral oration. (For this, to draw a crowd they had first secured the services of Everett, whose busy schedule—not Lincoln's—set the actual date). Even to secure the invitation for Lincoln, the Illinois Commissioner, Clark E. Carr, had to argue against widely shared doubts about "his ability to speak upon such a grave and solemn occasion as that of the memorial services." That Lincoln used the solemn ritual occasion to advantage for his "message" is, of course, an understatement. Even the viciously critical among the press, in dismissing it, understood in their negativity that it solidified the terms of Lincoln's political persona—what we would call his "message."

Now any ritual occasion—not only a cemetery dedication—is one that participants feel is transformative. It envelops people in a bounded spacetime where something "magical" happens, with effects lasting

beyond that time and place. Think of the "text" of a ritual like a wedding—the sum total of what is said by participants, what is played, danced, sung, how it is all moved through space-and-time, displayed, etc. The text gets its transformative effectiveness or "oomph" as a function of a dense, internal arrangement of meaningful symbols as they are experienced together and refract off one another. Ritual texts project an air of self-sufficiency about themselves, as though emerging densely and fully formed from realms not of this usual world and context. That's both necessary to, and part of, the "magic."

Not that rituals actually are divorced from their immediate and more remote contexts; quite the opposite. Rituals are completely creatures of the context in which they take place. (Rhetoricians speak of this "epideictic" quality of ritual speech, for example, but do not seem to know how to explain how it works—or why in fact all language is "epideictic!") But ritual texts manage to draw the context into themselves, because every symbol in a tightly structured ritual gets its specific, "this-ritual" loading for special effectiveness from the overall structure of the text itself. What was externally only wafer and wine are Body and Blood within the ritual spacetime; and, in turn, they constitute "sacrificed" Lamb of God, the "sacrifice" being instanced in their consumption. Ritual symbols, then, are—to borrow the sectarian term—"transubstantiated" from merely ordinary stuff, be it a word or expression, a color, a melody, a movement of people's bodies in a laid-out space. Drawn in from everyday experience to be part of an organized

design, the symbols become design elements in an overall figurative portrait or picture (the technical term is *diagram*) of what the text is supposed to effectuate in its particular context.

In this way a ritual text paints a picture of what it accomplishes in relation to that context and *can change our experience of the context* to the degree we accept the picture. And we accept it emotionally as well as otherwise. Recall my earlier discussion of Vygotskij here. A ritual symbolically creates contextually experienced chain-complexes of ideas; how a ritual causes this in those who experience it, even at second hand, is its measure of effectiveness. And it is important to recall that these are intuited ideas—laden with affect or emotion as they hit us—of how people, things, and situations fit together one with another, how they ought to fit together, and how, mystically speaking, they are destined to fit together. Ritually speaking, doesn't every marriage ceremony in our own day turn what began as a chance meeting into predestined wedded couplehood?

In the ritual medium of words in particular, uttering them over speaking time "paints" the ritual "picture." It is just as in music, where the measured ("metrical") organization of tones, singly and in chords, constitutes a rhythmic poetry over the duration of a piece. Or, consider the medium of spatial arrangement of people and things. Here, a ritual "picture" is painted in two ways. First, by the two- or three-dimensional static relative positions of ritually relevant people and things. Second, by their dynamic relative movements in space, if any, over the duration

of the ritual. Both words and spatiality are central to the original Lincoln text. Let's look at how they work.

The verbal text of the Gettysburg Address operates, not at the level of syllables, as in poetic doggerel, but in two other features of composition. (I attempt to lay this out visually in the accompanying structural chart of its poetics.) One is the syntactic construction of the sentences. Lincoln accomplishes a kind of incantation by repeating simple forms. This results, cumulatively, in long chains of parallelism, repetition of key words and sets of words that serve as his operant ritual symbols. A second, cumulative effect comes from creating a "fractally" repeating structure—doing the same thing at level upon level upon level of textual form. The text breaks in the middle, at what I have labeled segment [4], "It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this." This comments, in essence, on the propriety of saying and thereby doing what the speaker, Lincoln, if successful, is in fact doing together with the other people present: "dedicat[ing] a portion of [the Gettysburg battle]field" as a government military cemetery. (Lincoln's early draft of segment [4] is, "This we may, in all propriety do." Pretty lame, though it does serve to break the wonderful repetitive rhythms of [1-3] and [5-6]. The rephrased sentence, with its formulaic altogether fitting and proper and its do this emphasized in a subordinate clause at the very end, reminds one of Christ's injunction to "do this for me." Lincoln takes up, in parallel, what "it is for us" to do in the very complex sixth and final major segment.)

As I noted, ritual text is, at once, completely dependent for its effectiveness on the context in which it occurs, which it "pictorially" attaches to and transforms in some appropriately experienceable way. At the same time, principles of dense internal organization of its symbolic elements give ritual text a semblance of self-sufficient autonomy from its physical context. At Gettysburg, Lincoln anchored his actual performance first to the immediate and proximate context of the cemetery dedication and second to the remoter context of the history and destiny of the nation—at that time under a cloud of uncertainty (just as was his own political future). Seizing on the uncertainty—indeed, making it the overall "to-be-or-not-to-be" theme—he incorporates in his verbal text America's "fathers," its current "honored dead," veterans and soldiers of the battle, as well as his (still living) audience of (perhaps waveringly loyal) other Americans—together with himself—as a totalized ritual "we." He speaks of "[the] nation" in both historical and mystical time: "four score and seven years ago" to "now" in the first part of his remarks, "[the] larger sense" of its futurity being on "the earth" "under God" in the second. In this way, ordinary space and time of history in segments [1-3] are made parallel to the mystical Christian realm in segments [5-6].

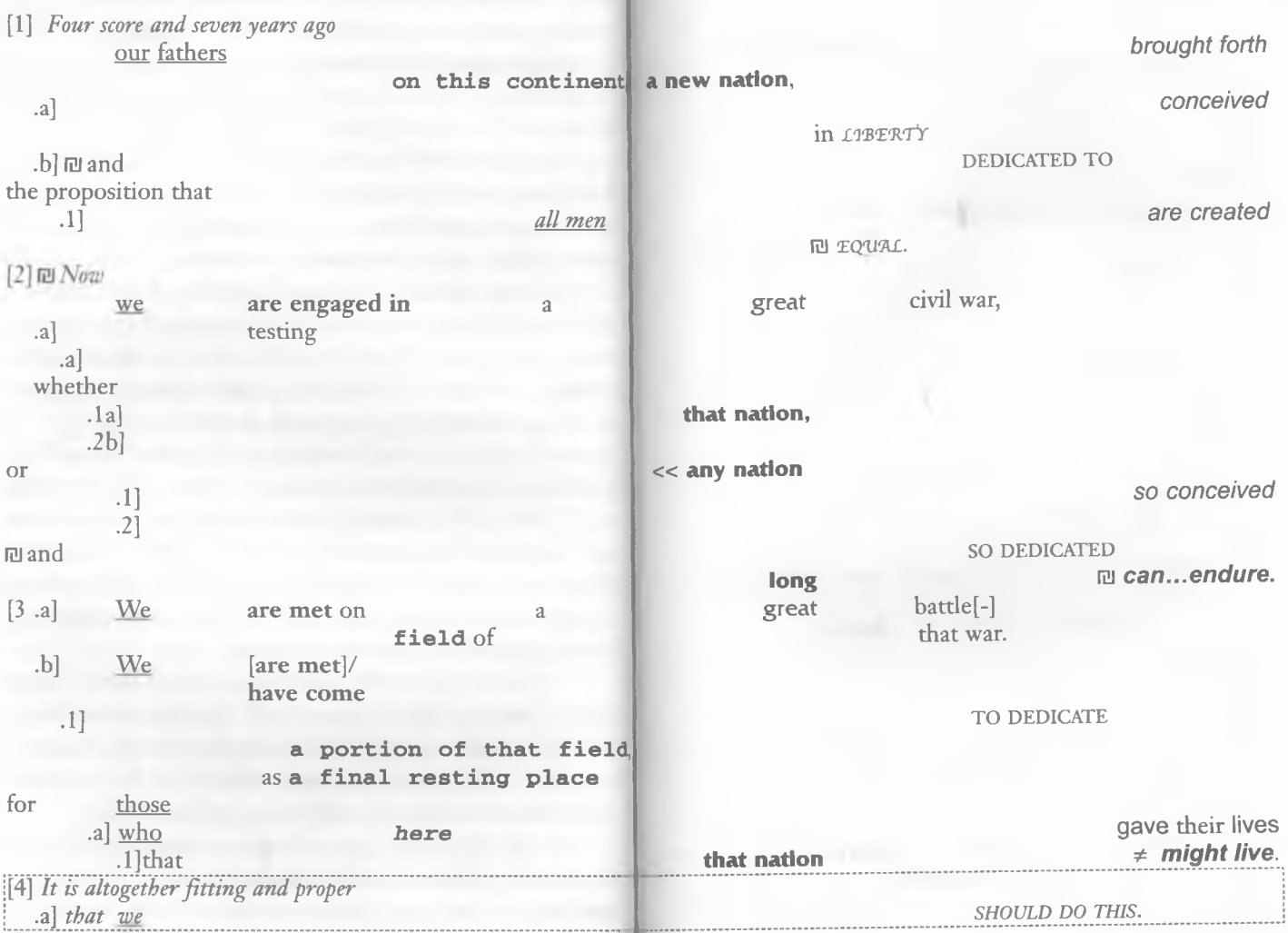
Lincoln uses the physical arrangement of the ritual site to organize the relations of all the people named as well as summoned to dedicatory effort. At the schematically apical top-and-center of the site he, Lincoln, "that nation's" Chief Magistrate and Commander-in-Chief, stands to call his audience to its

challenge and destiny that are the cruces of the text. Here, the birth/death/re-birth of the political nation (whose shaky government of/by/for the people Lincoln happened to head) and the eternal "endur[ance]" of the nation's soul ("Liberty" or "freedom" and "equal[ity]") are the issues Lincoln brings together in parallel at the focal point. Yet there at the focal point stands the unpronounced "I" at the center of his enunciated "we:" summoning all the coparticipants in his text, those named as well as those present, to what the speaker, Abraham Lincoln, stands for in the way of "unfinished work." Because of this double contextualization that Lincoln built in to the performance, the printed Gettysburg Address still speaks to us with a power rarely equaled in American public rhetoric. As a textually robust ritualization in words, it can even be extracted from its context with its "message" intact. Certainly Lincoln thought so; he continued to refine the text with minor re-wordings after the event—making it even better as a poetic ritual text—as he several times supplied new handwritten copies for later commemorative distribution.

Let's turn to the mechanics of the text-in-context. First, the internal metrical organization of the verbal material, and then how the features of context contribute to these metaphorically chained symbolic equivalences in the overall "message" event.

In Figure 1 I give a diagram of the structures I am talking about, in order to allow you to follow the text and its analysis. I have numbered and lettered the major segments of the text that Lincoln spoke according to the tiered organization of clause-like units of

Figure 1.


[1] Four score and seven years ago
our fathers
on this continent
a new nation,
brought forth
conceived
.a]
.b] ₪ and
the proposition that
.1]
all men
in LIBERTY
DEDICATED TO
are created
₪ EQUAL.
[2] ₪ Now
we
are engaged in
a
great
civil war,
.a]
testing
.a]
whether
.1a]
.2b]
or
.1]
.2]
that nation,
<< any nation
so conceived
₪ and
SO DEDICATED
long
₪ can...endure.
[3 .a]
We
are met on
a
great
battle[-]
that war.
field of
.b]
We
[are met]/
have come
.1]
a portion of that field,
as a final resting place
TO DEDICATE
for
those
.a] who
here
gave their lives
≠ might live.
.1]that
that nation
[4] It is altogether fitting and proper
.a] that we
SHOULD DO THIS.
[5a.a]
But,<< in a larger sense,

.1] we
.2] we
.3] we

this ground.

.b] The brave men
.1]

and
.2]
.a] who **struggled** ***here***
it,
.a] our
.1]
or
.2]
[5b] The world
.a.1]
.a.2] <<
nor
.a] what
we *SAY* ***here***,
but
.b] ≠ it
.a] what
they ⇆ *DID* ***here***.
[6a] *It is for*
us
rather,
.1] ***here***

.a] which
they
.1] who **fought** ***here***
have…advanced.
[6b] *It is… for*
χ rather
us

CANNOT DEDICATE –
<< CANNOT CONSECRATE –
<< CANNOT HALLOW

living

≠ dead

HAVE CONSECRATED

far beyond
≠ poor power
to add

≠ [to] detract.

little *will…note*

≠ long *[will] remember*

>> **never** *can…forget*

the living,

TO BE DEDICATED... TO
the unfinished work

thus far so nobly

.1]

χ **here**

.1]
be*fore*
us –
.a]
that *from* **these**
we *TAKE*

.1]
for
they ₪ *GAVE*
.b] that
we **here**
.1] that **these**

.2] that this
under God,

.3] and that
.a]
.b]
.c]

THE EARTH.

TO BE... DEDICATED TO

the great task
remaining

HONORed **dead**
increased DEVOTION TO
that **cause**

which
<< the last full measure of DEVOTION –

highly RESOLVE
dead
shall...have died

...not...in vain –
nation,

≠ *shall have a new birth*

of *FREEDOM* –
government
of the people,
₪ by the people,
₪ for the people, << ***shall not perish from***

sentence-structure. At the same time, I have organized the component unit-sized words and expressions of his prose into vertical columns to emphasize what I believe are the remarkable verbal parallelisms, repetitions, and progressions that operate according to their own special effects, much as in poetry, music, and graphic art. Chains of such elements are lined up vertically (as syntax allows), linked by being given similar font and diacritic treatment, to indicate chain-complex equivalence or identity or, for various pairs and triads of terms, special effects like chain-complexes of oppositeness (≠) or complementarity (⋒), or semantic crescendo (<<) and decrescendo (>>) effects. (These operate as well at the level of clauses, of course, as marked.) Nevertheless, the chart attempts to preserve the customary left-to-right and top-to-bottom printing conventions so the text can be read normally from beginning to end. Where the rhetorical structure dictates, some material has had to be charted out of the spoken order of denotational text. Accordingly, three dots (...) appear in the place where a word that is elsewhere plotted actually occurs in Lincoln's text (it can generally be located in my chart immediately before the marked gap or, rarely, as the following word in the same clause). The structure will become clearer as we follow along.

Lincoln organizes the whole text into a First Part—Pause—Second Part structure, like a conical figure of two nappes meeting at their vertex (segment [4]). He structures each sentence internally to give maximal rhetorical presence and force to the important concepts. Every sentence starts out, basically, with a

simple sentence-subject and simple predicate (with or without a preceding temporal adverbial—like four score and seven years ago—to set up the time frame). Most of the sentences conclude not with a simple noun, but with an appended object or complement construction to which are appended additional modifiers that prolong the basic, simple sentence. As a sentence unfolds in time within the complements or modifiers, a yet further modifying phrase hangs onto modifying phrase in a structurally very rhythmic arrangement that creates a cascading series of memorable, almost autonomous phrases of greatly resonant power.

For example, right in the initial segment, marked [1] in the accompanying figure, we have the simple clause [Subject:] our fathers—[Predicate:] brought forth a new nation. To this Lincoln adds the complex and parallel modifiers explaining what kind of nation they created relevant to the "message" of this occasion. It is a nation, Lincoln declares, [1.a] conceived in liberty (passive participle followed by prepositional phrase), and one [1.b] dedicated to the proposition (again, passive participle followed by prepositional phrase). But which proposition? Another modifier expands, this one a full clause that quotes Mr. Jefferson's immortal text in the Declaration of Independence: the proposition (or truth, we might say) [1.b.1] that all men are created equal. This structure rolls along from beginning to end, unfolding in a way by adding deeper and deeper levels of grammatical structure.

But this principle of composition even intensifies as Lincoln moves from beginning to end. By the

text's finale in segment [6], Lincoln lays out in segments [6a] and [6b] the things for us the living to be (here) dedicated to accomplishing so as truly to dedicate the cemetery. Here, his text gets very deeply embedded in syntactic complexity, level after level after level, the last unit [6b.1.b.3.c] resulting from fivefold nesting of phrases within phrases. The unfinished work in [6a] of those who fought at Gettysburg is spelled out in [6b] as *our* great task remaining and it is enumerated in multiple parallel formations, for example [6b.1.a] parallel to [6b.1.b]; within the latter, [6b.1.b.1] parallel to [6b.1.b.2] and to [6b.1.b.3]; and so forth. As each phrase occurring at some level of the complex structure seems to come to completion, we are treated to yet another example of the same principles of composition all over again, as what we thought was the last word bursts open with yet another construction to complete the thought.

So, even considered as a denotational text, a structured message in the informational sense, the whole has what we would now call a "fractal" beauty of structure. Think of the kind of aerial fireworks that, shot up high, bursts open in sequential stages as its remaining parts float down in the sky, each array of color hanging in the air for a moment to dazzle us and then in turn bursting into further, similarly dazzling color. It is the ultimate stuff, placed toward the end of every one of Lincoln's rhetorical segments, that gives the central symbolic oomph to the whole segment and to its import for the whole ritual text.

At the same time, Lincoln develops for each important symbol its proper emphasis in relation to

another symbol that he places in parallel to it, making a balanced pair at a relevant position within their respective grammatical phrases: thus even within the first segment, our fathers [agent subject]—all men [patient subject] and brought forth [active]—are created [passive] are two pairs in tandem, like mirror-images nicely rounding out the two full clauses of [1]; conceived (in)—dedicated (to) participial phrases used in describing the United States; liberty—equal[ity] each as its phrase-culminating value we get from the nation's founding fraternity.

More importantly, note also what we can term Lincoln's cantillation with tremolo on particular ritual points central to his "message"—his elaborate, decorative emphasis of them by repetition (that we can see in the vertical columnar array of Figure 1). Through repetition-with-variation, the basic principle of poetic parallelism, Lincoln highlighted certain words and phrases as the vehicles of the central symbols of this ritual (a new nation [1] > that nation [2.a.a.1.a]—any nation [so conceived …] [2.a.a.1.b] > that nation [3.b.1.a.1]; *this* nation" [6b.1.b.2]. (Here, also note the culminative progression, a > that [parenthetical any] > that > this. getting ultimately to the ritual "here-and-now" nation that matters.) In several places, Lincoln repeats exactly the same linguistic forms with poetically new meanings each time—punning in a way that seizes our attention: conceived in [1.a] vs. so conceived [2.a.a.1.a] plays on the senses of reproduction vs. rational thought, figuratively making the key point about what differentiates this nation from others. Again, dedicated (to) [1.b; 2.a.a.2.b.2] vs. to dedicate [3.b.1;

5a.a.1] plays on the difference between goal-orientation vs. ritually setting aside or consecrat[ing] [5a.a.2; 5a.b]. Observe how the two senses are merged and figuratively equated, with passive construction, in Lincoln's twice calling for "us" to dedicate ourselves—that is, for us ourselves to be dedicated to [6a.1; 6b.1]—the unfinished work of the great civil war and thus of this nation. He also uses whole series or sequences of words and phrases closely related in meaning to create the framework of overall metaphors in which his ritual theme is established: (the nation's) *birth* in history > (for humans,) actual or (for the nation,) threatened *death* > *rebirth* in *or* to (human) *immortality* or (national) cosmic eternity.

Lincoln's progressions of nested repetitions first zoom in relentlessly within the spatial realm, like a camera focusing us down, down, down; it is a field of meaning made orderly in the very textual order of the ritual: this continent [1] > a great battlefield [3.a] > a portion of that field and a final resting place (i.e., 'graves') [3.b.1] > here [3.b.l.a]. In this first half of the ritual text, he is tracing events in historical time as well, first the founding of the nation on a principle or proposition; then the "testing" of that principle or proposition—note how an exception "proves," i.e., tests, a rule or timeless generalization—by the war that is the ongoing reality; then the actual immediate present of the occasion itself, face-to-face with the dead and with each other. What to say or do *now*?

Quite brilliantly, in the second half of the ritual, Lincoln precipitously zooms out again, though always anchored in the "here-and-now" he shares with

his addressees, until he makes the physical ground part, in the larger sense, of the cosmic eternal of God's—not merely humanity's—earth: this ground [5a.a] > here and it [5a.b.a] (> 8 times here or equivalent) > this nation under God [6b.1.b.2] > the earth [6b.1.b.3]. Lincoln starts from the "here-and-now" he had reached at the end of the first part, and draws it up not into mere human futurity, though to be sure he appeals to his audience in terms of what it is for [them] to do after the ceremonial occasion. His call is, rather, for the rebirth of the freedom articulated in the Declaration of Independence, that is, for *the sacred futurity of an eternal principle*. This abstract value will not perish from the earth nor will this nation, under God, in that sacred order if the audience will only dedicate themselves to carrying on with the great task remaining before us in the temporal order. The audience will thereby join in the cosmic category he creates in this very ritual text, one that includes the Revolutionary Era fathers, the Civil War Era dead soldiers now buried "here," those (here) still living, and most of all the very individual who is grammatically at the center of and focused upon by the little inclusive word "*we*:" the speaker, Abraham Lincoln himself, their Commander-in-Chief, their Chief Magistrate, their Executive, their President.

We can note these poetic progressions independent of any overall "logic" rhetoricians want to find in the text—it's technically merely an exhortation to greater resolve in the war effort, now figuratively wrapped in eternal principle. The whole emergent text moves through two familiar orders, the temporal and

the eternal, manipulating symbols that draw people and events in the first order together with forces and destinies in the second. So we can see why certain things are constantly repeated and embellished through the whole text to show that they retain their essence in both realms. Such are, for example, Liberty [1.a] and equal[ity] [1.b.1] at the initial, conceptual and dedicatory founding moment of the new nation. These are recuperated in the cosmic realm of eternity at the very end by "our" resolution to give a new birth to freedom [6b.1.b.2].

Again, note the fractal structure of repetitions in positioning expressions for the United States, its history, its destiny. In segment [1], a new nation, a specific thing, is dedicated to the equality of all men [1.b.1], in the realm of general concepts; in [2], precisely parallel, the fate of that nation [2.a.a.1a]—specific—is linked to the fate of any nation [2.a.a.2b]—general—similarly conceived and dedicated. The whole first part, the historical recitation of events, concludes with Lincoln, using the modal might, making contingent the continuing life of that nation [3.b.1.a.1], the one whose history has been recited in outline from founding to Civil War to the Gettysburg battle to the precarious "now." Here is the crux of the moment to hand.

Then, in the second part, where Lincoln is speaking in the "larger sense" of futurities of the sacred and eternal, he repeatedly uses exactly the same structure of contrasts of specific and general. In [5a] and [5b], this same opposition is twice nested. We in [5a.a] and the brave men (who struggled here) in

[5.a.b] in each sub-part of [5a] draws a contrast between us, the living, more this-worldly, and the dead, now become eternal (buried, they have joined "our fathers"). As a higher-level unit, [5a] as a whole, dealing with these specific actors in the nation's present moment, is contrasted with [5b], which is framed by how the world—a generalized actor—is presumed to evaluate the contrast in [5a]. The significant difference the world will understand is between what we say here [5b.a.a], feebly trying, with words, to dedicate an earth(l)y memorial, and what they did here [5b.a.b], succeeding, with deeds, in consecrating it for eternity.

Segment [6a] takes up the theme of [5a] once more: since our words alone will not succeed in dedicat[ing] this ground [5a.a], rather we must dedicate ourselves, i.e., we must be dedicated [6a.1], to completing what they who fought here [6a.1.a.1] struggled [5a.b.2.a] to do. This specific unfinished work [6a.1]—which the crowd, in context, must have understood to be the cause of the Union—is in parallel fashion elevated in [6b] to the great task remaining before us [6b.1] in a generalized eternal realm. Being dedicated to the specific is, in parallel fashion, equated to being dedicated to the general—to the cosmic fate of these dead [6b.1.b.1], of this nation [, under God,] [6b.1.b.2], and of a principle of government [6b.1.b.3], all of which Lincoln anchors to the very site: "here," where "we," the living make the dead immortal. Within the last segment [6b.1.b] that calls Lincoln's audience to purposive resolve, note yet again the three-part crescendo of abstractness in the parallelism: [6b.1.b.1] is a resolve to redeem the specific fact of the

soldiers' deaths; [6b.1.b.2] is a resolve for the resurrection of freedom in this nation, under God (whose conception in Liberty is recalled from [1.a]); while [6b.1.b.3] is a resolve to render eternal the abstract principle, given in the ringing phrase (borrowed and refashioned from many earlier writers) government of the people, by the people, for the people which, then, shall not perish from the earth.

But the two major parts of the text work similarly. Lincoln recounts in [1] to [3] the whole set of *historical*—and therefore specific—precedents for being at Gettysburg on that November day. In [5] and [6] respectively, he turns to the set of first *moral* and then, additively, *performative* contingencies and futurities, the ones that depend upon and would follow on Lincoln's success at forging a resolute "*we*." These futurities can be made real—can be made consecrated flesh, as it were—only if the ritual is successful, if it draws its speaker and addressees together in the unity it declares.

Here, then, we come to the most remarkable of the sustained parallelisms of repetition in Lincoln's text, clearly the central axis of what the ritual pronouncement is all about: our "dedicat[ing]" and our "be[ing] dedicated." Six times Lincoln repeats it in one or another grammatical form, with one or another special sense. Twice more he repeats it in the synonym 'devote' (as in the wonderful opposition of our *tak*[*ing*] devotion [6b.1.a] from the dead's having *giv*[*en*] the last full measure of devotion [6b.1.a.1]). He elaborates it in the brilliant verbal crescendo dedicate << consecrate << hallow [5.a.a.1,2,3; 5.a.b]. And—if the audience or reader has any doubts left about the ritual task he is summoning us to—he spells it out in the explicitly defining performative formula for how, in democratic assembly, the people take binding action: we here highly resolve (that...) [6b.1.b (.1,.2,.3)].

Observe the progression. In [1-3], dedicate keeps its active voice, but shifts between [1-2]—where the meaning is commitment to an eternal truth—and [3]—where the ongoing ritual event is named as a dedicat[ion] [3.b.1], a setting-aside, the doing of which, in [4], Lincoln judges to be altogether fitting and proper. In [5-6], note, the earlier punning disjunction is made clearer in [the] larger sense. First, if we cannot dedicate...this ground [5a.a], i.e., set it aside, we certainly cannot consecrate it [5a.a.2], i.e., really and truly commit it to the sacred eternal, as clergy or similar Christian religious officiants would do. Nor certainly can we hallow it [5a.a.3], i.e., make it sacred in the first place, which only God can do. Notice that those who fought in the Battle of Gettysburg are said to be such consecrat[ors] of the cemetery ground [5a.b]; they have already committed it to the sacred eternal. In fighting or struggl[ing] here, they have done holy—if unfinished—work [6a.1] that the world...can never forget [5b.b], i.e., that is enduring.

Now we can see Lincoln's extraordinary and priestly Eucharistic move in segment [6]: if we cannot really and truly dedicate—active voice—in that enduring and eternal realm, we can be dedicated here [6a.1] in it—passive voice form meaning just 'committed to' something. Now in the parallel segment [6b.1], Lincoln uses the formal figure of chiasmus, crisscross-

ing, as he takes the passive form and returns it to its ritual or performative meaning. Observe the changed orderings: It is for us...rather...to be dedicated here to ... [6a.1] vs. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to ... [6b.1]. As in the service of the Eucharist, we must become transformed and mystically *set aside to (and within) "[the] cause"*—that is, incorporatively dedicated to it—by tak[ing] increased devotion (like wine and wafer transubstantiated) from the martyrs who gave the last full measure of devotion. Thus, our high resol[ution] to make it so that they martyred themselves for *our* cause—the cause of this nation, under God and its new birth of freedom (a *re-birth* recuperating 1776), this cause that "we" can here-and-now make immortal and eternal, never perish[ing] from the earth.

Indeed, there truly is a quality of Shakespearean seriousness to Lincoln's puns and plays on words! He was a highly gifted miniaturist in words as he moves across the realms of meaning that a single word-form can have, and as he plays upon the significant differences of the various grammatical forms of those very words.

But to appreciate further this masterpiece of "message"ing, we must imagine the scene on that November day. (If you've been to the site recently, you will know that the cemetery has now been enveloped in large-scale Gettysburg Battle tourism that decreases the contemplative sacredness of the site, instead emphasizing the battle itself.) Imagine an open-fan, a semicircular-shaped cemetery sloping down-and-out from near the top of a knoll or ridge. Imagine pie-

piece sections of graves for the various states' dead in various stages of completion or in-process freshness. At the radial center of this semicircular array was a flagpole, temporarily in the position where a large war monument was later erected (dedicated, 1869), barely beyond the closest-in circumferential lines of then-fresh graves. Slightly higher up, on the grounds of an already existing cemetery—the site was known as Cemetery Hill—there was set up a platform for speakers and dignitaries, leaving room for the audience between it and the new National Cemetery. In effect, on the surface of the hill all this comprised a somewhat lengthened and inverted (convex rather than concave) amphitheatre, all oriented to a high center-point of interest, where the speakers' and dignitaries' platform was set up. The speakers looked out from that center to the audience and beyond, to the places of burial of the dead. In the converse direction, the dead lay beneath the earth at the backs of the audience, who faced forward toward the center where Everett and Lincoln and others spoke to them and enjoined of them dedication to the completion of the unfinished work which they who fought here [lying behind the audience; constituting their background] have thus far so nobly advanced.

We can note in the address the way that the system of what are technically called "deictic" categories—the way one uses thises and thats; the way one speaks of a "past," a "present" and a realm of futurity; the way one refers to what is here and to what is there—is masterfully used by Lincoln (who even revised the text after the fact to make it better, that is,

tighter in its ritual poetics of deixis). The national past, the bloody and immediately deadly present, and the destiny Lincoln and his audience (and successors) will shape is verbally put into correspondence with the shape of the physical array in which the address is delivered: fathers metaphorically rolling up from the mythical past; honored dead, lying in graves just downhill and all around behind us; us the living, arrayed inside the concentric rings of the cemetery being dedicated; and the focal point we all seek in the nation's future, starting behind the audience and marching up to the high-ground top-and-center point of the audience's gaze where Lincoln himself stands, speaking to them. As in any good sacred ritual, the cosmic axis—here, leading us to redemption by (re)dedication and rebirth—runs right through the position that Lincoln speaks from, so that the futurity is indeed the mystical futurity of that larger sense in which we are here [very much on this ground as well as, in mystical nationalist time, on this continent and the earth] not so much to dedicate, as to **be** dedicated, punning on the official-collective ceremony vs. the personal-spiritual meaning of the ceremonial transformation. Compare here again the Eucharistic service, in which, inscribing the figure of a cross—The Cross—in ceremonial action, one incorporates the sacred Body and Blood so as to be mystically incorporated into the Body made institutional in the church and among its congregation of worshippers.

We can now appreciate even more the subtlety with which Lincoln uses such deixis. In [1], a past tense verb, brought forth, describes the founding

actions of the fathers of a new nation at the far end of the time interval of 87 years before the moment of speaking. In [2], a present form of an inherently continuous verb, are engaged in, describes the ongoing frame of a great civil war, implicating its habitualness or surround of the moment of speaking, hence now. In [3], a present perfect, are met/have come, describing a resultative state of an action, brings us, still within "now," to "here." Observe that in this first, recitational half of the text, each time something is introduced—for example, a new nation in [1], the next time Lincoln holds it up he does so with that, the distal demonstrative appropriate to setting things out for contemplation at a distance.

In his text-dividing sentence, [4], Lincoln uses a present tense and the verb do this, with the proximal demonstrative, that substitutes for the whole complex phrase of [3.b.1] (...to dedicate...might live).

Then in the second half, in [5] and [6], Lincoln moves out from "here" and "now" into contingent futurities, futurities that depend on our orienting ourselves to the deontological lessons of the recitation of the first segment. At this point, Lincoln switches entirely into the "proximal" deictics, here, this/these, we: he has now brought everything he denotes inside the ritual precinct. So, we start from the impossibility of really doing this, i.e., dedicating, consecrating, or hallowing *this* ground by merely say[ing] something (as opposed to the soldiers' having *done* something!). We learn that we *can* in effect do this by ourselves being dedicated to joining Lincoln in the "we" who will bring about actual futurities, all

wonderfully laid out as such in parallel future constructions that are thus made ritually equivalent—an emotion-filled chain-complex of ideals—in [6b.1.b]: that [the dead] shall not have died in vain = that [the U.S.A.] shall have a new birth of freedom = that [the principle of democratic government] shall not perish from the earth. The proximal demonstratives this/these—here combined with implied and actual future forms give us a presentational effect, holding before the ritual participants the very outcomes of a successful performance.

The Myth is the "Message"

As I observed, "[t]he world will little note, nor long remember" what Edward Everett said in his Gettysburg "Oration." But the mythology surrounding Lincoln's "Dedicatory Remarks" celebrates them as a rhetorical triumph of the quintessentially "American" civil-religious voice, and it celebrates Lincoln as the people's evangelist for the Union cause. As this very constructed "message" had already been helpful to his initial election, it was all the more definitively elaborated at his death. Each of the various mythological strands indicates something interesting about the "message"-worthiness of the Gettysburg Address.

There are various myths about the text's composition. The one I was told in elementary school was that Lincoln quickly jotted it on the back of an envelope while waiting at the train station, or while on the train to Gettysburg. There are variant details: that it was composed after dinner in the Wills house the night before its delivery; or, early in the morning before its delivery; or, partly in Washington and partly at Gettysburg. Or even that the text was only partially written out, the rest coming spontaneously from Lincoln in an inspired burst of feeling at the dedication ceremony itself. The absence of a definitive reading manuscript in Lincoln's hand that matches the stenographic record of a reporter reinforces the sense of these words as more or less divinely inspired and spoken by a priest if not prophet. These accounts, to different degrees, imbue the text with the sincerity of

inspired, spontaneous words-of-the-moment that, like all good poetry, are supposed in a kind of Romantic view to come to the inspired poet fluently and directly in an inspiration—like the feelings of religious conversion and ecstasy that they allude to.

But in actuality, Lincoln had long since formulated the general metaphorical structure of the Gettysburg text: the providential delivery of the Union to "us" on the 4th of July, the birthday of the nation, upon principles of universal human rights (notwithstanding the later Constitutional compromises about slavery). Already on the evening of the 7th of July in 1863, just a few days after the Gettysburg and Vicksburg engagements, Lincoln extemporaneously spoke to a crowd outside the Executive Mansion on this subject. His words were stenographically reported as follows:

> How long ago is it—eighty odd years—since on the Fourth of July for the first time in the history of the world a nation by its representatives, assembled and declared as a self-evident truth that "all men are created equal." That was the birthday of the United States of America....
> [A]nd on the 4th [just passed] the cohorts of those who opposed the declaration that all men are created equal "turned tail" and ran. Gentlemen, this is a glorious theme, and the occasion for a speech, but I am not prepared to make one worthy of the occasion. I would like to speak in terms of praise due to the many brave officers and soldiers who have fought in the cause of the Union and liberties of the country from the beginning of the war.

Even earlier, when the war was in its initial phases, Lincoln had sent a message to a special session of Congress on 4 July 1861, in which many of the phrasings of the Gettysburg remarks can already be noted. Addressing the Confederacy's secession, Lincoln argues that

> this issue embraces more than the fate of these United States. It presents to the whole family of man the question, whether a constitutional republic, or democracy—a Government of the people by the same people—can or cannot maintain its territorial integrity against its own domestic foes. It presents the question, whether discontented individuals... can... put an end to free government upon the earth.

Lincoln rhetorically asks why, in contrast to the ideals for which he—and, he hopes, Congress—stand, the Confederate declaration of independence "omit[s] the words 'all men are created equal', and why their constitution omits the phrase 'We, the People': Why this deliberate pressing out of view of the rights of men and the authority of the people?" And he concludes by remarking that even "[a]s a private citizen, the Executive [=President] could not have consented that these institutions [of popular government] shall perish"; and much less can he do so as President.

So it was not merely the issues that were Lincoln's to articulate; the very images of a "message" had long been forming themselves in phrasings that he ultimately put together in the brilliant poetry of his

text of November 1863. While that text may have gotten a final pre-delivery polishing in the days before the 19th, it certainly was in far advanced draft by a week or so before, when Lincoln was studying the layout of the cemetery and reviewing the text of Everett's oration.

Then there is the myth of the audience's stunned—or indifferent—silence at the dedication, and of Lincoln's sense of the immediate failure of the speech. Just as the myth of whole-sprung, inspired composition (or extemporaneity) hints at the "message" of Lincoln's powerful evangelical fervor, so this one constructs the image of the overlooked treasure—perhaps like Christ's disregarded message?—proffered to an initially uncomprehending world. (But the world ultimately discovers its treasure and grants immortality to the message.)

Actually, upon delivery, the speech was interrupted five times for applause, at what we can see are all "right" places, as well as receiving sustained applause at its conclusion. The Associated Press stenographer notes applause after [1], when Lincoln quotes the Declaration; after [5a], for the consecrating acts of the brave men... who struggled here: after [5b], contrasting what they did here to our mere verbiage; after [6a], noting that the combatants have thus far... nobly carried on the nation's unfinished work [changed to nobly advanced in later, post-delivery manuscripts]; after [6b.b.1], resolving that these dead shall not have died in vain: and at the end, after shall not perish from the earth, the correspondent noting "long continued applause." All these noted, in spite of

recollected memories of silence, whether hostile, uncomprehending, or whatever.

But of course the myths tell us something about the folk notion of the differences between the plain- and brief-spoken Lincoln, President of the people, speaking in language for the people, hoping to be reelected by the people, and the distinguished and Brahmanical public servant and Harvard president, Mr. Everett, who represents the gifts of elite artistry in the heroic Hellenic mold. (The very next day, Ambassador Everett wrote compliments to Lincoln, saying, "I should be glad if I could flatter myself that I came so near the central idea of the occasion in two hours as you did in two minutes." To this, the gracious Lincoln—ever the master of compactly witty words—replied, "In our respective parts yesterday, you could not have been excused to make a short address, nor I a long one.") When successful "message" wraps the message-bearer in its folds like a draped flag, the myth becomes the message. Lincoln's dedicatory remarks became "*The* Gettysburg Address" and this aspect of his "message"—what was at stake "in [the] larger sense" in both the war and *him being President*—was completely off bounds in the particularly rough political season ahead. The verbal and cartoon attacks on Lincoln from the militant northern Abolitionist side or the side of compromise with the Confederacy were sustained and vicious until the 1864 elections and beyond. But he had managed to inhabit a "message" at Gettysburg that, in his eventual martyrdom-to-"that cause" down to the present, seems "not [to have] perish[ed] from the earth."