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THE LITERARY LINCOLN

James Andrew Stevenson

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THE LITERARY LINCOLN

submitted by

James Andrew Stevenson

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
Georgia Southern College in Partial
Fufillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Statesboro, Georgia

1989

THE LITERARY LINCOLN

by

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CONTENTS

Page

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS i

INTRODUCTION 1

CHAPTER

I. THE EDUCATION: MINOR WOODSMAN TO MASTER WORDSMITH . . 6

II. THE CRISIS: MALIGNANT MASTERS AND MOVING MESSAGES . . 33

III. THE DENOUEMENT: MURDEROUS WAR BUT MAGNIFICENT WORDS . 63

WORKS CITED 96

Introduction

This thesis focuses on the literary aspects of the most significant and the most famous of Abraham Lincoln's political writings. It touches only on his rare poetry, and it does not deal with the enormous volume of his frequently moving personal correspondence. Most importantly, it does not treat the reader to an examination of his poorly punctuated or occasionally awkward pieces of writing. The first two of these topics have been investigated by published authors, and the latter topic will have to await one of my periodic anti-Lincoln moods. Without diminishing the political-historical background of Lincoln and his era to an unnecessary degree, the thesis explicates the style and the meaning of each of the following pieces of Lincoln's writings: "A House Divided," various speeches or parts of speeches in the Lincoln-Douglas campaign of 1858, the Farewell Address at Springfield, the First Inaugural Address, the Second Annual Message to Congress, the Gettysburg Address, and the Second Inaugural Address.

As an attorney and a politician, Lincoln neither regarded writing as his profession nor as an end in itself. In the works under consideration, he wrote and spoke for political purposes. And in that effort, he did not write as a political theoretician or as a political philosopher. He wrote, primarily, to inspire, to persuade, and to lead a voting public.

For Lincoln, the political rather than the literary objective was always paramount. This means that any thesis which devotes itself to an examination of the literary Lincoln must necessarily consider the political and the historical aspects of his writings and of his times. Nevertheless, in this study, these features of Lincoln's career have been subordinated to the literary aspect of his work. At times, the focus on Lincoln's literary techniques may throw a new light on some historical or political issue. Usually, however, the literary analysis will deal exclusively with Lincoln's literary meanings and skills.

In that regard, it is noteworthy that very few articles and even fewer books have dealt with Lincoln's literary techniques. Indeed, except for the serious work of such Lincoln literary critics as Daniel Kilham Dodge, Roy P. Basler, and Melvin E. Bradford, the techniques of Lincoln's writing have been largely ignored by investigators. And yet, as Basler notes, "originality" in a "literary artist" must refer to "technique of expression rather than to his matter" ("Artist" 149). In that connection, although Lincoln's grammar is sometimes imperfect, he more than compensates for that lapse by his inimitable and subtle feeling for cadence and stylistic balance. Such skills, Basler claims, distinguish Lincoln's writings by a "workmanship . . . so individual that it cannot be imitated" ("Artist" 149). Moreover, when Lincoln combines his command of style with his genius for expressing feelings, his writing, according to Basler, surpasses all but Walt Whitman's work in its ability to infuse the era of the Civil War with "poetic significance" ("Artist" 148-150).

The quality of Lincoln's writings had much to do with the fact that he lived during a climactic moment in U.S. history. It also was an era

when it was customary for political figures to write their own speeches and essays. Laboring over such works and his political correspondence, Lincoln wrote more than 1,078,365 words (Spiller 778). Indeed, this pre-1970 calculation may be somewhat low since, between that date and 1989, additional Lincoln documents have been discovered. Certainly, the magnitude of Lincoln's writing is astounding, and the authors of Literary History are correct in observing, "One may range through this record of utterance and find a wider variety of styles than in any other American statesman or orator" (778). Such versatility with the English language was primarily produced by Lincoln's tireless efforts and the conditions of the times, but it had its inception in the reading and the study of his youth and young manhood.

As a self-educated man, Lincoln was a diligent student of books. His writing reflects the whole range of his reading. In particular, his writing was influenced by his reading of the Bible and poetry. Similarly, his career as a lawyer introduced him to legal works and judicial practices which contributed to his literary style. Since these influences and other books and materials were important in building Lincoln's writing techniques, a brief examination of Lincoln's reading habits forms the opening pages of this study. Lincoln, at least, would have been the first to have acknowledged that reading played a crucial role in the shaping of his thoughts and his talent as a writer.

Lincoln's deep concern for the English language was evident throughout his life. He believed in the power of words. He was not only charmed and enlightened by words, but he was convinced that writing was man's greatest invention. The printing press, he likewise believed, was a

liberating instrument. Only a year before his Presidential election, Lincoln's devotion to writing moved him to praise it in these words:

> Writing . . . is the great invention of the world. Great in the astonishing range of analysis and combination which necessarily underlies the most crude and general conception of it--great, very great in enabling us to converse with the dead, the absent, and the unborn, at all distances of time and of space; and great, not only in its direct benefits, but greatest help, to all other inventions (CW III: 360).

For Lincoln, the beneficial force of writing was remarkably enhanced by the beneficial force of printing. Indeed, Lincoln extolled the epoch-changing power of printing in these words:

> At length [3,000 years after writing was invented] printing came. It gave ten thousand copies of any written matter, quite as cheaply as ten were given before; and consequently a thousand minds were brought in to the field where there was but one before. This was a great gain; and history shows a great change corresponding to it . . . the true termination of . . . "the dark ages." Discoveries, inventions, and improvements followed rapidly, and have been increasing their rapidity ever since (CW III: 362).

Writing and printing, Lincoln believed, democratized knowledge, advanced civilization, and terminated both the domination of the few and the

ignorance of the many. Perhaps when his work as a literary figure is better known, it will help contribute something to the impact that he thought words had. At least, if they do nothing else, Lincoln's writings let us glimpse an intelligent man who had the integrity to be different, the humanism to be compassionate, the imagination to be sensitive, and the wisdom to evolve.

Chapter I

The Education: Minor Woodsman to Master Wordsmith

Although the saga of Lincoln's rise from near bestial frontier origins to the White House has been told and retold, it has lost none of its allure. Here, after all, is an account of a boy who, raised by an illiterate father and an illiterate step-mother, had less than twelve months of formal schooling (CW IV: 62; Oates, Malice 5, 9, 14). Indeed, his mastery of the ABCs may have been accomplished without any tutorial assistance (Mearns 47-48). In any case, by the time he was twenty-two and a newly settled resident of New Salem, Illinois, Lincoln had read all or parts of the Bible, Mason Locke Weems's idealized account of the Life of George Washington, David Ramsey's Life of George Washington (the legendary damaged book, paid for by three days of Lincoln's labor), some of Shakespeare's works, the Revised Laws of Indiana (containing the Declaration of Independence, U.S. Constitution, and the Northwest Ordinance of 1787), Aesop's Fables, the Arabian Nights, John Bunyan's The Pilgrim's Progress, Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe, Watts's Hymn Book, Noah Webster's American Spelling Book, Thomas Dilworth's New Guide to the English Tongue (i.e., "Dilworth's Speller"), William Scott's Lessons in Elocution (containing lengthy excerpts from Shakespeare, John Home, and Joseph Addison), Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography, Lindley Murray's

English Reader, Robert Burns's Poetical Works, and numerous pieces of poetry by William Cowper, John Milton, Alexander Pope, and Thomas Gray (Mearns 51; Warren 28-50, 67-70, 76-80, 87-91, 103-106, 162, 211; Basler, Abraham 5; Houser 114-124, 318-324; Herndon-Weik I: 39-40).

From some of these works, Lincoln read ideas which had a lasting influence on him. Weems's biography of Washington so impressed him that he read it several times (Oates, Malice 12). A very prudent and careful Lincoln biographer, Louis A. Warren, wrote: "This volume [Weems's The Life of George Washington] influenced him more than any other early book except the Bible" (91). Lincoln seemed to confirm this in his February 1860 remarks to the New Jersey State Senate. In that reminiscence of his childhood reading and the task facing his Presidency, Lincoln said,

> May I be pardoned if, upon this occasion, I mention that away back in my childhood, the earliest days of my being able to read, I got hold of . . . "Weem's [sic] Life of Washington." I remember all the accounts there given of the battle fields and struggles for the liberties of the country, and none fixed themselves upon my imagination so deeply as the struggle here at Trenton, New-Jersey. . . . the great hardships endured at that time, all fixed themselves on my memory more that any single revolutionary event; . . . I recollect thinking then, boy even though I was, that there must have been something more than common that those men struggled for; that something even more than National Independence; that something

> that held out a great promise to all the people of the world to all time to come; I am exceedingly anxious that this Union, the Constitution, and the liberties of the people shall be perpetuated in accordance with the original idea for which that struggle was made . . . (CW IV: 235-236).

While Lincoln may have grown cynical about political biographies (Mearns 71-72), it is apparent that some of the patriotic spirit which he had imbibed from Weems's book clung to him throughout his life.

Likewise, his own desire to improve his mind and his station in life was reinforced by the example of self-help that Franklin's Autobiography extolled (Warren 87, 89-90). Many of Lincoln's adult speeches would contain his conviction that men could and should better themselves. Murray's English Reader also made an impression on Lincoln. Herndon reported that Lincoln told him that "Murray's English Reader was the best school-book ever put into the hands of an American youth" (Herndon-Weik I: 37). From Murray, a diligent youth could read excellent selections of English prose and poetry. The book not only contained a twenty page introduction of instructions on the principles of oral reading, but lessons on spelling, grammar, and mathematics (Warren 103-106). Scott's Lessons in Elocution was, also, a very practical text. Warren noted that it contained thirty-six pages on the "Elements of Gesture." Listing eighty-one human emotions, Scott prescribed precise body positions and mannerisms for every speaker who sought to convey any particular emotion. "Mixed passions and emotions of the mind," Scott declared, "require a mixed expression" (qtd. in Warren 76). Lincoln's boyhood oratory (Berry

841-842) may have owed something to his contact with Scott's book.

When Lincoln moved to New Salem, he read works by dozens of additional authors, and he began preparing himself for a career in politics. His more than five year sojourn in New Salem (August 1831-March 1837) provided him with the longest period in his life for sustained study. Indeed, he read so much that his neighbors regarded him as a "harmless" eccentric (Mearns 52). Yet, within the village, he found many friends who were willing to encourage the education of a young autodidact. The school master, Mentor Graham, and Lynn McNulty Greene discussed grammar and literature with him. Graham also helped Lincoln with math and surveying problems. The books which Lincoln used in those studies were Samuel Kirkham's English Grammar in Familiar Lectures, Abel Flint's System of Geometry and Trigonometry with a Treatise on Surveying, and Robert Gibson's Theory and Practice of Surveying (CW IV: 65; Mearns 57-58). Lincoln's third person, 1860, autobiographical account of this aspect of his education reveals the poignant story of his poverty on the frontier. After describing the bankruptcy of his New Salem mercantile venture with William F. Berry, Lincoln states,

> The Surveyor of Sangamon [John Calhoun], offered to depute to A [Lincoln] that portion of his work which was within his part of the county. He [Lincoln] accepted, procured a compass and chain, studied Flint, and Gibson a little, and went at it. This procured bread, and kept soul and body together (CW IV: 65).

But, in the long run, Kirkham's textbook on grammar was, perhaps, the most useful to Lincoln's future political career. According to historian

Martin Houser, the rules and examples in English Grammar were extremely clear and concise (117-118). Lincoln's literary style owes something to Kirkham.

Besides grammar and math, New Salem residents discussed history, literature, and politics with Lincoln. Historian Stephen B. Oates noted that Lincoln joined the New Salem debating society and was close to such educated men as James Rutledge (tavern proprietor and owner of a library of twenty-five or thirty books), Dr. John Allen (temperance advocate and graduate of Dartmouth Medical School), and Graham (self-taught schoolmaster and teacher of hundreds of students) (Malice 19-21). Outside of these contacts, Jack Kelso, a village blacksmith, recited the poetry of Burns and Shakespeare with Lincoln. Religion also was discussed among men who had read Paine's Age of Reason as well as the Bible (Herndon-Weik III: 439-440).

After Lincoln's death, numerous people claimed to have had the honor of tutoring him, but Lincoln never bestowed the title of tutor on any individual (CW IV: 60-67). So, although Salem residents William Butler and Henry McHenry claimed some role in Lincoln's legal studies, he read William Blackstone's Commentaries without a tutor. Later, in Springfield, Illinois, Lincoln continued his untutored legal studies, and he read Joseph Chitty's Treatise on Pleading and Parties to Action, Simon Greenleaf's Treatise on the Law of Evidence, Joseph Story's Commentaries on Equity Jurisprudence, and the "Revised Laws of Illinois (1824, 1841-3-5)" (CW III: 344; Mearns 60, 62). In mastering these and other difficult works, Lincoln worked tirelessly. His later prosperity convinced him that diligent self-study was the key to learning law. In 1855, 1858, and 1860,

he advised inquiring law students to follow his example and "go to reading for yourself." "The [self-study] mode is . . . laborious and tedious" but successful with "work, work, work" (Shaw 182-183). In Lincoln's opinion, successful learning was founded on the student's desire for it. He stated his view in these remarks:

> If you are resolutely determined to make a lawyer of yourself, the thing is more than half done already. It is but a small matter whether you read <u>with</u> any body or not. I did not read with any one. Get the books, and read and study them till, [sic] you understand them in their principal features; and that is the main thing (<u>CW</u> II: 327).

Summarizing his autodidactic outlook in his 1860 autobiographical sketch, Lincoln not only affirmed the method, but he noted his continuing quest for an education as well:

> What he has in the way of education, he has picked up. After he was twenty-three, and had separated from his father, he studied English grammar, imperfectly of course, . . . and nearly mastered the Six-books of Euclid, since he was a member of Congress. He regrets his want of education, and does what he can to supply the want (<u>CW</u> IV: 62).

Reflecting on such comments, students of Lincoln's reading habits have asserted that he read scores of books, reference works, and poems.

Actually, Lincoln was not the most voracious reader. Indeed, David Mearns, perhaps the foremost authority on Lincoln's reading habits,

stated, "But had Mr. Lincoln read, digested, absorbed all of the books imputed to him, he could not have been, as he was, the most gregarious of public men" (46). Still, Houser listed over 160 works that Lincoln was believed to have read (318-324). Perhaps, Herndon knew best: "The truth about Mr. Lincoln is that he read less and thought more than any man in his sphere in America" (Herndon-Weik III: 593). Herndon, on the other hand, was an avid reader, and, according to a witness named Henry Rankin, he would often entertain Lincoln with synopses of his recent readings (120-121). Lincoln, meanwhile, would frequently disturb Herndon by his practice of reading newspapers or books aloud. In Herndon's words:

> Lincoln never read any other way but aloud. This habit used to annoy me almost beyond the point of endurance. I once asked him why he did so. This was his explanation: 'When I read aloud two senses catch the idea: first, I see what I read; second, I hear it, and therefore I can remember it better' (Herndon-Weik II: 332).

Whatever the method and the extent of Lincoln's reading, most authorities agree that Lincoln and Herndon read a variety of books and other materials.

They not only analyzed a range of pro and anti-slavery newspapers, but they studied Hinton R. Helper's Impending Crisis in the South and George Fitzhugh's Sociology for the South, or the Failure of Free Society; they read Walt Whitman's Leaves of Grass, Edgar Allen Poe's "The Raven," Harriet B. Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin, Lord (George Gordon) Byron's poetry, and Oliver Wendell Holmes's "Last Leaf"; and they examined, among other

works, the writings of Theodore Parker, John G. Whittier, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Ralph W. Emerson (Rankin 124-126, 129-130, 132, 137-138; Herndon-Weik II: 319-320, III: 444-445). According to Houser, a copy of Byron's "Don Juan" was once seen on the Lincoln-Herndon law office table by a visitor, and Houser cited literary speculation that Lincoln liked Byron because he shared Byron's appreciation of anapestic meter (126). That Lincoln loved the poetry of Burns is beyond most doubt because he once acclaimed, "I can not frame a toast to Burns. I can say nothing worthy of his generous heart and transcending genius. Thinking of what he has said, I can not say anything which seems worth saying" (qtd. in Neely 241).

Lincoln's self-education was a remarkable accomplishment, but it was not undertaken for a pure love of learning. He read most prose for intellectual fuel, not pleasure. And, while poetry offered him charm, comfort, and entertainment, it also provided him with a literary model of rhythm and alliteration. Unlike Herndon, Lincoln was no bibliophile. He did not keep many books. He absorbed what he needed or wanted from books and pushed on to other business (Mearns 63-64). Although he loved Hamlet, he was a man of action, not a hesitating Hamlet. From his earliest boyhood, learning was a business for Lincoln. "I can remember," Lincoln said in 1860,

> going to my little bedroom, after hearing the neighbors talk of an evening with my father, and spending no small part of the night walking up and down, and trying to make out what was the exact meaning of some of their, to me, dark sayings. I

> could not sleep, though I often tried to, when I got on such a hunt after an idea, until I had caught it; and when I thought I had got it, I was not satisfied until I put it in language plain enough, as I thought, for any boy I knew to comprehend. This was a kind of passion with me, and it has stuck by me (qtd. in Shaw 93).

Such a diligent pursuit of knowledge might be regarded as obsessive or even compulsive by some. In fact, it was the product of a dynamic and restless intellect.

Yet, while historians generally accept, as established fact, Lincoln's power of mind, they cannot agree on his reading habits. Most authorities maintain that he was not an admirer of fiction, but it is fairly certain that he read Uncle Tom's Cabin, and he may have enjoyed Poe's stories because Poe suited the mathematical/metaphysical bent of his mind (Mearns 77-78, 83). He certainly read and enjoyed fiction as a youth. On the other hand, his contemporary, Joseph Gillespie, reported that Lincoln ignored all but a few works of history (Mearns 69). And Herndon quoted the mature Lincoln as being so cynical about biographies that he once told Herndon: "Biographies as generally written are not only misleading, but false. . . . In most instances they commemorate a lie, and cheat posterity out of the truth" (qtd. in Shaw 22).

Lincoln's reading habits during his Presidency are not any better known than they are in the years before he took the Oval Office. Mearns reported that the Library of Congress records show that 125 books were sent to the White House during Lincoln's Presidency, but no one knows who

used them (68). More importantly, the identification of the sources which Lincoln used as specific references for specific Presidential writings is shrouded in obscurity.

Lincoln was always an intellectually curious man, and he read for both information and pleasure. When he especially liked something that he had read, he committed it to memory. In particular, he had a penchant for memorizing the poetry he loved. Citing Lincoln's contemporaries, historians have noted his conversational propensity to recite long passages by Shakespeare, Burns, William Knox, Henry W. Longfellow, and other writers (Houser 137; Warren 211; Mearns 72, 82-83; Herndon-Weik I: 320; Carpenter 50-51, 59-61, 115). The lasting value of this devotion to poetic memorization is found in the literary style of many of Lincoln's speeches and letters. Lincoln's Presidential portrait painter, Francis Carpenter, buttressed this point when he attributed to Herndon this statement: "When young he [Lincoln] read the Bible, and when of age he read Shakespeare. This latter book was scarcely ever out of his mind" (331). Undoubtedly, Lincoln's best prose passages were guided by a sense of sound and rhythm as well as meaning and logic. Naturally, the latter two aspects had to dominate his political messages, but his love of poetry helped him to construct prose lines that approached meter in their regularity. A deeply moved President Lincoln, for example, wrote a letter of condolence to a mother, Lydia Bixly, who had been identified as having lost five sons in battle. When framed in a form resembling blank verse, the Letter to Mrs. Bixly illustrates Lincoln's gift for poetic expression:

> Dear Madam,--
>
> I have been shown in the files of the War Department

A statement of the Adjutant-General of Massachusetts,
That you are the mother of five sons
Who have died gloriously on the field of battle. I feel
How weak and fruitless must be any words of mine
Which should attempt to beguile you from the grief
Of a loss so overwhelming. But I cannot refrain
From tendering to you the consolation that may be found
In the thanks of the Republic they died to save.
I pray that our Heavenly Father may assuage
The anguish of your bereavement, and leave you only
The cherished memory of the loved and lost,
And the solemn pride that must be yours, to have laid
So costly a sacrifice upon the alter of freedom
(CW VIII: 116-117).

In rhythm and thought, Lincoln had the ability to give prose the grace of poetry.

By the mid-point of his successful law practice with Herndon, Lincoln had honed his legal and his forensic skills to virtual perfection. As he approached the eve of his 1858 Debates with Stephen Douglas, his writing skills were still developing, but they had little further to go to match the lyric style of those exquisite two minutes at Gettysburg. By June 16, 1858, Lincoln's incisive legal mind was already blending a political argument against slavery with poetic techniques and Biblical allusions. The aesthetic outcome was a speech that set the stage for the historic Lincoln-Douglas Debates. That famous speech was entitled "A House Divided."

As the opening salvo of the more than sixty speeches which Lincoln wrote and delivered in his June to November U.S. Senatorial campaign against Douglas, "A House Divided" is a technical and a political masterpiece. It expresses Lincoln's view that the nation cannot permanently endure half slave and half free, but it does not suggest that the Constitution gives Congress the legal power to tamper with slavery in the Southern states. On the other hand, it makes the careful argument that the Constitution gives Congress the power to prevent the spread of slavery to the territories. It further exposes the terrifying prospect of slavery spreading to the free states because the Supreme Court (Chief Justice Roger Taney), weak Presidents (Franklin Pierce and James Buchanan), and "popular sovereignty" (Stephen Douglas's concept) are fostering that result. Lincoln's theme is thus partisan (Republican goals) and profound (democratic goals). He pictures a series of events which, for years, have been building a trap that can only be avoided by controlling slavery with national politics. The choice is clear: If national politics do not control slavery, slavery will control national politics and end, forever, the American experiment in freedom.

From the outset of his carefully prepared speech, Lincoln infuses his political message with poetic imagination. He reminds his audience of their Biblical heritage with his use of the Old Testament "house divided" phrase. His use of domestic diction ("house") also reminds them of families, fathers, and domestic conflict. The "house" imagery follows the alliterative beginning of his address (my emphasis)[1]: "If we could first know <u>where</u> we are, and <u>whither</u> we are tending, we could better judge <u>what</u> to do, and how to do it" (<u>CW</u> II: 461). Three short sentences later,

Lincoln pursues his ear-catching opening with the unforgettable line "'A house divided against itself cannot stand,'" and a series of pithy sentences and clauses which cast political meanings in electrifying language: "I believe this government cannot endure, permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the house to fall -- but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing or all the other" (CW II: 461).

After this prophetic beginning, Lincoln indicts the Supreme Court (Dred Scott decision) and the Kansas-Nebraska Act (sponsored by Douglas) for fostering the spread of slavery. The focus of his attack, however, is on Douglas. And, in order to defeat Douglas, Lincoln links Douglas to a pro-slavery conspiracy of Presidents and Supreme Court jurists. But, since Lincoln could not prove the existence of an actual illegal conspiracy, he creates a powerful analogy which implicates Douglas by inference. This analogy, essentially a metaphorical device, envisions Douglas, Taney, a former President, and a sitting President as working to construct a house. The house, of course, is the slave system which, at the outset of his speech, Lincoln warns is threatening to engulf the nation; making it "all one thing." In a metaphor using homely frontier imagery, Lincoln crafts this passage:

> We can not absolutely know that all these exact adaptations are the result of preconcert. But when we see a lot of framed timbers, different portions of which we know have been gotten out at different times and places and by different workmen -- Stephen [Douglas], Franklin [Pierce], Roger [Taney] and James

> [Buchanan], for instance -- and when we see these timbers joined together, and see they exactly make the frame of a house or a mill, all the tenons and mortises exactly fitting, and all the lengths and proportions of the different pieces exactly adapted to their respective places, and not a piece too many or too few -- not omitting even scaffolding -- or, if a single piece be lacking [the next Supreme Court pro-slavery decision], we can see the place in the frame exactly fitted and prepared to yet bring such a piece in -- in <u>such</u> a case, we find it impossible to not <u>believe</u> that Stephen and Franklin and Roger and James all understood one another from the beginning, and all worked upon a common <u>plan</u> or <u>draft</u> drawn up before the first lick [Kansas-Nebraska Bill] was struck (<u>CW</u> II: 465-466).

The political strength of Lincoln's metaphor lies in its ability to depict Douglas as actively facilitating the spread and the perpetuation of slavery. The literary strength of the "house" metaphor is the clarity it creates in making an abstract argument concrete.

Yet, Lincoln's rhetorical style goes beyond a mere effort to reach the "common man." Lincoln loved figurative language. English Professor Daniel Dodge made a turn-of-the-century literary critique of Lincoln's fondness for metaphor and simile in these words:

> In considering Lincoln's imagination . . . we are immediately struck by its frequent homeliness, the

> material of metaphor and simile being usually taken from everyday experience. We find a tendency, too, especially in the letters, the repeated use of a figurative idea in connection with some important subject ("Evolution" 25).

Reinforcing Dodge's observation, literary critic Roy Basler writes,

> Considering Lincoln's writings as a whole, one finds his use of figurative language abundant. Even when one compares him in this matter with his supposedly more rhetorical contemporaries--Daniel Webster, for example--he seems to have been not less but more figurative than the current styles of public oratory allowed ("Rhetoric" 180).

According to Dodge, Lincoln was especially fond of drawing political analogies through the use of metaphorical references to playing cards, eggs, and ships ("Evolution" 25-28). Anyway, it is clear that the aesthetic power of metaphor and analogy truly charmed Lincoln, and when he constructed his House Divided speech, he built a number of imaginative houses. The speech itself is a well-crafted edifice; the founding fathers had reluctantly built a half-slave, half-free house; Douglas and his construction company are striving to build a slave house; and the Republicans are working to build a slave-free house.

Lincoln's metaphorical device put Douglas on the rhetorical defensive in all seven of the upcoming Lincoln-Douglas Debates. The only response Douglas could make to the device was an inadequate sarcastic rejection (Basler, "Rhetoric" 179-180). Thus, at the first debate in Ottawa, he

merely moaned, "His [Lincoln's] vanity is wounded because I will not go into that beautiful figure of his about the building of a house" (Debates 71). At the second debate in Freeport, Douglas was forced, by the continuing pressure of the figure and Lincoln's crafty "Freeport question"[2] to commit national political suicide. He could not extricate himself from the conspiratorial implications of Lincoln's house analogy, and he could not assure Southern slaveholders that he fully supported their efforts to extend slavery. By the sixth debate in Quincy, Douglas was forced to admit that his policies would perpetuate slavery "forever" (Debates 277). The "house," in short, would become "all" slave if Douglas were ever to become President.

Throughout the Debates, Lincoln uses more than metaphorical devices and logical analysis to cripple Douglas's future Presidential prospects. He uses moral conviction and impassioned rhetoric to assault the ethical "indifference" of Douglas's position. These, indeed, may have been the more persuasive features of his well-written speeches. Until 1854, at any rate, Lincoln's speeches are not very remarkable. But, after he was "thunder-struck" by the introduction of Douglas's Kansas-Nebraska bill, his rhetoric soars far above mediocrity. The great issue created the great statesman. A moral impulse underlay the whole phenomenon. It inspires Lincoln's writing and oral rhetoric with high purpose. Already, this is apparent in the first debate at Ottawa when he says,

> When [Douglas] invites any people, willing to have slavery, to establish it, he is blowing out the moral lights around us. When he says he "cares not whether slavery is voted down or voted up" -- that it is a

> sacred right of self-government -- he is, in my judgement, penetrating the human soul and eradicating the light of reason and the love of liberty in this American people (Debates 67).

Lincoln's use of diction which has a religious association is an unmistakable feature of his mature literary craft. Such words as "moral lights," "sacred," "judgement," and "soul" create an ethical aura for Lincoln's over-all argument.

As Lincoln and Douglas approached their final debate at Alton, Lincoln began stressing the immorality of slavery more frequently. Until the fourth debate, he barely mentioned the word "wrong" when referring to slavery. But, with escalating moral conviction, he denounces slavery as a "wrong" dozens of times in his final two Debate appearances. This rhetorical style is evangelical in its inspiration. Abolitionist speakers were famous for employing that style. And Lincoln, of course, was not only around such people, but as a youth, he had developed his forensic style by copying enthusiastic preachers (Simon 128).

At Alton, Lincoln's moral fervor reaches its peak. There, as elsewhere, it is important to note that his speech was based on a carefully composed, pre-written essay. Lincoln wrote his speeches before he delivered them, and they, therefore, are literary as well as oratorical works. Besides, he quite consciously designed them to be read. Throughout the course of the Lincoln-Douglas debates, Lincoln saved his prepared speeches and had Republican reporters send him their newspaper copies of the Debates. He saved this political literature in a scrapbook, and when he entered the 1860 Presidential campaign, he edited it for

errors and had it republished. Thus when Lincoln conveys, at Alton, his impassioned belief that slavery is "wrong" and vividly asserts that the controversy over it is part of the common man's ageless battle for justice, he is expressing a carefully considered written opinion. His words are meant to appeal to his frontier listeners' small-producer, anti-monarchical heritage. And in doing so, they demonstrate Lincoln's superb ability to synthesize common practices or beliefs with abstract ideals. Witness the following:

> It is the eternal struggle between these two principles -- right and wrong -- throughout the world. . . . The one is the common right of humanity and the other the divine right of kings. . . . It is the same spirit that says, "You work toil and earn bread, and I'll eat it." No matter in what shape it comes, whether from the mouth of a king . . . or from one race of men . . . enslaving another race, it is the same tyrannical principle (Debates 319).

The eloquence in these remarks lies in Lincoln's gift for transforming his listeners' inarticulate experiences into aesthetic utterances. While speech critic Earl Wiley maintained that Lincoln acquired a "knack of saying the right thing in the right way to the right people . . . at the right time and place," he did not realize how hard the literary Lincoln worked to come up with just the "right thing" (859).

After building his argument through weeks of debates and writing and rewriting, Lincoln uses a moving part of his Alton rebuttal time to denounce those who did not think slavery "wrong" in a drumbeat of

negatives. Within an estimated twelve to fifteen emotion-packed minutes, Lincoln uses the word "wrong" over thirty-five times (Debates 316-320). By redundantly using the word "wrong," Lincoln creates the diction which connotes evil, but it does so by audience inference. Illinois Protestants, of course, realized that the Biblical punishment for evil was divine retribution. Lincoln's words are designed to make them see that the secular punishment for condoning black slavery will be white enslavement.

In a post-Debate speech in Edwardsville, Illinois, Lincoln shrewdly combines these two aspects of retribution in order to politicize his listeners' moral sensibilities. Once again, Lincoln constructs his speech by using such spiritually charged diction as "soul," "hope," "darkness," "spirits," "damned," and "demon." He argues,

> Now when by all these means [popular sovereignty, Supreme Court decisions, Democratic moral indifference] you have succeeded in dehumanizing the negro; when you have put him down, and made it forever impossible for him to be but as the beasts of the field; when you have extinguished his soul, and placed him where the ray of hope is blown out in darkness like that which broods over the spirits of the damned; are you quite sure the demon which you have roused will not turn and rend you? (CW III: 95).

Douglas's efforts to match such religious imagery were hopeless.

Although Lincoln narrowly lost his Senatorial race with Douglas, he had irreparably wrecked Douglas's chances for the Presidency. Through the

course of the campaign, he also had elevated his own prose to a point just short of poetry. After writing a final campaign address, Lincoln spoke to his Springfield friends and supporters in his last speech of the 1858 campaign. His sentences resound with alliteration and assonance. In just nine of his most significant sentences, Lincoln links the sounds of (my emphasis) closing, contest, constitution, constantly (used three times), Congress, consisted, and circumstances. He joins such other alliterative sounds as neither-nor, scene-say, states-spread-slavery, brethren-believed, and first-free-felt at various positions throughout the piece. He uses, for example, the assonance sounds of indulged, in, interfere, and institution to help connect his first five sentences. And by employing the assertion "I have" eight times, Lincoln links his first five and his last three sentences together. This combination of similar sounds and identical diction creates essay continuity, but, more importantly, his sentence flow conveys a foretaste of the lyrical style that marks the sorrow and the magnanimity of a man striving to express his emotions with a pen. Using such parallel phrases as "a laborious" [and] "a painful," "neither assailed, nor wrestled," "labored for, and not against," "I have not felt, so I have not expressed," and "constantly declared [and] really believed," Lincoln creates a rhythmic pattern of words and phrases. These reinforce Lincoln's meanings with a deliberate stylistic pacing of similar or contrasting ideas. The whole excerpt reads,

> May I be indulged, in this closing scene [reflection of Shakespeare's play imagery?], to say a few words of myself. I have borne a laborious, and, in some respects to myself, a painful part in the contest.

> Through all, I have neither assailed, nor wrestled with any part of the constitution. The legal right of the Southern people to reclaim their fugitives I have constantly admitted. The legal right of Congress to interfere with their institution in the states, I have constantly denied. In resisting the spread of slavery to new teritory [sic], and with that, what appears to me to be a tendency to subvert the first principle of free government itself my whole effort has consisted. To the best of my judgement I have labored for, and not against the Union. As I have not felt, so I have not expressed any harsh sentiment toward our Southern brethren. I have constantly declared, as I really believed, the only difference between them and us, is the difference of circumstances (CW III: 334).

Just as the sentiment expressed in these latter remarks anticipates the closing paragraphs of Lincoln's First Inaugural Address, his mood in his final paragraph forecasts the sadness of his Farewell Address at Springfield. He states,

> Ambition has been ascribed to me. God knows how sincerely I prayed from the first that this field of ambition might not be opened. I claim no insensibility to political honors; but today could the Missouri restriction be restored, and the whole slavery question replaced on the old ground of "toleration["] by necessity where it exists, with

> unyielding hostility to the spread of it, on principle, I would, in consideration, gladly agree, that Judge Douglas should never be out, and I never in, an office, so long as we both or either, live (CW III: 334).

By making a reference to death in this final campaign speech, Lincoln not only emphasizes the importance of the slavery issue, but his melancholic mood as well.

The mood deepened after he learned of his 1858 defeat, but he regained his will to struggle and emerged victorious from the crucial 1860 Presidential contest. His triumph, however, was marred by secession and the prospect of war. As he left for Washington, D.C., he gave most of his books to Herndon and asked him to manage their Springfield law office until his return. Nevertheless, Lincoln's melancholia was evident, and his deep sadness was reflected in his poignant Farewell Address at Springfield.[3] He was, after all, saying goodby, on the eve of a civil war, to the people and places that had nurtured and shaped his mature intellectual and emotional life.

As a lyric expression of his most deeply felt emotions, the Farewell Address moves with the cadenced prose found in many of Lincoln's later writings. It reads,

> My friends--No one, not in my situation, can appreciate my feeling of sadness at this parting. To this place, and the kindness of these people, I owe every thing. Here I have lived a quarter of a century, and have passed from a young to an old man.

> Here my children have been born, and one is buried. I now leave, not knowing when, or whether ever, I may return, with a task before me greater than that which rested upon Washington. Without the assistance of that Divine Being, who ever attended him, I cannot succeed. With that assistance, I cannot fail. Trusting in Him, who can go with me, and remain with you, and be every where for good, let us confidently hope that all will yet be well. To His care commending you, as I hope in your prayers you will commend me, I bid you an affectionate farewell (CW IV: 190).

In this form, one can see that the speech is composed of a sentence structure of parallel patterns of thought, rhythm, and sounds.

In analyzing the Address, one discovers that when Lincoln writes, "Here I have lived a quarter of a century, and have passed from a young to an old man" (CW IV: 190), his thoughts are not only parallel, but the caesura at the comma creates a parallel rhythm. According to Basler's evaluation of the whole Address, when these patterns of thought and rhythm are not identically balanced or do not coincide, there is a compensating balance of phrases and pauses ("Rhetoric" 172). Such is the case in the first and the last of Lincoln's rhythmic sentences. The first reads, "To this place, and the kindness of these people, I owe everything" (CW IV: 190). And the last reads, "To His care commending you, as I hope in your prayers you will commend me, I bid you an affectionate farewell" (CW IV: 190). While the rhythm is varied throughout the speech, the only sentence

which appears without a compensating rhythm is the first (Basler, "Rhetoric" 172). Likewise, in the first two sentences, we find the alliterative balance of "friends . . . feeling," "situation . . . sadness," and "parting . . . place . . . people." In his forth sentence, Lincoln balances "born" with "buried," and he ends his comments with an alliteration of k sounds: "care . . . commending . . . [and] commend." Lincoln's use of alliteration links his meaning with rhyme. This technique is most evident in his middle sentence, which contains five words that begin with w. It reads, "I now leave, not knowing when or whether ever I may return, with a task before me greater than that which rested upon Washington" (CW IV: 190).

It is possible to detect so many of the sounds and rhythms of seventeenth century English poetry and the King James Bible in the Farewell Address that one scholar has rewritten it in irregular blank verse:

> My friends -- No one, not in my situation [,]
> Can appreciate my feeling of sadness at this parting.
> To this place, and the kindness of these people,
> I owe everything. Here I have lived a quarter of a century,
> And have passed from a young to an old man.
> Here my children have been born,
> And one is buried. I now leave, not knowing when [,]
> Or whether ever, I may return, with a task before me
> Greater than that which rested upon Washington.
> Without the assistance of that Divine Being [,]
> Who ever attended him [,] I cannot succeed.

> With that assistance [,] I cannot fail.
> Trusting [in] Him, who can go with me [,]
> And remain with you, and be every where for good,
> Let us confidently hope that all will yet be well.
> To His care commending you, as I hope
> In your prayers you will commend me,
> I bid you an affectionate farewell (Perry 215).

As a literary composition, the Farewell Address pulls together so many aspects of Lincoln's thought, personality, and literary style that it is hard to find a piece of his writing that surpasses it. The melancholic mood of his often contemplative and frequently gloomy personality is evident throughout the piece. Through words and rhythm, Lincoln creates a sad and moving message. He establishes his mood at the very outset of his speech with his frank and humble admission of the precious debt which he owes his frontier neighbors and the values which, together, they cherish. He blends their mutual devotion to an egalitarian/Jeffersonian society with a sad recognition that the patriotism he imbibed from Mason Weems will require a sacrifice and an outcome that only God can foresee. This cast of determinism, or perhaps fatalism, transports his words from the predestinationist-Baptist origins of his childhood to a prophetic future of seemingly endless war. Lincoln's deeds and his rhetorical response to that war will enshrine it as no other war in U.S. history.

Notes to Chapter I

[1]Unless indicated as my emphasis, all emphases will be that of the quoted author.

[2]Lincoln's most famous interrogative at Freeport placed Douglas in the dilemma of supporting either his own doctrine of "popular sovereignty" or the Supreme Court's decision in the case of Dred Scott. It was a choice which hoisted Douglas upon his own petard. Lincoln's question was, "Can the people of a United States Territory, in any lawful way, against the wish of any citizen of the United States, exclude slavery from its limits prior to the formation of a State Constitution?" (Debates 79).

[3]There are three versions of the Farewell Address at Springfield. The editor of Lincoln's Collected Works, Roy P. Basler, has identified them as the A, B, and C, Versions. The A Version was written down in pencil after the event and as the Presidential train pulled out of Springfield. It was written partly in Lincoln's hand and partly in the hand of his personal secretary, John Nicolay. It is the version commonly accepted as the most accurate, and it is the one cited in this thesis. The B Version of the speech appeared in Harper's Weekly the day after the Address was delivered, and it reappeared as a broadside in April 1865. In 1865, it was distributed by the American News Company of New York, and it varied only slightly (punctuation) from the Harper's Weekly account. The C Version of the speech appeared in the Illinois State Journal the day after the Address was delivered. William Herndon regarded it as the most accurate version of what Lincoln said, but there is no evidence that it

was a verbatim copy of what Lincoln said. Thus, the A Version is the only version which Lincoln personally reviewed (CW IV: 190-191). Also, it may be added that Lincoln prepared and memorized his speech before he made his remarks.

Chapter II

The Crisis: Malignant Masters and Moving Messages

When Lincoln arose to deliver his First Inaugural Address (March 4, 1861), seven states had already left the Union. Neither the rhetoric of reason nor the reality of restraint could bring them back without a war. Yet, if fairmindedness and patience could have played any part in averting the Civil War, Lincoln certainly offered them. His Inaugural speech perfectly expressed his peaceful intentions. It was an eloquent plea for conciliation and friendship. In making it, his pen captured, as deftly as could any of the best writers in the English language, the spirit of compassion that marks great leaders. In two splendid paragraphs at the end of his speech, Lincoln turned prose into poetry with, if nothing else, the meaning of his message.

Roy Basler reports that Lincoln used Henry Clay's famous 1850 compromise speech, Andrew Jackson's proclamation against Nullification, the U.S. Constitution, and Daniel Webster's reply to Robert Y. Hayne as sources for constructing his Inauguration speech (Speeches 589). Apart from our knowledge of these sources, little is known about Lincoln's use of reference materials for any of his speeches. As his state papers demonstrate, he obviously referred to works that contained statistical data, but it was not his habit to cite his resource materials. Indeed, as

much as he loved to recite the poetry of Shakespeare in private conversations, he seldom referred to any poet or verse in his private or public writings. In 1900, Dodge reported that Lincoln had only quoted Shakespeare eight times in his writings between 1832 and 1862 ("Evolution" 19-20, 55-56). Even allowing for additional discoveries of quotations in Lincoln's more recently published works, one cannot expect to find more than a rare Shakespearean verse. Similarly, Lincoln's writings reveal a dearth of Biblical quotations. In his famous "House Divided" speech, for example, the only Biblical reference is the one from which it took its title. Surveying this aspect of Lincoln's literary history, Dodge notes that out of a collection of twenty-five "representative addresses and other papers" from 1839 to 1865, Lincoln made only "twenty-two references to the Bible" ("Evolution" 18-19). These findings led Dodge to conclude that Lincoln used more quotations when he wanted to strengthen an emotional argument. "Thus," Dodge writes, "the very emotional 'Second Inaugural Address' contains four times as many quotations as the more argumentative 'First Inaugural Address'" (Master 47). While Dodge made an error in claiming that the First Inaugural has the distinction of bearing a Shakespearian verse, i.e., "You have no oath registered in Heaven" ("Evolution" 56), he is correct in inferring that Lincoln's words suggest the oath taken by Hamlet. Certainly, as Lincoln assumed the Presidency, he was a man burdened with more woes than Hamlet.

Beginning his Address with prosaic clarity, Lincoln tries to allay any suspicion that either he or the Republican Administration has any intention of tampering with the institution of slavery in the Southern states. In language devoid of ambiguity, he states,

> Apprehension seems to exist among the people of the Southern States, that by the accession of a Republican Administration, their property, and their peace, and personal security, are to be endangered. There has never been any reasonable cause for such apprehension. Indeed, the most ample evidence to the contrary has all the while existed, and been open to their inspection. It is found in nearly all the published speeches of him who now addresses you. I do but quote from one of those speeches when I declare that "I have no purpose, directly or indirectly, to interfere with the institution of slavery in the States where it exists. I believe I have no lawful right to do so, and I have no inclination to do so (CW IV: 262-263).

In avoiding rhetorical flourishes, Lincoln uses his diction in this opening paragraph to remove linguistic misunderstandings. He is legalistic and rational because political confusion abounds.

His subsequent quotations and paragraphs amplify his opening remarks and go further in affirming the Constitutionality of local and national fugitive slave laws. Indeed, he advises all public office holders and citizens to obey such laws. On this issue, however, he adds an important caveat that suggests that conscience-stricken, anti-slavery people could work to repeal such laws. In his words (my emphasis): "I do suggest, that it will be much safer for all, both in official and private station, to conform to, and abide by, all those acts which stand unrepealed, than

to violate any of them" (CW IV: 264). Such wording reminds one of Douglas's 1858 complaint that Lincoln "has a fertile genius in devising language to conceal his thoughts" (Debates 262). Actually, despite Douglas's insinuation of Lincoln's verbal cleverness, Lincoln was extremely forthright in advocating what he thought. The sentence cited, for example, is quite precise.

Lincoln was no simple homespun author of words. He was a gifted attorney and a master of the English language. His phraseology extends along a continuum from the unadorned clarity of Paine's style to the variegated sounds and rhythms of English Renaissance poetry. He mixed these into a blend of his own unique artistry. Although conventional wisdom has extolled Lincoln's writings for their clear, simple, and crisp style, it is misleading to contend that his style is devoid of all else. Lincoln's language can be incredibly subtle and multi-faceted. This characteristic of his writing is most evident in his policy statements regarding controversial political issues. His political and legal position statements often strike a complex balance between his personal beliefs or emotions and his Constitutional obligations. This was the case throughout the Lincoln-Douglas Debates, and it is especially evident in such Presidential documents as his Inaugural Addresses, his August, 1862 Letter to Horace Greeley, the Emancipation Proclamation, and his important messages to Congress. In the main body of such works, he is strictly rational and mathematically precise about expressing his opinion and about making sure that he captures every nuance of the question under consideration. At times, the careful crafting of his language and the icy logic of his thinking make him seem a pettifogging lawyer. But his

precision with words reveals an immense talent for shading and developing his points. And this, contrary to the assertion of Douglas, marks the man's fundamental integrity of thought, word, and action.

Between the tenth and thirty-third paragraphs of the First Inaugural, therefore, Lincoln thoroughly reviews all the issues pertaining to secession, national authority, popular rule, Presidential duties, and the legal rights of slave owners. Throughout the body of his address, he counsels moderation, patience, reflection, and peaceful resolution of differences. Such pacific language led critic John Jay Chapman to make an innovative comparison of Lincoln and Hamlet. Chapman maintains that Lincoln's First Inaugural rhetoric is so conciliatory that it reflects a man who "seems to be debating inwardly 'whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, or to take arms against a sea of troubles and by opposing end them'" (378). Actually, Lincoln's paragraphs are written in the well-reasoned style of a dispassionate lawyer. His words hold out an olive branch, but they also reveal his firmness and resolve.

Lincoln's First Inaugural sentences reflect the implacable logic which he applied to every momentous question of his era. Two examples of this point will suffice to illustrate his sure grasp of logical reasoning. The first follows shortly after his incontrovertible claim that all minority rights guaranteed by the Constitution have been protected. Such being the case, secession, in a democracy, is logically impermissible. As Lincoln states his case,

> Plainly, the central idea of secession, is the essence of anarchy. A majority, held in restraint by

> constitutional checks, and limitations, and always changing easily, with deliberate changes of popular opinions and sentiments, is the only true sovereign of a free people. Whoever rejects it, does, of necessity, fly to anarchy or to despotism. Unanimity is impossible; the rule of a minority, as a permanent arrangement, is wholly inadmissable; so that, rejecting the majority principle, anarchy, or despotism in some form, is all that is left (CW IV: 268).

Just as logical, but more homely in its style, was the paragraph in which Lincoln argues that practical problems stand in the way of effective secession and separation. His remarks on this matter are crucial for understanding why, once the bombardment on Fort Sumter occurred, the North fought to retain the South in the Union, but they also demonstrate Lincoln's stylistic versatility. In order to make the abstract logic of his earlier comments concrete, he creates an almost risque analogy between divorce and disunion. He declares,

> Physically speaking, we cannot separate. We cannot remove our respective sections from each other, nor build an impassable wall between them. A husband and wife may be divorced, and go out of the presence, and beyond the reach of each other; but the different parts of our country cannot do this. They cannot but remain face to face; and intercourse, either amicable or hostile, must continue between them. Is it

> possible then to make that intercourse more advantageous, or more satisfactory, after separation than before? Can aliens make treaties easier than friends can make laws? Can treaties be more faithfully enforced between aliens, than laws can among friends? Suppose you go to war, you cannot fight always; and when, after much loss on both sides, and no gain on either, you cease fighting, the identical old questions, as to terms of intercourse, are again upon you (CW IV: 269).

Turning some obvious Freudian analytical temptations aside, if one considers Lincoln's use of the word "intercourse" throughout this passage, Lincoln's marriage analogy becomes an extended metaphor for the breakup of the nation. Such playing with words and techniques not only makes Lincoln's point clear, but it also reflects an author who enjoys using his imagination.

His creativity becomes even more evident in the final two paragraphs of the First Inaugural. In 1911, literary critic James Perry demonstrated that fact when he rendered the First Inaugural Address into irregular blank verse (213-220). Perry concluded, however, that Lincoln's "poetical charm" went deeper than "metrical forms in his prose." "That charm," Perry wrote, "lies in the deep poetical feeling back of both form and words" (214). Lincoln certainly combines form and feeling in the final passages of his First Inaugural. These two paragraphs beautifully underscore the style and the point of his whole address--the idea of an indissoluble Union. First, there is the richly poetic warning of

Lincoln's obligation to save the Union:

> In your hands, my dissatisfied fellow countrymen, and not in mine, is the momentous issue of civil war. The government will not assail you. You can have no conflict, without being yourselves the aggressors. You have no oath registered in Heaven to destroy the government, while I shall have the most solemn one to "preserve, protect and defend" it.

In contrast to his next and final paragraph, this passage emphasizes the isolation of Lincoln, and his lonely defense of the Union. By juxtaposing the plural subjective "you" and the plural possessive "your" against the singular subjective "I," Lincoln not only dramatizes his commitment against the odds, but his words gain sympathy for the honorable underdog. After all, the single "I" in the paragraph is outnumbered by the three plural "you" and the one plural "your" pronouns.

When Lincoln writes his final paragraph, however, his use of pronouns shifts to the plural, subjective case of "we." This technique emphasizes unity and a more sanguine future. No longer is it "I" against "you." Now it is "we" who can and must remain united. In his famous closing passage, Lincoln makes a lyrical appeal for brotherhood and Union:

> I am loth to close. We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battle-field, and patriot grave, to every living heart and hearthstone, all over this broad

> land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature (CW IV: 271).

This moving peroration reveals Lincoln at the zenith of his technical ability to construct a rhythmic paragraph.

In reference to Lincoln's stylistic habit of balancing phrases and creating rhythmic writing, critic Philip B. Kunhardt, Jr., claims that Lincoln was greatly influenced by the phraseology of the "Prayer Book" (209). Lincoln literary critic Daniel Dodge, on the other hand, notes that while Lincoln may have had the Prayer Book phraseology "lodged" in his memory, it "is easy, too, to exaggerate the extent of an apparent literary influence and to refer to it features that really proceed from other sources" (Master 137). "The habit," stresses Dodge, "of using words in pairs, which [Lincoln's] proclamations show in common with the Prayer Book may have been suggested by the formal language of the law" (Master 137-138). In any case, Lincoln adopted, and made his own, a powerful rhythmic style which, when he wanted to use it, emphasized the emotional impact of his words. He occasionally surpassed the power and the beauty of his ending in the First Inaugural, but he never surpassed the stylistic cadence of his phrases.

When one compares the cadence of his phrases and the arrangements of his words with the ending first envisioned by Secretary of State designate William Seward, one realizes the immensity of Lincoln's talent for transforming prosaic word patterns and meanings into outstanding art. Seward suggested this ending:

> I close. We are not[,] we must not be[,] aliens

> or enemies[,] but fellow countrymen and brethren. Although passion has strained our bonds of affection too hardly[,] they must not, I am sure they will not[,] be broken. The mystic chords which[,] proceeding from so many battle-fields and so many patriot graves[,] pass through all the hearts and all the hearths in this broad continent of ours[,] will yet again harmonize in their ancient music when breathed upon by the guardian angel of the nation (CW IV: n. 261-262).

Purged of Seward's awkward diction and phraseology, this passage took an aesthetic leap forward when Lincoln revised it.

Between the First Inaugural Address and Lincoln's Second Annual Message to Congress (December 1, 1862), twenty months of bitter war had cost approximately 200,000 lives. During that period, Lincoln delivered his First Annual Message to Congress (December 3, 1861), wrote a public letter on his war aims to Horace Greeley (August 22, 1862), made public the Emancipation Proclamation (September 22, 1862), and sent his Second Annual Message to Congress. Of these four writings, two of them, the First Annual Message and the Emancipation Proclamation, are rhetorically mundane. One of them, the Letter to Horace Greeley, is interesting as a brilliant example of Lincoln's method of leading public opinion to a new political position. And the Second Annual Message is one of Lincoln's finest pieces of writing for that type of state document. Its body duplicates the lengthy factual-style model of the First Annual Message, but, by December of 1862, the slaves in rebellious areas have been freed

(de jure), and the Second Annual Message shines with a moral purpose that is absent from the 1861 Message. Oddly, the Emancipation Proclamation lacks the inspired rhetoric one would expect to find in so historic a document.

At its high point, the language of the Proclamation barely rises above the style of an office memo which has been written in overly-long sentences. Even its key and most vigorous passage lacks literary splendor. As Lincoln writes,

> That on the first day of January in the year of our Lord, one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, all persons held as slaves within any state, or designated part of a state, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free (CW V: 434).

The cause of such stylistic flatness may have been Lincoln's well-founded political belief that Northern anti-black sentiment was too strong to accept both great rhetoric and great deed. In any case, Lincoln's failure to match his rhetoric with his deed did not alter, as Karl Marx once noted, the historic content of the deed (Neely 104).

Bringing that deed about, however, involved some of Lincoln's finest literary talents as well as many of his best political skills. These were combined in his August 22, 1862 public Letter to Horace Greeley. As a document in which these abilities are preeminently demonstrated, the Letter prompts a political as well as a literary analysis. Indeed, it is impossible to separate the two. At any rate, the Letter's historic importance lies in the fact that it forecasts and helps pave the way for

the emancipation of the slaves. To understand Lincoln's language in the Letter it is necessary to observe that on July 22, 1862, Lincoln had written the first draft of his Emancipation Proclamation, but his Cabinet Officers dissuaded him from issuing it until the Union armies had demonstrated some success in the field (CW V: 336-337; Oates, Malice 336-337). This "success" came in the form of the bloodiest single day of American warfare at Antietam Creek, Maryland (September 17, 1862). However, even before that battle, Lincoln had written, for newspaper publication, his artfully worded Letter to Horace Greeley.

This remarkable document not only purports to describe Lincoln's War aims as they stood a month after he had secretly written his preliminary emancipation order but after he had decided to issue that order when the opportune moment arrived. In this historical context, it is possible to interpret his diction in the Letter and to grasp the many hidden subtleties in Lincoln's language. Like fine poetry, his words have more than one meaning. While he selects his words with an overriding political purpose in mind, he usually achieves that goal in a truly artistic manner. His style is something beyond the precision of a lawyer and the rhetoric of a politician. Rather in the manner of Gustave Flaubert's search for the mot juste, Lincoln, as reported by one of his early literary biographers, Luther E. Robinson, "brooded over his words, tried his verbal resources to their utmost, and then chose the best he had in hand" (176). Hence, by explicating every passages of the Letter, it is possible to see that Lincoln's August 1862 War aims were much more than they seemed. Indeed, a careful reading of the Letter reveals that Lincoln's real objective in writing it was to prepare the Northern public for the act of

emancipation.

In his evaluation of the technical aspects of Lincoln's writing in the Letter, Basler notes that Lincoln's use of parallelism in the Letter is so pronounced that it permeates the whole letter. This literary device, Basler states, broke "a complex idea" into such "measured parts" that it creates an argument of "almost deceptive simplicity" ("Rhetoric" 168). As historian William Hassler notes, the Letter also contains an excellent example of Lincoln's rhetorical technique of mixing his word order in order to emphasize alternatives (57). This stylistic device occurs at the point where Lincoln states: "If I could save the Union without freeing _any_ slave I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing _all_ the slaves I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone I would also do that" (_CW_ V: 388). Considering Lincoln's ultimate political objective, the persuasive techniques in the Letter are unusually important.

In his opening paragraph, Lincoln is responding to the personal and vehement attack on him and his war policies that Greeley had published in his newspaper, the New York _Tribune_. Entitled "The Prayer of Twenty Millions," Greeley's editorial charged that Lincoln had harmed the Union's cause by his deference to Southern slavery and by his failure to support emancipation efforts (Linn 196-197). Since Greeley was a Radical supporter of a more vigorous prosecution of the war, Lincoln's initial response to Greeley's remarks are designed to mollify him:

> I have just read yours of the 19th. addressed to myself through the New York Tribune. If there be in it any statements, or assumptions of fact, which I may

> know to be erroneous, I do not, now and here, controvert them. If there be in it any inferences which I may believe to be falsely drawn, I do not now and here, argue against them. If there be perceptible in it an impatient and dictatorial tone, I waive it in deference to an old friend, whose heart I have always supposed to be right.

This style of conditional phraseology not only forecasts the arrangement of word order in the Letter's crucial third paragraph, but it portrays Lincoln as standing above the fray of personal recriminations. However, each time that Lincoln uses the word "If" he is not only explicitly stating that he will not reply to Greeley's charges, but he is implicitly declaring that he not only could reply to them but also could refute them. The phrases "which I may know to be erroneous" and "which I may believe to be falsely drawn" are diplomatically softened by the use of "may." Deprived of "may" the phrases convey the message that Lincoln disagreed with Greeley's charges, but Lincoln wants to make that point without losing Greeley's political support. Likewise, Lincoln describes Greeley's "tone" as "impatient and dictatorial," but his positive parallelism tempers that observation with the consoling words "old friend" and "right" "heart." Yet, even at this juncture, Lincoln's search for the <u>mot juste</u> results in the use of "supposed." Lincoln does not say that Greeley's heart is "right." He only says he "always supposed [it] to be right." Such artful wording permits Lincoln to imply that Greeley might yet prove him wrong in this generous supposition.

Lincoln's next one sentence paragraph prepares the reader to expect

policy clarity in all following statements. His sentence reads,

> As to the policy I "seem to be pursuing" as you say, I have not meant to leave any one in doubt.

Given the political alternatives and the complex levels of meaning that Lincoln subsequently charts, this sentence raises false expectations about how simplistic Lincoln will become in his explanation of his policy.

At the opening of his third paragraph, the diction of his next two simple sentences do not alert the innocent reader to the complexities lurking in their largely monosyllabic language:

> I would save the Union. I would save it the shortest way under the Constitution.

By August 22, 1862, Lincoln has assumed war powers as Commander-in-Chief of the military, and he believes that the Constitution grants him the power to carry out emancipation as an action required by military necessity. This means, in the context of the War, that the phrases "I would save" carries a special meaning of Executive authority and power.

In contrast to Lincoln's two preceding sentences, his polysyllabic words in the two following main clauses have to symbolize the increasing complexity of his meanings:

> The sooner the national authority can be restored; the nearer the Union will be "the Union as it was."

Because of Lincoln's gift for subtle diction, the last of this pair of main clauses raises questions about their combined meaning. By August of 1862, the Union armies had either freed or were controlling large numbers of slaves as contraband of war. Confederate intransigence showed no sign of softening, and the border states had refused to consider any

compensated, gradual emancipation of their slaves. Thus, the phrase "the Union as it was" has an ambiguous quality about it. In fact, Lincoln omitted a line from his published Letter that proves that he doubted that all Southern institutions could be restored in the mode of the pre-1861 period. The omitted line reads: "Broken eggs can never be mended, and the longer the breaking proceeds the more will be broken." Given such a background, a careful reading of the words "the nearer the Union will be 'the Union as it was'" reveals that Lincoln's use of "nearer" can be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, if "nearer" is closely associated with the words "sooner" and "restored" in the preceding main clause, it can refer to proximity in time. In that case, it has no influence on the nature of the restored socio-political system of either the Union or of its various sections. But, if "nearer" is read without reference to the independent main clause which precedes it, then it can refer to proximity in degree. In that case, it is used to acknowledge that conditions since 1861 have changed, and, as they continue to change, the further the Union and the South will move from the pre-1861 socio-political structure. "Nearer" thus means a state of being closer to things as they were; it does not mean that a complete return to the status-quo antebellum is possible. This is the meaning that Lincoln, in the context of events, meant "nearer" to impart.

Lincoln's splendid choice of diction continues in his next sentence. By using a conditional "If" and the negative phraseology of "those who would not" and "I do not," Lincoln reinforces the view that a complete return to the past is impossible. His choice of these words, however, blunts the charge that he is opposing slavery. One need only substitute

the word and for "unless" and remove the negatives in Lincoln's sentence to discover how a positive formulation of his remarks would make his statement appear uncompromisingly hostile to slaveowners. As actually composed, Lincoln writes,

> If there be those who would not save the Union, unless they could at the same time save slavery, I do not agree with them.

Since all rebellious Southern slaveowners wanted to destroy the Union and also wanted to save slavery, these words comprise a dramatic change in Lincoln's pre-War (i.e., First Inaugural) position. His stance at that time held that the Constitution prevented him from altering the institution of slavery in the Southern states. It is important to note that Lincoln's Letter does not use words that refer to slavery in the territories. In short, his words in this statement indicate a departure from his previous position on the slavery issue. By using the word "slavery" without reference to a modifier of territories, Lincoln is expressing his intention to enlarge the scope of his anti-slavery policies.

His next sentence, however, signals that there are still limits on the scope of those policies:

> If there be those who would not save the Union unless they could at the same time destroy slavery, I do not agree with them.

Since Lincoln had never been an abolitionist, there is not a great deal that is new in this statement. Still, his previous comments indicate that some part of slavery already has been irretrievably destroyed. What he

means by stating that he does "not agree" with "those" who would "destroy" slavery is thus relative. His words are clear. He will not sacrifice the Union for the sole purpose of destroying slavery.

In linking the Union and slavery in his two previous sentences, Lincoln employs a complicated language that appears deceptively simple. His diction and his syntax, however, are consistent with the objective of preventing the spread of slavery and with the wartime conditions of 1862. His next statement is much less candid:

> My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union, and is not either to save or to destroy slavery.

These words are disingenuous because Lincoln would never have accepted the "Union" on just any terms. What he loved about the Union was not the Union for its own sake but for the ideal of democracy that the Union, as a shell, protected and promised to extend. After all, why did Lincoln steadfastly oppose the spread of slavery and confront the South in a war if he were willing to accept the "Union" on any terms? In selecting the word "paramount," however, Lincoln is truthfully depicting his main objective. Nevertheless, given Lincoln's opposition to the spread of slavery and his willingness to fight to prevent that spread and to save the Union, "paramount" is much less absolute than it appears.

While Lincoln's next statements seem to buttress a narrow interpretation of his "paramount object," i.e., saving the Union, they actually weaken such an interpretation because, as options, they are formulated as conditionals. By creating three equal and conditional options for saving the Union, Lincoln has not narrowed but widened the

definition of "paramount." In contrast to his previous flat declaration of aiming to "save" the Union, he has added the possibility of saving it by freeing "some" or "all" of the slaves. If his sole object were to "save" the Union, he need only to have stated, "I will save the Union without freeing any slave" or, better yet, "We surrender." The conditional "if" adds flexibility to his goal of saving the Union. "If," as many people have noted, is the biggest word in the English language, and Lincoln illustrates how to make a large use of it:

> If I could save the Union without freeing <u>any</u> slave I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing <u>all</u> the slaves I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone I would also do that.

In view of Lincoln's pre-existing plan to emancipate all slaves held in rebellious territories and to protect slaveowners' property rights in non-rebellious territories, all these "ifs" are merely opening wedges to prepare the public mind for the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation. After all, the first "if" option applies only <u>if</u> the miracle of a Confederate surrender were to occur.

In Lincoln's next passages, he elaborates upon his previous two main clauses, and he stresses a long-standing personal position. Every word in the following main clauses is consistent with Lincoln's pre-1861 position on slavery. At that time, he opposed the extension of slavery because its spread, he believed, would imperil the equal rights of whites and would destroy the Union. Therefore, when he uses the words "what I do" and "what I forebear" to describe his relationship to blacks, his diction

reflects a long-held preference for whites. As his words unambiguously declare, Lincoln will serve blacks only if that service benefits white citizens.

> What I do about slavery, and the colored race, I do because I believe it helps to save the Union; and what I forbear, I forbear because I do not believe it would help to save the Union.

In these passages, Lincoln's stress on the word "Union" is politically calculated to appeal to the many Northern Democrats and Republicans who were simultaneously racist and pro-War.

Tying the thoughts in his next sentence to those in his two previous main clauses, Lincoln uses the comparatives "less" and "more" to cue his Radical readers to the fact that he is going to "do more" to end slavery. In the midst of an intensifying war, an intransigent foe, Radical Republican demands for a more strenuous prosecution of the war, and thousands of refugee ex-slaves fleeing to safety behind Union armies, the option of doing "less" about slavery is out of the question. He states,

> I shall do less whenever I shall believe what I am doing hurts the cause, and I shall do more whenever I shall believe doing more will help the cause.

Since Lincoln knows that objective circumstances are dictating that "more" must be done about slavery, his use of the comparative "less" is designed largely to provide grammatical balance to his statement. The "less" satisfies his propensity for creating parallel patterns of phraseology, and it denotes Lincoln's lack of personal dogmatism. However, given the existing military situation in 1862, doing "less" must be considered a

political mirage.

When Lincoln expresses his next remarks, he again indicates that changes in policy are in the making. In fact, his whole Letter has been building to this expressly dynamic conclusion. In twenty-seven words, Lincoln not only displays the essence of his intellectual outlook, but he verifies the philosophy of inexorable change which his diction, syntax, and conditional statements have implied throughout the Letter. He writes,

> I shall try to correct errors when shown to be errors; and I shall adopt new views so fast as they shall appear to be true views.

Such words pleased Greeley as well as those important Radical Republicans who knew that Lincoln already had adopted their "true views" on emancipation.

In his concluding paragraph, Lincoln permits the public to have a dramatic glimpse of where his policies are headed. Using a contrasting parallelism, he balances his "official duty" with his "personal wish" and explicitly states his desire to see "all men" "free." Although he terms this desire only a "wish," the most important diction in his two main clauses are the words "no modification." Since these words are conspicuously absence from the clause in which Lincoln states his "purpose" "according" to his "view of official duty," it means that he will allow himself to modify the policies flowing from his "view of official duty." On the other hand, Lincoln's final main clause clearly states that he will not modify his "wish that all men every where could be free." One, logically, may infer from Lincoln's carefully chosen words that any policies which conflict with Lincoln's conscience are subject to

change at the appropriate political moment. As he explains,

> I have here stated my purpose according to my view of official duty; and I intend no modification of my oft-expressed personal wish that all men every where could be free.

In summary, as soon as Lincoln's "official duty" coincides with his "personal wish," nothing will stand in the way of emancipation. Indeed, as early as July 22, 1862, the exigencies of war had brought about that fortunate coincidence (CW V: 388-389).

Given this critique of the meaning of Lincoln's language in his Letter to Horace Greeley, it is important to explore the relationship of Lincoln's words to his actions. Was Lincoln a liar? Or, was he a political opportunist? Historian and literary critic Melvin E. Bradford, for instance, contends that Lincoln was a "rhetor" who wrote to manipulate the emotions and the passions of the public in "behalf of a 'policy' never fully stated (in fact, altered as he went along)" ("Against" 109). While Bradford did not specifically analyze Lincoln's Letter to Horace Greeley, certain features of his overall criticism seem valid when applied to it. Bradford maintains that the corpus of Lincoln's works reveals a "duplicitous" Lincoln who employs a variety of rhetorical strategies to persuade his audiences with literary devices that, contrary to the "ethics of rhetoric," inspire fear and anger. These strategies include "the trope of affected modesty; the oraculum (speaking, in the epideictic vein, the language of the gods); the diabole (slandering, predicting the worst); the argumentum ad populum (flattering the people); the false dilemma (crocodilities -- unacceptable choices); and, especially, the argument ad

verecundiam (an appeal to traditional values, to the prescription of the Revolution)" ("Against" 111).

However valid the specificities of Bradford's critique may be when applied to the Lincoln-Douglas Debates, the First Inaugural Address, the Gettysburg Address or the Second Inaugural Address (Bradford, "Dividing" 17-21; "Legacy" 362), they are virtually absent from Lincoln's Letter to Horace Greeley. And yet, the historical background of Lincoln's famous Letter indicates that Lincoln was, indeed, less than forthright in stating his plans and policies. There certainly is some sign of Lincoln's use of the trope of affected modesty in his opening paragraph, and the tenor of his Letter is based on an ad hominem argument from character. In fact, as Bradford notes about Lincoln's rhetoric in general, "the forensic 'good man, speaking well' of Cicero's definition" is more apparent than real in Lincoln's Letter to Horace Greeley ("Dividing" 17). Still, Bradford exaggerates the extent of rhetorical dishonesty in Lincoln's speeches. It is possible to concede that Lincoln employed some or all of the deceitful literary devices that Bradford attributed to him and yet not to reach Bradford's conclusion that Lincoln was fundamentally dishonest or almost diabolically motivated in using such devices. Lincoln may be faulted for being a racist and an opportunistic abolitionist (Bradford, "Dividing" 15-17), but he also can be seen as a man who intellectually evolved with events. In this latter interpretation, Lincoln's public Letter to Horace Greeley is a political attempt to lead a racist Northern society in the direction of accepting emancipation. In preparing the public for that momentous event, Lincoln may not have revealed his full plans and deliberations, but his Letter does not entirely conceal them either.

Lincoln, as virtually all men, had to shade the truth or lie from time to time, but he was not an inveterate liar. His Letter to Greeley supports this claim because it exposes more about Lincoln's policies than it conceals. Indeed, it not only sets out alternatives, but the peroration frankly suggests which alternative Lincoln is leaning toward.

When, a month after the Letter to Greeley was published, the Emancipation Proclamation was issued, it transformed the War from a War to preserve the Union to a War to end slavery. This single act lifted the struggle to a moral plane above all U.S. wars. Perhaps inspired by the moral grandeur that accompanied the freeing of the slaves, Lincoln wrote his 1862 Annual Message to Congress. Unlike his previous Annual Message, this second Message was majestic in its scope and moving in its rhetoric. As the paragraphs are read, one can sense that underneath Lincoln's piles of facts and figures lie the treasure of his vision for a reconstructed, prosperous, and democratic America. For Lincoln, such an America must serve as a beacon of liberty and of man's capacity to make himself.

As Lincoln opens his Second Annual Message, he discusses U.S. problems with foreign governments, but his poetic and prophetic vision quickly sweeps from problems to prospects. Within less than twenty-five paragraphs of his lengthy address, he has proposed Atlantic and Pacific trans-oceanic telegraphs, the development of western U.S. mineral resources, and a financial reform package which includes the issuance of Federal notes and bonds to finance the War effort (CW V: 518-523). Then, skipping across the mostly discouraging War news with scarcely more than seventy-five words, he commends the success of the Post Office. His concern for settlers facing Indian attacks is noted, and he returns to his

basic theme of national progress through the expansion and the improvement of canal and river projects, the construction of a transcontinental railroad, and the development of agricultural innovations. Quoting the Bible, "One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh, but the earth abideth forever," he reiterates and embellishes, at length, his Inaugural argument that secession is geographically irrational. "Our national strife," he concludes,

> springs not from our permanent part: not from the land we inhabit; not from our national homestead. . . . In all its adaptations and aptitudes, it demands union, and abhors separation. . . . Our strife pertains to ourselves--to the passing generations of men; and it can, without convulsion, be hushed forever with the passing of one generation (CW V: 527, 529).

To "hush" the "strife" Lincoln proposes a Constitutional amendment which, when approved by Congress and ratified by three quarters of the states (including the seven Southern states still in rebellion), will free all of the slaves by the year 1900 (thirty-seven years from 1862) and will compensate all of the slave owners with Federal tax revenues. With the waste of war figuratively behind him, the literary Lincoln went on to envision a nation of such geographical size that it compares favorably with the whole of Europe and is of such a population that it will equal Europe "at some point between 1920 and 1930" (CW V: 533). When considering the magnificence sweep of Lincoln's vision in the Second Annual Message, one cannot discount the possible influence of a poem which

Lincoln once read in the Lincoln-Herndon Law Office, The Leaves of Grass.

It is on the subject of abolishing slavery, however, that Lincoln's Second Annual Message is even more in agreement with the outlook of Walt Whitman. Lincoln's firm grasp that slavery, and slavery alone, has caused the Civil War (CW V: 533-534) leads him to recommend slavery's total and permanent abolition. The grandeur of abolition, in the midst of a prodigious national bloodletting, is not diminished by the lengthy process or nature of its implementation because, for Lincoln, emancipation by any method still expresses the prophetic truth embodied in the Declaration of Independence. And, beyond that, the scope of Lincoln's vision includes a future society that will grow and expand its prosperity on the basis of equal rights and democratic practices shared by all its citizens. He spends, therefore, a considerable portion of his speech allaying white fears that freed blacks will compete with them and will damage their prosperity (CW V: 534-536). In his view America has enough room for both abundance and equality. With courage, vision, and energy, Americans can make the necessary reforms to end slavery. As Lincoln writes,

> The dogmas of the quiet past, are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew, and act anew. We must disenthrall ourselves, and then we shall save our country (CW V: 537).

In making a literary evaluation of this passage, one is tempted to suggest that Lincoln has both Paine's admonition that the first principle of politics is change and King Lear's stormy atmosphere in mind. In

juxtapositioning words like "dogmas" and "disenthrall," for instance, Lincoln creates the image of a trance-like state and suggests that "stormy" atmospherics demand a new perspective and a new response.

In his final truly inspired paragraph, Lincoln calls his generation before the bar of history. Their actions, regarding slavery, amid the vicissitudes of civil war, will forever mark their commitment to a unique political experiment. For what they do will have a meaning that goes beyond the scope of America. It is the preservation of a freedom that is the "last best, hope of earth" (CW V: 537). To press this point in his inimitable style, Lincoln uses the word we fourteen times in his fourteen sentence paragraph. Not only do five of Lincoln's sentences begin with We, but the alliterative effect of the repeated use of the word, especially in the middle of his paragraph, makes it a powerful rhetorical device. The subjective case of the pronoun we, after all, does not let any individual escape his social responsibility. By using we so frequently, Lincoln simultaneously speaks directly to every individual and to every group of individuals. No one, he is saying, can escape the burden that the fate of each is bound with the fate of all:

> Fellow-citizens, we cannot escape history. We of this Congress and this administration, will be remembered in spite of ourselves. No personal significance, or insignificance, can spare one or another of us. The fiery trial through which we pass, will light us down, in honor or dishonor, to the latest generation. We say we are for the Union. The world will not forget that we say this. We know how

> to save the Union. The world knows we do know how to save it. We--even we here--hold the power, and bear the responsibility. In giving freedom to the slave, we assure freedom to the free--honorable alike in what we give, and what we preserve. We shall nobly save, or meanly lose, the last best, hope of earth. Other means may succeed; this could not fail. The way is plain, peaceful, generous, just--a way which, if followed, the world will forever applaud, and God must forever bless (CW V: 537).

Again, one of Lincoln's perorations sweeps across the page with exquisite prose and effortless rhythm.

Lincoln's words may be written as free verse with predominately three and four accents in each line. As they were written, Lincoln's pattern of commas, conjunctions, and periods create the caesuras that produce an almost metered rhythm of accents and syllables:

> We sáy we aŕe for the Únión.
> The ẃorld will ńot forǵet
> that weź sáy thiś.
> Wé knów how to sáve the Únión.
> The ẃorld knówś we dó knów how to sáve it.
> Wé--even wé heŕe--
> hóld the pówer,
> and beár the respońsibiĺity.
> In giving fréedom to the sláve,
> we ássure fréedom to the frée--

hónorable alike in what we give,

and what we preserve.

We shall nobly save,

or meanly lose,

the last[,] best,

hope of earth.

With this rhythm of phrases and clauses in his concluding paragraph, almost like the "sprung rhythm" of Gerald Hopkins's late nineteenth century poetry, Lincoln exhibits a style that characterizes the ending of all his great Presidential addresses. The style, nearly miminimalist by modern standards, is found in the First Inaugural, the Second Annual Message, the Gettysburg Address, and the Second Inaugural.

Less than two weeks after Lincoln delivered his Second Annual Message, General Ambrose Burnside sacrificed over 10,000 Union men at the Battle of Fredericksburg, and, within five months, General Joseph Hooker lost more than 11,000 men at Chancellorsville. By the fifth of July, 1863, places like the "Devils Den," "Little Round Top," and the "Wheat Field" had joined the "Peach Orchard" and the "Sunken Road" as landscapes soaked with blood. After Gettysburg, the butchery intensified, and Lincoln became increasingly melancholic. Always careful not to claim that God favored either side in the struggle, Lincoln began to think that both sides were in the grip of a higher power. Reflections of this outlook began to appear in Lincoln's writings in late 1863, and they became stronger as General Ulysses Simpson Grant's relentless pressure on Lee produced thousands of corpses. As the casualty reports from the gruesome inferno of the Wilderness, the slaughterhouse of Spotsylvania, the

whirlpool of Yellow Tavern, and the holocaust of Cold Harbor began to pour into the War Department's telegraph room, Lincoln's gloom deepened. It found one release in his conviction that the War was a worthy cause. It found another outlet in his fatalistic mood. Both of these elements manifested themselves in the most religious of Lincoln's speeches, the Gettysburg Address and the Second Inaugural. These two speeches placed Lincoln at the apex of his literary ability.

Chapter III

The Denouement: Murderous War but Magnificent Words

When Lincoln received his belated invitation to speak at the November 19, 1863 dedicatory ceremonies at Gettysburg, the bulk of his life had been consumed with contemplating and writing about the meaning of American democracy. His acceptance of the invitation gave him an opportunity to consolidate and to articulate those ideas. But it did more because the desolation of war had added a profoundly spiritual dimension to his thinking. That dimension lifts Lincoln's rhetoric to a new level of art. His post-July 1863 writings evoke a psychological mood that surpasses patriotism, duty, and country. His best rhetoric, in this final phase of his life, carries the reader from thoughts of glory to thoughts of sacrifice, from thoughts of victory to thoughts of humility, from thoughts of vengeance to thoughts of forgiveness, from thoughts of hatred to thoughts of compassion, and from thoughts of death to thoughts of rebirth. After the Battle of Gettysburg, Lincoln spoke, more forcefully than ever before, to the spiritual side of man.

When David Wills invited Lincoln to speak his "few appropriate remarks" at Gettysburg (qtd. in Nicolay 596), Lincoln had slightly more than two weeks to compose his address (Nicolay 597). Actually, the busy President had started his literary preparations as early as his 1838

speech before the Young Men's Lyceum of Springfield, Illinois. The theme of that speech, entitled "The Perpetuation of Our Political Institutions," is a condemnation of "mobocracy," but it is most interesting as a precursor of Lincoln's later remarks about democracy in the Gettysburg Address. In particular, one passage of the speech points the way toward his sophisticated 1863 comments. It states:

> Their's [founding fathers] was the task (and nobly they performed it) to possess themselves, and through themselves, us, of this goodly land; and to uprear upon its hills and its valleys, a political edifice of liberty and equal right; 'tis ours only, to transmit these . . . to the latest generation that fate shall permit the world to know (CW I: 108).

These remarks, and his additional comment that certain forces or personalities might yet challenge the "proposition," of "the capability of a people to govern themselves," prove that Lincoln had long-held many of the ideas and some of the very terminology that he would employ at Gettysburg (CW I: 113).

Years after his Lyceum speech, Lincoln's debates with Douglas firmly establish that he believed that the phrase "all men are created equal" made the Declaration of Independence the preeminent American political document. Indeed, the line "Four score and seven years ago" places the chronological beginning of the United States in 1776 not in 1787 (the drafting of the U.S. Constitution). With this belief as his guide, Lincoln uses one Presidential address/message after another to maintain that the War is being fought to preserve the right of a free people to

govern themselves. In his First Annual Message to Congress, for example, he describes his rebellious foes as bent on destroying that right. "It continues to develop," he says, "that the insurrection is largely, if not exclusively, a war upon the first principle of popular government--the rights of the people" (CW V: 51). His remarks at Gettysburg were thus years in the making. In the corpus of his writings, they are unique only in their succinct construction, emotive power, and religious imagery.

Textual critic and historian Philip Kunhardt could not confirm the claims of less diligent investigators that Lincoln began writing the Gettysburg Address in the White House. In his discussion of the extant first two versions of the Address (both in Lincoln's hand), Kunhardt states,

> Long have there been arguments as to which of these [the drafts Lincoln gave to each of his secretaries, John Nicolay and John Hay] was written first and whether one or both preceded the speech or instead were jotted down by Lincoln afterward in attempts to recreate what he had said. There will never be a definitive answer, but today the best thinking is that both were written before the speech, as drafts of what the President planned to say (228).

While this conclusion creates uncertainties about the date and place Lincoln wrote the Gettysburg Address, it does lend support to those who argue that it was composed days before the oration.

More certain than Kunhardt, John Nicolay, one of President Lincoln's two trusted wartime secretaries, asserts that "the original version,

manuscript draft" was written "by Mr. Lincoln, partly at Washington and partly at Gettysburg" (596). Interestingly, Nicolay also adds some remarks that reveal much about Lincoln's general writing habits:

> There is no decisive record of when Mr. Lincoln wrote the first sentence of his proposed address. He probably followed his usual habit in such matters, using great deliberation in arranging his thoughts and molding his phrases mentally, wanting to reduce them in writing until they had taken satisfactory form. There was much greater necessity for such precaution, in the case, because the invitation specified that the address of dedication should only be "a few appropriate remarks" (597).

Nicolay continues, in this 1894 account, to buttress his assertion that Lincoln wrote at least the first nineteen lines of the Gettysburg Address in Washington. He cites the textual evidence and makes the observation that "the Honorable James Speed" reported, in 1879, that Lincoln told Speed, on the day before he left Washington for Gettysburg, that "he [Lincoln] found time to write about half of his speech" (597).

Since Nicolay accompanied Lincoln on the journey to Gettysburg and since he sat on the speaker's platform, he is an excellent eye-witness to many of the events pertaining to Lincoln's behavior on that occasion. As Nicolay describes it, Lincoln finished writing the last part of his speech only on the morning of the day he was to deliver it:

> It was after the breakfast hour on the morning of the nineteenth that the writer, Mr. Lincoln's private

> secretary, went to the upper room in the house of Mr. Wills, which Mr. Lincoln occupied, to report for duty and remain with the President while he finished writing the Gettysburg Address during the short leisure he could utilize for this purpose before being called to take his place in the procession . . . (601).

Apparently, Nicolay was not present at the exact moment Lincoln began writing the final words of the Address because he speculates: "The time occupied in the final writing was probably about an hour for it is not likely that he [Lincoln] left the breakfast table before nine o'clock, and the formation of the procession [to the speakers' site] began at ten" (602). In Nicolay's judgment, Lincoln had inked the first page of his Address (nineteen lines) at the White House. Then, while at Gettysburg, Lincoln used pencil to finish the Address. Looking at the textual evidence, Nicolay asserts that it shows that Lincoln used his pencil to cross out the final three words on his inked, first page and then substituted the words "we here be dedicated" (601). From that point on, Lincoln's words were written in pencil and on plain, instead of Executive Mansion, stationery.

Although Nicolay believed that the copy of the Address which Lincoln subsequently gave him and which he saw Lincoln working on at the Wills house was Lincoln's first draft, Kunhardt argues that the entirely penciled version of the Address which Lincoln gave his other private secretary, John Hay, was Lincoln's first draft (228-229). Whatever the case, both of these drafts were written before Lincoln delivered his most

famous speech. He probably had the Nicolay version (part ink, part pencil) in his hand when he delivered the speech (Kunhardt 229; Nicolay 602). After the ceremony and once the merit of Lincoln's words became recognized, Lincoln wrote at least three more copies of the Address for various people and patriotic events (one for Edward Everett, and two to benefit the Maryland Soldiers' and Sailors' Fair at Baltimore). Each of these final copies of the Address contained some minor revisions (Kunhardt 229-231).

The most notable change which appears between the first two drafts (the Nicolay and Hay versions) and the last three drafts is the addition of the words "under God" in the last three drafts. In view of the fact that the final three copies of the speech were written after Lincoln delivered his Address, this change seems significant. But, in fact, it appears that when Lincoln delivered his speech, he spoke the words "under God." This ad-lib was noted by two of the most accurate note-taking reporters on the scene. Charles Hale, for example, carefully took down every word that Lincoln said. Hale was an official member of a commission that had been sent to represent Massachusetts at the ceremonies. He was a veteran newsman, and he wrote shorthand. According to Kunhardt, "Hale's version [of the Gettysburg Address] is the closest we have to what Lincoln actually said that day" (214). Another shorthand expert, Joseph Gilbert, of the Associated Press, took down about half of what Lincoln said and then became so fascinated with Lincoln's remarks that he stopped writing to watch the speaker. Gilbert, after the speech, asked Lincoln for his manuscript, and, from it, he copied the words he had omitted in his own notes. Gilbert also corrected some of his earlier errors, and his version

contains a few (six) minor differences from Hale's version. Both the Hale and the Gilbert versions of Lincoln's speech contain the words "under God" (Kunhardt 215, 252).

In 1895, Congress adopted Lincoln's fifth, and probably last, handwritten copy of the Gettysburg Address as the official version of the Address (Kunhardt 231). That copy, known as the Bliss version, is the version presented below:

> Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.
>
> Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.
>
> But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate--we cannot consecrate--we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather,

> to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us--that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion--that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain--that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom--and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth (CW VII: 23).

In two minutes, ten sentences, and 268 words, Lincoln obtained a fame that none of the world's greatest writers have surpassed.

Ironically, Lincoln's words have become more noted and more remembered than what the "honored dead" "did" there. His simple language (194 of his words are only one syllable) and short phrases pulse with intentional Biblical rhythm. With "battle-field" counted as one word, the speech contains seven words of four syllables, thirteen words of three syllables, and fifty-four words of two syllables. Many of the plain, ordinary, and helpful words repetitiously occur: that, thirteen times; the, ten times; we, ten times; here, nine times; to, eight times; a, seven times; and, six times. Grammarians might complain that Lincoln's frequent use of that, the, or here is overdone, but Lincoln's experience as an attorney and as a politician taught him the value of repeating words. This type of emphasis is reinforced by the alliteration of such words as score and seven, and four, fathers, forth as well as continent,

conceived, and created in the first sentence. Such an aurel stylistic device also is employed in the last sentence with the words dedicated, dead, and devotion. Another literary technique which Lincoln used was anaphora or the repetition of the same word at the beginning of successive clauses (or verses). This technique appears at the beginning of the third paragraph when Lincoln writes: "we cannot dedicate--we cannot consecrate--we cannot hallow this ground." The literary device most characteristic of the Address, however, is Lincoln's frequent use of parallelism. While Kunhardt thinks that Lincoln's habit of coupling words reflects a style of Biblical writing found in the "Prayer Book," he supplies no evidence that Lincoln ever read the "Prayer Book" (209). In any case, Lincoln wove a parallelism of word and thought throughout the fabric of his speech (my emphasis): Four score and seven years; conceived in Liberty and dedicated to the proposition; so conceived and so dedicated; fitting and proper; living and dead; to add or detract; and will little note nor long remember.

This style of writing gives a cadence and a rhythm to the speech which, when supported by the religious diction that Lincoln scatters throughout the oration, creates a haunting mood. Obviously, the nature of the occasion at Gettysburg was such that it invited an elegiac address. Still, Lincoln was more sensitive than the main speaker, Everett, in perceiving the language which not only suited the occasion but which suited a Christian audience as well. Invited as the principal orator of the ceremonies, Everett admitted that in two hours he did not come as close to expressing what needed to be said as Lincoln "did in two minutes" (qtd. in Kunhardt 221). Lincoln's accomplishment was largely due to a

combination of syntax and diction that gave the Gettysburg Address its pervasive spiritual and memorable quality.

The topic sentence sets the religious imagery in motion with its reminder of the Old Testament line "the days of our years are three score and ten" (qtd. in Basler, Touchstone 95). This subtle linking of the Bible to the political birth of a nation "dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal" allows Lincoln to infuse a secular cause with religious significance. Describing this phenomenon, historian Glen E. Thurow claims that the Gettysburg Address is best described as a "poem" of Lincoln's "political religion" (127-128). Lincoln certainly keeps the religious idea alive with words charged with spiritual energy (my emphasis): conceived, created, resting place, consecrate, hallow, living and dead, nobly, honored dead, devotion, new birth, shall not perish, under God, and in vain. In the manner of a sermon, Lincoln repeats some of these key words to bind his listeners to a theme of democratic renewal (my emphasis): dedicate or dedicated is used six times; conceived is used twice; devotion is used twice; and consecrate or consecrated is used twice. The blending of all these grammatical/diction devices creates such a poetic impression that literary critic Robert Berkelman maintained that the Gettysburg Address owed a debt to "both the Bible and Shakespeare" for its "exalting" lines of "power and rhythm" (310). Given Lincoln's love of Shakespeare and Wills's admonition that Lincoln keep his remarks brief, it is even possible that, in preparing for his speech, a whimsical Lincoln may have been reminded of a line from Hamlet, one of his favorite plays: "Therefore, [since] brevity is the soul of wit,/And tediousness the limbs and outward flourishes,/I will be brief" (Hamlet

II, ii, 90-92).

Yet, while Lincoln's words are few, they create an expansive theme. The theme is man's continuing effort to be free and equal. Lincoln boils down that struggle to one political term which has a sacred meaning for him -- democracy. In expressing what he believes has justified the deaths of so many thousands of men, Lincoln composes a perfectly styled essay. His composition ends where it begins, since his opening remarks describe the birth of a nation founded on a radically new idea, and his closing remarks express the "resolve" (lawyer's term) to give a "new birth" to the idea of freedom. In linking these two "births," Basler notes that Lincoln has integrated the "theme dearest to his audience, honor for the heroic dead sons and fathers" with the "theme nearest to his own heart, the preservation of democracy" (Touchstone 94). The resurrection concept at the end of the speech thus fulfills the spirit of secular religiosity that pervades the whole oration.

For Lincoln, the United States was an experiment in popular self-government. It started as a risky experiment fraught with danger. The chance that the U.S. would survive its early years was slim, but the nation survived. By the time Lincoln spoke at Gettysburg, however, he believed that his task was to do more than merely preserve the Constitutional Republic. And since he always placed the dynamic ideal that "all men are created equal" before a Constitution which legalized inequality, i.e., slavery, Lincoln used his Gettysburg speech to persuade Americans that the democratic experiment was still unfolding. Not only was it still unfolding, but the living owed it to the dead to keep impelling the experiment in an ever more democratic direction. Thus,

Basler contests Matthew Arnold's contention that Lincoln's use of the word "proposition" ruined the speech (Touchstone 94). On the contrary, Basler argues that Lincoln's use of "proposition" is the rhetorical key to the whole speech.

According to Basler's explication, Lincoln uses "proposition" in the "logician's sense: a statement to be debated, verified, proved" (Touchstone 94). As such, the word "proposition" guides the theme of the essay to its inevitable conclusion. At the outset, the founders had established a political experiment to determine if men could use self-government to achieve the goal of making all men equal in rights and opportunity. Toward this goal, Lincoln maintains that they had set slavery on the road to extinction. But, by his generation, a crisis of democratic commitment had been reached. Some men had lost sight of the goal, were absorbed with self-interest, and were seeking to set the nation on a new and an anti-democratic course of development. Part of Lincoln's generation, however, met the crisis head-on -- at Bull Run, Shiloh, Antietam, and thousands of other bloody fields, including Gettysburg. At Gettysburg, the military turning point of the War, the Union army proved that the "affirmation" that "all men are created equal" was "still a live rather than a dead issue" (Basler, Touchstone 95). Yet, as in any experiment, the "proposition" remains open to question. Therefore, in his Address, Lincoln imagines that democracy is in a continual state of becoming; it is in constant need of protection and perfection. So, the Gettysburg Address calls on "us the living, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced." This dynamic concept of an ever changing democracy -- either

moving forward or backward -- is what creates the politically timeless dimension of the Address. Lincoln's words are a powerful reminder that the "proposition" must be renewed and verified by every generation.

When Lincoln resumed his seat after his two minute speech, he had referred to his prepared copy only once (Nicolay 602), and he regarded his effort as a failure. To Everett's polite comments, he replied, "We shall try not to talk about my address. I failed, I failed, and that is about all that can be said about it" (Kunhardt 225). At the time, his friends and companions on the platform, Seward and Ward Lamon, concurred. Hundreds of other spectators were not even sure of what he had said (Kunhardt 215-216, 224-225). The newspaper reaction, on the other hand, was not as universally negative as myth would have it.

Actually, Lincoln' speech was rapidly acknowledged as very good, if not great. Still, in the tense political atmosphere of the Civil War, instant editorial reaction split along partisan pro-Union, pro-War lines and anti-War and/or anti-Union lines. In the North, the Republican papers praised the speech, and the Democratic papers ridiculed it (Holzer 144; Reid 57-60). The anti-Lincoln Chicago Times editorial of November 23, 1863, stated, in part,

> But aside from the ignorant rudeness manifest in the President's exhibition of Dawdleism at Gettysburg,--and which was an insult at least to the memories of a part of the dead, whom he was there professedly to honor,--in its misstatement of the cause for which they died, it was a perversion of history so flagrant that the most extended charity

> cannot regard it as otherwise than willful (qtd. in Mitgang 359-360).

At the rival pro-Lincoln Chicago Tribune, however, Lincoln's address was praised. "The dedicatory remarks by President Lincoln," stated the writer, "will live among the annals of the war" (qtd. in Holzer 144). Southern papers naturally despised the speech. The Richmond Examiner stated, as reprinted in the Chicago Times, "Kings are usually made to speak in the magniloquent language supposed to be suited to their elevated position. On the present occasion Lincoln acted the clown" (qtd. in Holzer 144). From England and the anti-Lincoln London Times, came its December 4, 1863 comments:

> The inauguration of the cemetery at Gettysburg was an imposing ceremony, only rendered somewhat . . . ludicrous by some of the luckless sallies of that poor President Lincoln (qtd. in Mitgang 361-362).

More positive and perhaps more accurate was the Springfield (Massachusetts) Republican:

> The rhetorical honors of the occasion were won by President Lincoln. His little speech is a perfect gem; deep in feeling, compact in thought and expression, and tasteful and elegant in every word and comma . . . in its verbal perfection and . . . brevity. . . . Turn back and read it over, it will repay study as a model speech (qtd. in Holzer 145).

In time, this positive opinion became the prevailing view of the speech.

Literary professionals also developed a consensus in favor of the

merits of the speech. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow thought that the address was "admirable," and Ralph Waldo Emerson, two years after the speech, stated that Lincoln's "brief speech at Gettysburg will not easily be surpassed by words on any recorded occasion" (qtd. in Neely 125). Critic Dodge concurred with Emerson. As one who made an early extensive study of Lincoln's writings, Dodge concluded: "Nothing need be said here about the beauty of the Gettysburg Address. No words of praise can add to the brightness of its sun" ("Evolution" 50). In Dodge's professional opinion, Lincoln's literary gifts far surpassed the polished writing of British Prime Minister William E. Gladstone (Master 2).

Such statements regarding Lincoln's literary accomplishment in the Gettysburg Address raise questions about its originality. In defending Lincoln against the charge that his famous conclusion to the Address was copied from other authors, Nicolay identified a number of individuals who, prior to Lincoln's November 1863 Speech, had expressed definitions of democracy similar to Lincoln's. Beginning with the first of four of these, Nicolay noted that James Douglas in "The Advancement of Society of Knowledge and Religion" (1830) had stated, "The depressed vassal of the old continent becomes co-legislator and co-ruler in a government where all power is from the people and in the people and for the people" (qtd. in Nicolay 607). Likewise, he cited "Webster's Reply to Hayne," United States Senate, January 26, 1830, and quoted Webster as saying, "The people's government made for the people, made by the people and answerable to the people" (qtd. in Nicolay 607). More importantly, in view of the numerous authors who have argued that Lincoln was influenced by the writings of Theodore Parker (See Jessie Fell's comments in Herndon-Weik

III: 445; Rankin 139-140; Mearns 88.), Nicolay included a Parker quotation made at the 1850 New England Anti-Slavery Convention in Boston: "A democracy, that is, a government of all the people, by all the people, for all the people" (qtd. in Nicolay 607-608). Nicolay's final example was an obscure Lieutenant named M. F. Maury. Maury's 1854 remarks, in a report to Congress, were: "The government is by the people, for the people and with the people. It is the people" (qtd. in Nicolay 608). By demonstrating the commonplace knowledge of such phraseology, Nicolay sought to absolve Lincoln of any innuendo of plagiarism. Mearns, more recently, noted that Lincoln had read Parker's The Effect of Slavery on the American People: A Sermon Preached at the Music Hall, Boston, on Sunday, July 4, 1858 . . . Revised by Author in the spring of 1858. According to Mearns, Lincoln marked one sentence with a pencil: "Slavery is in flagrant violation of the institutions of America--Direct Government--over all of the people, by all the people, for all the people" (Mearns 88). In Mearns's speculative opinion, that sentence was recalled by Lincoln as he composed the Gettysburg Address (Mearns 88). In fact, it is impossible to prove that Lincoln used any specific source material to prepare the Address.

The main ideas expressed in the Gettysburg Address had been part of Lincoln's thinking for most of his adult life. He needed no reference materials to state what was part and parcel of his existence, Nicolay put it well when he wrote,

> Mr. Lincoln's humble birth, the experiences of his boyhood and all incidences in the rugged path of his self-education for political service imbued him

> with a deep sympathy for an unswerving faith in the people as a political entity and power (608).

The fact that so many American orators, writers, and ordinary citizens shared Lincoln's outlook on democracy or, more precisely, on a common phraseology to define it, does not weaken the originality of his most famous speech. In the words of historian Richard Current,

> The ideas of the Gettysburg Address were no more original with Lincoln than those of the Declaration of Independence were with Jefferson. The principles of each of these great statements of American democracy were widely held . . . But they never had been put so well. . . . Lincoln . . . crystallized in superb language the ideals and aspirations of millions of men and women (10).

Thus, as Current notes, it is the literary Lincoln who makes the ideas and ideals of the Gettysburg Address unique.

Lincoln's skill with diction, grammar, composition, and peculiar meanings creates an essay which strikes the intellect on at least three levels. First, it is such an eloquent and simply-worded hymn to dead heroes and to democracy that even school children easily memorize it. Next, it appears as a finely cadenced prose elegy, urging the living to remember the dead, and calling on the living to sacrifice for freedom's sake. Finally, it is a haunting, deeply religious, poetic utterance dedicated to a resurrection theme of endless spiritual and democratic rebirth. In combination, these levels of meaning have made the Gettysburg Address one of the world's most revered speeches.

Although the Battle of Gettysburg marked the military turning-point of the War, some Southern die-hards and thousands of exhausted Rebel fighters refused to end the agony. By the time Lincoln delivered his Second Inaugural Address (March 4, 1865), General William T. Sherman was devastating a path through South Carolina, and General Robert E. Lee's starving and shrinking army was besieged in Richmond. The South was unmistakably defeated, and Lincoln used the occasion of his Second Inaugural to ponder the meaning of the Civil War. As in the case of the Gettysburg Address, his rhetoric was profoundly religious. But the Second Inaugural reflected the hidden, deeply spiritual and emotionally troubled side of Lincoln more than any of his other public statements. According to Lincoln's friend and political supporter, Carl Schurz, the speech "was like a sacred poem." He added:

> No American President had ever spoken words like these to the American people. America never had a President who found such words in the depth of his heart (qtd. in Dodge, Master 85).

Indeed, the Second Inaugural marked the culmination of the cathartic experience which Lincoln had endured for many gruesome years

Although a man of various moods, Lincoln's natural despondency had deepened as the war dragged on. After all, he was a man who, by the age of nineteen, had lost a mother and a sister. Two of his young sons had died before 1863, and his wife was frequently, and inconsolably, distraught. Throughout his life, Lincoln had his share of sorrow. Burdened by it, he even termed his periods of intense depression the "hypo" (CW I: 268). Familiar with this side of Lincoln, Herndon saw him

as a "man of opposites--of terrible contrasts" (qtd. in Oates, Abraham 35). Not surprisingly, Lincoln's favorite poem, "Mortality," was a depressing description of human vulnerability and fate. Written by an obscure Scottish poet named William Knox, "Mortality" was so beloved by Lincoln that he once said that he would "give all I am worth, and go in debt, to be able to write so fine a piece as I think that [it] is" (CW I: 378). Containing fourteen stanzas, the opening and closing verses of this poem illustrate some of the morose lines which Lincoln often recited from memory:

> Oh! why should the spirit of mortal be proud?
> Like a swift-flitting meteor, a fast flying cloud,
> A flash of the lightning, a break of the wave,
> He passes from life to his rest in the grave.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> 'Tis the wink of an eye, 'tis the draught of a breath,
> From the blossoms of health, to the paleness of death.
> From the gilded saloon, to the bier and the shroud.
> On, why should the spirit of mortal be proud!
> (qtd. in CW II: 90; qtd. in Current 7).

Much of Lincoln's own poetry had an equally dark side. When writing about a boyhood acquaintance, Matthew Gentry, who had gone suddenly mad, Lincoln expressed his feelings in verses which reflect the more dreary passages in Macbeth or Hamlet:

> But here's an object more of dread
> Than ought the grave contains--
> A human form with reason fled,

> While wretched life remains.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> O death! Thou awe-inspiring prince,
>
> That keepst the world in fear;
>
> Why dost thou tear more blest ones hence
>
> And leave him ling'ring here? (CW I: 385-386).

For a man accustomed to thinking and writing in such terms, it is not amazing to discover that he could quote vast sections of Hamlet (Carpenter 50-51) or that he regarded Macbeth, one of Shakespeare's darkest tragedies, as his favorite play: "I think nothing equals Macbeth. It is wonderful" (CW VI: 392). Perhaps one reason he enjoyed Macbeth was that the play contained dream portents. His own dream portents and recurring bouts of melancholia mark him as an intensely burdened man. Certainly, his personal history could have inclined him to ruminate about the fatalism expressed in Macbeth.

Lincoln's own fatalistic tendencies grew as the War continued. As early as 1862, after the Union defeat at the Second Battle of Bull Run, he described the War as being in the grip of a providential power over which no one had much control:

> I am almost ready to say this is probably true--that God wills this contest, and wills that it shall not end yet. By his mere quiet power, on the minds of the now contestants, He could have either saved or destroyed the Union without a human contest. Yet the contest began. And having begun He could give the final victory to either side any day. Yet the contest

proceeds (CW V: 404).

Later, Lincoln could take no real consolation when Union victories began to replace defeats in the second half of the War. Such victories often were more costly than the defeats.

The final collapse of the South, therefore, brought Lincoln no real joy. His intellectual preoccupation, by that stage of the struggle, took on a philosophical and spiritual cast. As one of the most perceptive witnesses of the Second Inaugural oration, the Marquis de Chambrun (Charles Adolphe Pineton) confirmed Schurz's opinion of the speech when he described the deeply religious character of Lincoln's remarks in these words:

> The utterance, in almost a religious manner, of his thought, seemed to speak out the very sentiments of all his listeners, and . . . seemed tinged with something of the eloquence of the prophets (27).

As de Chambrun noted, Lincoln's Second Inaugural was quite unusual. It was, after all, a religious discourse delivered by a political figure, on a political occasion, and for a political purpose.

An analysis of the short Second Inaugural first reveals many of the quintessential literary techniques that are the hallmarks of Lincoln's mature writing style. The speech is only four paragraphs long. The middle two paragraphs are the heart of the speech, and the peroration comprises the sum of their argument. While Lincoln employs his habitual phrase parallels, cadences, and Biblical diction throughout the speech, he uses them most obviously in his final, famous paragraph. In addition, the lyrical character of his peroration reinforces the pervasive melancholy of

the two previous paragraphs. In discussing Lincoln's technique, Basler notes that the rhythms in the final paragraph are established by "a series of phrases or clauses separated by caesuras and grouped in balanced staves of two or more phrased units" (Touchstone 97). All of the parallel phrases in this passage are balanced comparisons rather than contrasts. The entire peroration is infused with the religious concept of forgiveness. It reads:

> With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan--to do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and a lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations (CW VIII: 333).

The ideas in this paragraph grow out of Lincoln's previous argument, and they go beyond that argument rather like a sum being greater than its parts.

While Lincoln has used similar grammatical techniques in his two previous paragraphs, his theme in those paragraphs is not forgiveness, but a discussion of the nature of God's justice and of the limits of man's free will. That discussion, ultimately theological in its nature, creates a unique and logical basis for Lincoln's peroration on "charity" and peace. In making his argument, Lincoln tries to explain the meaning of the war in such a way that it will lead thousands of his embittered fellow countrymen away from thoughts of vengeance. He, consequently,

argues that the War is over and that justice has been done. Although the basis for his fascinating argument appears to be his deterministic/fatalistic philosophy, that interpretation is only one of a number of views.

For generations, the religious nature of Lincoln's remarks in the Second Inaugural has inspired a debate among historians, critics, and Lincoln students. Some people have maintained that the Second Inaugural and/or the Gettysburg Address represent the proof that, at some point before one or both of them, Lincoln had undergone a conversion experience and had become an orthodox Christian. Partly in response to this type of contention (Current 54), Herndon decided to write his biographical account of the man who had befriended him and with whom he had practiced law for sixteen harmonious years. As a freethinker, Herndon was at pains to contend that Lincoln had died as he had lived "an unbeliever," i.e., a non-Christian (qtd. in Current 55). His strongest argument was provided by a quotation from Mary Lincoln. "Mr. Lincoln," Mary wrote, "had no faith and no hope in the usual acceptation [sic] of those words. He never joined a Church; but still, as I believe, he was a religious man by nature." Continuing her comments, Mary explained:

> He first seemed to think about the subject when our boy Willie died, and then more than ever about the time he went to Gettysburg; but it was a kind of poetry in his nature, and he was never a technical Christian (qtd. in Herndon-Weik III: 445).

In Mary's opinion, Lincoln was more thoroughly religious than those who practiced the rituals of organized sects.

The view that Lincoln may have disguised his true religious beliefs, i.e., skepticism, in order to please the public also originated with Herndon (Thurow 129). But, this opinión strains credulity when applied to a discussion of the Second Inaugural. Besides, a private Lincoln letter to Thurlow Weed explicitly refutes the idea that Lincoln thought that his views in the Second Inaugural might flatter the public. Parenthetically, his remarks to Weed also indicate that he might have regarded the Second Inaugural as his best speech:

> Every one likes a compliment. Thank you for yours on my little notification speech, and on the recent Inaugural Address. I expect the latter to wear as well as--perhaps better than--any thing I have produced; but I believe it is not immediately popular. Men are not flattered by being shown that there has been a difference of purpose between the Almighty and them. To deny it, however, in this case, is to deny that there is a God governing the world. It is a truth which I thought needed to be told; and as whatever of humiliation there is in it, falls most directly on myself, I thought others might afford for me to tell it (CW VIII: 356).

When the facts of this statement are added to a variety of other evidence, Lincoln does not appear to have been either an orthodox "Christian," or an atheist or an agnostic, and he, most certainly, cannot have been a political opportunist.

Recently, Thurow posits yet another interpretation of Lincoln's March

5, 1865 religious beliefs. Inferring from Lincoln's always "conditional" Second Inaugural statements "about the relationship of the Civil War to God" (136), Thurow concludes:

> One can see the kinship of the Second Inaugural to that skepticism for which Lincoln was noted among his friends. The faith that regards providence as essentially unknowable and the skepticism of all providence agree that the pattern of future events cannot be known and hence that our capacity to manage the future is limited (137).

In this view, Lincoln was a bewildered believer at the time he delivered the Second Inaugural.

Thurow's interpretation is challenged by David Hein, who argues that Lincoln's "theological taste was first cultivated in the religious environment of his childhood" (Calvinistic churches), and "did not undergo any truly decisive transformation over time" (145). Hein acknowledges that "Lincoln was a reflective man whose thinking undoubtedly deepened over the years . . . But . . . the central elements of Lincoln's mature religious faith were already present in the religious outlook of the young Lincoln" (145).

Since the historical record of Lincoln's writings gives ample evidence that Lincoln often referred to God as a Providential force (Shaw 71, 74-75), Hein's point is well taken. In 1846, a thirty-seven year old Lincoln described his belief in the "Doctrine of Necessity." At that time, he never stated that he had ceased believing in the idea, only that he seldom tried to maintain it "in argument." As he stated,

> It is true that in early life I was inclined to believe in what I understand is called the 'Doctrine of Necessity'--that is, that the human mind is impelled to action, or held in rest by some power, over which the mind itself has no control; and I have sometimes (with one, two or three, but never publicly) tried to maintain this opinion in argument. The habit of arguing thus however, I have, entirely left off for more than five years (CW I: 382).

Sixteen years after making these remarks Lincoln made comments, after the Second Battle of Bull Run, which reflect his continuing deterministic view of man's fate and of God's providential designs (CW V: 404). Indeed, the Second Inaugural itself is proof that Lincoln believed that a Deity dominated at least the larger affairs of men with purposes other than those which men created. In support of this view, Isaac N. Arnold, a Lincoln acquaintance, reported that "Mr. Lincoln once said: 'I have all my life been a fatalist. What is to be will be, or rather, I have found all my life as Hamlet says: There's a divinity that shapes our ends,/ Rough-hew them how we will'" (qtd. in "Evolution" 24).

Analyzing the middle two paragraphs of the Second Inaugural, it is easy to illustrate how Lincoln starts by arguing that aggressive, self-interested men (slaveowners) were responsible for beginning the War. This argument corresponds, theologically, to the view that men have "free will." Lincoln introduces his argument on this point with a beautiful parallelism and a stunning four word concluding sentence:

> Both parties deprecated war; but one of them would

> make war rather than let the nation survive; and the other would accept war rather than let it perish. And the war came (CW VIII: 332).

More prosaically, Lincoln reinforces his "free will" as the cause of the War theme by noting that Southern slaveowners had such a "powerful interest" in maintaining their slave system that they started the War:

> All knew that this interest was, somehow, the cause of the war. To strengthen, perpetuate, and extend this interest was the object for which the insurgents would rend the Union, even by war; while the government claimed no right to do more than to restrict the territorial enlargement of it (CW VIII: 332).

It is clear that in this passage men are making their own history. Lincoln's words portray materially motivated men, slaveowners and government officials, who consciously decide to clash.

At this point, Lincoln introduces a subtle shift in his argument. From the theological perspective, his next lines suggest that the human ("free will") actors in this unfolding tragedy had lost control of events:

> Neither party expected for the war, the magnitude, or the duration, which it has already attained. Neither anticipated that the cause of the conflict might cease with, or even before, the conflict itself should cease. Each looked for an easier triumph, and a result less fundamental and astounding (CW VIII: 332-333).

With diction like "Neither . . . expected" and "Neither anticipated,"

Lincoln is indicating that things are slipping out of human control. Although he could have decided that the new forces controlling men were the man-made events themselves, Lincoln's profound religiosity leads him to select a supernatural agent of control.

In his next sentences, Lincoln begins to indicate why human control of events was diminishing. His explanation introduces the concept of a Deity who has His own "purposes" and who does not "fully" respond to the prayers of men. The deterministic argument which Lincoln puts forth reflects, interestingly enough, the comments of the Player King in Hamlet: "Our thoughts are ours, their ends none of our own" (Hamlet III, ii, 213).

> Both read the same Bible, and pray to the same God; and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces; but let us judge not that we be not judged. The prayers of both could not be answered fully. The Almighty has His own purposes (CW VIII: 333).

These final remarks prove that Lincoln is not only contending that God's purposes are different from men's, but that God imposes these purposes on men.

Lincoln's next passage begins to explore the precise nature of God's intentions. Unsurprisingly, Lincoln contends that slavery has offended God's sense of ethics. He quotes Matthew 18:7 to launch his argument:

> 'Woe unto the world because of offenses! for it must needs be that offenses come; but woe to that man by

> whom the offense cometh!' (CW VIII: 333).

God, in short, punishes the wicked. But who are the wicked? And what is the nature of God?

Although all of Lincoln's subsequent comments about God are put in the conditional, it is evident that Lincoln is using the conditional as a rhetorical device for emphasizing his deterministic (Calvinistic) concept of the Deity and his idea of the Deity's purposes. It also is evident that Lincoln envisions a righteous God who has a sense of justice. This Deity is certainly not a Deist. Indeed, considering Lincoln's expression of the idea that God wills "this terrible war" to punish both North and South, he is asserting the hoary evangelical notion that any compromise with sin is sin itself. And such an attitude requires a God who intervenes in human affairs. Accordingly, Lincoln follows his quotation from Matthew with a cadenced and pointed question:

> If we shall suppose that American Slavery is one of those offenses which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South, this terrible war, as the woe due to those by whom the offence came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a Living God always ascribe to Him? (CW VIII: 333).

In Lincoln's interpretation, "American Slavery," condoned by the South and tolerated by the North, is one of those "offenses" that calls for Divine retribution. As Lincoln argues, the War was that punishment, but, since

God is just, both sides deserve the punishment. In equating the moral guilt of North and South, Lincoln not only explains why the War cost both sides so much in blood and treasure, but he clears the way for a national reconciliation.

Having reached this stage in his discourse, Lincoln concludes his comments in the Second Inaugural's third paragraph with an observation that demonstrates the utter subordination of man's will to God's just purposes. In Lincoln's theological scheme even devout prayer is pointless. The morally outraged Deity which Lincoln envisions punishes wrongdoing and enacts justice even when His purposes and His justice are concealed from the minds of men. Hence, it is that Lincoln's dark and fatalistic philosophy is no where more evident than in this final passage from the third paragraph:

> Fondly do we hope--fervently do we pray--that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue, until all the wealth piled by the bond-man's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash, shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said 'the judgments of the Lord, are true and righteous altogether' [Psalm 19:9] (CW VIII: 333).

In view of the compassionate peroration which follows this passage, one could conclude that Lincoln believed that the Divine retribution for slavery was over. If not, Lincoln, logically, could not have called for

"malice toward none; with charity for all" (CW VIII: 333).

In a theological sense, the Second Inaugural ends where it begins. Men had started the conflict, and now, exercising free will, they can bring it to a charitable conclusion. In between the beginning and the end of the ordeal, God had firmly dictated the course of men's actions. Now, the War over, His retribution is no longer needed, and men can return to making their own history. Naturally, they can do so only within the limits of God's deterministic plan. Such is Lincoln's theological concept of a "divinity that shapes our ends."

Conclusion

Forty-two days after Abraham Lincoln delivered his Second Inaugural Address, he passed into martyrdom and legend. Today, practically all historians agree that he was a great national leader. In part, his reputation is due to his enormous gift for manipulating the English language. In that respect, he probably ranks above such significant writers/orators as Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Paine, Edmund Burke, Benjamin Disraeli, Jean Jaurès, Woodrow Wilson, and Martin Luther King, Jr. Professor Current, at any rate, declared of Lincoln, "Of the other Presidents, only Thomas Jefferson and Woodrow Wilson could be compared with him in power of literary self-expression, and surely at his best he surpassed them both" (7). Among Lincoln's contemporaries, Harriet Beecher Stowe believed that some passages in his state papers ought "to be inscribed in letters of gold" (qtd. in Oates, Abraham 39). And, in pre-World War I England, Lord (George Nathaniel) Curzon, a former Chancellor

of Oxford, ranked the Gettysburg Address and the Second Inaugural Address as two of the three masterpieces of eloquence in the English language (Hassler 58). But, perhaps, Edmund Wilson, one of America's foremost writers and critics, paid Lincoln the greatest literary compliment when he appraised "Lincoln's writings in bulk" and found:

> These writings do not give the impression of a folksy and jocular countryman swapping yarns at the village store . . . there is very little humor in these writings, and only the gravest sentiment. . . . This is a Lincoln intent, self-controlled, strong in intellect, tenacious of purpose (117).

Lincoln, indeed, was a serious man and a serious writer. He crafted words to convey his ideas with precision and power.

Lincoln's studied effort to compose his essays/speeches means that he invested his creative energies in prose that mirrored his thoughts. This creative act, as any writer knows, adds precision to thinking, and it constantly shapes literary technique. Most importantly, serious writing is an act of supreme integrity. When an author not only writes, as did Lincoln, about what he believes but also writes for a public audience, the task compels him to clarify and to develop his own thinking. In Lincoln's case, this dialectical process led him to develop extraordinary contrasts of style. He could be poetically vague and painstakingly precise at almost the same time, e.g., the public Letter to Horace Greeley. He could seem simplistic and yet utter profoundly spiritual ideas, e.g., the Gettysburg Address. He could call for forgiveness on a theological basis, but condemn greedy slaveowners on a political basis, e.g., the Second

Inaugural. In all these documents and literary styles, however, the diligent student can detect the writer's honesty of purpose. It is not that Lincoln or any serious writer was/is ipso facto honest, but that good writers must admit any intellectual dishonesty to themselves. This produces a need to say exactly what is on one's mind -- even if it is the deliberate attempt to obfuscate the issue. In contrast, a person who merely mouths the words which others have written never really confronts the full dimensions of his thinking and is therefore out of touch with the integrity demanded by serious writing. Such was not the case with Lincoln. Lincoln was either vague or precise because he wanted to be, not because a ghost writer usurped his thoughts and turned them into what he or she thought they should be. It is the honesty of the creative act which sets the writings of President Lincoln apart from most contemporary Presidents.

One can only speculate that had Lincoln not been assassinated, his love of the written language might have led him into a professional writing career. He certainly enjoyed the art of writing, and he could have offered a unique view of the Civil War. Perhaps, he would have retired to Springfield and written some poetry. What is certain is that his historical example and his ideas exercise a continuing presence in the political culture of the U.S. In part, that presence is due to his written expressions, and these place him among America's greatest political writers. He is situated there by virtue of the scope of his imagination, the eloquence of his expression, and the influence of his words.

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