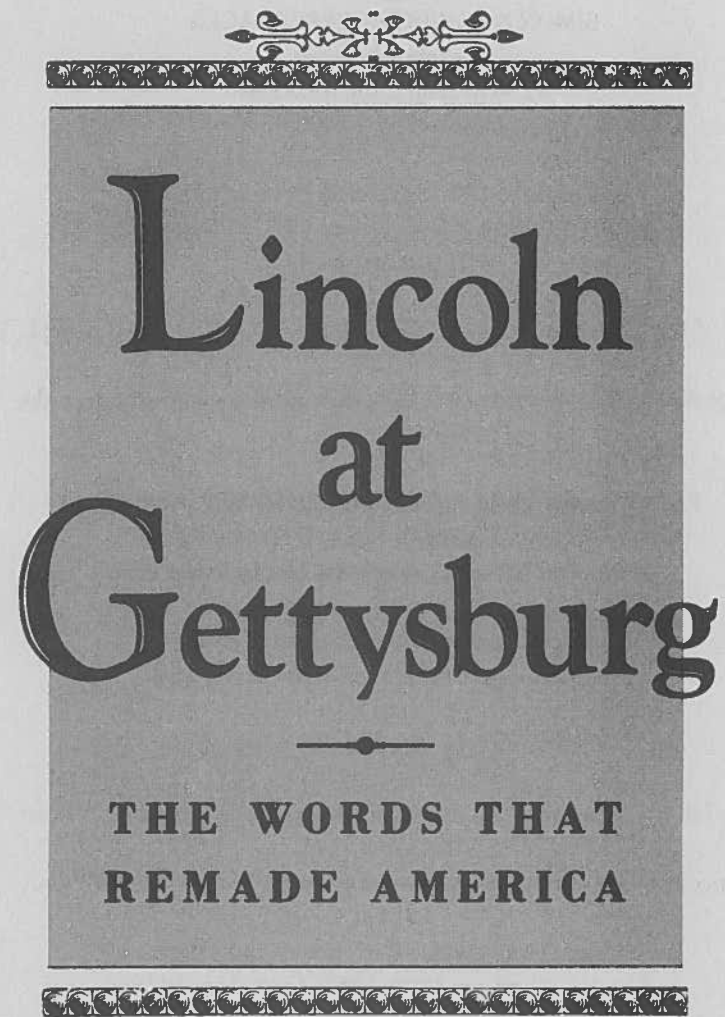


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Designed by Carla Weise/Levavi & Levavi
Manufactured in the United States of America

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

The Library of Congress has cataloged the hardcover edition as follows:
Wills, Garry, date.

Lincoln at Gettysburg : the words that remade America / Garry Wills.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and indexes.

1. Lincoln, Abraham, 1809-1865. Gettysburg address.
2. Lincoln, Abraham, 1809-1865—Oratory. I. Title.

E475.55.W54 1992
973.7'092—dc20 92-3546

CIP

ISBN-13: 978-0-671-76956-7

ISBN-10: 0-671-76956-1

ISBN-13: 978-0-7432-9963-3 (Pbk)

ISBN-10: 0-7432-9963-9 (Pbk)

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During that time Lincoln found the language, the imagery, the myths that are given their best and briefest embodiment at Gettysburg. In order to penetrate the mystery of his “refounding” act, we must study all the elements of that stunning verbal coup. Without Lincoln’s knowing it himself, all his prior literary, intellectual, and political labors had prepared him for the intellectual revolution contained in those fateful 272 words.³³

1

*Oratory of the
Greek Revival*

James Hurt says that Lincoln used “the ordinary coin of funeral oratory” at Gettysburg.¹ Insofar as there was a standard coinage of funeral tribute, Pericles struck the master coin 2,394 years before Lincoln spoke. At the end of the first year of Athens’ war with Sparta, Pericles gave a speech over the ashes of the Athenians who had fallen in that year. Thucydides put a version of that speech in his history of the Peloponnesian War, and it became the most famous oration of its kind, a model endlessly copied, praised, and cited—especially in the early nineteenth century, during America’s Greek Revival.

Edward Everett lost no time referring to that speech at Gettysburg. He opened his talk with a detailed description of the annual funeral rite at which Pericles had spoken, comparing it point for point with the ceremony for the Union dead. Both rites involved *reburial*. Athenian soldiers or sailors were cremated

where they fell, then their ashes were returned to Athens and buried, together, on the annual day of military tribute. They were buried by tribe, with a special place for those whose tribes could not be identified—as the Union dead were buried by states, except for those “unknown soldiers” who had their own special place.

But at Gettysburg the reburial was still at the battle site. The ancient parallel for this, Everett was learned enough to know, was the Battle of Marathon (490 B.C.E.), after which the Athenians were buried on the spot where they had saved Hellas from the Persians.

These references, common enough at the time, all had a special meaning for Everett, considered by some the new Pericles for a young democracy of the Western world. Ralph Waldo Emerson, who studied Greek at Harvard in Everett’s classroom, was emphatic in his teacher’s praise: “There was an influence on the young from the genius of Everett which was almost comparable to that of Pericles in Athens.”²

America as a second Athens was an idea whose moment had come in the nineteenth century. This nation’s founders first looked to Rome, not to Greece, for their model. Like most men of the eighteenth century, they thought of Athens as ruled by mobs. If any Greek city was admired, it was Sparta, whose discipline inspired the severe moralists of the early Roman republic. The “mixed government” of Rome—not Athens’ direct democracy—was the model invoked in debates over the proper constitution for the United States.³ The great republican of the new era, George Washington, was regularly referred to as a modern Cincinnatus, after the Roman who left the plow to serve the republic and then returned to his fields, relinquishing power.⁴ When Jefferson laid out the plan for his University of Virginia, he fashioned everything to Roman architectural standards.

All this changed very rapidly as the eighteenth turned to the

nineteenth century. Archaeology in Greece brought the ancient democracy to mind just as modern Greece began its struggle for freedom from the Turks. Greece would prove as important to the romantic movement as Rome had been to the Augustan age.⁵ Byron died as a military participant in the war for Greek liberty. Shelley wrote a *Prometheus*. Keats rhapsodized on a Grecian urn. Hölderlin and the German romantics composed plays and poems on Greek themes.⁶ Architects looked to the Parthenon now, not the Pantheon. (The Elgin Marbles, taken from the Parthenon, had been moved to London by 1806.) It is significant of this changed taste that Washington completed his inherited home (as Jefferson conceived his own house) in the form of a Roman villa, while Lincoln’s additions to the house he purchased were in the Greek Revival style. This was a “democratic” style in the eyes of Lincoln’s contemporaries:

Thomas Jefferson’s brief and highly personal Roman Revival was the product of an individual mind; the Greek Revival was the product of a popular sentiment. The fact that it became expressive for the whole of American society, from the erudite to the untutored, from the capital to the village, from the city house to the farm, gave it a national independence and set it apart from the architecture of Europe in a way and to a degree that American builders had never before achieved. Indeed, at no time in the history of Western man had a single stylistic form, however sentimentally conceived, been so spontaneously accepted by a total society. It is in this sense that the Greek Revival must be understood as America’s first national style of architecture.⁷

Everett played a key role in America’s Greek Revival. Harvard established its new chair of ancient Greek studies for him. He had sped through Harvard at the top of his class, completed his divinity studies, and been appointed to the prestigious Brattle

Street pulpit before he was twenty. His promise as a scholar made Harvard call him back from the pulpit to the classroom. But first the university subsidized his studies in Germany, where he was the first American to earn his doctorate at a center of the new philology (in 1817, from Göttingen). While Everett was abroad, he traveled widely and met the leaders of the romantic age, from Goethe to Byron.⁸ He went to Greece, to walk over the battlefields where the first democracy of the West won its freedom. He returned to America convinced that a new Athens was rising here.

This was a vision he found it hard to keep alive while teaching teenagers their Greek verb forms.⁹ His earlier success in the pulpit made him think he could accomplish in the secular sphere what the ancient orators had in the Greek marketplace, groves, and public cemetery (Agora, Akademy, and Kerameikos). He was confirmed in this sense of vocation in 1825, the year of Lafayette's visit to America. That return occasioned one of this country's great outpourings of romantic feeling. Here was a warrior from the age of General Washington surviving into the age of Byron. His appearances prompted rallies for Greek independence—a favorite cause of Everett.¹⁰ At Cambridge, Lafayette was treated to a long oration by Everett, devoted to the role of literature in America. The response was almost as great as the response to the speech Daniel Webster addressed to Lafayette, across the Charles River, in Boston. Everett's own talk propelled him into the political arena—as congressman, Massachusetts governor, minister to the Court of St. James's in London, senator (after an interval as president of Harvard), and secretary of state. But, all along, his public lecturing remained the most satisfying part of what he considered an essentially pedagogic career. Webster's orations were an offshoot of his role as statesman and legislator; but Everett, in effect, ran for and held office in order to attract an audience for his speeches.

He was always a teacher. He had merely traded the classroom for the stump. And his students followed him out into this wider world. Emerson made the public lecture his own main art form, launching his career with the 1837 address on the modern scholar as Everett had launched himself in the 1825 talk on American letters. Everett was a model to Emerson and the other Transcendentalists because he was so clearly a scholar before he became a popularizer of democratic ideals. Emerson's experience in Everett's classroom gave an entirely new direction to his life:

Germany had created [literary] criticism in vain for us until 1820, when Edward Everett returned from his five years in Europe, and brought to Cambridge his rich results, which no one was so fitted by natural grace and the splendor of his rhetoric to introduce and recommend. He made us for the first time acquainted with [Friedrich August] Wolf's theory of the Homeric writings, with the criticism of [Heinrich] Heine. The novelty of the learning lost nothing in the skill and genius of its interpreter, and the rudest undergraduate found a new morning opening to him in the lecture room at Harvard.¹¹

Emerson's mention of the philologist Wolf struck an ominous note for orthodox Calvinists of New England. By tracing multiple authorship in Homer, Wolf had encouraged a similar approach to the other main text of a "heroic age," calling into question Moses's authorship of the Pentateuch.¹² Transcendentalists like Emerson and Theodore Parker would abandon or alter Christian tenets to accommodate this "higher criticism."¹³ The other name Emerson mentioned, that of the lyric poet Heine, suggests a different side of Homer, one that would also be important in the romantic period. Homer, who was thought of as wild and natural, held a relation to the polished Roman poets, like Virgil, roughly resembling that of Wordsworth to Alexander Pope.¹⁴

Everett's immense prestige sent others to Göttingen for German learning, including the historian George Bancroft, whose lecture on progress Lincoln would later imitate. Bancroft intended to study ancient languages at Göttingen, for interpreting the Bible, but he feared no pulpit would welcome a "higher critic." He moved on to Berlin, where he acquired his personal Transcendentalism from the philosopher Friedrich Schleiermacher.¹⁵ But his main interest was Greek history. After his return to America, he set up a preparatory school to imitate on our soil the methods of educational reformer J. H. Pestalozzi, which he had observed in the German Gymnasium. During his teaching years, he translated from German some works of his Göttingen professor Arnold H. L. Heeren. These included *Ancient Greece*, a history that Harvard accepted as a textbook.¹⁶

Heeren's book, which glorified the Periclean age, shows how far romantic historiography had moved from the picture of Athens as anarchical. Bancroft was ahead of the wave of histories that would glorify Periclean Athens in Victorian England. Direct democracy, a flawed system in republican theory, was rehabilitated, for its usefulness in the parliamentary reform movement, by British historians like George Grote.¹⁷ In America, a similar motion toward government *by* the people, not just *for* the republic, was signaled by an enthusiasm for Greek symbols. Bancroft became a Jacksonian Democrat when he began to apply the historical skills formed on the Attic democracy to America's development. Walter Savage Landor recognized what was happening in America when he dedicated the second volume of his *Pericles and Aspasia* to President Andrew Jackson.¹⁸

It was as the voice of a fashionably romantic Hellenism that Everett became famous. This is what led people to turn naturally toward him when the Gettysburg cemetery was to be dedicated—as it had, earlier, led New England orators to imitate the Greek idea of popular debate and instruction. Perry Miller describes

Everett's impact on the most influential philosophical school of his period:

No account of Transcendentalism is ever comprehensible unless it includes a consideration of what seemed, during the 1820s, the unearthly magic of his [Everett's] eloquence. If the whole group, and especially Emerson, were committed to the belief that oratory is among the supreme manifestations of art, they were persuaded not only by such forensic giants as Webster and Clay, but more particularly by Everett, who was one of their own kind. Here at last was a New England scholar who appeared the master of all that European culture could offer, who in native terms made articulate, in a style that could compete with Burke and Pitt and Sheridan, everything that America held precious.¹⁹

Emerson, who was always ready to pay his debt to the influence of Everett, learned to tighten his own public speeches toward a knottier classicism than Everett's diffuse speeches exhibited. Emerson represented the next step in the modern use of classical rhetoric—and it was a step in the direction of the Gettysburg Address itself. Emerson uses antithesis, aphorism, the nervous rhythms of a quickening time. It is no wonder that Emerson admired Lincoln's speech at Gettysburg more than that of his old master: "His brief speech at Gettysburg will not easily be surpassed by words on any recorded occasion."²⁰ But, in forming the ideal of modern democratic speech that gave us Emerson, Everett had helped create the very conditions that brought forth Lincoln's demotic oratory. Everett's classicism was as much the forerunner of Lincoln's talk as its foil or contrast.

The classicism of Everett's opening references at Gettysburg should not be taken as mere antiquarian reverence for the past. Everett had always opposed any fetishism of the classics. In his speech on the Battle of Concord (1825), he said:

Are we to be eternally ringing the changes upon Marathon and Thermopylae; and going back to find in obscure texts of Greek and Latin the great exemplars of patriotic virtue? . . . We feel a glow of admiration at the heroism displayed at Marathon, by the ten thousand champions of invaded Greece; but we cannot forget that the tenth part of the number were slaves, unchained from the workshops and doorposts of their masters, to go and fight the battles of freedom. I do not mean that these examples are to destroy the interest with which we read the history of ancient times; they possibly increase that interest, by the singular *contrast* they exhibit. But they do warn us, if we need the warning, to seek our great practical lessons of patriotism at *home*; out of the exploits and sacrifices of which our *own* country is the theatre; out of the character of our *own* fathers. [Italics added.]²¹

But, like a good student of Germany's "higher critics," Everett held that certain large themes are only traceable in history's *process*, and a vision of long stretches of time is needed to grasp and advance those themes. Transcendentalism looked to the progressive realization of ideals implicit in ancient art. Everett felt that popular awareness of these ideals could be kept alive by a reverence for the "holy places" of freedom, democracy, and eloquence. Speaking in 1833 to commemorate the Battle of Bunker Hill, Everett urged the citizens of Boston to raise the funds for completing their monument, not trusting to time for the preservation of a site sacred to liberty. He described how "I have searched in vain for the narrow pass [Thermopylae] between the foot of the mountain and the sea. It is gone."²² He compares, at Gettysburg, his tracing of the battle's course on Pennsylvania fields to his student days at Marathon. That is what made him celebrate the "birthplace" of American democracy at revolutionary-war sites. These, he said, were America's classic places, "the battlefields, the infant settlements," that became our "matter of

history, of poetry, of eloquence."²³ He campaigned in the 1850s for the restoration of Mount Vernon as a shrine, raising \$90,000 by delivering his eulogy to Washington before many audiences.

As a Greek scholar, Everett knew that the state Funeral Oration (Epitaphios Logos, normally shortened to Epitaphios—Epitaphioi in the plural) was a genre established before Pericles spoke, one whose formulae can be traced in the six surviving examples of the genre.²⁴ As the earliest known prose performance mandated by the democratic polis, it set the tone and style for most later public rhetoric.²⁵ By the continuity of its themes and values, it established a sense of Athenian identity. Nicole Loraux, in her influential study of the rite, even claims that Athens was "invented" in this communal act:

Indeed it may well be that from the end of the fifth century right up to Cleidemus [in the second half of the fourth century] the Athenians were officially content with the "Athenian history of Athens" repeated in every Funeral Oration, in which the series of warlike deeds performed by the *polis* was interchangeable with and symbolic of the perennial nature of civic aretē [heroism]. This repetitive oral history had to serve as archive and document.²⁶

Everett had such historical ideals in mind as he completed his celebration of modern political deaths. He lived in the pre-professional era of historians like Francis Parkman, William Prescott, and George Bancroft, who meant to create a historical memory in the American public. This made Everett scrupulous in compiling his accounts. In his speeches at Lexington and Concord, for instance, he corrected popular versions of Paul Revere's ride. When he published his amplified text from Gettysburg, he appended a note to show how carefully he had studied this recent event:

Besides the sources of information mentioned in the text, I have been kindly favored with a memorandum of the operations of the three days drawn up for me by direction of Major-General Meade (anticipating the promulgation of his official report), by one of his aides, Colonel Theodore Lyman, from whom also I have received other important communications relative to the campaign. I have received very valuable documents relative to the battle from Major-General Halleck, Commander-in-Chief of the army, and have been much assisted in drawing up the sketch of the campaign, by the detailed reports, kindly transmitted to me in manuscript from the Adjutant-General's office, of the movements of every corps of the army, for each day, after the breaking up from Fredericksburg commenced. I have derived much assistance from Colonel John B. Bachelder's oral explanations of his beautiful and minute drawing (about to be engraved) of the field of the three days' struggle. With the information derived from these sources I have compared the statements of General Lee's official report of the campaign, dated 31st July, 1863, a well-written article, purporting to be an account of the three days' battle, in the *Richmond Enquirer* of the 22d of July, and the article on "The Battle of Gettysburg and the Campaign of Pennsylvania," by an officer, apparently a colonel in the British army, in *Blackwood's Magazine* for September.

It was this scrupulousness and dedication to the largest tasks that Nicolay and Hay admired in the Gettysburg Address:

Edward Everett made an address worthy alike of his fame and the extraordinary occasion. . . . It is not too much to say that for the space of two hours he held his listeners spell-bound by the rare power of his art. . . . If there was an American who was qualified by moral training, by literary culture, by political study, by official experience, by party affiliation, by long practice in historical criticism, and ripe experience in public utterance, to sit in calm judicial inquiry on the causes, theories, and possible results of the

civil war, that man was Edward Everett. . . . [His speech] embodies the calm reflection of the thinker in his study, pronounced with the grave authority of the statesman on his tribune.²⁷

The *Boston Journal* understood Everett's historical aspirations when it wrote (on November 20, 1863):

The detailed narrative of the campaign ending in the battle of Gettysburg reads like the most brilliant pages of Macaulay or Prescott. As Mr. Everett has taken great pains in collecting the data for the narrative, having access to official authorities, it is probably the best history of the campaign which this generation shall have the privilege of reading.²⁸

But Everett aspired to more than mere accuracy. Along with Bancroft and other romantic historians of his time, he meant to create a tradition that would inspire as well as inform. Like the Attic orators—and dramatists—he knew the power of symbols to create a people's political identity. By a favoring coincidence, the best estimate of the crowd at Gettysburg is fifteen thousand people—the same number that attended the theater of Dionysos at Athens. In the *Eumenides* of Aeschylus, the heroic myths were altered to explain the historical development of Athens:

It is thus likely that when Aeschylus identified the Semnai of the [Athenian] Areopagus with the Erinyes who had pursued Orestes, he was making a startling innovation. To the extent that his audience accepted the idea, it would revolutionize their understanding. . . .²⁹

It does not overstate Everett's ambition, in this crowning effort of his oratory, to say that he hoped to accomplish something like the impact of Greek drama as well as of the Greek Epitaphios. As

Aeschylus had used the gods to explain Athenian ideals to the Athenians, he would use Greek ideals to explain America to Americans. That he failed is no disgrace, given the height of his aspiration. What is amazing, and can seem almost like a joke of the gods themselves, is that where he failed Lincoln succeeded.

Lincoln brought nothing of Everett's superb background to this charged event. True, his sense of style in words was far greater than his feel for the ornaments on his Greek Revival house; but he was not aiming at Periclean effect. Yet his speech is now at least as famous as the Athenian's. That is because Lincoln was an artist, not just a scholar. Classicism of Everett's sort looks backward; but the classic *artifact* sets standards for the future—for a whole rank (*classis*) of efforts it makes possible.³⁰ Pericles' speech in Thucydides established a norm, a benchmark—but no more than Lincoln's Address created a political prose for America, to rank with the vernacular excellence of Twain. Lincoln does not, like Everett, archaize—but neither did Pericles. Pericles rejected the notion that his predecessors had done more than his own generation.³¹ It was the challenge of *the moment* that both Pericles and Lincoln addressed.

Lincoln sensed, from his own developed artistry, the demands that bring forth classic art—compression, grasp of the essential, balance, ideality, an awareness of the deepest polarities in the situation (life for the city coming from the death of its citizens). Take, first, the matter of compression. Everett addresses many different tasks in his diffuse oration—historical narrative, constitutional argumentation, excoriation of the foe, comparison with the Greeks, etc. This means that, in praising the Greeks, he fails to imitate them. His speech is far longer than any Epitaphios from Athens. Even the Greek orations embedded in literary works (and embroidered there) can be recited comfortably in under twenty minutes. The Gorgias model is actually no longer than Lincoln's Address.³² The standard recital time seems

to have been under fifteen minutes—five times the length of Lincoln's "remarks" but only one-eighth of Everett's sprawling oration.

The compactness is not merely a matter of length. There is a suppression of particulars in the idealizing art of Lincoln, as in the Greek orations. This restraint produces the aesthetic paradox that makes these works oddly moving despite their impersonal air. The Greek orator does not refer to himself except as answering the city's ordinance. Most often, he uses the plural "we" (*hēmeis*) of all the citizenry—as Lincoln does.³³ Nor are the Greek dead referred to by name (except in one late example).³⁴ The fallen are usually just "these (men)" (*hoide*)—as Lincoln speaks of "what they did here" or of "these dead."³⁵ The Epitaphios, as Loraux puts it, is "an oration that ignores individuals."³⁶ Restraint deepens passion by refusing to give it easy vent.

The *prose* form of the Greek orations was meant to be bracing after the sung lament (*thrēnos*) of the burial rite—as Lincoln's astringent speech stood in contrast to B. B. French's preceding hymn and the following "dirge."³⁷ Plato says the Epitaphios used bald (*psilos*) language, stripped of the poets' ornaments.³⁸ The prose form is itself a return to political life, a transition from family mourning to the larger community's sense of purpose. There is an air almost of rebuke in the dismissal of mourners at the end of the speech: "Your individual lamenting done, depart."³⁹ The task left by the dead must be taken up—what Lincoln calls "the great task remaining before us." Milton caught the discipline of this attitude toward death in his imitation Greek chorus:

*Nothing is here for tears, nothing to wail
Or knock the breast, no weakness, no contempt,
Dispraise or blame, nothing but well and fair,
And what may quiet us in a death so noble.*⁴⁰

The struggle to contain individual sorrow in a larger meaning is pronounced "well and fair" by each orator. Lincoln unconsciously echoes this when he says, "It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this"—*dignum et justum est*, as the old Latin Mass put it.⁴¹

No proper names are used in Lincoln's Address—not even the name of the battle, or of the cemetery he is dedicating with his speech. "This ground" is only a testing place where "the proposition" is to be vindicated by "these dead" (*hoide*):

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. . . .

The general or generalizing articles—a great civil war, a great battlefield, a portion, any nation—make this military engagement part of a larger process. There is an almost hygienic air about the *experiment* in liberty. The process can be observed on the broadest scale because its parts are so interchangeable—this portion of a field is of interest only because it is testing what any nation of the same condition may expect. The "unfinished work," the "task remaining before us," will affect liberty's prospects over the whole *earth*, as the last word puts it. The draining of particulars from the scene raises it to the ideality of a type.

Everett, despite his training as a Hellenist, is not really classical in spirit. He speaks unabashedly for the romantic age. His earlier speeches are highly colored and full of movement—even Warren's statue is felt to be on the verge of stepping off its pedestal.⁴² The dead themselves are still restless under a soil that throbs with their emotions.⁴³ Looking to the battles, Everett calls up smoke-filled scenes of "the boiling veins, the burning nerves, the almost maddened brain, which alone could have encountered

the terrors of that day."⁴⁴ Everett liked to name particular heroes, like Henry V looking to future celebration of the fight on Crispin's day. As Everett said at Lexington, echoing Shakespeare's very words:

Its sacred memories must be transmitted by your citizens, from father to son, till all its thrilling incidents are as familiar as household words, and till the names of the brave men who reaped the bloody horrors of the nineteenth of April, 1775, are as well known to us as the names of those who form the circle of our friends.⁴⁵

And then Everett ends his speech with a call of names: "Parker, Munroe, Hadley, the Harringtons, Muzzy, Brown."⁴⁶ Bedford and Exeter, Warwick and Talbot.

By contrast with any of Everett's battle orations, Lincoln's has the chaste and graven quality of an Attic frieze. An ability to balance the particular against the type marks Lincoln's thought, as it did that of the Athenian masters. Lincoln had a logical mind, furthermore, that regularly showed itself in the act of *distinguishing* alternatives. His thought leaned toward antitheses, as classical rhetoricians have noticed.⁴⁷ He regularly underlined contrast-words in the texts he prepared for delivery.

Either the *opponents* of slavery will arrest the further spread of it, and place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in course of ultimate extinction; or its *advocates* will push it forward, till it shall become alike lawful in *all* the States, *old* as well as *new*—*North* as well as *South*. [SW 1.426]

Nothing marked Greek literature more than its use, in almost every sentence, of the polarizing particles *men* and *de*. These do not crudely spell out "on the one hand" and "on the

other.” Rather, a first glance (as it were) of the mind (*men*) “serves to prepare for a [following] contrast of greater or less sharpness”—which the second particle (*de*) provides as “a balancing adversative” to the first.⁴⁸ President Truman used to ask for “a one-handed economist,” to avoid on-the-other-handedness. He would have been a frustrated leader in Athens, where, linguistically, there were no one-handed Greeks. The characteristic organization of Greek prose by polarities is evident in all the surviving Epitaphioi, not only in the use of those omnipresent particles but in the broad contrasts Athenians used to sort out their reactions. For instance:

1. The one and the many. Pericles chafes at the fact that so many dead must rely on one speaker’s skill.⁴⁹ On the other hand, the many living are blessed by the few who died for them.⁵⁰

2. Light and dark. The dead go into the dark; but the living need the splendor of the departed, as they do the sun.⁵¹

3. Mortal and immortal. The life of the soldiers was short and is ended, but their fame will live forever.⁵²

4. Athenians and others. Athenians differ from all others in their death because they live in a different way, with a characteristic regimen (*politeia*).⁵³

5. Word and deed. It is hard to fit poor words to the heroes’ great deeds. On the other hand, the fame of what they did depends on the words people will speak of them.⁵⁴

6. Teachers and taught. The intellectual aspirations of the Greeks made them think of experience as an education (*paideia*) by which the pupil (*mathētēs*) eventually becomes a teacher (*didaskalos*). So the fallen heroes in the Kerameikos advanced their nobility (*eugeneia*) by going to school to the polis and its values (*politeia*). Thus, by their death, they teach others to live, making their city a training (*paideia*) for the whole civilized world.⁵⁵

7. Age and youth. Both old and young look toward men in their prime (*akmē*), who die when life is at its peak. The parent who buries a child reverses the order of nature, but is consoled by the almost supernatural deeds of those who win life for the next generation.⁵⁶ The mystery of death in these circumstances is pondered in the sculpture of the “Ilissos stele” of c. 330 B.C.E. In its frieze, a dead man of godlike build is mourned by a cloaked and mysterious father, a dwarfed and helpless son. The approximation of the dead man to the Herakles type suggests his transcendence of the dimmer lives of the old man and young boy. He is more vivid in death than they are in life.⁵⁷

8. Male and female. Though Pericles addresses the heroes’ wives, most of the orations refer only to parents and sons. (On the “Ilissos stele” there are no women.) This accentuates not only the male world of battle, but the pre-eminence of *the* mother—the city, the nurturing land. Athenians were, in patriotic myth, “born of the land itself” (*autochthones*).⁵⁸

9. Choice and determination. The necessity of death for the life of the city is poised against an emphasis on the heroes’ free choice of death.⁵⁹

10. Past and present. The mythical exploits of the founders and fathers are poised against those of the present heroes in a dialectic that draws strength from the past.⁶⁰

11. Life and death. This is the great contrast underlying all the rest. Life-out-of-death is the mystery by which the polis lives while her finest die. Everything in the oration moves toward an exploration of this claim, an explanation of it to the survivors.⁶¹

Lincoln, of course, did not think in all these polarities, or have time to include most of them, even if he had thought in them. But Lane Cooper rightly remarked of the Gettysburg Address:

The balance in thought and phrase is easily detected by both eye and ear, and the use of antithesis is obvious, as in the contrast between then and now, birth and death, the living and the dead.⁶²

Lincoln's thought does approach several of the points mentioned above. On the third one, for instance, playing mortality off against immortality, Lincoln contrasts "those who here gave their lives" with the system of government that will live on ("shall not perish from the earth"). On the fourth point, Lincoln separates America from other nations by its birth from a proposition. On the fifth, Lincoln opposes word to deed, *logos* to *ergon*, in a way even Gorgias might admire:

*The world will little note,
nor long remember
what we say here,
but it can never forget
what they did here.*

Lincoln's self-deprecating contrast of his (and Everett's) words with the soldiers' deaths seems to neglect the second aspect of the Attic orators' contrast—the necessity, nonetheless, for words to insure undying fame. But that is implied in the notion of the world's *remembering*: reports will multiply beyond the few words said at any one time, in tribute to a deed that makes words as necessary as they are inadequate.

On the sixth point, of political life and death as an *education*, Lincoln offers his interpretation of the battle at Gettysburg as an experiment testing whether a nation dedicated to a proposition can maintain itself. On the eighth point, Lincoln maintains his dry experimental air by making no reference to women, despite his admiration for Everett's passage on the nurses present at the battle (SW 2.537). He is doing something different, so-

berer, almost hard in its dedication to the *issues* being tested. On the ninth point, of free choice, Lincoln tells us that the dead "gave their lives," they did not simply lose them, and they did so for a single purpose, "that that nation might live."

On the tenth point, Lincoln poises the present against the past, the dead and living at Gettysburg against the fathers, the new birth against the fathers' "bringing forth," without admitting any exclusion of the descendants (*epigoni*) from the nation's epic work. "The great task remaining," the "unfinished work," is what will complete the experiment and keep freedom from perishing.

The principal contrast in Lincoln's speech, as in the Attic ones, is between life and death. Plato says that the twin tasks of the Epitaphios are to extol the dead and to exhort the living—he uses a jingle on the same root word to say something like "laud the dead and lead survivors."⁶³ The Funeral Orations have two major sections—*epainesis*, or praise for the fallen, and *parainesis*, or advice for the living. The various themes can occur in different places within this large massing of two units, but they have "favored" positions traced in great detail by John Ziolkowski.⁶⁴ A sketch of the common shape for an Epitaphios is therefore possible:

***epainesis* of the dead**

- logos/ergon:*** The spoken word is fitted to heroes' deeds, perpetuating the fame of the dead in the words of the living.
- dikaion:*** The rite is a good thing despite the sadness of the occasion.
- progonoi:*** The heroes have the nobility (*eugeneia*) of great ancestors.
- autochthones:*** All the heroes share an ancestry from the Attic earth itself.
- paideia:*** The dead were trained to heroism.

- politeia:** The city's norms are heroic.
aretē: The exploits of the fathers have been matched by the valor (*aretē*) shown by the heroes in their exploit (*aristeia*).

parainesis of the living

- paramythētikon:** The living should be comforted that the dead have won honor.
protreptikon: The living should prove worthy of the fallen.

The Greek authors develop these themes in different detail, expanding, contracting, omitting one or another. But most of the elements show up in most of the speeches, however altered the order or emphasis. They reflect a coordinated vision rather than mechanical formulae. What is astonishing about Lincoln's speech is that he arrived at so similar a vision. Analogues of his themes can be traced in the classical works—in Plato's "these men fathered our freedom as well as our bodies," as in Demosthenes' "the valor of these men in death is the principle of life for all Hellas," or Hyperides' "is it not right to think that in leaving this life they have undergone a new birth, better than the first?"⁶⁵

epainesis

- progonoi** Four score and seven years ago, our fathers
autochthones brought forth on this continent a new nation,
politeia conceived in liberty
 and dedicated to the proposition
 that all men are created equal.
paideia 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
aretē who here gave their lives that that nation might
 live.
dikaion 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.
logoslergon The world will little note,
 nor long remember, what we say here,
 but it can never forget what they did here.

parainesis

- protreptikon** It is for the living, rather,
 to be dedicated 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—
paramythētikon 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.

The basic elements at work in the whole speech are life and death. Commentators from widely different backgrounds all agree on that. The poet Robert Lowell noticed a “curious, insistent use of birth images: ‘brought forth,’ ‘conceived,’ ‘created,’ and finally ‘a new birth of freedom.’”⁶⁶ The classicist Lane Cooper wrote: “Proem, body, and epilogue are naturally bound together by the successive concepts of birth, death, and rebirth.”⁶⁷ Literary critic James Hurt finds a “broad structural pattern in the Address [of] imagery of birth-death-rebirth.”⁶⁸ The survivors at Gettysburg draw life from death, as their forefathers had sown life in the earth of this continent. The survivors take “*increased* devotion,” even though the fallen men gave “the last *full* measure of devotion.” The increase is not only over what the survivors felt before; it is something that goes *beyond* the ultimate of what the fallen gave. They left a “remaining” task that only the living can complete. The dead not only saved a nation but advanced it on the course it must complete. Their dying was an education for the task ahead, one derived from those

*who here gave their lives
that that nation might live*

—and not only might live for itself, but might complete the test of government by and for and of the people for others spread around the globe. Life-*in*-death is made a life-*through*-death, so that the miraculous birth from this continent leads to a miraculous not-quite-death in the prehallowed ground where the heroes rest. The largest contrasts of existence are focused on one moment of history, with an implicit suggestion that death and life would give up their ultimate meaning if we could just decipher the inner reality of this event on a testing-field at Gettysburg. The Address does what all great art accomplishes. Like Keats’s Grecian urn, it “tease[s] us out of thought / As doth eternity.”



Gettysburg and the Culture of Death

Edward Everett was not only a celebrant of American battlefields; he was also a connoisseur of American cemeteries. He had participated in the creation of Mount Auburn, the Cambridge cemetery that became one of the principal cultural institutions of the nineteenth century.

Everett’s interest in battles and burial had a common element—the fad for ancient Greece. The “rural cemetery” movement initiated at Mount Auburn took Athens’ Kerameikos as its model, since that ancient burying ground existed outside the city proper, near the groves of the Akademy, in what was still countryside. As Justice Story, of the United States Supreme Court, put it at Mount Auburn’s dedication:

The Greeks exhausted the resources of their exquisite art in adorning the habitations of the dead. They discouraged inter-