

Lincoln Lore

The Bulletin of THE LINCOLN MUSEUM

LINCOLN LORE

No. 1 FORT WAYNE, INDIANA April 15, 1929

Lincoln Lore

Bulletin of the
LINCOLN HISTORICAL RESEARCH
FOUNDATION
Louis A. Warren, Editor
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The Lincoln National Life Insurance Co.
Publishes

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Published each week by The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company, Fort Wayne, Indiana.
No. 395 FORT WAYNE, INDIANA October 19, 1936

PRESIDENTS BEFORE AND AFTER LINCOLN

Comments by Lincoln on the 15 Presidents Who Preceded Him

1. GEORGE WASHINGTON—"Washington is the mightiest name on earth. In sixteen years' prominence the name, and in his naked deathless splendor leaves it shining on."—Address, Feb. 27, 1842.
2. JOHN ADAMS—"The two men most distinguished in the framing and support of the Declaration were Thomas Jefferson and John Adams—the one having penned it and the other sustained it the most faithfully in debate—the only two of the fifty-two who signed it who were elected Presidents of the United States."—Speech to Congress, July 7, 1862.
3. THOMAS JEFFERSON—"It is now no child's play to save the principles of Jefferson from total overthrow in this nation. . . . The principles of Jefferson are the definition and aim of free society and yet they are denied and evaded, with the small show of success."—Letter, April 4, 1852.
4. JAMES MADISON—"The first national bank was established chiefly by the name man who formed the Constitution. . . . It received the sanction, as President, of Mr. Madison in whom common consent has awarded the proud title of 'Father of the Constitution.'"—Circular, March 4, 1842.
5. JAMES MONROE—"Almost every good man since the formation of our government has uttered the name of Madison. . . . General Washington, who treated that we should yet have a confederacy of free states" with Jefferson, Jay, Monroe, down to the latest days."—Address, March 5, 1855.

Comments on Lincoln by the 15 Presidents Who Followed Him

1. ANDREW JOHNSON—"When future generations shall read the history of the second revolutionary crisis. . . . Abraham Lincoln will stand out as the greatest man of the age."—Fribourg.
2. ULYSSES S. GRANT—"A man of great ability, pure patriotism, unswerving courage, full of fervor to his enemies, bearing malice towards none. . . . His fame will grow brighter as time passes and his great work is better understood."—Memorandum, 1865.
3. RUTHERFORD B. HAYES—"Lincoln's fame is safe. He is the darling of history forevermore. His life and achievements give him titles to regard second to those of no other man in ancient or modern times."—Letter, April 15, 1885.
4. JAMES ABRAHAM GARFIELD—"He was one of the few great rulers whose wisdom increased with his power, and whose spirit grew gentler and tenderer as his triumphs were multiplied."—Address, Feb. 22, 1877.
5. CHESTER ALAN ARTHUR
6. GROVER CLEVELAND—"He was called to save a nation. . . . He too loved the country. He who made the country gave him in compensation, an unquenchable measure of admiration for the most impressive and solemn public duty."—Youth Companion, Feb. 2, 1892.
7. BENJAMIN HARRISON—"He stands like a great colossus to show the way of duty to all his country."

LINCOLN LORE

Bulletin of the Lincoln National Life Foundation - - - - - Dr. Louis A. Warren, Editor
Published each week by The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company, Fort Wayne, Indiana
Number 1000 FORT WAYNE, INDIANA June 7, 1948

DR. LOUIS A. WARREN, EDITOR OF LINCOLN LORE

(This 1000th Issue of Lincoln Lore Was Suggested and Prepared by Friends of the Editor)

The wide distribution for nearly twenty years of a weekly publication restricted to a highly specialized historical field is in itself an achievement deserving some attention, but when it is known that this vast reservoir of information is the contribution of but one editor, the task performed is even more worthy of recognition. The 1000th issue of this periodical, *Lincoln Lore*, seems to offer an appropriate occasion to honor its editor, Louis A. Warren, and fulfill a desire expressed by many recipients of the publication, that some word of appreciation might be prepared.

Dr. Warren has lived continuously in communities which have offered peculiar advantages to the Lincoln student. His first interest in the Lincoln family began in Worcester, Massachusetts, where he received his elementary education. The school he attended was situated on Lincoln Square, where Dr. Abraham Lincoln had conducted an apothecary shop as early as 1784. Levi Lincoln, Dr. Lincoln's brother and a member of Thomas Jefferson's Cabinet, also lived in Worcester. When President Lincoln visited Worcester in 1848 he was entertained by Levi Lincoln, Jr., a Governor of the State of Massachusetts. These Worcester Lincolns and Abraham Lincoln were all descendants of Samuel Lincoln of Hingham, Massachusetts. In this Lincoln atmosphere Dr. Warren spent his early years.

During the Centennial year of Lincoln's birth, 1909, Dr. Warren moved to Lexington, Kentucky, where he entered Transylvania University, the oldest educational institution west of the Allegheny Mountains. Here he identified himself with the State of Lincoln's birth.

In 1918, Dr. Warren became the editor of the "Larue County Herald" in Hodgenville, Kentucky, the town near which Abraham Lincoln was born. While serving here as the newspaper editor, he became convinced that too much dependence had been placed upon the reminiscences of elderly citizens and too little search had actually been made of authoritative records for the true facts contained therein about the Lincolns. He then began his exhaustive search of public archives for documentary source material about Abraham Lincoln, and he is still diligently seeking authentic data. It may be truthfully said that no one individual has contributed more information concerning the early years of Lincoln's life than he has brought to light. This new revelation, much of it unpublished, comes through *Lincoln Lore*.



Louis A. Warren

attempting to raise funds for the erection of a memorial to Lincoln's mother. His speaking itinerary in Northern Indiana was under the direction of Mr. Arthur F. Hall, then President of The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company at Fort Wayne, and through this contact Dr. Warren was consulted in February, 1928, about the possibility of establishing

Lincoln Lore

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These findings hope to serve as a supplement to the excellent publications now being issued by The Abraham Lincoln Association, which has its headquarters at Springfield, Illinois. The President, and the Chairman of the Executive Committee, The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company, as well as the Director of the Lincoln Historical Research Foundation, or its members and their associates of

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A Mr. King and a Miss Keagy, as well as Miss Harris, were in an adjacent Lincoln bedroom. The evening suit, possibly during the night they were admitted for a moment to the death chamber. Some writers have held that Vice-President Johnson was also present at one time, but, this fact is not generally accepted.

QUERY

In these early authority for the statement that shortly after the death of President Lincoln the Jeweled' Association of America met in convention and decided that all clocks have been

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Lincoln Lore

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THE LINCOLN MUSEUM

The mission of The Lincoln Museum
is to interpret and preserve the history and
legacy of Abraham Lincoln through research,
conservation, exhibitry, and education.

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Lincoln Lore 75th Anniversary: 1929 – 2004

In a noteworthy commitment to research and scholarship, Louis A. Warren printed the first issue of *Lincoln Lore* the year after the establishment of the Lincoln Historical Research Foundation. Pictured on the cover are several milestone issues, as the publication evolved from a weekly single page to a monthly format of four pages to the current quarterly publication of twelve to twenty pages.

Issue #1 — April 15, 1929

The choice of April 15th dictated the content: Lincoln's Wearing Apparel (on the night of the assassination); his last writing; a listing of those who visited his bedside; and the first announcement of his death. Warren also stated his desire that *Lincoln Lore* would serve as an important contribution to Lincoln scholarship and research.



Issue #393 — October 19, 1936

Presidents Before and After Lincoln is a fascinating compilation of (1) comments by Lincoln on those who came before him and (2) comments about Lincoln by those who succeeded him. Especially moving are Lincoln's comments about Washington, "Washington is the mightiest name on earth...In solemn awe pronounce the name, and in its naked deathless splendor leave it shining on."



The excerpts of praise from presidents who served after Lincoln show a consistent understanding of his Legacy. "Lincoln's fame is safe. He is the darling of history forevermore" (Hayes) "He was called to save a nation" (Cleveland) "He stands like a great lighthouse to show the way of duty to all his countrymen and to send afar a beam of courage to those who beat against the winds." (Benjamin Harrison) "A thousand years hence no story, no tragedy, no epic poem, will be filled with greater words than that which tells of his life and death." (McKinley)

Issue #1000 — June 7, 1948

The 1000th issue was suggested and prepared by the friends of the Editor. It is a special four page issue which contains biographical data on Warren and three pages of testimonies from such notable Lincoln scholars as Paul Angle, Roy Basler, David Donald, F. H. Meserve, J. Monaghan, J. G. Randall and Benjamin Thomas.



Issue #1454 — April 1959

This issue celebrates the 30th anniversary of *Lincoln Lore*. An image of Issue #1 is on the cover, and the text is devoted to the material presented during the lifetime of the publication. Editor R. Gerald McMurtry calculated that the accumulated articles would contain 1,857,000 words, as compared to 1,025,000 words in the complete works of Shakespeare and 926,877 words in the *Bible*. His breakdown of topic headings is as follows: Genealogy; Environs; Development; Illinois Politics; Presidency; Commander-in-Chief; Writings; Addresses; Assassination and Conspirators; Books and Periodicals; Photographs and Prints; Shrines and Memorials; Lincoln Bibliography; and Indexes.



Lincoln's Resonant Eclecticism in His "My Childhood Home I See Again"

by Sarah Joan Ankeney, Lincoln Lore and Lincoln Herald Contributor

[Editor's note. A reproduction of the poem can be seen on the back cover.]

Lincoln, in this poem, is mainly a man of his time, a Romantic. But his use of conventions from other periods and from several writers within the Romantic Period creates an eclectic effect. In short, in "My Childhood-Home" there is a collection of styles. Lincoln's love of the beauty of the elements of poetry seems to have put him in "sympathetic vibration" or "resonance" with many poets of different periods. Therefore, there is great musicality in all his lines even though their difference in style frequently creates a sense of the inappropriate.

Roy Basler refers to Lincoln's eclecticism as experimental,¹ and we do not know if Lincoln would have eventually assimilated the variety of styles he admired and would have given them a "new birth" in a mature style of his own in the lyric genre. His later prose writings and speeches, as I pointed out in my "Lincoln's Poetry," (Lincoln Lore #1864) still retain a collection of styles, although they have been blended into an oratorical style distinctly Lincolnian. In this follow-up to "Lincoln's Poetry," I will try to demonstrate Lincoln's eclecticism by placing certain lines of his poem, "My Childhood-Home I See Again," beside those of known classics. In doing this, I have become more acutely aware of two aspects of Lincoln's personality: his identity with his own Romantic Period and his sensitivity to the beauty and the emotion of the greatest literature to which he was exposed.

In Europe and England, the Romantic Period began in the latter part of the 18th Century and extended through the 19th.² The movement was a rebellion against what had seemed to have become the coldness and rigidity of the Neoclassical Period (c.1660 to c.1740). The Romantic Period was not a sentimental movement as we know that term today. It was, among other things, a return to nature and to everyday experiences. It stressed individual freedom and the common man. In Germany, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) was concerned with the nature of society and its restrictions and with the limits to which an individual might rebel against it.³ The movement was also, as Victor Lange said, "concerned with the complicated and forever more puzzling character of reality."⁴ Experiences and emotions of the artist and writer were stressed, those involved in the creative arts frequently identifying with nature and questioning the conventional in society. A spirit that transcended all that was obvious was felt to exist and to manifest itself in natural phenomena. Shelley's skylark, for instance, was to him a "blithe spirit" of political and artistic freedom.

In general, it can be seen that "My Childhood-Home" is of Romantic spirit. Lincoln tells of his own feelings upon his return to his Indiana home (in a way, a kind of return to nature). As the Romantic poet, William Wordsworth, returns to Tintern Abbey to reflect upon his life and the nature of things, Lincoln returns to Indiana to reflect upon his life, his childhood, his relationship



Lincoln Farm Corner Oak. Photograph by Louis A. Warren. TLM #648

to the land, and death. As some Romantic poets might have said, Lincoln reflects upon being "one with the clod."⁵ Lincoln expresses this idea of being one with nature in this manner:

*The very spot where grew my bread
That formed my bones, I see.
How strange, old field, on thee to tread,
And feel I'm part of thee!*

It is good to note the simple affection with which Lincoln writes these concluding lines. They are devoid of misplaced poetic devices. Here, too, with the "strange" sensation Lincoln has, he is questioning the nature of his existence. What is life? What is its origin, and what is the relationship between man and nature? All questions of the Romantic Period.

The plight of Lincoln's mad friend, Matthew, is somewhat like the poet, Goethe's, prose hero, Werther, of 1774. Matthew, like

Werther, is a person of promise, but his so-called madness (equate to Werther's intense emotionalism) drives him to attempted murder. Werther is driven to suicide.⁶ Werther's intense emotionalism concentrates on the woman, Charlotte. He insists upon possessing her, attempting to deprive her of her own freedom to marry the man to whom she is betrothed. Here Goethe shows how easily the freedom of one man can encroach upon the freedom of another. Werther's suicide brings grief to all who know him. But part of the blame for this tragedy of a man who seems to care too much can be placed upon the people around him. They neither understand nor accept his emotional nature and his passionate love of nature and freedom. Lincoln's Matthew has somewhat the same problem in that his behavior, whether he is capable of responsibility or not, is beyond the limits of conventional society and is unacceptable to those around him. His madness brings grief to all who know him. It seems obvious that there can be little understanding of his condition by the people of the frontier society.

Lincoln's poem manifests his own fear of insanity which in our understanding could be interpreted as his need to exert his individualism and his subsequent fear of the consequences (social disapproval). Lange says, "The key to this new, romantic, sensibility is the ever-deepening sense of conflict between emotions and intellectual individualism and a political and social life that was, if not authoritarian, at any rate attached to rigorously conservative ideals."⁷

We might wonder whether Lincoln's possible struggle between "intellectual individualism" and the conservative ideals of the society from whence he came, caused him to be cautious in moving on his anti-slavery views. Perhaps Lincoln asked Goethe's question:

how far can an individual rebel against convention without actually causing a worsening of the conditions he seeks to reform? It is an understandable question, less easy to understand the farther away we are from the situation. In fact, no matter how serious an issue is at stake, the question is unavoidable. It is possible that Lincoln asked the question and by asking it, achieved more than those who would have impetuously thrown it aside.

Lincoln wrote of his sorrow concerning Matthew's insanity:

*Air held his breath; the trees all still
Seemed sorr'wing angels round.
Their swelling tears in dew-drops fell
Upon the list'ning ground.*

Goethe's Werther wrote to his friend (time: late 18th Century), "I know not whether deluding spirits are hovering round this spot, or whether it is the divine and ardent fancy of my heart...."⁸ He wrote of "kindly spirits hovering round the springs and fountains."⁹ These expressions to Goethe and possibly to Lincoln are meant to convey the spirituality of nature. Angels and spirits in this sense, express the empathy of the natural world with which the questioning Romantic has aligned. But in Lincoln's poem, the use of angels is something of a shock, while the spirits of Werther seem only a characteristic manner of his speaking. In Lincoln we experience the eclectic, possibly a shift from Romanticism plain-spoken, as in some of Wordsworth (to be noted later) to the more fanciful Romanticism of a Werther. Perhaps the Romantic attempt, as Lange said, to describe more than "one stable and self-evident view of life"¹⁰ led to the use of such devices. Or, perhaps it is a



Site of Lincoln Home in Indiana. Photograph by Louis A. Warren (1933) TLM #637

throw-back to the Neoclassical Period. The question being asked is of the nature of the world beyond the obvious. (Lincoln's "mid-way world" where "dreamy shadows rise.") Of course I am not suggesting that Lincoln necessarily was familiar with Goethe's "The Sorrows of Young Werther," but the spirit of Werther did pervade the literature and the philosophy of the time.

The satirist, Alexander Pope (1688-1744), with whom Lincoln was familiar, wrote during the Neoclassical Period (c.1660 to c.1740). Pope borrowed the classical Roman styles of Horace, Persius, and Juvenal, but blended them into a style of his own.¹¹ Pope invokes the muse in mock-heroic fashion in "The Rape of the Lock" (Canto I, 1.3): "I sing—This Verse to Caryll, Muse!" In similar manner, although near the end of his poem, Lincoln invokes (the personification) of death. In the third from the last stanza of "Childhood-Home,"¹² he writes: "O Death! thou awe-inspiring prince." In Pope's "Rape of the Lock," spirits abound: "unnumber'd Spirits round thee fly, The light Militia of the lower sky." (Canto I, 11.41-2). Pope's spirits are satirical, and Lincoln's are in dead earnest, but the convention is the same. It is borrowed from the Classical style. Pope removes unaccented syllables of words through use of the apostrophe in order to maintain a strict beat. In "Rape of the Lock" (Canto I, 1.20), "Her Guardian Sylph prolong'd the balmy Rest," the spelling is shortened because the syllable was pronounced (pro.long.ed). In like manner, Lincoln writes "sorr'wing" for "sorrowing" and "list'ning" for "listening." This may seem inappropriate to us, but Lincoln was writing in an age during which this Neoclassical rule of prosody (the science of metrics) was still generally adhered to.

Before I mention other poets and Lincoln's similarities to them, I would like to analyze Lincoln's "Air held his breath" quatrain more closely. In spite of the fact that the "Air held his breath" quatrain seems out of place in the poem and that it seems banal to us, the image is consistent. The logical Lincoln has been at work. We see a somewhat Classical god of air, possibly some lesser known relative of Zephyr, too stricken to take a breath. Therefore the trees are still. They seem like angels (possibly the leaves can substitute for feathers) gathered around Lincoln. Tears form in the eyes of the tree-angels as dew forms on leaves during the night. (Before the Classical "god of day" has "streaked the Eastern hill.") It is so quiet, the ground seems to be listening to the fall of tears. But considering that, certain humorous connotations arise. Did it hear the first tear fall and then have to wait for the second as in the falling shoes gag? Unwanted images can creep into an image like this, and we have to contend with them. The poet has to make sure he has left no room for them. Unfortunately, Lincoln's image allows for the humorous and fails to create the emotion Lincoln wishes to communicate. So, in spite of his consistency of image, it does not work. This imagery is an example of pathetic fallacy, the giving of human feeling to objects in nature. Its innate failing is that it can be reduced to the ludicrous. We do not feel the empathy with nature that the Romantics intended. Lincoln's ear has created a short tone poem of silence and expectancy, though. This is his genius. His imagery may have failed, but its music is beautiful.

Among other Romantic poets who speak of nature crying, as does Lincoln in the quatrain under observation, is William Blake. In 1794, he writes in his short poem, "The Tyger": "When the stars



The poisonous white snakeroot plant which was responsible for the death of Nancy Hanks Lincoln. TLM #4166a

threw down their spears, And watered heaven with their tears." (1.18) Blake allows his imagery to be extremely hard to visualize. There might be more logic in Lincoln's dew falling to the ground. (More poetry in Blake and more logic in Lincoln.)

On Lincoln's use of the word "all" in his quatrain, we can place it beside words of Henry Vaughn (1622-1695). Lincoln writes, "the trees all still," and Vaughn writes in "The World" (11.1-3):

*I saw Eternity the other night,
Like a great ring of pure and endless light,
All calm as it was bright.*

Later in the poem, Vaughn uses the word in "all scattered." This use of "all" means "entirely" or "completely" but carries with it, also, a sense of awe. Today, Vaughn's usage seems too emotional. Sometimes it is relegated to juvenilia. (The kitten was all soft and fuzzy.) Lincoln's usage, while probably not inconsistent with Romantic style, actually dates back to the 17th Century.

"My Childhood-Home" can be compared to a great deal of the poetry of William Wordsworth. Lincoln's first and fourth quatrains are reminiscent of the first quatrain of Wordsworth's "Lines Written in Early Spring" (1798)... a favorite time-period of Lincoln's:

*I heard a thousand blended notes
While in a grove I sate reclined,
In that sweet mood when pleasant thoughts
Bring sad thoughts to the mind. (11.1-4)*

In his lines, Lincoln gladdens "with the view" (compare to the English tradition of the prospect), but "There's sadness in it too." Mood and tone are similar, and so also are the rhythmic and rhyme schemes with minor variations. Wordsworth regrets "What man has made of man," (1.24) while Lincoln regrets what Matthew has made of Matthew. (Lincoln is more consistent in the number of metric feet he uses per line.)

In the Preface to his "Lyrical Ballads," Wordsworth says that poetry "takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity." Compare this to Lincoln's memory "Where things decayed, and loved ones lost/ In dreamy shadows rise." His memory is freed from "all that's gross or vile."

Both poets, as Romantics, turn to nature for meaning and imagery. In his "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey," (1798), Wordsworth recalls how differently he reacted, five years ago, to the prospect: "The sounding cataract/Haunted me like a passion," he says, but now: "again I hear/These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs/ With a soft inland murmur." (11.76-77 and 2-4) Lincoln writes that his memory serves "As leaving some grand water-fall/ We ling'ring list it's [sic] roar." Wordsworth says (11.88-91): "For I have learned/ To look on nature, not as in the hour/ Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes/The still, sad music of humanity." Lincoln says, "How plaintively [Matthew's] mournful song, Upon the still night rose." In recollecting scenes from the past, both poets hear Wordsworth's "still, sad music of humanity." Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" is written as one would speak...naturally. It is written in iambic pentameter, but it seems almost to be free verse, and it seems devoid of obvious poetic devices. It is poetry in its honesty, loftiness of sentiment, beauty of language, and simplicity. Lincoln's poem, except for obvious rhyme and meter, often carries with it these qualities of Wordsworth.

So many of Lincoln's lines are plain, almost expository, that his insertion of devices from earlier periods comes as something of a jolt to us. For example, when Lincoln writes, "Ere yet the rising god of day had streaked the Eastern hill," these lines of the Elizabethan, Shakespeare, come to mind:

from Hamlet, Horatio (I,i,150-52):

*The cock that is the trumpet to the morn,
Doth with his lofty and shrill-sounding throat
Awake the god of day....*

and Horatio again (I,i,166-67):

*But look, the morn, in russet mantle clad,
Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastern hill.*

Lincoln cannot use this type of imagery simply because Shakespeare did. In Lincoln's context, it is out of place.

Thomas Gray's poems look toward the Romantic Period. His "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" (1751) is written in iambic pentameter with a simple, alternate rhyme scheme. A poem that honors the poor country-dweller (with whom Gray identifies) who has no chance for fame or glory, it contains few Classical or Neoclassical poetic devices. It does contain personification such as "Honor's voice" (1.43), "Let not Ambition mock," (1.29), and "If Memory o'er their tomb no trophies raise" (1.38). In "The breezy call of incense-breathing Morn," (1.17), we see reflected the Neoclassical use of Classical personification, Morn seeming to be a Classical goddess. This dignified use of the Neoclassical lends a tone of respect toward the simple people who are the subjects of the poem. But at least fifteen out of thirty-two quatrains are relatively free from any device other than rhyme, meter, and the beautiful flow of the English language. Edward H. Weatherly, editor of *The English Heritage*, says: "In Gray's work is to be found the mixture of romantic and neoclassical qualities so common in the poetry of the mid-eighteenth century. Gray's interest in the past, his sympathy for the common man, and the underlying note of melancholy in much of his poetry are romantic."¹³

Gray's sympathy for the common man appealed to Lincoln. Perhaps Lincoln identified with the unknown about whom Gray wrote:

*Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid
Some heart once pregnant with celestial fire;
Hands, that the rod of empire might have swayed,
or waked to ecstasy the living lyre. (11.45-48)*

And he probably remembered Gray's "th'unhonored Dead" (1.93) when he composed the Gettysburg Address. Gray's "And all the air a solemn stillness holds" (1.6) seems to have been an inspiration for Lincoln's "Air held his breath; the trees all still." Like Pope, Gray shortens words to avoid excessive unaccented syllables: "tow'r," "bow'r," "mould'ring," and so on. Why would not Lincoln, as an admiring student, do the same? In one case, Gray resorts to pathetic fallacy, but a rare one of dignity it is:

*Save from yonder ivy-mantled tow'r,
The moping owl does to the moon complain
Of such, as wand'ring near her secret bow'r,
Molest her ancient solitary reign. (11.9-12)*

Lincoln's pathetic fallacy is not as noble as Gray's, but for precedent in the use of the device, he has a fine example.

Lincoln's poem is free of seemingly artificial devices in quatrains 1,6,7,8,11,12,13,14,15,16,17,21,22,23, and 24. Fifteen out of twenty-five quatrains contain no adornment. Because of this, also, the other ten quatrains seem out of place or forced. (I have included here the third from the last quatrain beginning, "O death!" This quatrain, frequently omitted, is in the eclectic spirit of Lincoln. It falls back on a Classical device that is out of place, but it also contains irony admirably crafted in that death takes those of sound mind but leaves a suffering madman alive.) Lincoln's plain quatrains, like Wordsworth in some of his poetry and like Gray, could almost be coined "expository poetry." There is something of the quality of very great prose in them. And the plain-spoken quality of so many lines of Lincoln reminds us of his later speeches

which are eclectic in that expository prose, poetic prose, and pure poetry are intermingled with Hebraic rhymes of thought. (See "Lincoln's Poetry.")

In "My Childhood-Home," the section on Matthew anticipates the emotional build-up of Lincoln's later oratory. The effects created by oratorical parallels, repeated "and"s, and through irony ("with reason fled, While wretched life remains" for instance). The oratorical is, then, another style to include in the eclectic nature of the poem. Eclecticism was a type of philosophy found among the ancient Greeks, and it can be found in philosophy today. It was popular in the 19th Century, and can be seen in such 19th Century architecture as the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C. Lincoln's problem, in his poem, is that he does not seem to be aware that he is being eclectic. His problem is in his failure to create an artistic whole.

However, Lincoln's music, which is reminiscent of Gray's, does help him to achieve a unity of mood. In the first lines of the "Elegy," ("The curfew tolls the knell of parting day, The lowing herd wind slowly o'er the lea") we may see the birth of Lincoln's

love of "l" sounds and of his good use of subtle vowel sounds. Gray's poem tolls like a beautiful, soft bell. Lincoln's language is beautiful, too, and we could hear it more clearly if we were not distracted by some of the imagery.

In his poem, Lincoln shows his identity with Romanticism both in subject matter and in style. But he also writes in the manner of other periods and in the manner of many individual poets within the Romantic Period. He uses styles ranging from Shakespeare, through Vaughn, Pope, Gray, and Wordsworth, to the influence of the German, Goethe. Lincoln also writes in an oratorical, poetic-prose style. The effect is of a collection of styles, or eclecticism. But the beauty of each style holds his poem together somewhat. The poem is held together mainly by strict adherence to rhyme and meter. It is not a crude poem, as some have thought, and it shows a great deal of familiarity with English poetry. In most regards, it is well-crafted (ignoring minor spelling and grammatical errors). Lincoln's poem is of a developmental style, a kind of resonant eclecticism, a style that can be seen in some of his later prose compositions.

Endnotes

¹ Roy P. Basler, ed., *Abraham Lincoln: His Speeches and Writings* (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1946), 12. Basler uses the term "literary experimentation."

² Jacques Barzun, *Classical, Romantic and Modern* (New York: Doubleday, 1961), 98-99. The period covered here is what Barzun calls the first phase of Romanticism: 1780-1850. The second phase, Realism: 1850-1885; third and fourth, Symbolism and Naturalism: 1875-1905. Lincoln was moving through two phases of Romantic literature in the course of his career. (There are no set dates for the Neoclassical and Romantic Periods, and styles overlap. For instance, Keats, of the Romantic Period, used Classical devices throughout his "The Eve of St. Agnes." The question is always whether or not devices used lend to an artistic whole.)

³ Victor Lange, ed., in *Great German Short Novels and Stories: An Anthology* (New York: Modern Library, 1952), viii.

⁴ Lange, ed. *Great German Short Novels*, ix.

⁵ Tennyson, "Somewhat before the heavy clod/Weighs on me," (*Supposed Confessions of a Second-Rate Sensitive Mind*); Keats, "To thy high requiem become a sod," (*Ode to a Nightingale*);

and in Shakespeare, "This sensible warm motion to become/A kneaded clod," (*Measure for Measure*). Keats's meaning was closest to that of identifying with nature.

⁶ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, trans. by William Rose, in Lange, ed., *Great German Short Novels*, 3-99.

⁷ Lange, ed. *Great German Short Novels*, viii.

⁸ Goethe, *Sorrows of Young Werther* in Lange, ed., *Great German Short Novels*, 5.

⁹ Goethe, *Sorrows of Young Werther* in Lange, ed., *Great German Short Novels*, 6.

¹⁰ Lange, ed. *Great German Short Novels*, ix.

¹¹ M. L. Rosenthal, Gen. Ed., *Poetry in English: An Anthology* (New York: Oxford, 1987), 372-73. Rosenthal says, "Pope's art always was that of the synthesist who adapted the best of the past, criticized the worst, and made both part of his modern vision." This is what Lincoln failed to accomplish by simply putting different styles in juxtaposition.

¹² Basler, *Abraham Lincoln: His Speeches and Writings*, 193. This is the third from last stanza of "My Childhood-Home" that does not appear in the Library of Congress manuscript:

*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?—*

¹³ Edward H. Weatherly, *The English Heritage, Vol. I* (Boston: Ginn and Co., 1945), 567.

Poems used in this paper other than "My Childhood-Home" can be found, among other anthologies and complete works of individual poets, in Rosenthal, Gen. Ed., *Poetry in English: An Anthology and Weatherly, The English Heritage, Volumes I and II*. Wordsworth's Preface to "Lyrical Ballads" can be found in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature, Sixth Edition* (New York: Norton, 1996), 1341-52.

Union, Liberty, And Emancipation

Book Review

Allen C. Guelzo, *Lincoln's Emancipation: The End of Slavery in America*
Simon & Schuster, 2004

Reviewed by Herman Belz, Professor of History, University of Maryland

Allen C. Guelzo, prize-winning author of *Abraham Lincoln: Redeemer President*, has filled a scholarly void that no one knew existed. He has written a comprehensive and systematic account of the Emancipation Proclamation, the most important of the many exercises of executive authority during the Civil War on which Lincoln's historical reputation rests. Lincoln said in the second inaugural, "All knew that slavery was, somehow, the cause of the war." Two years earlier, very nearly at the mid-point of the conflict, Lincoln's proclamation of emancipation anticipated a successful outcome by tolling the knell of slavery as a political and social institution.

Slave emancipation was a military instrument for preserving the Union. The Emancipation Proclamation, however, was more than a means to an end. It comprehended within itself something intrinsically good — the freedom of human beings from unnatural and unjust tyranny. To employ a nineteenth-century idiom, Lincoln's proclamation was instinct with the libertarian purpose for which the nation was founded and the Civil War fought.

What aspect of the Emancipation Proclamation eludes the comprehension of historians today, necessitating renewed study of this momentous event? In recent decades two basic issues, long considered matters of scholarly consensus, have been rendered problematic. The first concerns the effect of Lincoln's proclamation: did it in fact emancipate and secure the freedom of any slaves in the area to which it was applied? The second and more important issue, perhaps incapable of being raised prior to the era of the modern civil rights movement, concerns the question of causal agency in bringing about slave emancipation during the Civil War.

A body of scholarship now exists, based on the social history of emancipation, which argues that the Emancipation Proclamation did not actually free the slaves, nor was it intended to free them. The motive behind military emancipation, rather, was to defeat the Confederacy and bring about the restoration of the Union with slavery legally and constitutionally intact. The revisionist social history account contends that it was not Lincoln and the Union high command that freed the slaves. The slaves emancipated themselves, seizing the opportunity for freedom that arose as invading Union armies disrupted plantation society. Far from the Great Emancipator of American folklore, Lincoln was the white man's president who reluctantly acceded to African Americans' irresistible demand to be free.

Questions of ideology aside, the weakness of the social history interpretation lies in its necessarily partial and limited view of emancipation. From the standpoint of historical method, the scope and comprehensiveness of Allen Guelzo's account is its distinguishing feature. Guelzo focuses on the varied meanings of the

Emancipation Proclamation that constitute its intelligibility as a text, as well as on the social and political context in which it was written and applied. Perhaps most impressive, the research on which this book rests is deeper and more comprehensive than any previous study of the Emancipation Proclamation. The result is a work that possesses the authenticity of a "you-are-there" narrative, showing the relationship of the motives and considerations — military, political, social, moral, and constitutional — that went into the making of the Emancipation Proclamation.

To understand the nature of the Emancipation Proclamation and the mind of its author, it is helpful to ask whether slave emancipation during the Civil War was a matter of necessity or a matter of contingency. In other words, was emancipation an essential element in Lincoln's understanding of the nature and purpose of the Union, and the war to preserve the Union? Or was emancipation something that did not have to happen, but that did happen, on account of causes unrelated to Lincoln's fundamental aims and aspirations? This is the interpretive and philosophical framework in which controversy over the Emancipation Proclamation exists in contemporary scholarship.

Skeptical of Lincoln's motives, critics incline toward the contingency interpretation of the proclamation. In their view, elements of necessity and essentiality have reference to and characterize the actions of the slaves, resulting in the self-constitution of African Americans as a people, class, or sub-national group. Guelzo, although recognizing contingencies in history, tends toward an essentialist view of the Emancipation Proclamation, considered in the light of Lincoln's understanding of the relationship between Union and liberty and the requirements of natural justice.

Admirers of Lincoln and students of the Civil War will recognize in this account the familiar features of the emancipation story: the decision to defend the Union after the attack on Fort Sumter, the Crittenden resolutions of 1861 and the border state strategy of noninterference with slavery, the reluctant if not recalcitrant conduct of Union General George B. McClellan, and the zealous advocacy of the antislavery vanguard. Guelzo weaves these elements into a coherent whole by considering the ideas and interests of the major participants in the action, including the slaves who sought practical freedom within Union army lines. Lincoln is the central figure in the action, not simply because of his superior political abilities, but in the most immediate sense because of the design of the Constitution. The nation's constitutionally elected chief executive, Lincoln was duty-bound to maintain and preserve the Union against secessionist dismemberment. He was under moral and legal obligation to uphold liberty and Union as reciprocally related, never to be separated moral goods that define the meaning of American nationality.

The central interpretive theme in this narrative is the prudential ground of the Emancipation Proclamation. Guelzo states that Lincoln pursued emancipation "from reason and prudence," in contrast to abolitionists' moral idealist demand for emancipation without regard for consequences. Lincoln proceeded against slavery no further than the Constitution allowed, seeking the widest consensus by including elements of gradualism, compensation, and consent in his preferred emancipation policy. This was not mere pragmatism. Lincoln always believed that Union and liberty, rightly understood, required each other and must be defended as inextricably related goods.

Guelzo observes that friends and associates were convinced that Lincoln's "face was set toward emancipation from the day of his nomination for the presidency" (26). In Lincoln's view emancipation "was within the expectation of the Constitution, and the law curved ineluctably toward emancipation" (25). In calling the state militia in April 1861, Lincoln said his purpose was to maintain the honor, integrity, and the existence of the Union, to preserve popular government, "and to redress wrongs already long enough endured." There can be little doubt that the privileged position of slavery under the Constitution was one of the things he had in mind.

In Guelzo's telling, the decision to issue the Emancipation Proclamation was deliberate, reasonable, constitutional, and inexorable. It bore the identifying features of Lincolnian practical reason. Lincoln had long believed that state-inaugurated acts of gradual and compensated emancipation best served the requirements of justice and constitutional propriety as means of abolishing slavery. Accordingly, he advocated this plan in 1862, while preparing the country for the practical alternative of federal military emancipation. The chief obstacle to Lincoln's preferred policy was McClellan's politically motivated reluctance to engage the enemy in battle. Guelzo relates with skill and insight the interaction of motives, purposes, and interests that converged in the decision for emancipation. By his estimate, "Lincoln understood from the first that his administration was the beginning of the end of slavery and that he would not leave office without some form of legislative emancipation policy in place"(5). To carry out this policy, however, Lincoln needed time, and in mid-1862 time was running out mainly because McClellan refused to fight. Moreover, Lincoln's belief that compensated emancipation would appeal to the border states proved mistaken. Executive action therefore appeared necessary to prevent emancipation from being "swept off the table entirely"(7).

As so often during the Civil War, Lincolnian prudence involved consultation with higher authority. For example, responding to the urging of religious advocates of emancipation in September 1862, Lincoln said he was considering a proclamation of emancipation, but would not take such a step without knowing "the will of Providence in this matter." "Whatever shall be God's will he would do"(151). Shortly thereafter the battle at Antietam disclosed the divine will and the matter was decided. Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, September 22, 1862. "I made a solemn vow before God," he later explained, "that if General Lee was driven back . . . I would crown the result by the declaration of freedom to the slaves"(151).

Guelzo, a wise historian, allows the reader to ponder the inscrutability both of divine providence and Lincolnian prudence. Whatever the precise relationship between the mind of Lincoln and the mind of God, the fruits of the interaction could be seen in the effect of the Emancipation Proclamation. This question, a more down to earth matter that is subject to historical analysis, forms a major part of Guelzo's study.

A standard criticism is that the Emancipation Proclamation freed slaves in states where the Union lacked power to enforce it, and protected slavery in states where a freedom order could have been made effective. Viewed in this way, the proclamation was a rhetorical device intended for political effect, not a sincere attempt to secure the liberty and rights of black people. In response to this argument Guelzo says "Lincoln may not have had the power available to him to free every slave in the Confederacy, but he certainly had the authority, and in law, the authority is as good as the power"(8). He further observes that no slave declared free by the proclamation was ever returned to slavery once inside Union territory.

Guelzo's account makes clear the far-reaching effects of the Emancipation Proclamation throughout the South. In order to understand the nature of Lincoln's statesmanship, however, it will be helpful to analyze the theoretical question of the relation between power and authority in Lincoln's executive proclamation.

Contrary to the assertion that in legal matters authority is as good as power, it is more accurate, as well as more consistent with Lincoln's way of thinking, to say that in political life the exercise of power is as good as the authority that sustains and justifies it. In the American Constitution, authority is the key to exercise of the executive power. This is the lesson to be drawn from Lincoln's authorship of the Emancipation Proclamation and his conduct as commander-in-chief during the Civil War.

Considered in materialist terms as brute physical force, power lacks legitimacy and permanence. Power acquires the force of moral, political, and legal obligation when it is informed by, and conformed to, standards of reason, justice, and right. Amending a favorite maxim of contemporary pseudo-realists, we may say that authority does not grow out of the barrel of a gun. Whether its sources lie in divine revelation, natural law, tradition, history, or human nature, the establishment of legitimate authority involves far more than the application of physical force. Criticism of the Emancipation Proclamation as political rhetoric rests on failure to understand this basic fact. Whatever energies it may command, power defined as brute force cannot look beyond the exigencies of the moment. By contrast genuine authority, defined with reference to principles of reason and justice, aims at the completion of morally worthy ends and objects in the future.

The virtue of prudence, which Guelzo says is "the key to Lincoln's political behavior," comprises this kind of recognition of natural right. Guelzo grasps the deep normative meaning of the Emancipation Proclamation in stating that "Lincoln would completely rewrite the title deeds of the South's four million slaves to make them, at one stroke, free"(120). To put it another way, military emancipation was in Lincoln's view a project for recon-

structing the Union more completely and perfectly on the principle of human liberty. Directed at states where, in a positivist sense, the power of the Union government was deficient, the proclamation was rendered efficacious through the reciprocal integration of ends and means that it comprehended.

The power of the Emancipation Proclamation as a means lay in the authority of the end to which it was directed, namely, preservation of the Union dedicated to liberty. Military emancipation was not only a means, however. It was also an end in the sense that it constituted and augmented the intrinsic good of human liberty. A means of suppressing the rebellion, emancipation was coeval with the end of liberty for the sake of which the Union was created.

The normative force of the Emancipation Proclamation, resulting from its complication of means and ends, was apparent in its reception among slaves, masters, and citizens throughout the South. Guelzo observes: "the presidential mandate for freedom triggered a cascade of running away in 1863 that began sweeping off the underpinnings of slavery." The "social havoc it was bound to wreak" was "proof of the 'military necessity' for an Emancipation Proclamation"(214). The Emancipation Proclamation, we may conclude, was effective precisely because it was neither confined to nor defined by positivist legal reasoning. Its authority lay in the natural law principles of reason and justice, cognizable to the common sense understanding of those to whom it was addressed whether or not they personally agreed with the principles, which the document disclosed as the prudential ground of Lincoln's decision.

Historical error and moral misunderstanding occur when the Emancipation Proclamation is viewed as a rhetorical formality that distracts from true appreciation of the nature of African American freedom, rather than as a deliberate act reflecting the political intelligence and moral clarity of its author. For political and consti-

tutional reasons, Lincoln framed the proclamation as a matter of "military necessity." Nevertheless, slave emancipation during the Civil War was not necessary in a natural or philosophical sense. It was not something that had to happen, or that was imposed on Lincoln's reason and will by forces beyond his control. In cabinet discussion, Lincoln said the Emancipation Proclamation was "my last card," and it "may win the trick." The words suggest an act of desperation, leading Guelzo to describe Lincoln's decision as "one of the biggest political gambles in American history." In the final analysis, however, the decision for emancipation was a prudential act of determinate practical reason, directed to a good end and guided by intellectual mastery of possible ways of action.

In the midst of wartime contingency, the Emancipation Proclamation declared Lincoln's resolute determination to preserve and reconstruct the Union on the principle of human liberty. Thomas Norris Chester, a Liberian black, captured the essential significance of the document in stating that it "ends the days of oppression, cruelty and outrage, founded on complexion, and introduces an era of emancipation, humanity, and virtue, founded upon the principles of unerring justice"(215). Allen Guelzo's splendid book confirms this conclusion. It is an indispensable guide to historical understanding of the real meaning of the Emancipation Proclamation as a construction of American liberty.

Allen Guelzo, author of *Abraham Lincoln: Redeemer President and Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation*, was recently named Henry R. Luce Professor of the Civil War Era and Director of Civil War Era Studies at Gettysburg College.



Two Reviews

"We Are Lincoln Men": Abraham Lincoln and His Friends
by David Herbert Donald
Simon & Schuster, 2003

Lincoln's Sanctuary: Abraham Lincoln and the Soldiers' Home
by Matthew Pinsker
Oxford University Press, 2003

Reviewed by Myron A. Marty, History Professor Emeritus, Drake University.

When John Hay and John G. Nicolay collaborated in the 1880s on their ten-volume biography of Abraham Lincoln, whom they had served as private secretaries, they discussed the tone and bias of their work. As recounted by David Donald, they agreed that theirs would be no stump speech. Rather, they would "write the history of those times like two everlasting angels—who know everything, judge everything, tell the truth about everything and don't care a twang of their harps about the one side or the other." But then,

according to Donald, "Hay added a demurrer: 'There will be one exception. We are Lincoln men all the way through.'"

Donald's focus in this book is on four "Lincoln men" in addition to Hay and Nicolay: Joshua Speed, William H. Herndon, Orville H. Browning, and William H. Seward. He writes also of several others on the edges of Lincoln's circle of friends, among them David V. Derickson, of the 150th Pennsylvania Volunteers. Derickson's Company K was charged with protecting Lincoln when he and his family spent the summer of 1862 at the Soldiers' Home in northwest Washington. With Mrs. Lincoln away for a lengthy period that summer, and with the war draining him physically and emotionally, Lincoln enjoyed relaxing with the young soldiers in the evening hours after he returned from the White House, and he developed a particular closeness with Derickson.

Lincoln's three long summers spent at the Soldiers' Home have received only passing mention in most works treating his presidency. Now, in *Lincoln's Sanctuary*, Matthew Pinsker gives those summers and Lincoln's activities there the attention they deserve. His portrayal of Lincoln as a profoundly private man who needed company, a lonesome man who disliked loneliness, a man without



Lincoln with his private secretaries, Nicolay and Hay. Photograph by Alexander Gardner November 8, 1863. TLM #0-76

close friends searching for friendship, complements Donald's book very well. Fittingly so, for in his acknowledgements Pinsker describes Professor Donald as his "first mentor in the Lincoln field, a wonderful teacher and a memorable role model." (Pinsker holds a B.A. from Harvard, Donald's longtime professorial home, and an Oxford D. Phil.)

In probing the nature of Lincoln's relationships with his closest associates, Donald sets the stage for readers of *Lincoln's Sanctuary*, in which Pinsker's study of Lincoln's life in a confined

setting provides a sensitive elucidation of the difficulties Lincoln had in maintaining friendships.

Lincoln surely did not see himself as friendless, nor would the many who called themselves his friends see him that way. Yet, Donald contends convincingly that only a handful of these friends were on intimate terms with him. Those who knew him best, Donald says, "came to realize that behind the mask of affability, behind the façade of his endless humorous anecdotes, Lincoln maintained an inviolable reserve." Even Herndon, his longtime law partner, found him



Anderson Cottage at the Soldiers' Home complex. TLM #3993

"incommunicative—silent, reticent—secretive." He called him "the most shut-mouthed man who ever lived."

Wondering how a man who had no friends could also be a man who had nothing but friends, Donald immersed himself in the extensive literature on the nature and significance of friendship. He concluded that most ideas about friendship derive from philosophical analyses traceable to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. According to Donald, Aristotle described three basic kinds of friendships: "There are . . . 'enjoyable' friendships, in which people associate simply for the pleasure they derive from each other's company; there are 'useful' friendships, in which each party has something to gain by associating with the other; and there are 'perfect' or 'complete' friendships, in which there is free sharing of ideas, hopes, wishes, ambitions, fears." Complete friendships, understandably rare, occur between people similar in virtue, with each party wishing for the other good things simply because the other is good.

Lincoln had a great many useful friends among his supporters, and some of his friends were enjoyable. But the list of men who might be seen as complete friends is short. Some who might have placed themselves as belonging on that list, among them Ulysses S. Grant and Edwin M. Stanton, left few records of their conversations with him, so forming judgments about the nature of their friendships is impossible. The six friends on whom Donald concentrates, however, left "full, revealing reports of their association" with him, and by studying those reports in the larger context of Lincoln's

life, each revealing a different side of him, Donald attempts to draw "a rounded picture of Lincoln at various stages of his development."

After a brief chapter on Lincoln's friendships in his boyhood and as a young man, or the puzzling lack of such friendships, Donald turns to Lincoln's first intimate friend, Joshua Speed. In the nature of a complete friendship, the two men had endless conversations on a wide range of subjects. Living together for four years and even sharing a bed, intimacy was natural for them.

Here Donald addresses a question raised by persons seeking to sensationalize the past: Did Lincoln and Joshua Speed have a "homoerotic" relationship? Giving the question the cautious consideration it deserves, he notes that no contemporary ever raised the question of sexual relations between Lincoln and Speed; that "in these still primitive, almost frontier, days in Illinois, it was anything but uncommon for two or more men to share a bed"; and that while in the first half of the nineteenth century intimacies between two people of the same sex were tolerated, they tended to be among persons younger than Speed and Lincoln, who were twenty-eight and twenty-three when they came together in 1837. Moreover, those who attempt to make the case that Lincoln was gay do so on implausible grounds and fail to produce the evidence they claim to have. In a note, Donald concedes wryly that he may be prejudiced against them because one of them called him "a dried old heterosexual prune at Harvard."

When Speed returned to Kentucky and married a woman Lincoln admired, and when Lincoln himself married, they drifted apart.

During Lincoln's presidency, differences over plans for emancipation created tensions between the two men, but they remained friends. When Speed visited Lincoln at the White House in early 1865, their final conversation included words one would speak only to a complete friend: "Speed, die when I may I want it said of me by those who know me best . . . that I always plucked a thistle and planted a flower where I thought a flower would grow."

As the author of *Lincoln's Herndon*, published in 1948, Donald knows Lincoln's law partner very well and treats his relationship with Lincoln sensitively. After Lincoln's death, Herndon gathered recollections from those who knew him and recorded many of his own, but rarely did he claim that Lincoln had shared his intimate thoughts. Indeed, he asserted that "Mr. Lincoln never had a confidant, and therefore never unbosomed himself to others." Still, Herndon was as close to the center of Lincoln's circle of friends as one could get.

In the 1840s Lincoln served with Orville Browning in the Illinois legislature, and Browning was in Washington as a senator during Lincoln's presidency. They visited frequently, sometimes in the company of their wives, but Lincoln's failure to give Browning the appointments he yearned for, including a seat on the Supreme Court, drove a wedge between them. Browning's resistance to Lincoln's emancipation policies pushed the wedge in farther. Although they too drifted apart, their friendship remained, and Browning recalled it as close, warm, and sincere, "never interrupted for a moment."

Relations with William Seward started poorly when Lincoln gained the 1860 Republican nomination for the presidency that Seward presumed would be his. However, Seward accepted appointment as secretary of state in Lincoln's administration, and as Lincoln treated him respectfully and massaged his ego at critical points, a cordial, mutually rewarding friendship developed, but it could hardly be called intimate.

Donald's treatment of Lincoln's friendship with his two young secretaries is the most delightful portion of the book. John Nicolay and John Hay were too young to be as deferential to Lincoln as they might have been, so they had fun with him, referring to him as the Tycoon. He no doubt appreciated their uncommon loyalty as "Lincoln men all the way through," but age differences made intimate friendships improbable.

Matthew Pinsker's *Lincoln's Sanctuary* had unusual origins. Richard Moe, president of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, invited Pinsker to Washington to discuss plans for renovating and preserving the Soldiers' Home. When completed, a guidebook for tourists would be needed. Perhaps Pinsker could write it. Before long he was immersed in the project, and careful and extensive research produced material that made this book possible. As Donald had done when he published his first book on Lincoln several decades before his young counterpart was born, Pinsker drew upon the wisdom of what he calls "an all-star cast of Lincoln and Civil War-era scholars."

While basing much of his work on well-known Lincoln resources in the Library of Congress, the National Archives, and Lincoln col-

lections in Springfield, Illinois, Pinsker also discovered new ones, particularly in the form of letters written by young Pennsylvania soldiers assigned to guard Lincoln and the Soldiers' Home. He uses his findings imaginatively within a well-organized chronological framework, with separate parts devoted to each of the four-month seasons that Lincoln and his family lived in their sanctuary away from the White House. Pinsker contends persuasively that considering what Lincoln did during the one-fourth of his presidency when he lived at the Soldiers Home is essential to understanding him.

Much was the same each time the Lincoln family lived at the Soldiers' Home, although Mrs. Lincoln's life became increasingly troubled and the alienation between her and Mr. Lincoln intensified. The differences between Robert Todd Lincoln and his preoccupied father remained unresolved. Counterbalancing these distressing aspects of Lincoln's life were his enjoyable experiences, and his son Tad's, too, with the young men stationed at the Soldiers' Home to protect them.

In the first season at the Soldiers' Home (1862), writes Pinsker, Lincoln wrestled with decisions that escalated the war's level of violence and its larger meaning. He notes that, veering back and forth between difficult choices over such matters as the Emancipation Proclamation and the firing of General George McClellan, Lincoln stumbled and lost his poise. But eventually, perhaps due in part to the sustenance he discovered in his sanctuary and the rhythm and interactions of his daily commute between there and the White House, he regained his balance and provided the leadership the nation needed.

In the summer of 1863 the war reached a favorable turning point, with Lincoln intensely involved in studying its progress and making key decisions to advance the Union's cause. By then he had issued the Emancipation Proclamation, and he could take satisfaction in Union victories at Gettysburg and Vicksburg.

In 1864 war issues continued to demand his attention, pushing him to the point of exhaustion. Even so, he could not ignore the struggle he was in for reelection that fall. Consequently, the Soldiers' Home proved to be an even more essential sanctuary than in previous summers. Not surprisingly, threats to Lincoln's life increased, and partly because he did not take them seriously, those around him had to.

Both David Donald, the veteran Lincoln scholar, and Matthew Pinsker, the relative newcomer to Lincoln studies, allow readers to observe how good historians' minds work. We see their insatiable curiosity, their unwillingness to take evidence at face value or to advance unwarranted conclusions, their acknowledgement that some questions cannot be answered, and their reliance on assistance from colleagues who share their interests.

A wise man who worked with young men and women throughout his seventy-year career frequently reminded them that "young is a circumstance, but youth is a quality." Readers have reason to appreciate the youthful spirit displayed by the authors of these two books, one well into his eighties, the other not yet forty. They show convincingly that those who believe there is nothing fresh to say about Abraham Lincoln are wrong.

Devout Believer or Skeptic Politician?

An Overview of Historians' Analyses of Abraham Lincoln's Religion: 1959–2001

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I

The role of religion in the life of Abraham Lincoln has been a much-discussed topic. It has been said that he was neither an "orthodox Christian" nor a "technical Christian"; but he was called a Calvinist, a latter-day Puritan, a "Christian without a Creed" and a "biblical Christian". His law partner William Herndon intimated that he could also be called an atheist.¹ From his speeches it is clear religion played an enormous role in his intellectual life. His 1864 Second Inaugural Address reads more like a sermon than a speech to Congress. The Emancipation Proclamation, the Gettysburg Address, his views on slavery, and even his decision to designate Thanksgiving a national holiday have all provided generations of historians with a rich area by which to examine not only Lincoln's spiritual beliefs, but also the larger issue of what role religion plays, and should play, in American politics.

Yet the issue is a complicated one. Lincoln's writings themselves offer numerous interpretations concerning the role of religion in his life. But because of the horrific nature of his death, Lincoln's life has become shrouded with a layer of myth and symbolism that makes any objective analysis of his spirituality enormously difficult. Immediately after his assassination, an acrimonious debate arose as to which religious group would claim him as one of their very own. "Many members of the Christian community," wrote William J. Wolf, a leading author on the topic of Lincoln's religion, "have been shameless in claiming Lincoln as a secret member of their denomination or about to become such."²

Simultaneously, Lincoln became a martyr, a mythical figure unprecedented in American history. "Jesus Christ died for the world," preached the Hartford Baptist C.B. Crane on Easter Sunday, 1865, two days after Lincoln's death, "Abraham Lincoln died for his country."³ Lincoln, more than any other figure in American history, has come to be seen as a savior figure, capable of healing a wide variety of wounds. Nearly one hundred years after his death William Sperry, former Dean of the Harvard Divinity School, proclaimed that Lincoln "is one of the few men in history, our own history and all history, whose religion was great enough to bridge the gulf between the sects, and to encompass us all."⁴ Such inflated rhetoric makes any objective analysis of Lincoln's religion an especially daunting task.

After Lincoln's death, there was an immediate rush to publish books showing him to be an atheist, but these were met with public outrage; clearly, people wanted a holy version of Lincoln. Indeed, another problem with analyzing Lincoln's use of religion relates to the role of religion in American life. Public opinion polls proclaim time and time again that Americans believe the Constitution makes us a Christian nation. Over 90% of Americans profess a belief in God, the highest in the Western world. When Vice-Presidential candidate Dan Quayle was asked during a

debate in 1988 as to what he would do first if the United States were attacked by the Soviet Union, he said that he first would pray. While the Republican Party claims to reflect the religious beliefs of America's "moral majority," Democratic Senator Joseph Lieberman mentioned the term "God" thirteen times in his acceptance speech during the Democratic convention before our last presidential election, a contest between two candidates with extremely powerful religious views. Perhaps Lincoln remains such an integral part of the American political imagination because of his use of religion.

Americans have been particularly inclined to place religion at the forefront of Lincoln's life, noting, among other things, that he was shot on Good Friday and that his first name connotes powerful biblical imagery. But how religious was he? While his father was a member of Baptist churches in Kentucky and Indiana, and though he did as president regularly attend the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church in Washington, he himself never joined a church. On a personal level, the record is equally ambiguous. Observers were struck that Lincoln did not, for example, say grace before meals.

An analysis of Lincoln's use of religion raises the following questions: Did Lincoln attempt to move the American people in a religious direction, to shape the country's beliefs, or did he merely reflect their own strongly held religious concerns? Did he utilize religion as a political tool, or was it for a higher purpose? Was he trying to connect people to their God, or to their government? How connected were Lincoln's ideas of equality and his religious beliefs?

A broad survey of the literature of the past half-century concerning Lincoln and religion reveals wide disagreement concerning the exact nature of the spiritual life of our sixteenth president. Some saw a deeply religious figure whose beliefs shaped not only his public rhetoric but also his private decisions; yet conclusions as to both the source and the timing of these beliefs in his life vary widely. If literary, from where exactly did Lincoln's beliefs originate? From English literature, the Bible, or the Enlightenment? While some saw a personal religion in Lincoln, others perceived only a political religion. Others interpreted Lincoln as a skeptic; yet there is disagreement as to the degree of strength, if any, Lincoln derived from his skepticism. Current events, be it school desegregation, Vietnam, or recent presidential elections, are frequently invoked, but with strikingly divergent conclusions: some long for the return to a religious oriented politics, while others fear it. The literature demonstrates little agreement as to the exact nature of Lincoln's religious orientation.

II

The best place to begin answering these questions is with William

J. Wolf, upon whose work most of the recent scholarship on Lincoln and religion has built. A professor of theology at the Episcopal Theology School, in 1959 Wolf wrote *Lincoln's Religion*, which chronicled the growth of Lincoln's views on religion throughout his lifetime. One of the first major works devoted solely to the topic of Lincoln's religious beliefs, it is the most often cited text for subsequent studies addressing the issue of Lincoln's spirituality. Only six years earlier, in 1953, were the complete written works of Lincoln published, the nine-volume *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, edited by Roy Basler.

Wolf claimed that his study was thus the first "to let Lincoln illuminate his own religion in his own words,"⁵ though he was not completely successful in his attempt, as he oftentimes refers to impressions of Lincoln from such sources as his cabinet members and family members. But Wolf's analysis was a departure from previous studies in that he was the first to attempt to focus exclusively on Lincoln's rhetoric. It is an angle he was conscious of throughout the book. "The trouble with so many studies of Lincoln's religion," he wrote midway through the text, "is that they soon bog down in the clash of other people's testimony about his beliefs."⁶

A central theme for Wolf was that Lincoln's view of religion changed dramatically over the course of his lifetime. "His religion was not static," Wolf argued, "but dynamic in its development."⁷ In tracing Lincoln's spiritual development, Wolf compared Lincoln with other leading political figures of the day, as well as with other family members. Throughout, Wolf emphasized Lincoln's ability to change. "Part of the tragedy of Mary Todd," he wrote, "is that she did not have the capacity for growth that (Lincoln) had."⁸

To Wolf, the source of Lincoln's religion was internal, as he emphasized that Lincoln was not widely read in religion. Rev. James Smith's *The Christian's Defense*, he noted, "is one of the very few technical books on theology read by Lincoln."⁹ Wolf acknowledged that there is ample reason, superficially at least, for people to question the depth of religious belief in Lincoln. For example, Wolf's research concluded that the words Jesus and Savior do not appear in his writings – but he concluded that a religious framework guided Lincoln's outlook, writing that "Lincoln saw American history in the freshness of prophetic insight."¹⁰

This vision becomes clearest to Wolf when examining not only the language of Lincoln's seminal speeches, but his numerous political decisions as well. "Lincoln reached his decision about the timing of the Emancipation Proclamation in an immediate awareness of the presence of God," Wolf claimed. "For Lincoln ... God was ultimate yet personal reality, and He made Himself accessible to one who sought Him out."¹¹ To Wolf, Lincoln's relationship with God was a highly personal one. "Lincoln was a 'biblical prophet' who saw himself as an 'instrument of God,'" he concluded, "and his country as God's 'almost chosen people' called to world responsibility."¹² Part of Wolf's tone is explained by current events at the time he was researching his text. Wolf connected Lincoln's efforts to free the slaves with contemporary issues such as school integration in the South. For Wolf, politics and religion, when connected, can be used to achieve noble purposes.

But Jean Elshtain, a professor of social and political ethics at

the University of Chicago, argued in 1999 that Lincoln's writings reflected more a legal and philosophic sensibility than a religious one. Lincoln drew "on a naturalist morality, not entirely unlike natural law, rather than invoking doctrines of revealed religion," she wrote. "Slavery, he believed, is a consequence of our most base natural drives and is incompatible with a 'love of justice' that is also natural."¹³ Whereas Wolf saw a religious grounding in Lincoln's morality, Elshtain detected a philosophical one, emanating from Lincoln's extensive reading on the Enlightenment.

The issue of the interplay between morality, religion, and politics was the subject of Reinhold Niebuhr's 1959 article "The Religion of Abraham Lincoln." Niebuhr, then professor emeritus at Union Theological Seminary, concluded that "Lincoln's religious convictions were superior in depth and purity to those held by the religious as well as by the political leaders of his day."¹⁴ Niebuhr emphasized the mysterious nature of Lincoln's spirituality, pointing out that he joined none of the religious sects of the frontier. Yet unlike Wolf, Niebuhr was not convinced as to the certainty of Lincoln's views on religion. For example, Niebuhr interpreted Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address as demonstrating both religiosity and skepticism.

Niebuhr's article was concerned with Lincoln as a political figure. "The chief evidence of the purity and profundity of Lincoln's sense of providence," he wrote, "is the fact that he was able to resist the natural temptation to do what all political leaders, indeed all men, have done through the ages: identify providence with the cause to which he was committed."¹⁵ Niebuhr had high praise for Lincoln's handling of crucial decisions throughout his presidency, specifically the Emancipation Proclamation. In Niebuhr's eyes, "Lincoln was primarily not a moral prophet but a responsible statesman."¹⁶

Niebuhr especially emphasized Lincoln's ability to blend moral commitments with religious reservations; in Niebuhr's judgment, "to embrace this paradox was an important achievement."¹⁷ Niebuhr was attracted to how Lincoln dealt with the issue of skepticism and religious doubt, contrasting him with others of the time who believed in the certainty of their convictions. "The moral ambiguities in the idealism of this man," he wrote, "proved themselves religiously superior to the pure moral idealism of the abolitionists."¹⁸

Like Wolf, Niebuhr also connected Lincoln to the current battle raging over school desegregation in the South, but unlike him, offered a strong opinion about the causes of the South's predicament: Reconstruction. The region's current troubles, he believed, stemmed from a vengefulness that Lincoln would have avoided. Niebuhr closed his essay with a lengthy analysis of current integration efforts, clearly ascribing Southern resistance as a reaction to the "vindictiveness" displayed by the North during Reconstruction. Contrasting Lincoln's patience with the "self-righteousness" of those who came after him, Niebuhr's interpretation of the post-war period as one characterized by a "vindictive crushing of a vanquished foe" illustrated the view of Reconstruction prevalent in Niebuhr's time, one thankfully fully discredited by later historical scholarship.

Niebuhr most admired Lincoln's unselfishness and that Lincoln had a religious sense of the meaning of the drama of history.

Lincoln was "a rare and unique human being who could be responsible in the discharge of historic tasks," wrote Niebuhr, "without equating his interpretation of the task with divine wisdom."¹⁹ To Niebuhr, Lincoln's religiosity is important primarily because of the moral vision it gave him to succeed in the political arena, concluding that Lincoln was much more successful than were "religious idealists" like Oliver Cromwell and Woodrow Wilson.

As Niebuhr's analysis makes quite clear, many saw Lincoln as a figure who would help Americans deal with contemporary issues. Lincoln as a healer of the nation's wounds is a key theme found in much of literature. In Elton Trueblood's 1973 *Abraham Lincoln – Theologian of American Anguish*, the author clearly longs for a Lincolnesque figure to help heal the divisiveness the country felt over the Vietnam War and the generational divide of the past decade. Such is also, incidentally, the sentiment expressed in the use of Lincoln in Oliver Stone's film *Nixon*, where the screenwriter has an extended close up of the majestic statue of Lincoln at the Lincoln Memorial before showing Nixon's famous spontaneous late-night visit to the anti-war protesters camped in front of the memorial.

While Wolf and Niebuhr were not principally concerned with the interplay itself between the political and religious arenas, Glen Thurow's 1976 text *Abraham Lincoln and American Political Religion* placed religion directly within the realm of politics. Even more than Wolf, Thurow's study focused exclusively on the speeches Lincoln gave; he displayed no intention of investigating Lincoln the individual. His goal was to understand Lincoln in order to shed light upon the larger issue of religion's place within American politics. "Lincoln's religion, as we know it, is part of his political rhetoric and cannot be divorced from it," he wrote. "In this sense, at least, Lincoln's religion is political religion."²⁰

While Elton Trueblood boldly claimed that "to question whether Lincoln believed in God is a clear waste of time and effort,"²¹ Thurow saw Lincoln as somewhat of a skeptic. And whereas Wolf and Niebuhr essentially claimed a religious grounding for Lincoln's rhetoric, Thurow painted Lincoln as first and foremost a politician, arguing that "Lincoln's religion is the culmination of a reasoned reflection about American politics."²² One explanation of Lincoln's extensive use of religious imagery is that Lincoln had the ability to tailor his speeches to the audience he was addressing, and that since Americans were a religious people, Lincoln made special pains to please them. Another explanation, emphasized by Wolf, is that Lincoln experienced growth and change during his lifetime. But to Thurow, "much of the confusion surrounding Lincoln's religion stems from the fact that commentators have tried to see whether he belonged to the religion of the churches, neglecting the possibility that his speeches were political, not religious; or religious because they were political." As a consequence, "Lincoln leads us, not to religion, but to political religion,"²³ which to Thurow becomes something capable of reforming the nation during especially disruptive times.

In this respect Thurow shared much with Garry Wills. A prolific author, commentator, and Northwestern history professor, Wills addressed the issue of religion in politics in his essay "Lincoln's Black Theology," from his 1990 book *Under God: Religion and American Politics*. In that text Wills contrasted the crucial role

religion plays in contemporary politics with the small one it had in the lives of the mostly secular journalists who cover campaigns. Wills's focus was on the 1988 campaign, not only on George Bush and Michael Dukakis but also Gary Hart, Pat Robertson, and Jesse Jackson. Echoing de Tocqueville, Wills recognized the paradox that although Americans place tremendous importance on religion, the United States is a nation with the separation of church and state. Implicit here is the assumption that the intelligentsia has failed to understand how the two can coexist with one another.

Echoing Niebuhr's admiration of Lincoln's conciliatory rhetoric towards the South, Wills was particularly interested in the Gettysburg Address, especially Lincoln's indictment of the entire nation for the original sin of slavery. "There is nothing more astonishing in the history of war," Wills wrote, "than this attempt to wage it without being partisan, to forgive while killing, and to ask for forgiveness from those one kills."²⁴ To Wills, Lincoln's use of the Christian concept of forgiveness distinguished him from all other American political figures. Others, too, were struck by the religious implications of Lincoln's language. "More remarkable in the words of a victorious party is the refusal to recruit God as a partisan," wrote Jean Elshain. "The war and its outcome do not vindicate a grand narrative of historical inevitability that brings all parties under divine judgment."²⁵

Yet Wills's analysis differed from others discussed here in two important respects. First, Wills believed (argued more forcefully in other areas of the text) that religious beliefs are potentially damaging to republican government. He viewed religion as an emotional current that has the potential to disrupt the course of the nation. Lincoln's strength, to Wills, was that he walked the delicate tight-rope between church and state, using his faith for a noble purpose, namely to further the cause of the war.

Second, in his essay there was an interaction with African-American beliefs that was sorely missing from other studies. "It was more fitting, probably, than Lincoln realized that his religious views should so closely approximate those of the slaves that were at the center of the moral struggle," he wrote. "The distinctive features of African-American theology...are all repeated in Lincoln's thought."²⁶ Wills saw a further connection with African-American life:

Lincoln's dreams and meditations on death have led some to find in him a "Messiah complex." One could as well say that the slaves expressing their theology in the spirituals had a Messiah complex. They were at one with their suffering people. They did not imagine pain as contained within themselves, but shared it with the suffering God in everyone around them. That is Lincoln's state of mind as well.²⁷

Wills's efforts to incorporate a discussion of African American life were not only highly effective, but clearly illustrate an area of scholarship that needs to be addressed in much further detail.

Another area that has not been much written of is Lincoln's relationship with intellectual history. Allen Guelzo, a religious and intellectual historian, examined the role of religion in Lincoln's life in a different manner in his 1999 intellectual biography, *Abraham Lincoln: Redeemer President*. The 1999-2000 winner of

the Lincoln Prize, Guelzo's study differed from previous biographies in that his primary concern was with the ideas of Lincoln. To Guelzo, evangelical Protestant Christianity was at the very heart of Lincoln's decision to not only wage war on the South, but to continue in the conflict despite lack of military success. And while Lincoln rejected the Calvinism of his youth, according to Guelzo, Calvinist ideas remained with him throughout his life.

While others, most notably David Hein, have argued that Lincoln's religious beliefs were firmly rooted in his childhood,²⁸ Guelzo emphasized that only in the mid 1850s did Lincoln begin to frame his opposition to slavery in religious terms. Most important, Guelzo emphasized the role of providence in the Civil War. Here Lincoln began to see divine powers at work in the progression of the war, a shift from his earlier beliefs in providence. To Guelzo, Lincoln gravitated towards Calvinism during the war, while developing a strong belief in providentialism. In the process, Lincoln "had become Whitman's Redeemer President, redeeming the political community of the republic from the sin of slavery and the corruption in his own blood and pronouncing forgiveness to all offenders."²⁹

Yet this surrender to providentialism also exerted a price, according to Guelzo. "To do Liberalism's greatest deed – the emancipation of the slaves - Lincoln had to step outside liberalism," he argued, "and surrender himself to the direction of an overriding divine providence whose conclusions he had by no means prejudged."³⁰ In doing so, Guelzo emphasized, Lincoln assumes a world where no free will exists, where it is irrational for leaders to make moral judgments about society. This would have very damaging results for Reconstruction, according to Guelzo. "As a result, for twelve years after Appomattox the government dithered away its opportunity to remake the South in the national image and, in the end, gave up entirely," he wrote. "Rarely, if ever, in a secular liberal republic, has so much public good and ill come from one kind of religious decision."³¹ Here Guelzo offered a portrait of the post-war era diametrically opposed to Niebuhr's, as mentioned earlier.

Yet Guelzo shared Niebuhr's view that Lincoln was much more of a religious skeptic than Wolf and others have concluded, attributing the source of this skepticism, much as Elshtain did, to his extensive readings on the Enlightenment. Guelzo stressed, among other things, that Lincoln never publicly professed his Christianity. "Lincoln was a typical Victorian doubter, born in the Enlightenment, shaped by classical liberalism, and nurtured in angst when the Enlightenment's confidence in its optimistic solutions proved illusory," he wrote. "He could not come the whole way to belief. He did not know if there was a God who had made him, deliberately, with conscious interest and good will, like a father."³²

To Guelzo, the key to understanding Lincoln is to fully grasp the dilemma that Lincoln's religion did not give him comfort. "None of the preachers and devout lay folk who wanted so badly to Christianize Lincoln in death ever penetrated to the real heart of Lincoln's personal anguish," he proclaimed, "the deep sense of helplessness before a distant and implacable judge who revealed himself only through crisis and death, whom Lincoln would have wanted to love if only the judge had given him the grace to do the loving."³³

Guelzo's emphasis on Calvinism, ignored by earlier scholars, has paved the way for new scholarship. Nicholas Parrillo argued in a 2000 article for the journal *Civil War History* that many "have noted that Lincoln's references to God and religion became more profound in his later life, but there has never been an attempt to chart comprehensively how the emphases, nuances, and shadings of his religious rhetoric developed over the years."³⁴ To Parrillo, Lincoln's election to the presidency signaled a turning point in his thinking, turning him to Calvinism. "In the prewar years, it was not from religion but from secular republicans that Lincoln's rhetoric and actions drew their energy," he wrote. "But once Lincoln became president...the notion of God that appeared in his language gravitated ever closer to that of Calvinism: an activist, independent, and judgmental God whose designs informed every single earthly event but whose purpose often seemed inscrutable to human eyes."³⁵

To Parrillo, much like Thurow, Lincoln's views on slavery and emancipation were primarily responsible for his changing religious views. Whereas Wolf argued that Lincoln's religious beliefs were the root from which sprung both his hatred and moral condemnation of slavery and his love for democracy, Parrillo argued "that Lincoln's democratic and antislavery beliefs were fully formed in a secular fashion long before his religious ideas came into their own."³⁶ Parrillo also believed that Lincoln derived tremendous strength from his religious doubts and uncertainties. "Lincoln came to believe that, while as a mortal he could never know God's mind with certainty, he could still search into God's purposes when those purposes seemed to be manifest," he wrote, "and he could allow his own perceptions of God's will to inform his actions, especially when this helped him to face circumstances or make difficult decisions."³⁷

According to Parrillo, 1850s America was an optimistic time, as Americans more and more began to see their nation as a new Israel, an era dominated by millennialism and perfectionism; as a result, God was not much of a force in Lincoln's pre-war writings. Echoing Wills, Parrillo wrote that Lincoln hoped the rule of law would become "the political religion of the nation."³⁸ "With secular political traditions taking on the seriousness of religion," Parrillo argued, "Lincoln's actual references to God in his political speeches merely provided a corollary to his political ideals."³⁹

Only in the early 1860s did the idea of sin come up in Lincoln's writings, specifically that the nation was being punished for its sins. Yet the war was still viewed as a way to have that sin removed; we still see an optimistic Lincoln. And only during the middle of the war, Parrillo argued, did Lincoln look to God to tell him what to do. For the first time we see Lincoln following the design of God, a leader not acting on his own. To Lincoln, emancipation became viewed as a preordained act of God. "As the bloodshed mounted, Lincoln pleaded less and less for God to end the war," wrote Parrillo. "He began asking God only to preserve the Union so that it could continue to fight and to experience purposeful suffering for as long as God thought necessary."⁴⁰

Whereas Niebuhr praised Lincoln's generosity of spirit in dealing with the defeated South, Parrillo saw Lincoln's actions in a more

subtle fashion. "By ascribing the offence of slavery to providence rather than to individuals, Lincoln's words imparted a strong sense of the universality of sin," he wrote. "Many observers have called Lincoln a charitable Christian because he refused to single out the South for blame. But we must recognize that Lincoln's charity made sense only in the context that slavery was America's original sin."⁴¹

Parrillo's article thus begs an obvious question: is there anything left to be said on the topic of Lincoln and religion? While there has been much repetition in recent years, some new approaches have indeed emerged. In a recent article, published in the fall of 2001, James Stevenson found the source of Lincoln's religion in none other than the works of William Shakespeare. To Stevenson Lincoln "was a man, like Hamlet, trapped in a tragedy not of his own making."⁴² Pointing out that Lincoln read Shakespeare widely and often attended his plays, Stevenson argued that "following his boyhood immersion in a predestinationist Baptist tradition, Shakespeare's providential view of history must have struck Lincoln as common sense."⁴³

Stevenson, echoing other historians, emphasized that Lincoln was not familiar with theological works, revealing that some have suggested that he had only read six in his entire life. And as has been mentioned earlier, Lincoln did not join an organized religion during his early years. Stevenson viewed this as a clear sign of Lincoln's lack of interest in religious matters. "From the 1830s to early 1865, Lincoln made clear that Shakespeare, and not John Calvin, best expressed his understanding of man's subordination to a providential design," he wrote. "In effect, Lincoln adopted the outlook of the Renaissance neo-Stoics who had reconciled their view of Christianity with their philosophy of fate to arrive at the idea of Providence which accepted both fate and free will."⁴⁴

Focusing on Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address, Stevenson argued that "Shakespeare's influence is unmistakable, for Lincoln not only crafted his speech with the cadence and rhythm of late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century English poetry, but, like Shakespeare, he struck a rich poetic meaning with his tone."⁴⁵ He convincingly showed how Lincoln employed both the language and themes found in Richard III, Hamlet, King Lear, and Macbeth, especially the conflict between determinism and free will, the question of the deity's purpose, the mixture of natural and supernatural activity found in both writings, and the theme of national prosperity ruined by crime and civil war.

Most convincingly, Stevenson reconstructed the last part of Lincoln's address as free verse, demonstrating a clear poetic intention on Lincoln's part. "From religious outlook to poetic style," Stevenson concluded, "the Second Inaugural Address reveals a Shakespearean rather than a Calvinist doctrine of predestination...a theology which perceived the entire nation as a nation of quasi free-will sinners whose crime was so foul that it upset providential design."⁴⁶ Stevenson's study is instructive for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is that it demonstrated that new and unorthodox areas of analysis still exist for future examinations of the topic of Lincoln and religion.

III

While his religious principles clearly were influential in both his speeches as well as his actions as president, both the source of those beliefs as well as Lincoln's purpose for using them are not fully clear. Lincoln's political life lends itself easily to a myriad of interpretations, from both those that believe the mixture of religion and politics can be dangerous, such as Garry Wills, as well as from those who believe that religion has an important place in political life, such as William J. Wolf and Reinhold Niebuhr.

Furthermore, the question of Lincoln either leading or reflecting the country's religious beliefs is contingent upon whether one believes that Lincoln's religion was personal, as Elton Trueblood argued, or political, as Glenn Thurow surmised, as well as at what stage of his life, if ever at all, his religious impulses manifested themselves. Was it during his early political career in the 1850s, at the beginning of the Civil war, or only once the military tide had turned in favor of the North, as Parrillo has argued? And while all these historians admire Lincoln's actions, and almost all attribute some religious connection to his presidency (while disagreeing as to its exact source), whether his strength derived from either belief or from skepticism is a source of deep contention.

Nevertheless, understanding how historians have treated Lincoln's religion is an especially relevant exercise, as it may help illuminate not only past developments in American history, but future ones as well. From John Winthrop's declaration of America as a "City on a Hill" to Woodrow Wilson's call to make the world "Safe for Democracy," to Reagan's 1983 condemnation of the former Soviet Union as "An Evil Empire" and to Bush's declaration of the existence of "An Axis of Evil," messianic rhetoric has been a hallmark of the American experience. An understanding of the role religion played in the life of Lincoln, America's most revered president, helps shed light upon contemporary political rhetoric and ideology as well.

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³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 447.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 462.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 446.

³⁴ Nicholas Parrillo, "Lincoln's Calvinist Transformation: Emancipation and War." *Civil War History*, (September 2000), p. 1.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁴² James Stevenson, "A Providential Theology: Shakespeare's Influence on Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address." *Midwest Quarterly*, (Autumn 2001, V. 43, Issue 10), p. 8.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

My Childhood-Home I See Again

[Editor's note: Text is copied as written in *Collected Works*, although there are two versions containing some minor differences in wording.]

*My childhood-home I see again,
And gladden with the view;
And still as mem'ries crowd my brain,
There's sadness in it too.*

*O memory! thou mid-way world
'Twixt Earth and Paradise,
Where things decayed, and loved ones lost
In dreamy shadows rise.*

*And freed from all that's gross or vile,
Seem hallowed, pure, and bright,
Like scenes in some enchanted isle,
All bathed in liquid light.*

*As distant mountains please the eye,
When twilight chases day –
As bugle-tones, that, passing by,
In distance die away –*

*As leaving some grand water-fall
We long'ring list it's roar,
So memory will hallow all
We've known, but know no more.*

*Now twenty years have passed away,
Since here I bid farewell
To woods, and fields, and scenes of play
And school-mates loved so well.*

*Where many were, how few remain
Of old familiar things!
But seeing these to mind again
The lost and absent brings.*

*The friends I left that parting day –
How changed, as time has sped!
Young childhood grown, strong manhood
grey,
And half of all are dead.*

*I hear the lone survivors tell
How nought from death could save,
Till every sound appears a knell,
And every spot a grave.*

*I range the fields with pensive tread,
And pace the hollow rooms;
And feel (companions of the dead)
I'm living in the tombs.*

*And here's an object more of dread
Than ought the grave contains –
A human-form with reason fled,
While wretched life remains.*

*Poor Matthew! Once of genius bright,
A fortune-favored child –
Now locked for aye, in mental night,
A haggard mad-man wild.*

*Poor Matthew! I have ne'er forgot
When first with maddened will,
Yourself you maimed, your father fought,
And mother strove to kill;*

*And terror spread, and neighbours ran,
Your dang'rous strength to bind;
And soon a howling crazy man,
Your limbs were fast confined.*

*How then you writhed and shrieked aloud,
Your bones and sinews bared;
And fiendish on the gaping crowd,
With burning eye-balls glared.*

*And begged, and swore, and wept, and
prayed,
With maniac laughter joined –
How fearful are the signs displayed,
By pangs that kill the mind!*

*And when at length, tho' drear and long,
Time soothed your fiercer woes –
How plaintively your mournful song,
Upon the still night rose.*

*I've heard it oft, as if I dreamed,
Far-distant, sweet, and lone;
The funeral dirge it ever seemed
Of reason dead and gone.*

*To drink it's strains, I've stole away,
All silently and still,
Ere yet the rising god of day
Had streaked the Eastern hill.*

*Air held his breath; the trees all still
Seemed sorr'wing angels round.
Their swelling tears in dew-drops fell
Upon the list'ning ground.*

*But this is past, and nought remains
That raised you o'er the brute.
Your mad'ning shrieks and soothing strains
Are like forever mute.*

*Now fare thee well: more thou the cause
Than subject now of woe.
All mental pangs, but time's kind laws,
Hast lost the power to know.*

*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?*

*And now away to seek some scene
Less painful than the last –
With less of horror mingled in
The present and the past.*

*The very spot where grew the bread
That formed my bones, I see.
How strange, old field, on thee to tread,
And feel I'm part of thee!*

*The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln
Volume I, The Abraham Lincoln Association,
Springfield, Illinois, Roy P. Basler, Editor,
Rutgers University Press; 1953*