

TRANSPERSONAL PSYCHOLOGY AND THE INTERPRETATION OF HISTORY: A READING OF THE GETTYSBURG ADDRESS

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ABSTRACT: Transpersonal psychology continues to have impact far beyond the discipline of psychology alone. Providing a broader context for studying key historical figures, events, and movements is one example. The transpersonal perspective is particularly relevant in psychohistorical study, especially in the interpretation of political rhetoric. In certain instances, it can help explain the formal structure and broad appeal of memorable political orations. As an illustration, the author applies Stanislav Grof's notion of basic perinatal matrices in a close reading of one of the most significant speeches in American political history: Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address.

Transpersonal psychology and the discipline of history have much to offer each other. An array of key historical figures, events, and movements awaits exploration by psychohistorians who are knowledgeable about and equipped with a transpersonal orientation. A transpersonal perspective is not often seen even among the copious analyses surrounding memorable addresses by national leaders. One example warranting further attention is Abraham Lincoln and his Gettysburg Address.

If ever there were an American president who, by bent and temperament, was in touch with the transpersonal dimension, it is Abraham Lincoln. His famous "melancholy," remarked on by contemporaries and biographers, was seen in his own Romantic era as *liminal*—evidence of contact with the numinous dimensions in his own personality and the cosmos (Wills, 1992, pp. 72–75). Lincoln was attentive to his own dreams, to the point of sometimes letting them guide his practical actions in family affairs,¹ and his law partner and contemporary biographer described him as alert to portents and omens (Herndon & Weik, 1942/1889, p. 352; Wills, 1992, p. 76). Only two weeks before his own assassination, he had a vivid dream, which he recounted in detail to his assistant Ward Lamon, foreboding the event (Stern, 1940, p. 185). As the catastrophic Civil War whirled around him, Lincoln, who always remained skeptical of the nostrums of organized religion, nevertheless increasingly saw the War as divinely ordained; while laboring daily to affect its outcome, he mulled continually over its ultimate governance by divine will.² The War's appalling death toll, and tragedy within his own family, inexorably intensified his lifelong preoccupation with death, focusing his mind on its meaning and possible aftermath.³ His beloved and favorite son Willie, then eleven years old, died after a feverish illness on the night of February 20, 1862. As his thoughts on the War matured into the foundation of his immortal funeral oration at Gettysburg, Lincoln remained in deep mourning, twice having his son's body exhumed in order to contemplate the remains (Stern, 1940, p.

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137). In those same months, Mary Todd Lincoln, desperately hoping to contact her dead son, was conducting séances in the White House (Wills, 1992, p. 76). Clearly, transpersonal psychology—in partnership with psychohistory—offers a meaningful framework to study both Lincoln and his Gettysburg Address.

PSYCHOHISTORY: FROM FREUD TO DEMAUSE AND GROF

Sigmund Freud originally applied his notions to historical and political figures,⁴ and psychoanalysis and its progeny have influenced biography, including political and historical biography, ever since. While loose efforts at explaining historical behavior with psychoanalytic theory have often seemed fatuous, a more disciplined effort to apply concepts derived from modern psychology to the study of history emerged in the later 1950s. In 1957, William Langer gave a landmark address before the American Historical Association, subsequently published in the *American Historical Review*, in which he called for just such an effort, labeling it the “next assignment” (Langer, 1958). The following year saw the publication of Erik Erikson’s psychoanalytic account of Martin Luther, which convincingly demonstrated the potential value of the genre and still is regarded as a major classic in the field (1958). Initially, as in those cases, psychohistory focused primarily on the biography of major historical figures—an approach that has proved fruitful in accounts of political leaders ranging from Lincoln to Woodrow Wilson, Adolf Hitler, and Malcolm X.⁵

The application of psychological theory to explain collective as opposed to individual behavior might be traced back at least to Freud’s own sociological writings, particularly *The Future of an Illusion* (1927/1961) and *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930/1962). Moreover, Carl Jung, with his concepts of archetypes and the collective unconscious, provided notions that begged for historical illustration and for the examination, in light of those notions, of broad social movements. Jung himself took steps in that direction, interpreting major public events of his time—such as, for example, the rise of Nazism—in terms of archetypes and their mass appeal.⁶

In the two decades following Langer’s address, the use of psychoanalytic ideas to understand the motivation and behavior of historical groups gained momentum. In 1971, Peter Lowenberg published a seminal essay in the *American Historical Review* on Nazi youth, exploring the effects of massive social trauma on later collective behavior. That article established trauma reactions as a central focus of the field. Psychohistory’s two principal journals, *Psychohistory Review* and the *Journal of Psychohistory*, both published their first issues in 1973, the latter initially focusing on the history of childhood.⁷ Lloyd deMause’s studies of the history of childhood, many published in that journal, gave impetus to that field, particularly with an edited volume published in 1974. deMause’s “psychogenic theory of history” posits that childrearing practices generate group fantasies that later are acted out in public life. Some more recent works apply group process and family systems theory to political and social movements.⁸

Whether focusing on individuals or groups, the field of psychohistory has been decidedly psychoanalytic in orientation. Indeed, one of its major practitioners has portrayed it as a “synthesis between the disciplines of history and psychoanalysis”

(Lowenberg, 1985, p. 3), a characterization that is descriptively accurate. The field has also been highly controversial, with more enthusiasts in the psychoanalytic community than among mainstream historians. There have been complaints of psychological reductionism, ahistorical analysis, and of too facile associations between infantile traumas and adult behavior in public life (see, for example, Barzun, 1974 and Stannard, 1980). Over time, however, psychohistory has become more established, and its bibliography has grown ample. It also has acquired defenders among highly distinguished historians who are lauded in all quarters of their profession. Preeminent among them, perhaps, is Peter Gay, former Sterling Professor of History and Yale and now Director of the Center for Scholars and Writers of the New York Public Library. A cultural and intellectual historian who underwent psychoanalytic training, Gay is the author of *Freud for Historians* (1985), *Freud: A life for our time* (1988), and numerous historical studies, including the multivolume *The Bourgeois Experience: Victoria to Freud*, which is informed with psychoanalytic concepts (1984–1991).

The purpose of this paper is to argue that concepts emerging from transpersonal psychology can add depth to psychohistory, and ultimately can be of considerable value in historical study. Moreover, just as with other disciplines, opening up another field for the play of transpersonal thought is likely to enrich the concepts and perspectives that constitute the transpersonal movement itself.

The views that now constitute that movement arose out of psychology, particularly humanistic psychology, in the 1960s. Drawing on Eastern spiritual traditions, on the results of newer psychotherapeutic techniques, and on experience with psychedelics, its early proponents emphasized the possibility of higher states of awareness, and of a sense of identity that extended beyond the individual “to encompass wider aspects of humankind, life psyche and cosmos” (Walsh & Vaughn, 1993, p. 3). In so doing, they began to depict what Stanislav Grof has called “enlarged models of the psyche,” and to perceive consciousness as a basic principal of existence, pervading all of reality (Grof, 2000, p. 142). Accepting the validity of the spiritual dimension, they soon came to challenge the materialistic assumptions of modern Western thought.

Such broad notions clearly resonated beyond the field of psychology alone. Western precursors extended back through the earlier psychology of Carl Jung and William James to philosophical movements from German Idealism and American Transcendentalism to neo-Platonism and Platonism—and to mystical traditions all along the way. Transpersonal concepts, moreover, soon engaged ideas emerging from other disciplines and fields of thought. Indeed, it fits well with assumptions of transpersonal theory to argue that a *Zeitgeist* was becoming visible across several disciplines (see Tarnas, 1991, pp. 433–440). Ideas that had emerged from transpersonal psychology could be seen as reflected in, and reinforced by, concepts surfacing in philosophy, theoretical physics, biology, neurology, optics, anthropology, and sociology.

To construct a more transpersonally-oriented psychohistory, we might begin with the study of political ideology and rhetoric. As transpersonal psychology plumbs further into the depths of human consciousness, it can clarify motifs that have a strong collective resonance, and that can be mobilized to animate political

movements. A case in point is Stanislav Grof's notion of "Basic Perinatal Matrices" (BPMs), with their sequence of associated archetypal imagery leading from death, or near-death, to rebirth. For an illustration of the explanatory power of Grof's concept in the analysis of political rhetoric, we need look no further than to the central oration of American political experience, Lincoln's Gettysburg Address.

LINCOLN AT GETTYSBURG

On November 19, 1863, Lincoln took the podium at the site of what remained the Civil War's bloodiest battle, to dedicate a cemetery for the soldiers who had died there four months earlier. There had been some 8,000 deaths on that field in southwestern Pennsylvania, and 50,000 casualties; but the Northern forces had prevailed, bringing new hope to their war effort. As Lincoln rose to speak, Edward Everett, the venerable Harvard classicist and former Secretary of State, had already delivered the occasion's principal declamation, a two-hour performance that well met the audience's high expectations. Lincoln's role was ancillary, to pronounce the formal dedication, and no more. His "Dedicatory Remarks," as they were listed on the formal program, lasted three minutes. They were composed of a mere 272 words, a quarter of the length of the occasion's invocational prayer.

"The power of words," writes historian Wills, "has rarely been given a more compelling demonstration" (1992, p. 25). Lincoln's "remarks" are now viewed as a key document of the American civil religion, second only to the Declaration of Independence in defining the core of a national political consciousness. The Gettysburg Address framed the War as the great test of whether the ideals of liberty and equality, embodied in republican government, could survive anywhere on earth. It spoke of a transcendent purpose behind the great trauma of battle, and of the hope of renewal. The nation, implicitly cleansing itself of the sin of slavery, could not only survive, but rededicate itself to its original ideals and reassert in more pure form its original values. In referring to the Declaration of Independence as the country's founding charter, Lincoln solidified the place of Thomas Jefferson's words as the core statement of national purpose and rededicated American society to the ideals of freedom and equality (see Wills, 1978, pp. xiv-xxii). To that national Torah he added his own New Testament, introducing the more specifically Christian themes of death, sacrifice and rebirth, and positing a new level of transcendence to national goals (Bellah, 1968, p. 12). As Robert Lowell pointed out, Lincoln "left Jefferson's ideals of freedom and equality joined to the Christian sacrificial act of death and rebirth" (1964, p. 89). In so doing, he gave expression to the central credo of American civil religion; he articulated a meaning for the American past and a mission for the American future. However well or poorly the country may have lived up to those rhetorical ideals, however the terms might have shifted meanings along their historical way, Lincoln's words remain at the very core of a national psyche. In times of solemn national ritual and of national crisis, the themes of freedom, natural rights, equality, tolerance, democracy, sacrifice and God's blessing inevitably re-emerge.⁹

What can explain the power of those 272 words? The persistent myth that Lincoln wrote the Address on the back of an envelope attests in a popular sense that the Address was inspired, a result of pure illumination rather than patient craftsmanship.

Clearly, the Address carried a message that the society needed to hear. Considered in terms of content alone, it drew meaning from carnage and, with splendid timeliness, isolated thoughts and sentiments capable of rallying national energies. But content in a speech, of course, is never alone: thoughts and sentiments are always embodied in images, words and cadences, with connotation and resonance. Unlike, say, the erudite and finely-honed passages of Everett's oration on the same occasion, the Address remains an almost unparalleled fixture of the national canon.

In attempting to probe the secrets of Lincoln's oratorical technique, scholars have advanced numerous explanations, many partially true, all surely playing some role in the speech's effectiveness, but none fully satisfactory. They have pointed to its parallels with classical Greek funeral oratory—the tradition of Pericles' encomium to Athenian democracy—with its praise for the fallen and exhortations for the living. The Greek tradition reveled in antitheses, especially of life and death—the very antitheses that Lincoln invokes so powerfully at Gettysburg (see Hurt, 1980, p. 377; Cooper, 1932, pp. xxxii–xxxiii; Smiley, 1917, pp. 124–128).¹⁰ He set in opposition, as well, word and deed, mortality and immortality. But although he may have identified the deepest polarities of the historical moment, the use of antitheses was by no means uncommon in the political rhetoric of Lincoln's day, and later. Others have argued that in an age of rhetorical efflorescence, Lincoln launched a more spare and muscular form of political speech, without figurative language, shorn of most coupling words (Wills, 1992, pp. 171–172). Some have noted a high proportion of Anglo-Saxon rather than Latinate terms in the Address (Barton, 1930, p. 148). But any speech beginning with phrase “Four score and seven” and ending with a highly complex sentence of eighty-two words, including four subordinate clauses, is hardly a model of simplicity, and other critics have pointed to many Latinate terms.¹¹ Although it is free of formal tropes, the speech displays artful repetitions. Parallel phrases are enunciated in staccato style. Certain words—such as “here,” “that,” and “dedicate” or “dedicated”—are repeated numerous times, linking successive sentences (Wills, 1992, pp. 172–173). In general, these repetitions surely have the effect of building the speech's rhetorical power, but rhetoricians have condemned as well as praised some of them (Barton, 1930, p. 147).¹²

In an age dominated by evangelical Protestantism and in which the King James Bible was the central cultural document, Lincoln's words resonated with scripture. The opening phrase—that complicated rendering of the years since the Declaration of Independence—echoes the familiar Psalm (90:10) allotting “threescore years and ten” to human life, helping to give Lincoln's words a tone of religious dignity (Wills, 1978, p. xv). The notion of a “new birth” of freedom might have touched his audience's New Testament-inspired sense of the need to be “born again” (John: 3:3). Garry Wills takes the argument of scriptural and religious allusion still further, arguing that Lincoln's use of “our fathers,” despite its explicitly political reference, had religious overtones, and comparing the notion of “bringing forth” a new nation to the miraculous conception of Jesus (1978, p. xv). But the scriptural references, if that they be, are fleeting and rather vague even to be called allusions. They are not explicit, as in many another Lincoln address, such as, for example, his “House Divided” speech of five years earlier. Scholars also point to cultural and intellectual fashions of Lincoln's time as contributing to the Address's resounding reception, such as the mourning conventions of the new rural cemetery movement or Transcendentalism's

notion of history as a progressive working out of extramundane ideals (such as equality) (Wills, 1978, pp. 78–79, 101–109). Yet the Address remains in the national consciousness, independently of trends in the cultural context of the 1860s.

Surely all of these elements—the conventions of Greek funeral oratory, the use of antitheses, the relatively spare oratorical style, the artful repetitions, the scriptural language, the surrounding cultural and intellectual trends—play some role in contributing to the power of Lincoln’s oratory. A still more profound explanation of the potency of the Address, however, its lasting hold on national consciousness, may be found on a psychological plane. A clue lies in a factor observed by Robert Lowell in the early 1960s: in a speech to bury the dead, he noted, there is “a curious, insistent use of birth images” (1964, p. 88). In that birth images form a central core of Grof’s transpersonally-based research, his work offers guidance for reaching deeper understanding of Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address.

GROF’S BASIC PERINATAL MATRICES

For Stanislav Grof, the birth experience is of “paramount significance” in psychic life (1985, p. 197): memories and impressions of it lie deeply buried in both individual and collective unconscious, impelling behavior. In this emphasis on the defining character of the birth experience, Grof builds on insights stemming from Otto Rank (1929) and others,¹³ but his account of the “perinatal” relies principally on experiential research on non-ordinary states of consciousness, especially in sessions of LSD therapy and “holotropic breathwork”—the self-exploration technique that he developed in conjunction with Christina Grof, which involves deep breathing and driving music. In such states, Grof reports, clients frequently encounter a realm of the unconscious in which themes of birth and death are not only dominant but intimately intermingled. The entire realm points to “the strong representation of birth and death in our unconscious psyche and the close association between them” (2000, p. 29); it is, he says, “as if these two aspects of the human experience were somehow one” (1993, p. 28). This mixture of themes of birth and death is a reflection of the actual birth experience, which is, in Grof’s view, a life-threatening trauma, the most profound that we endure. As such, it leaves “deep unconscious imprints in the psyche” (2000, p. 31–32). The perinatal realm, however, cannot be reduced to a reliving of biological birth. Rather, the birth process represents a “core” experience in which its associated archetypal themes can be organized, and which helps to reveal their dynamics (1985, p. 99; 1988, pp. 8–9). It provides a conceptual model that allows us to understand deep elements of the individual and collective unconscious. Those elements are naturally organized as a “death-rebirth experience” (1985, p. 99).

This death-rebirth experience occurs in four “typical thematic clusters” that follow stages of the biological birth process (1985, p. 99). Grof has labeled the clusters “Basic Perinatal Matrices,” or BPMs, numbered I through IV. The first cluster, BPM I, corresponds to the fetus’s amniotic existence, between conception and the onset of birth contractions (1985, 1988, 1993, 2000). In a healthy generative process, the fetus’s interuterine existence is close to ideal, offering full security and protection. The experience is of serenity and tranquility. Those ideal conditions

come to an abrupt end with the onset of contractions and BPM II. Suddenly the soon-to-be-born child senses his world closing in: the environment becomes painful and life-threatening. He seems to be caught in an apocalyptic event, raising a sense of overwhelming peril, the specter of death. “It is no wonder,” writes Grof, “that death and birth are so closely related in this matrix” (1993, p. 47). BPM III, however, offers an escape, but one requiring intense struggle. The cervix opens, and the fetus begins its passage through the birth canal. Fighting for survival, still experiencing a vital threat, it nevertheless senses purpose, direction, and hope. It must be actively involved in the effort, but an end is in view. The atmosphere has changed from overwhelming peril to titanic struggle. Finally, with BPM IV, actual birth, the fetus becomes the newborn child. He or she has achieved liberation, a new existence, a triumphant redemption that recaptures some elements of BPM I.

In Grof’s work with non-ordinary states of consciousness, these perinatal themes are often associated with a wide range of imagery drawn from the subject’s biographical experience as well as from mythology, art, religion, politics, and other aspects of collective life. Much of Grof’s writing, in fact, involves exploring and classifying this infinitely varied imagery. Birth represents the beginning of individual existence, death its end. In the perinatal realm, they are intertwined. That realm forms a link, an intersection, between the biographical level of the psyche and the transpersonal, the realm beyond our individual existence. In the model provided by the birth experience, the perinatal matrices serve as “organizing principles for material from other levels of the unconscious” (1985, p. 101). They can, Grof reports, “provide us with a doorway to what Jung called the collective unconscious” (1993, p. 29). BPM I might be accompanied, for example, with imagery of nourishing nature, social harmony, or a golden age; BPM II with that of death, the horrors of war, descents into an underworld, and dark nights of the soul; BPM III with epic battles, passionate exertions, and conquest; BPM IV with resolution, rebirth, salvation, and the reclaiming of religious meaning. Especially significant is the pattern of imagery formed by the four matrices, implying a “universal archetypal sequence” deeply rooted in the human psyche (2000, p. 150).

GROF AND DEMAUSE: CONVERGENCE OF TRANSPERSONAL PSYCHOLOGY AND HISTORY

Grof’s application of these concepts to the sociopolitical realm and to history is provocative but limited, largely focused on asserting the perinatal roots of violence (see 1993, pp. 213–217 and 2000, pp. 302–313). The life-and-death struggles of the birth canal, he suggests, “may actually be partially responsible for wars, revolutions, and similar atrocities” (1993, p. 213). In support of that assertion, Grof cites the historical investigations of Lloyd deMause. Grof had been aware of those studies since shortly after the publication of his first book (1975), when deMause contacted him to report the congruity between their independently-derived ideas (Grof, 1993, p. 214).

With Freudian premises, deMause had examined the comments of wartime leaders, looking especially for “personal imagery, metaphors, slips, side comments, jokes, scribbles on the edges of documents and so on.” Such spontaneous remarks, he said, amounted to “free associations” (deMause, 1982, p. 91). Eventually deMause found

that, with striking frequency, such associations entailed images related to birth. The group fantasies of wartime, he concluded, resurrect feelings of being strangled and trapped in the birth canal, a state that seemingly can be relieved only by violent struggle (pp. 91–94). Such fantasies move from a sense of pregnant tension before combat, to explosive relief when battle finally breaks out. DeMause provides numerous instances of birth-related wartime metaphors; examples later cited by Grof include Samuel Adams’s speaking during the American Revolution of “the child of Independence now struggling for birth” and an official message transmitted to Washington announcing the successful detonation of the atom bomb: “The baby was born.” (deMause, 1982, p. 97; Grof, 1993, p. 215, 2000, pp. 304–305). DeMause and Grof coincide in this argument: The powerful emotions and energies that are part of our birth experience remain within us, often inadequately integrated. Under certain circumstances, the potentially destructive perinatal energies, particularly those stemming from a sense of overwhelming threat and a need for titanic struggle, can be mustered for individual or collective violence. War can thus be seen, in deMause’s words, as “a rebirth fantasy of enormous power” (deMause, 1996).

While deMause’s theoretical framework is Freudian, Grof’s analysis of the perinatal matrices, derived from observing thousands of experiences in non-ordinary states of consciousness, is a notion that emerges from transpersonal psychology.¹⁴ That analysis provides a meaningful classification of archetypal imagery in the Jungian collective unconscious—and it admits of a much wider application to the study of history than it has yet been given. From his earliest writings, Grof has noted that the various matrices can be associated with images of sociopolitical conditions and, especially, upheavals (see 1975, pp. 115–149 and 2000, pp. 302–303). In his history of Western thought, Richard Tarnas (1991) interprets the evolution of epistemology over the last several centuries in terms of Grof’s matrices. The archetypal *sequence* of matrices, he notes, forms a “powerful dialectic” that is often experienced on a collective as well as individual level and can apply to “the evolution of an entire culture” (p. 429).

Potentially, that sequence also has very fruitful applications in the study of political rhetoric. To date, deMause and Grof have noted isolated phrases pointing to the importance of birth imagery in the comments of political leaders, but an equally significant element in sustained analysis of political rhetoric may lie in the powerful dialectic of transitions from one perinatal stage to another. Since the experience of these matrices is universal and deep within each of us, the associated imagery can be mobilized as a powerful political force, particularly when that imagery indeed reflects the realities of collective life. Some political leaders have instinctively recognized that, and some of the greatest of them have shown an intuitive grasp of elements of that “universal archetypal sequence” which Grof has defined.

Consider, for example, one of the most familiar passages of political rhetoric of the twentieth century, the peroration to Winston Churchill’s speech to the House of Commons on June, 4, 1940, after the evacuation at Dunkirk (Churchill, 1989/1940). For the British forces, Dunkirk was a narrow escape from the threat of annihilation. Although the worst did not come to pass, thousands of men and essential materiel were lost, and the moment was as dark as any in British history. After reviewing the battle and assessing the subsequent military situation, Churchill raises the specter of

a German invasion. In some of his most stirring rhetoric, he then rallies his countrymen to resistance:

Even though large tracts of Europe and many old and famous States have fallen or may fall into the grip of the Gestapo and all the odious apparatus of Nazi rule, we shall not flag or fail. We shall go on to the end, we shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender, and even if, which I do not for a moment believe, this island or a large part of it were subjugated and starving, then our Empire beyond the seas, armed and guarded by the British Fleet, would carry on the struggle, until in God's good time, the new world, with all its power and might, steps forth to the rescue and the liberation of the old.

With its near strangulation of the British military, Dunkirk represented the classic situation of BPM II—as did the falling of neighboring states, the dire military situation, and the threat of invasion. In his peroration, however—with its insistent mustering of the will to struggle, its dogged refusal to surrender, its repeated exhortations to battle however ubiquitous the battlegrounds, and its offering of hope and of growing confidence and strength despite the implacable threat—Churchill's imagery moves forcefully into the elements of BPM III. And, with the promised “rescue” in the end by the power and might of the new world, the speech culminates with an image of BPM IV. The eventual result will be not only rescue but “liberation,” implying a new life. All will happen “in God's good time,” suggesting, however slightly, that both the struggle and the liberation are part of a larger, divinely governed, transcendent order, in which lies the ultimate hope.

LINCOLN AND THE “UNIVERSAL ARCHETYPAL SEQUENCE”

Much of the power of the Gettysburg Address comes from Lincoln's intuitive mastery of the “universal archetypal sequence,” not simply in specific elements and transitions but in its full range. In its brief 272 words, the Address not only immerses us in the entangled themes of birth and death, but leads us, one by one, through all four perinatal matrices, linking them with the national experience and the travail of civil war, using them to forge a sense of national purpose.¹⁵ The opening sentence of the Address, which Lincoln set down as a complete paragraph, corresponds to the first basic perinatal matrix:

Four score and seven years ago, our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

“Brought forth” is a biblical term, used in the King James version for generation and giving birth.¹⁶ Lincoln refers to the birth of the nation, but the more subtle emphasis is on conception, as the next phrase, “conceived in Liberty,” makes explicit. This image of conception at the opening of the Address has been noted before. As Garry Wills

observes, “The suggested image is . . . of a *hieros gamos* a marriage of male heaven (‘our fathers’) and female earth (‘this continent’). And it is a miraculous conception . . . ” (1978, p. xv; see also Wills, 1992, pp. 77–79). From the moment of conception brought about by the male fathers and the female continent, the nation is “dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.” This post-conception phase, Lincoln implies, is undisturbed, even paradisaic—both terms that Grof applies to BPM I. Lincoln gives us no hint that world of liberty and equality is not achieved. At the very least, the nation seemed to itself to be existing in a realm blessed by those virtues. Grof notes that BPM I is linked with images of happy childhood and, socially, a golden age: Lincoln suggests similar associations for the young United States.

The next sentence, however, tells of the sudden onset of pain, threatening the very existence of the nation:

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure.

Lincoln not only introduces the theme of war, but raises the threat of national death: can the nation “long endure”? With that sentence, we are brought suddenly into the imagery of the second perinatal matrix, dominated by the theme and threat of death. Lincoln continues with that theme for the next three sentences—which are linked to the previous one as a single paragraph—focusing on the site of the cemetery and the act of burying the dead:

We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

The image of death, the result of war and the battlefield, is reinforced by the short, staccato sentences, and the repeated references to the site of the cemetery: this is a “final resting place”; men “gave their lives” here; the dedication of the battlefield as a cemetery is “fitting and proper.” In this short second paragraph devoted to themes of the second matrix, Lincoln has indelibly linked the theme of death to his earlier theme of birth. Nevertheless, he gives us a hint of hope: the men gave their lives, but the nation still “might live.” With that brief suggestion of hope, he marks the transition to the third perinatal matrix.

People in non-ordinary states immersed in the second matrix, Grof remarks, often see “the futility of life without spirituality” (1993, p. 53). Emerging from images of that matrix, Lincoln’s rhetoric, in his next sentence, takes a leap into the transpersonal:

But in a larger sense, we can not dedicate—we can not consecrate—we can not hallow this ground.

Lincoln employs three verbs—“dedicate,” “consecrate,” and “hallow”—climbing to progressively higher states of numinosity: “consecrate” is a more sacred term than “dedicate,” and “hallow,” or make holy, the most sacred of the three. The reference serves to put death and our earthly travails into a spiritual context. The principal theme of the third matrix is struggle, struggle towards an emerging goal.

With his following two sentences, Lincoln suggests that not only death but the struggle of battle has a larger, transpersonal meaning:

The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here.

The struggle of the soldiers at Gettysburg, Lincoln then argues, must become the struggle of all, of the living. In urging the active involvement of the living in the struggles of the dead and of the War, Lincoln expresses the core aspect of the third matrix:

It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced.

The repeated use of the word “here,” referring to the cemetery—Lincoln uses it six times in the course of the Address—is a recurring reminder that the struggle is one of life and death. But in the first phrases of the final sentence of the address, by far its longest, Lincoln asserts that the great struggle has a greater purpose, though he does not yet define it:

It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—

In these staccato exhortations, Lincoln insistently rephrases the need for struggle, linking it with sense of purpose: we must be “dedicated” to a “great task,” take “increased devotion” to “that cause” for which the dead soldiers devotedly gave their lives, and “highly resolve” that they not have died in vain.

Finally, in the following phrase, Lincoln moves to the fourth perinatal matrix, announcing that the great, transcendent purpose is rebirth:

that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom . . .

In discussing characteristics of BPM IV, Grof states that it provides “a sense of reclaiming our divine nature and cosmic status” (2000, p. 54). With the simple phrase “under God,” which he certainly said at Gettysburg but which may not have been in his first written draft (see Wills, 1993, p. 194), Lincoln reasserts that the national rebirth is divinely advocated if not ordained. The Gettysburg Address followed the Emancipation Proclamation by some ten months, and the “new birth of freedom” to which he refers is above all the eradication of slavery. With that, the nation is to be born again and indeed reassert its “cosmic status” and national purpose as the protector not only of the political liberty in which it was conceived, but of the equality to which it was originally dedicated:

—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

The great purpose of the War, Lincoln asserts, is the preservation of popular, republican form of government, made possible by a necessary rebirth of its original ideals. In the classic form of the fourth matrix, the rebirth is a redemption that reclaims elements of the first.

“A deep experiential encounter with birth and death,” writes Grof,

is regularly associated with an existential crisis of extraordinary proportions, during which the individual seriously questions the meaning of existence, as well as his or her basic values and life strategies. This crisis can be resolved only by connecting with deep, intrinsic spiritual dimensions of the psyche and elements of the collective unconscious (1985, p. 100).

For Abraham Lincoln, who bore heavily the burdens of wartime leadership, the Civil War was, personally, just such an existential crisis. It forced him to question the meaning of the nation’s existence, its basic values and strategies. The Gettysburg Address represents the distillation of a personal process of both questioning and questing that he underwent during the War. That process, we might surmise, pushed him to connect with spiritual dimensions of his own psyche, and with elements of the collective unconscious. It involved a deep encounter with death, in which he perceived, on some level, the archetypal connection between death and birth, and even the universal archetypal sequence represented by the perinatal matrices.

In articulating the nation’s struggle in terms that follow that sequence, Lincoln portrayed the Civil War as a kind of rite of passage. Such rites are almost universal in indigenous cultures, practiced at times of critical change in individual or cultural life. Their “common denominator,” writes Grof, “is a profound confrontation with death and subsequent transcendence” (2000, p. 225). They typically attempt to induce a “psycho-spiritual death and rebirth”—dying to an old role and being reborn into a new one (2000, pp. 9–10). In Christianity, this basic theme of death and rebirth is clearly related to the Resurrection and the Johannine need to be “born again,” but it is still more universal, applied in other religious and esoteric systems. And in all of those systems, it is seen as healing and transforming. Through symbolic death and rebirth, the psyche can be liberated from sin or the unbearable tensions of life (Grof, 2000, pp. 52, 109). With that redemption comes forgiveness and compassion.

Carrying this analysis further, we might argue that the luminous sanity of Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Address—his other speech that is incontestably part of the national canon—owes something to that process of personal evolution that he himself had undergone, and into which he was attempting to lead the nation. In the Second Inaugural, Lincoln displays some of the principal characteristics of psychological health as described by humanistic and transpersonal psychology. For example, rather than attributing all evil to the enemy—the common projection of wartime, especially after a war so bloody and bitter as that one—he acknowledges the participation of his own side in the source of the conflict. That source he has now explicitly identified as the sin of slavery. The divine punishment is appropriately meted out to both sides, to the South for holding slaves, to the North, implicitly, for participating in the national and economic system that sustained it. The entire process of sin and justice is placed in a transpersonal context, as a product of the

“providence of God”; yet clear human action is called for, and that action must be dominated not by vengeance but compassion: “With malice towards none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right . . .” Rather than speaking of the South as other, as still the enemy, Lincoln identifies with the entire nation, exhorting his countrymen “to bind up the nation’s wounds” and “to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves, and with all nations.”

THE LEGACY

Lincoln had spoken to an audience at Gettysburg of some 15,000 people (Wills, 1992, p. 51). In the immediate aftermath, he himself saw the speech as a “failure” and the public as “disappointed”—so he confided to Ward Lamon (cited in Sandburg, 1939, v. II, p. 472). Everett apparently thought otherwise: he wrote a note to Lincoln saying that “I should be glad if I could flatter myself that I came as near to the central idea of the occasion in two hours as you did in two minutes” (cited in Stern, 1940, p. 788). Immediate editorial comments often followed party lines; some were hostile or dismissive. But the speech was widely reproduced in print, in rural and small-town weeklies as well as the urban dailies, reaching readers across the country. By the time of the Second Inaugural Address sixteen months later, it had begun its march to the core of the national canon. Charles Francis Adams, Jr., a representative of the skeptical New England intellectual elite, recorded, after the latter speech, what was to become the American consensus: “That rail-splitting lawyer is one of the wonders of the day. Once at Gettysburg and now again on a great occasion he has shown a capacity for rising to the demands of the hour which we should not expect from orators or men of the schools” (cited in Edwards & Hankins, 1962, pp. 86–87). By the early twentieth century, a quintessential man of the schools, Earl Curzon, Chancellor of the University of Oxford, could refer to the Gettysburg Address and the Second Inaugural as two of the three “masterpiece[s] of modern English eloquence” (cited in Barondess, 1954, p. 47). By the time Carl Sandburg was writing his biography of Lincoln in the 1930s, the Gettysburg Address had become, in Sandburg’s words, “The Great American Poem” (cited in Edwards & Hankins, p. 87).

REFLECTIONS

Why did the Gettysburg Address resonate so powerfully in American consciousness? Because it succinctly articulated a national meaning and artfully expressed a transcendent good that could emerge from the trauma of civil war: the rebirth of freedom and equality. And what was the secret of Lincoln’s artful expression? All the factors that historians have identified may well have played a role, but underlying them is a factor revealed by transpersonal psychology, with its enlarged models of the psyche. At a time of extraordinary crisis, Lincoln questioned, for himself, the very meaning of the nation’s existence. The relentless encounter with death, on levels both personal and social, I suggest, pushed him into contact with spiritual elements of the psyche, especially the primordial intermixture of death and birth. Drawing intuitively on the collective unconscious, Lincoln used imagery that tapped into the death-rebirth experience expressed in the spiritual life of many cultures. His

intuitive grasp of that experience was so strong that he expressed it, concisely but completely, in terms that follow what Stanslav Grof has identified as a universal archetypal sequence of thematic clusters characteristic of the perinatal realm of the psyche. Lincoln touched in succession on core elements of each of that sequence's four matrices. The extraordinary response to the speech, its persistence over time in the national consciousness, its central place in American civil religion, are evidence, drawn from political history, of the power of those elements in the collective unconscious. They are indicators, as well, of how the study of political rhetoric, and the field of psychohistory itself, might be enriched by incorporating ideas from transpersonal psychology. Ultimately, we might hope, the recognition of such indicators could portend a mutually enriching dialogue between the transpersonal movement and the discipline of history.

NOTES

¹ See, for example, a telegram he sent to Mary Todd Lincoln, urging her to hide away a pistol because of a dream he had about his son Tad (Stern, 1940, p. 755).

² See, for example, "Meditation on Divine Will," circa September 30, 1862 (Stern, 1940, p. 728). Lincoln's thoughts on the matter come to full fruition in the Second Inaugural Address.

³ Lincoln's life since childhood had been battered by the premature loss of loved ones. His brother Thomas, three years younger than he, died in infancy. Nancy Hanks Lincoln, his biological mother, died when Lincoln was nine years old—an event that his psychobiographer Charles Strozier views as central in his development (Strozier, 1982, pp. 28–35). His sister Sarah, two years older than he and his close childhood companion, succumbed in childbirth ten years later, at the age of twenty-one. The love of his young manhood, Ann Rutledge, died, probably of typhoid, after three years of their courtship, leaving Lincoln in deep despair (see Strozier, 1982, pp. 41–42). The second of Abraham and Mary Todd Lincoln's four sons, Edward, lived only until age four.

⁴ Most notably in "Leonardo di Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood," (Strachey, 1955–1961, v. 11, pp. 63–136).

⁵ Alexander and Juliette George had published a psychoanalytic study of Woodrow Wilson (1956) the year before Langer's address. Charles Strozier, founding editor of the *Psychohistory Review*, is the author of *Lincoln's Quest for Union: A Psychological Portrait* (1982). No epoch has garnered more attention from psychohistorians than the Third Reich, and no person more than his leader. See, for example, Rudolph Binion's *Hitler Among the Germans* (1976) and Robert Waite's *The Psychopathic God: Adolf Hitler* (1977). Victor Wolfenstein's *The Victims of Democracy: Malcolm X and the Black Revolution* (1981) is another major work of the genre.

⁶ See, for example, "Wotan" (1936), the Preface and Epilogue to *Essays on Contemporary Events* (1946), "After the Catastrophe" (1945), and "The Fight with the Shadow" (1946). All are included in *Civilization in Transition*, volume 10 of Jung (1964).

⁷ The journal initially was entitled *History of Childhood Quarterly: The Journal of Psychohistory*. The name changed to *Journal of Psychohistory* in 1976.

⁸ Some notable studies of historical group processes are Rudolph Binion's examination of German society's response to Hitler (1976), George Kren and Leon Rappoport's work on the Holocaust (1980), Robert Jay Lifton's account of Nazi doctors and their behavior (1986), and Charles Strozier's exploration of the psychology of fundamentalism (1994). David Beisel's study of the origins of World War II makes use of family systems theory (2003).

⁹ Presidential speechwriters are keenly aware of the rhetorical tradition. Consider, for example, George W. Bush's speech to a joint session of Congress on September 20, 2001, following terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. He spoke of a country "called to defend freedom," and of the terrorists as "enemies of freedom," stating that "freedom itself is under attack." In defining more specifically what he saw as under siege, Bush referred to "democratically elected government . . . our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with one another." The traditional value of equality remains, though in the mutated form of "tolerance," which implies equal protection of rights. On one side of the battle line, said the President, stood "all who believe in progress and pluralism, tolerance and freedom." He appealed to citizens to "uphold the values of America": "in a fight for our principles . . . our first responsibility is to live by them. No one should be singled out for unfair treatment or unkind words because of their ethnic background or religious faith."

As Lincoln portrayed the Civil War as a battle with world-wide significance, Bush does the same for the war against terrorism: ". . . what is at stake is not just America's freedom. This is the world's fight . . ." Despite the crisis, he assured his listeners, "this will be an age of liberty here and across the world." Liberty remains, as always, the American mission: "in our grief and anger, we have found our mission . . . Freedom and fear are at war. The advance of human

freedom . . . now depends on us.” In exhorting Americans to prepare for a “lengthy campaign” and in hinting that they should expect casualties, Bush echoed the Lincolnian theme of sacrifice for the transcendent goal. In a quintessential gesture of the American civil religion, he portrayed this struggle for freedom as divinely endorsed. Just as Lincoln urged a resolve that “this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom,” Bush claimed that “God is not neutral” in the battle between freedom and fear. And he finished the address by invoking divine blessing on the nation: “may God grant us wisdom and may he watch over the United States of America” (Bush, 2001).

In attempting to mobilize support for a war, Bush and his speechwriters turned to these Lincolnian themes. However one might judge the sincerity of the rhetoric, surely he and his speechwriters were well aware of their deep resonance for the American public.

¹⁰ Wills (1992) presents these various analyses of Lincoln’s rhetoric, and my brief account of them relies heavily on his study. His analysis of the parallels between Greek funeral orations and Lincoln’s Address is in Chapter 1: “Oratory of the Greek Revival,” 41–62.

¹¹ Strunk and White (1959, p. 63) note that “The President could have got into his sentence with a plain ‘Eighty-seven,’ a saving of two words and less of a strain on the listeners’ powers of multiplication.” They attribute Lincoln’s phrasing to his ear for cadence, despite its “flirting with disaster” and “skirting the edge of fanciness.” On Lincoln’s use of Latinate terms, see Wills (1992), p. 174.

¹² Although Barton criticizes the repetition of “that,” Lincoln’s repetition of the term as a conjunction introducing subordinate clauses that define the nation’s “great task” echoes the presentation of “self-evident” truths in the Declaration of Independence, with which he was explicitly linking his speech. Consciously or not, Lincoln thus invokes the philosophical passages of the Declaration in both content and form.

¹³ Grof discusses Rank’s contribution to his thought most extensively in 1985, pp. 170–173.

¹⁴ Despite his Freudian orientation—and in opposition both to Freud himself and to currently prevailing psychoanalytic theory—deMause coincides with Grof in believing in the possibility of fetal and birth memory (see deMause 1982, p. 244–251), and he cites Grof’s work, including the concept of the basic perinatal matrices, in support of that belief (1982, p. 250). Yet unlike Grof, deMause remains thoroughly grounded in Freudian theory, essentially extending Freudian dynamics back into the womb. His model for the “basic model of fetal psychology” portrays the “fetal drama,” which focuses on the relationship and struggles of the fetus with the placenta, as “the precursor for the oedipus complex.” His fetal psychology, by his own testimony, “has the same structure as that which Freud posited for psychoanalytic theory,” namely, an opposition of pleasure principal and superego (1982, p. 259–260). Like that of most psychohistorians, then, deMause’s orientation remains psychoanalytic, not transpersonal. Unlike Grof, deMause does not view consciousness as a basic principal of existence, nor as functioning apart from an individual human brain, and his writings display little interest in spiritual experience or realities. In fact, he chides Grof for having “moved off into the paranormal,” a malady, he observes, that can be “an occupational hazard connected with fetal psychology” (1982, p. 250).

¹⁵ There are several extant versions of the Address, with slight variations. Stenographic accounts differ on Lincoln’s spoken words. It is not certain that we have his delivery text, the written version that he spoke from; but if we do, he apparently departed from it. Lincoln revised the text after the fact at least four times. The last of these revisions, written in his own hand at the request of historian George Bancroft, was intended to be lithographed for sale at the Baltimore Sanitary Fair of February, 1864. As the final text that Lincoln authorized, it is generally accepted as representing his ultimate preference. It is the version most widely reproduced and the one used in this analysis. (See Wills, 1992, pp. 191–203.)

¹⁶ The term’s first appearance, for example, is in Genesis, 1: 11: “And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so.” In the Gospel of Luke (1:31), Mary is told that she will “bring forth a son.”

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Much of the Gettysburg Address defines its own immediate rhetorical situation. Lincoln locates "we," speaker and audience, on a portion of a great battlefield in a continuing war, and he dwells on the immediacy of this setting in space and time by repeating the word here six times (a seventh in one version, an eighth in another). This often-noted repetition is critical in Lincoln's purpose. The Gettysburg Address is profoundly the speech of a moment in our history and it is altogether fitting and proper to remember its anniversary. Yet whenever it is read or spoken it seems to belong to that moment. How is that possible? Because languages like English not only express the situation of an utterance, they also recreate that situation when the language is experienced anew. Transpersonal psychology, or the Fourth Force, addressed some major misconceptions of mainstream psychiatry and psychology concerning spirituality and religion. It also responded to important observations from modern consciousness research and several other fields for which the existing scientific paradigm had no adequate explanations. Michael Harner, American anthropologist with good academic credentials, who also experienced during his field work in the Amazon a powerful shamanic initiation, summed up the shortcomings of academic psychology very succinctly in the preface to his book *The Way of The Gettysburg Address - full text and analysis*. This is the currently selected item. But, somehow, the 272 words that Lincoln says here in the Gettysburg Address has become one of the most famous and important pieces of rhetoric in American history. So, in this video, I'd like to just take a little time to read the Gettysburg Address and to interpret it, line by line, to give a better sense of what it's trying to say and why it's so important. All right, so let's see if I can do this justice. Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. The Gettysburg Address is a speech by U.S. President Abraham Lincoln. It was delivered on the afternoon of Thursday, November 19, 1863. This speech was made during the American Civil War, at the dedication of the Soldiers' National Cemetery in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. This was four-and-a-half months after the Union Army had a victory over the Confederate States Army at the Battle of Gettysburg. Course Hero. "The Gettysburg Address Study Guide." Course Hero. 3 Nov. 2017. Web. 12 Dec. 2020. . In text. (Course Hero). Lincoln uses metaphor when he speaks of the nation's fathers conceiving the nation, or bringing it forth: this starts an extended biological metaphor of conception and birth that Lincoln continues through the speech. He returns to this biological metaphor in his final line, referring to a "new birth of freedom."

In an excellent analysis of the Gettysburg Address, Nick Morgan offers an interesting perspective on Lincoln's repetition of one word throughout the address: And buried in the biblical phrasing there's a further device that works unconsciously on the audience, and the reader, to weave some incantatory magic. We can learn a lot about public speaking by studying the great speeches of history. The Gettysburg Address is one of the greats. Lincoln took his audience on a journey. It began with the founding of America and ended at a crossroads. He wanted to make sure that Americans chose the right path. And he did. We might never deliver a speech or presentation that becomes as famous as the Gettysburg Address, but we can still make an impact when we speak. A Primer of Transpersonal Psychology 1 Bridging Psychological Science and Transpersonal Spirit A Primer of Transpersonal Psychology Copyright© 2011 by Paul F. Cunningham, Ph.D. Department of Psychology Rivier College, Nashua NH 03060-5086 pcunningham@rivier.edu 1 A Primer of Transpersonal Psychology 2 CONTENT FOREWORD 85 i. The Naturalistic Approach to the History of Transpersonal Psychology 97 o America's Visionary Folk Psychology Tradition 97 o Hidden Tradition of Psychic Research in Modern Psychology The Gettysburg Address - full text and analysis. This is the currently selected item. Later stages of the Civil War - 1863. The idea that the states are the most prominent portion of the country and that the individual states plural, were together in a union that was secondary to the idea of statehood. But, midway through the war, Lincoln starts to use the word nation more and more. And afterwards, it will always be known as The United States. So, Lincoln is signaling here that this is one united nation, not just a collection of states and that is what the American forces are fighting for. That is what the forces of the United States are trying to achieve, a united nation, not a united set of states. The other in HISTORY OF TRANSPERSONAL PSYCHOLOGY - Free download as PDF File (.pdf), Text File (.txt) or read online for free. Transpersonal psychotherapy draws upon both psychology and spiritual traditions to create a bold new vision of a psychologically-informed spirituality and a spiritually-based psychology. Perhaps the core assumption of transpersonal psychology is that individuals are essentially spiritual beings rather than simply a self or a psychological ego (Sperry, 2001). A similar shift occurred in transpersonal psychotherapy which now addresses the whole person, including ordinary consciousness, suffering, pain, abuse, mental disorders including psychosis, and relationship conflicts. Much of the Gettysburg Address defines its own immediate rhetorical situation. Lincoln locates speaker and audience, on a portion of a great battlefield in a continuing war, and he dwells on the immediacy of this setting in space and time by repeating the word here six times (a seventh in one version, an eighth in another). This often-noted repetition is critical in Lincoln's purpose. The Gettysburg Address is profoundly the speech of a moment in our history and it is altogether fitting and proper to remember its anniversary. Yet whenever it is read or spoken it seems to belong to that moment. How is that possible? Because languages like English not only express the situation of an utterance, they also recreate that situation when the language is experienced anew.