THE SHORT AND THE LONG OF IT: RHETORICAL AMPLITUDE AT GETTYSBURG

DAVIDA CHARNEY

Treatises on rhetoric since antiquity have illustrated how to amplify passages but give scant attention to strategies for when or why. Dealing mostly with isolated passages, they ignore the effect of amplification on amplitude, the proportions of units that give a text its overall shape. This article considers the relationship between length and importance, sets criteria for a method of mapping amplitude, and applies the method to the Gettysburg addresses of Abraham Lincoln and Edward Everett. Though their shapes differ, each address balances crucial sections against each other. In Lincoln’s case, a more symmetrical shape emerged by accident as he delivered the speech. Then, when editing the official version, he decided to preserve the new shape. Everett’s address is shown to have better proportions than critics assume. Mapping amplitude sheds light on authors’ strategies for dealing with their kairos.

Treatises on style since antiquity have dwelt on amplification, the process of enlarging a point through restatement, elaboration, or supporting appeals. Techniques of amplification are generally illustrated with passages extracted from their context. In the “Amplification” entry of the Sourcebook on Rhetoric, for example, James Jasinski illustrates two forms of amplification. Linguistic amplification is illustrated with Franklin Roosevelt’s threefold reformulation of “yesterday” in the “date of infamy” speech after Pearl...
Harbor. Textual expansion is illustrated with a passage from Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s speech “The Solitude of Self,” depicting numerous aspects of self-reliance.\(^1\) Famously, treatises such as Erasmus’s *De Copia* and Raymond Queneau’s *Exercises in Style* include passages with no original discourse context, having been composed solely to be amplified.\(^2\)

However, the outcome of amplification—a passage’s increase in mass—cannot be appreciated without context. Passages are amplified to emphasize them relative to what’s around them. As Thomas B. Farrell notes, “magnitude is always (sort of) relative to other related and recognizable values and ‘weights.’”\(^3\) Rhetoricians have focused on how to amplify, but we have neglected the when and why. We have ignored the effect of amplification on amplitude, the relative sizes of the parts that give a text its final shape.\(^4\)

Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca are among the few to consider relative size, observing that a speaker allocates time carefully so that “the length of each part of his speech will usually be in proportion to the importance he would like to see it occupy in the minds of his hearers.”\(^5\) They say little more about proportions, however, spending most of their own time warning against superfluous elaboration.

Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca’s claim has apparently not been explored further or tested with textual analysis. In terms of text production, do writers/speakers in fact adjust the size of each part to reflect its importance to the whole? In terms of rhetorical analysis, is it productive to ascribe importance to the sections of a text based on their length? In this article, I develop the concept of amplitude in three ways, by exploring popular connections between length and importance, by sketching methodological desiderata for mapping amplitude, and by mapping the amplitudes of the Gettysburg addresses of Abraham Lincoln and Edward Everett. I find that amplitude does reflect importance in each address, and that crucial sections of each address are balanced against each other. In Lincoln’s case, archival evidence even suggests that he preserved a more symmetric final shape deliberately. In Everett’s case, a text critiqued for disproportionate length turns out to be carefully balanced.

**POPULAR ASCRIPTIONS OF IMPORTANCE TO LENGTH**

In popular media, importance is frequently assumed to correlate with length. In 2016, for example, Hillary Clinton’s and Donald Trump’s
acceptance speeches at their respective party’s presidential conventions were represented graphically in the *New York Times*. Thumbnail views of the transcripts were printed side by side with passages devoted to what was good about our country highlighted in green and passages devoted to what was wrong in yellow.6 The thumbnails allow readers to compare what topics were raised under each heading and how much time each candidate devoted to the positive versus the negative. The writers conclude that Trump’s view was exceptionally grim. Similarly, after President Barack Obama’s 2015 State of the Union address, the *Washington Post* printed an annotated transcript listing the total minutes devoted to each topic: economy, 25 minutes; unity, 12; foreign policy, 10; education, 4; national security, 2; climate, 2; race, 1.7 The implication is clear: topics with more minutes are those the president deemed more important.

The question of what counts as important, of course, depends on who is looking at a text and for what purpose. The U.S. Supreme Court recently overturned a death sentence because an expert witness had testified that the African American defendant’s race made him a continued threat. The state of Texas argued not only that the expert’s reference to race was quite brief but also that it was outweighed by other evidence. Chief Justice Roberts rejected that argument. “When a jury hears expert testimony that expressly makes a defendant’s race directly pertinent on the question of life or death, the impact of that evidence cannot be measured simply by how much airtime it received at trial or how many pages it occupies in the record,” he wrote. “Some toxins can be deadly in small doses.”8 The reference to race became paramount during the appeal process. During the sentencing phase of the trial itself, the lawyers on each side may have regarded other issues as most important. Inevitably, texts remain open to differing interpretations, including the importance of their different parts.

What rhetorical analysis of amplitude can illuminate is how a speaker/writer uses space to maximize the chance of persuading an audience in a particular rhetorical situation. Apparently, Abraham Lincoln’s great lawyerly skill was gauging what points to defend and what to let pass, as illustrated in an anecdote from Leonard Swett, a lawyer who had faced him in court. Swett describes Lincoln habitually conceding points in few words: “he would say he ‘reckoned’ it would be fair to let this in, or that; and sometimes, when his adversary could not quite prove what Lincoln knew to be the truth, he ‘reckoned’ it would be fair to admit the truth to be so-and-so.
When he did object to the Court, and when he heard his objections answered, he would often say, ‘Well, I reckon I must be wrong.’” Lincoln was “blandly” giving away “what he couldn’t get and keep,” according to Swett. “By giving away six points and arguing the seventh, he traded away everything which would give him the least aid in carrying that. Any man who took Lincoln for a simple-minded man would very soon wake up with his back in a ditch.” Lincoln reserved his energies for the points necessary to win. Further, Lincoln’s accumulation of laconic concessions of points that he might have contested conveyed that he considered them all equally unimportant. Points that his adversaries wanted to emphasize were in effect leveled with their most trivial remarks. In contrast, whatever points Lincoln did address received more of his time and therefore assumed greater importance.

Gauging amplitude as a strategy thus requires attention to the overall shape of the discourse. Attention to the interplay of points may be what Richard Weaver alludes to when he deems amplification (what I am calling amplitude) the essence of rhetoric: “The very task of the rhetorician is to determine what feature of a question is most exigent and to use the power of language to make it appear so.”

**Methodological Desiderata for Mapping Amplitude**

A method for mapping amplitude should serve both as an investigative tool and as a platform for sharing results. It should be systematic, not algorithmic. It should leave traces that are open to inspection and critique so that alternative readings can be evaluated. But amplitude is tricky to map. What units should be used? How should relative sizes be reported? The highlighted and annotated thumbnails by the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* capture only select elements; suppler, more accessible graphics are needed.

In what follows I try out several different units for mapping Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address. Rather than defining units by way of typographic cues, such as paragraphs or page breaks, I end up arguing for identifying rhetorical units, which constitute building blocks in a line of argument. In my usage, a rhetorical unit is a coherent passage in which claims on a single topic are developed and supported. In a lengthy text, a unit may develop one or more claims at a single stasis—existence, definition, value, cause, or
action. In a brief text, a unit may represent an entire section, such as the problem or solution section of a proposal. A unit’s coherence can be established by appealing to familiar cues, such as the links between the topics in grammatical subject position, use of cohesive ties, transitional adverbial phrases, and so on. The base-level unit for any given text depends on its overall length; in the following, Lincoln’s brief text is described in terms of sentences (S); Everett’s lengthy one in paragraphs (¶). Identifying the rhetorical units is a matter of interpretation and analysis, open to challenge and subject to defense with supporting evidence, as illustrated with the cases that follow.

**LINCOLN’S GETTYSBURG ADDRESS**

In the century and a half since it was delivered, Lincoln’s address has certainly been given its due, with major treatments by Edwin Black, Leah Ceccarelli, Barbara Warnick, Garry Wills, and David Zarefsky, among others. Rather than recapitulating these accounts, I focus on the structure of the text and draw on these readings as necessary. To make a case for mapping amplitude with rhetorical units, I begin by considering several typographic methods.

Among the more obvious typographic methods is sentence length. Fig. 1 provides a graphic display of the lengths of the ten sentences. Lincoln clearly varies his sentence lengths. The two shortest sentences, S3 and S5, flatly spell
out the current occasion and its appropriateness. The last and longest sentence, S10, contains over a third of the total words (83 out of 272). As in other speeches, Lincoln puts weight at the end. However, graphing amplitude by sentence length provides few clues to important structural features.

Fig. 2 presents the speech divided both by sentences and paragraphs. Two versions of Lincoln’s paragraphing are shown: on the right, the Nicolay version that Lincoln used while delivering the address, and on the left, the Bliss version that Lincoln produced during subsequent editing. Both versions display a very short opening, consisting only of S1. But the relative proportions of the second and third pieces are incompatible. The Bliss version presents a medium-sized middle section and a very lengthy conclusion; the Nicolay version a lengthy middle and shorter concluding piece. Without taking the content into account, the typographic cues provide no plausible means for interpreting or evaluating the two structures.

In his structural analysis, Edwin Black ignores Lincoln’s paragraphing and even sentence breaks. Instead he identifies two “pivot points” in the speech: the word “but” in S6 and the word “rather” in S10. Based on these

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bliss Version</th>
<th>Nicolay Version</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>¶1</td>
<td>¶1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S1</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¶2</td>
<td>¶2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2</td>
<td>Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived, and so dedicated, can long endure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S3</td>
<td>We are met on a great battle-field of that war.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S4</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S5</td>
<td>It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¶3</td>
<td>¶3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S6</td>
<td>But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate, we can not consecrate — we can not hallow — this ground.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S7</td>
<td>The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S8</td>
<td>The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¶3</td>
<td>¶3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S9</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S10</td>
<td>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 here gave the last full measure of devotion, that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain, that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Fig. 2. Lincoln paragraphing and sentence breakdown.
rhetorically derived pivot points, Black divides the speech into three portions that appear to him roughly equal in size both in terms of words and syllables:

The structural elegance of the discourse can be rendered statistically. The speech consists of 367 syllables. Its first pivot occurs at syllable 146; its second pivot at syllable 263. One-third through the syllables is at 122; two-thirds through at 244. The speech consists of 272 words. The first pivot is at word 103; the second pivot at word 193. One-third through the words is at 91; two-thirds at 182.18

Black’s sense of these rough proportions is off; the three sections he creates are not close to thirds. In syllables, his three sections account for 40, 32, and 23 percent of the text, respectively; in words, they account for 38, 33, and 29 percent, respectively. Either way, his pivot points create a text shaped like an inverted pyramid, with the largest section at the top.

An inverted pyramid contrasts sharply with the shapes indicated by Lincoln’s paragraphing, as shown in fig. 2. The Nicolay version has brief introductory and concluding sections and a bulge in the middle. The Bliss version is a right-side-up pyramid with three successively longer units.19 So none of these units, syllables, words, sentences, or paragraphs, seems sufficient to account for Black’s rhetorical analysis.

Black is not finished, however. On the basis of his line breaks (signaled in fig. 2 by double slashes), Black goes on to find an “hour glass” shape that he ultimately prefers.

“If the speech is divided into twenty-three lines (as it is on my computer): nine lines constitute the statement of facts; then five lines constitute the pause; then nine lines constitute the resolution. The mathematical proportioning of the speech is so close to perfect that it seems almost formulary, yet it is inconceivable that it actually was. The two sections of movement are equal in length; the middle section of arrest is virtually half the length of either of the sections of movement. In visual terms, the speech is shaped like an hour glass. Temporally, it is past, present, then future. Its visceral effects are contraction, strain, and then release. Respirationally, it is an exhalation, then a pause, then an inhalation.”20
For Black, the hourglass shape is aesthetically nearly perfect. Why so? Lincoln’s assigned task at Gettysburg was to perform the official act of dedication. The invitation from the organizers asked him “to formally set apart these grounds to their Sacred use by a few appropriate remarks.”21 Lincoln accepted the invitation but did not actually fulfill the task. While the word “dedicate” or close synonyms thereof appear seven times in the speech, Lincoln never utters a performative formula on the order of “I hereby dedicate these grounds.” This unfulfilled expectation creates a tension that governs the structure of the speech. As Black puts it, the speech “refuses to permit the ceremony to be a consummation, refuses to make it whole and complete. The speech rejects the ceremony as a vehicle of fulfillment.”22

Unfortunately, however, Black’s line breaks are simply an artifact of how the text appeared on his computer screen, given the technology of the time. If there is any merit to the symmetry of the hourglass proportioning, it requires firmer grounding.

Like Black and David Zarefsky, I would sum up the logic of the text as “now, but, rather.” Lincoln raises the usual expectations for this kind of performative task, overturns them by declaring the task to be impossible, and then transforms the task to suit his own object. Fig. 3 shows my division

<table>
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<th>What we are here to do</th>
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<td>S2 Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived, and so dedicated, can long endure.</td>
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<td>S10 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 here gave the last full measure of devotion, that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain, that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.</td>
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Fig. 3. Rhetorical units of Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address.
of the text into rhetorical units that answer three questions: what are we here to do (S1–S5); why can’t we do what we are supposed to do (S6–S8); and what must we do instead (S9–S10).

These rhetorical units can be supported textually. Despite Lincoln’s setting off of S1 into its own paragraph, it actually fits into a tightly cohesive unit with S2–S4, grounded in the present time and place. Tucked within Lincoln’s reference to the nation’s founding moment is an essential deixis—the word “ago.” It is only “now” in 1863 that 1776 could be “four score and seven years ago.” The five opening sentences are stitched together with a chain of anaphoric references that tighten the focus from the abstract nation to a particular patch of ground. In the terms of the “given-new contract,” the given agent and grammatical subject of each sentence, “we,” engages with “new” material in the previous predicate that is labeled with a demonstrative definite article: the new nation that the founders brought forth (S1), the war that threatens that nation (S2), the battlefield of that war (S3), the portion of that field that we have come here to dedicate (S4), and the fittingness and propriety of this imminent act (S5).

The opening establishes a high pitch of expectation for the performative act of dedication that is dramatically overturned by the three sentences of the second unit. This unit declares, restates, and explains why dedicating the field is impossible: it would be redundant, devoid of meaning, and even impious because it has already occurred through the sacrifice of the soldiers who fought here. The redundancy of the act is underscored by the repeated contrastives: “but,” “far above our poor power,” “what we say” versus “what they did,” and by repeated negatives—“can not,” “can not,” “can not”; “little note nor long remember”; and “never forget.” Despite how greatly Lincoln has amplified the claim that the act can’t be done, the overall amplitude of the unit is small. Proportionately, it remains the smallest of the units in the text as a whole. By thoroughly reversing the expectations of the first section, this tightly cohesive middle section heightens the suspense for an alternative.

In section three, what was supposed to be done is superseded by what should be done instead. Lincoln’s attention is still on the present, what those assembled “here” can do that is not redundant and meaningless: they can dedicate themselves to finishing the war. They can redeem themselves both with respect to the founders and the honored dead. By giving the nation a “new birth of freedom,” they match the founders’ bringing forth of the “new
nation.” By committing to seeing the war through to completion, they reciprocate the actions of those who fought and died at Gettysburg. The honored dead dedicated the ground, a task that the audience was supposed to undertake; so the audience must instead dedicate themselves to the war, “the cause” that the soldiers nobly advanced but left unfinished.

This reading divides the text into complete sentences, a more natural method than Black’s rather arbitrary selection of pivot words or lines on a computer screen. Counting the number of sentences in the proposed three units, however, still fails to produce a satisfactory structure. The first section contains five of the ten sentences (50 percent), the second, three (30 percent), and the third, two (20 percent)—another inverted pyramid that fails to reflect the rhetorical relationships.

However, calculating the amplitude in words per section produces the hourglass shape that Black intuited. The center section with about 20 percent of the words serves as a fulcrum upon which are balanced the nearly equal weights of the first and third sections. An hourglass shape has no intrinsic merit per se; it simply reflects an elegant balancing of thwarted intentions against productive commitments.

Interestingly, archival evidence indicates that this symmetry was not Lincoln’s original plan, but he did approve how it turned out. In his 2013 book, Writing the Gettysburg Address, Martin Johnson draws on archival accounts, including Everett’s and Lincoln’s papers, newspaper articles, and diaries of organizers and attendees, to reconstruct how Lincoln composed, delivered, and edited the Gettysburg Address. In the Nicolay text that he used during his delivery, Lincoln called only once on the living to dedicate themselves to concluding the war. However, a transcript by the Associated Press’s reporter on the scene suggests that this is not what Lincoln actually said from the dais. As shown in fig. 4, Lincoln improvised the words under UrAP up to the applause and then repeated a closer version of what was written down.

As Johnson explains, due to such arcane circumstances as faulty last-minute editing in pencil, the falling of a page break, and the interruption of applause, Lincoln ended up reformulating and then restating the call for dedication. Back in Washington, D.C., while consulting the Nicolay version (his presentation draft) and a newspaper account, Lincoln created the Bliss version, making a variety of small changes to put the text into final form and keeping the reformulation as S9.
Why did Lincoln deliberately choose to amplify the final unit by keeping S9? The concluding unit was by nature apt to seem light; it turns from the concrete achievements of the founders and the soldiers to the insubstantial future and to the abstractions of human attitudes. Despite being part of the longest paragraph on the page and despite ending in the speech’s longest sentence, the third section in the Nicolay version was also rather light in words. As shown in fig. 5, the proportions of the three sections—41 percent–25 percent–34 percent—are less distinct, though they still form an hourglass shape. In the Bliss version, shown in fig. 6, the additional 24 words

* Following Johnson (223-24), the Nicolay text is the version Lincoln read from while the UrAP text is the most reliable newspaper transcription of what he actually said; words Lincoln wrote in pencil are indicated in boldface, words Lincoln struck out are indicated with a single strike-through. The double slash in "dedic/a/ted" indicates the location of a page break in the Nicolay text.

Fig. 4. Johnson’s reconstruction of dedication restatement (S9 and S10).

Fig. 5. Lincoln’s amplitude (Nicolay version) in words per section.
change the proportions to 38 percent–22 percent–40 percent, sharpening the fulcrum and bringing the two ends into closer balance.

The increased weight allocated to the final section might reflect Lincoln’s preference for greater symmetry. But it also strengthens the proposal to respond to the huge death toll by recommitting to winning the war rather than negotiating for peace.

The amplitude of Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address does not support framing it as a paean to civil liberties, as many now read it. Nor does it seem to rehearse Christian values, as Barbara Warnick would have it. It reads as a war speech.

**Edward Everett’s Gettysburg Address**

Edward Everett’s assignment at Gettysburg was to deliver the keynote address, a genre that at the time demanded a lengthy oration. Everett’s speech is notorious for taking two hours, when Lincoln’s took only two minutes. In the zero-sum game of popular criticism, Everett has long served
as a foil for Lincoln in the eyes of rhetoricians as well as media critics. Black, for instance, devotes nearly 15 pages to Lincoln’s address that he praises for uniqueness and originality while dismissing Everett’s talk in 50 words:

Edward Everett’s oration at Gettysburg echoes Daniel Webster’s epideictic mode; its set-piece on the battle aspires to Livy, with brushstrokes of Periclean melancholy. Everett’s speech is in a grand ceremonial tradition, and it is through that tradition that we apprehend it. Its relationship to a family of other discourses is apparent, and even predictable.23

Black criticizes not merely the speech’s length but also its disproportionate attention to the battle at Gettysburg. Everett’s description of the battle is even considered excessive by some of his strongest supporters. Fred Stripp comments that Everett’s “fifty-minute account of the three-day struggle must appear long-winded to the American a century later who endorses the brief funeral service.”24 Ronald F. Reid actually omits the entire passage on the battle from his reprinting of the text.25

Black’s critique is the most trenchant. By characterizing the speech as a whole as “ceremonial” and the battle section as a “set-piece,” he reduces Everett’s ostensible goal from persuasion to declamation. In a similar vein, some scholars denigrate Renaissance era “set pieces” as produced by writers who while “schooled in the use of the classical topics when composing a set piece of argument upon any proposition . . . drew upon the topics, not for probative support, but to amplify their matter. Logical flow of argument leading to logically acceptable conclusions gave way to rhetorical frills as ends in themselves.”26

Other scholars also find Everett’s speech to be ill-proportioned. According to Bjørn Stillion Southard and Belinda Stillion Southard, Everett gave undue attention to vilifying the South: “Specifically, we argue that Everett’s accentuation of southern culpability undermined his message of national unity, limiting the eulogistic dimensions of the speech and its potential legacy. Lincoln, conversely, more successfully honored the dead and envisioned a unified America, which helps explain the longitudinal resonance of his address.”27 As evidence of undue “accentuation,” the Stillion Southards cite the sections devoted to the South as well as the “polarizing” language of vilification throughout. In effect, they claim that an imbalance between
honor the dead and envisioning a reunified nation in Everett’s speech as compared to Lincoln’s explains its poorer reception.

Before considering the structure of Everett’s speech, it is worth noting that his long-standing goal as a speaker for the Union was persuasive, not ceremonial. In September 1861, Everett delivered a wildly successful speech, “Causes and Conduct of the Civil War” in Boston. He toured with it for the next two years to raise funds for the war, repeating it a remarkable 59 times across the Northeast and Midwest.28 “Causes” opens with a reminder of the sacrifices that had been necessary for prosecuting the American Revolution. The bulk of the speech is a detailed indictment of 30 years of actions by the Southern states.29 The final section enumerates the economic and diplomatic costs of the secession and the war and predicts that higher costs would ensue from any partial peace settlements with individual Southern states. In closing, Everett calls on listeners to step up to the sacrifices needed to compel complete surrender and reunification. According to Reid, Everett’s delivery was “cool and strictly argumentative,” avoiding “emotionalism” because his “primary persuasive purpose was to do what Horace Greeley praised him for having done with his ‘Causes’ lecture, ‘to thoroughly impress any waverers.’”30 The need to impress waverers was evidently the same or even greater at Gettysburg; Reid reports that “peace sentiment” was widespread at the time, in part perhaps because the victory at Gettysburg had improved the military outlook for the Union.31

In planning the keynote, Everett recognized the obvious need to frame the battle that had taken place only four months before on the very spot where the ceremony was to take place. As vividly described by Garry Wills, the ground at the time was barely turned sufficiently to hide the human remains from sight; the hemispheric tiers of graves were only partially completed. Although impromptu tours were being given, the site lacked every accoutrement of public memorial so plentiful there today. The battle had certainly been covered by the press. However, the dedication was the first time a broad swath of the public viewed the site. The huge crowd of over 15,000 included townspeople, who had had the battle on their very doorsteps; enlisted men and officers, some survivors of the battle, some relatives of the slain soldiers from as many as 18 states; governors, state and federal legislators, foreign dignitaries, cabinet members, and the press.

Everett anticipated that this crowd would be intensely interested in what had taken place and what role they, as first responders, as well as
their relatives, constituents, and comrades had played. His preparations for the speech included extensive research of the battle; he uncovered new details by soliciting original documents, summaries, and sketches from eyewitnesses.

A structural map of Everett’s speech is presented in fig. 7, with word counts for each paragraph and for four major rhetorical units. The more
graphic representation of the amplitude, provided in fig. 8, shows that the speech has two large central sections and shorter opening and closing sections. The shape is ovoid, even somewhat top-heavy. The first two units that account for 60 percent of the speech address the occasion itself and the history of events leading up to it. The third and fourth units turn, as Lincoln’s speech did, to what must happen next. And, as Lincoln did, Everett argues for pursuing the war to victory. Although the ovoid shape of Everett’s speech achieves a fair degree of balance, it lacks the catalyst of Lincoln’s central reversal to push toward the conclusion. Closer examination of the units, however, reveals that Everett did plan a central climax.

The first and larger half of Everett’s address consists of a short opening unit (¶1–¶8) that accounts for 13 percent of the overall text and a longer...
history of the war so far (¶9–¶38) representing 47 percent. The opening
takes on the not-so-difficult task of praising Athens to the Americans,
invoking Pericles’s funeral oration for the fighters at Marathon who had
turned back the invading Persians. In drawing the parallels to the present
occasion, Everett’s duty to fill Pericles’s sandals doesn’t entirely escape his
own notice. However, invoking Athens does remind the audience of Ame-
rica’s essential similarity to the first democracy, the great costs of defending
it, and the necessity of honoring the dead by linking them to national values.

The second unit provides a detailed review of the history of the war. As
the descriptions of the subunits show in fig. 7, historical time moves more
and more slowly as Everett narrows the scope from decades to years to
seasons to June—the month preceding the battle—to the days and hours of
the three days of the battle itself, before enlarging the scope for the days of
the aftermath. Interestingly enough, the proportions of these subunits also
form a top-heavy ovoid with the longest section—one on the three days of the
battle itself—in the center.

Black’s critique of this unit suggests that Everett’s goal is ceremonial with
ekphrastic amplification for its own sake (that is, epideictic with a negative
spin). As exemplified by this excerpt from ¶32, Everett’s narrative style is
indeed grand and dramatic, chock-full of vivid sensory details, psychologi-
cal characterizations, references to physical landmarks at the site itself, and
inclusory references to “our” positions and movements:

As on the preceding day, [the enemy’s] efforts were now mainly directed against
our left center and left wing. From eleven till half past one o’clock all was still,—a
solemn pause of preparation, as if both armies were nerving themselves for the
supreme effort. At length the awful silence, more terrible than the wildest tumult
of battle, was broken by the roar of two hundred and fifty pieces of artillery from
the opposite ridges, joining in a cannonade of unsurpassed violence,—the Rebel
batteries along two thirds of their line pouring their fire upon Cemetery Hill, and
the center and left wing of our army. Having attempted in this way for two hours,
but without success, to shake the steadiness of our lines, the enemy rallied his
forces for a last grand assault. Their attack was principally directed against the
position of our Second Corps. Successive lines of Rebel infantry moved forward
with equal spirit and steadiness from their cover on the wooded crest of Seminary
Ridge, crossing the intervening plain, and, supported right and left by their
choicest brigades, charged furiously up to our batteries. Our own brave troops of
the Second Corps, supported by Doubleday’s division and Stannard’s brigade of the First, received the shock with firmness; the ground on both sides was long and fiercely contested, and was covered with the killed and the wounded; the tide of battle flowed and ebbed across the plain, till, after “a determined and gallant struggle,” as it is pronounced by General Lee, the Rebel advance, consisting of two thirds of Hill’s corps and the whole of Longstreet’s,—including Pickett’s division, the elite of his corps, which had not yet been under fire, and was now depended upon to decide the fortune of this last eventful day,—was driven back with prodigious slaughter, discomfited and broken.

Notably, Everett does not invite his hearers to imagine themselves on the ground with individual soldiers. Rather, he wants them to identify with the Union side as a whole. His frequent use of “our” does not refer to the spectators at the ceremony but rather the Union’s military position from a bird’s-eye view. This identification throughout an action-packed narrative builds up to a psychological climax, when Everett turns to assessing the costs of the carnage in terms of losses and the rescue of survivors.

The emotional high point of the speech is ¶38, which describes the compassionate service of first responders, many of whom were in the audience. This paragraph is positioned near the center and is second in length only to the next paragraph (¶39) that makes the turn toward the future. Everett vividly depicts the first responders as “brethren and sisters of Christian benevolence, ministers of compassion, angels of pity” who moistened the parched tongues of the wounded and recorded the final messages of the dying. As Johnson comments, “It was a moment of high Victorian sentiment.” Newspapers describe visitors from afar, the local residents, and Lincoln himself all reduced to tears at this moment. According to the Philadelphia Public Ledger, this homage had “decisive effect.” Arguably, this climactic moment primed the audience to hear a proposal either that the sacrifice has been sufficient and it is time to sue for peace or that the sacrifice has been so great that it demands the opponents’ complete defeat.

Everett, of course, takes the latter alternative with a proposal section that takes up the second half the speech. The unit consists of two subunits roughly equal in size and a brief concluding benediction. The first subunit, condemning the rebellion and the leaders of the Confederacy (¶39–¶47), includes some material reworked and condensed from the “Causes” lecture. The central argument, however, is new. In ¶42–¶45, Everett refutes the notion that the
Constitution leaves open the right of states to secede—a notion that Everett terms an “absurdity,” “nonsense,” and “wretched sophistry.” Everett notes that this point is hardly a digression because the lack of grievance delegitimizes the war and necessitates taking it to a victorious conclusion:

¶46 Pardon me, my friends, for dwelling on these wretched sophistries. But it is these which conducted the armed hosts of rebellion to your doors on the terrible and glorious days of July, and which have brought upon the whole land the scourge of an aggressive and wicked war,—a war which can have no other termination compatible with the permanent safety and welfare of the country but the complete destruction of the military power of the enemy.

According to Johnson, this argument greatly impressed Lincoln, who smiled and slapped his knee (or Seward’s) and who afterward complimented Everett about it.38

The next large subunit, ¶48–¶57, develops another new point, the realistic possibility of reconciling with ordinary Southerners once they have been defeated. Everett’s thinking about the war’s endgame had evidently evolved since the “Causes” speech. There, he speculated that individual states might split off the Confederacy following many indecisive battles, so he argued against partial peace talks with smaller combinations of states. At Gettysburg, he speaks at the level of citizenry, differentiating between the elite leaders of the whole Confederacy who could never again be trusted and the “masses” of individual Southerners, whom he believed could be rehabilitated. The groundwork for this argument is laid in ¶47, where Everett depicts ordinary Southerners escaping from the influence of their leaders’ inflammatory delusions and “yearning to see the dear old flag again floating upon their capitol.” The second and longer part of the argument is a series of examples of successful intranational reconciliations after civil wars or unrest in England, Italy, France, and Germany. Even if Everett deluded himself on both these points, the combined argument is an important and weighty one. Everett made a pleasant and attainable prospect of reconciliation dependent on the defeat of the entire Confederate superstructure.

To those standing beside the graves of the Union dead, the prospect of reconciling with the masses in the South must have seemed surprising, and it may seem a waste of time to readers today. The point was probably to
allow an emotional catharsis. In “Enthymemes of Anger,” Jeffrey Walker shows how outrage may be transformed from shame to the “nobler” anger of revenge when practical means of action are called to mind. Walker’s analysis redeems long dull-seeming passages in Cicero and Thomas Paine. In Paine’s case, he argues that the much-derided final section of *Common Sense* was essential for persuading colonists that a revolution could succeed and for thereby transforming the colonists’ agitation over their grievances to practical action. In the case of Everett’s speech, Reid confirms the key role of the reconciliation point: Everett considered it “the part of the address which I valued most,” describing how he made the case that “the present alienation between the two sections of the Country, would not necessarily be permanent” by laying out “the Historical parallels and the important inferences warranted by them.”

Overall, then, Everett’s text appears to be well designed to fit his reading of the rhetorical situation. The criticism of Bjørn and Belinda Stillion Southard that Everett’s vilification of the South overbalanced his call for national unity seems particularly off-base. Everett’s goal was not to appeal directly to the South but to strengthen commitment to the Union cause. The first half raises the pitch of agitation at the cost of the battle; the second half argues for recommitting to seeing the war through to complete victory. It is also hard to view the Gettysburg section as disproportionately long. The occasion, the setting, and the makeup of the audience demanded a recounting as well as an interpretation of what had happened in that very place. When the very layout of the graves treated soldiers from different states equally, how could Everett slight some military actions in favor of others, especially before family members or dignitaries from those states?

Reid’s study of newspaper accounts shows Everett’s speech receiving about double the commentary Lincoln’s did, largely positive. Johnson notes a certain dryness in some of the initial commentaries and editorials but attributes it to their reliance on reading Everett’s advance text rather than waiting for the more effusive accounts submitted by reporters at the scene. Although distance from the scene has rendered Everett’s speech less persuasive to later audiences, this may not have bothered Everett himself. Reid cites several entries from Everett’s diaries that show he especially valued direct interaction between speaker and hearers and criticized oratory aimed at later readers rather than at the auditors on hand.
CONCLUSION

My overall goal was to promote the value of mapping the amplitude of the rhetorical units of a text. Mapping amplitude in future research may uncover overlooked patterns in familiar texts and change our readings of them. In classroom work and other research, I find that authors at many historical periods have signaled greater importance with greater textual space, both in public policy opinion columns and in the biblical book of Psalms. Future research is needed to refine this observation. Perhaps nineteenth-century orators, who were so conscious of formal style, made greater efforts to achieve textual symmetry. More broadly, maps of amplitude should become a standard tool for checking the viability of a rhetorical analysis, particularly for shedding light on an author’s handling of his or her kairos.

The effects of historical time and geographic distance have taken their toll on appreciation of both Lincoln’s and Everett’s rhetorical strategies, though in opposite directions, with Lincoln exalted and Everett deprecated. The éclat of Lincoln’s address nowadays is attributed to its elegance, its brevity, and its universalism rather than its immediacy. At the time, however, hearers were reportedly struck most by the antithesis in S8: “The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here.” At the moment of delivery, what was important was not the ceremony but the deeds that the cemetery was designed to commemorate. It is a manifold irony that the two sides of Lincoln’s antithesis have proven equally false. Everyone remembers Lincoln’s words but no one (other than Civil War buffs and tourists) remembers the deeds of the soldiers who died at Gettysburg, deeds that were fully articulated in a speech by Everett that most people disparage, in a unit that even Ronald Reid excised from a reprinting in a book dedicated to Everett’s oratory.

Analyzing the amplitudes of two Gettysburg addresses has uncovered aspects that have been underappreciated. Evidently, Lincoln and Everett both saw the rhetorical situation as an opportunity to inspire their listeners—and readers across the Northern states—to commit to fighting through to victory over the Confederacy. Both use amplitude to underscore this message, balancing what has happened with what should happen next. Everett more explicitly addresses surrender and reconciliation as the Southern states are reintegrated, but Lincoln leaves no doubt that “the cause” to which he asks his audience to rededicate themselves is restoring an
undivided nation. Even though Lincoln and Everett viewed the rhetorical situation similarly, the sequence of the dedication ceremony presented each with a different *kairos*. Lincoln’s speech could be brief expressly because Everett was sure to make the key premises salient.

Lincoln and Everett seem to have appreciated this point. The day after the ceremony at Gettysburg, Everett wrote Lincoln to compliment him, saying “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.” In his response, Lincoln wrote: “In our respective parts, yesterday, you could not have been excused to make a short address, nor I a long one.”

**NOTES**


3. Thomas B. Farrell, “The Weight of Rhetoric: Studies in Cultural Delirium,” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 41(2008): 472. This posthumous article was based on a draft introduction to a new book on magnitude that Farrell was working on when he died in 2006. Farrell noted how little work has been done on “the multifarious ways in which largesse, degree, quantity, and priority are themselves composed and nuanced” (474). The very dearth of scholarly attention, “the fact that angels actually have feared to tread,” is what emboldened him “to approach such an impossibly rich topic” (474). Sadly, while he did sketch out a broad array of questions about the complexities and paradoxes of magnitude and illustrated them with intriguing cases, Farrell couldn’t see the project through. The article appears in an issue of *Philosophy and Rhetoric* dedicated to his memory.

4. These two terms have not generally been distinguished in this way. In *The New Rhetoric*, Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca use both terms rather interchangeably. The more common term, amplification, generally applies to the process. Kenneth Burke, for example, defines amplification as “extension, expatiation, the saying of something in various ways until it increases in persuasiveness by the sheer accumulation” [*A Rhetoric of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1950), 69]. Here I reserve “amplification” for the means and “amplitude” for the proportions of parts making up the shape of the text as a whole.


11. Guidance for dividing public policy arguments into units is provided in Davida Charney and Christine Neuwirth, *Having Your Say* (London: Pearson/Longman, 2006). The approach there begins with superordinate sections for issue, problem, and solution, each of which can be developed with a sequence of units at the traditional stases. Subordinate units of claims and supporting reasons and evidence are identified by topical cohesion. Strategies for maintaining and shifting topic are described by William J. Vande Kopple, “Functional Sentence Perspective, Composition, and Reading,” *College Composition and Communication* 33 (1982): 50–63.


15. Wills, *Lincoln at Gettysburg*. 

17. As Garry Wills notes (Lincoln at Gettysburg, 157), Lincoln had already experimented with a weighty final sentence in the Second Inaugural Address, a sentence of 75 words out of 700.


19. The Bliss version is the basis for Barbara Warnick’s analysis. Her major goal, like mine, is to illustrate a method of structural analysis, in her case drawing on Paul Ricoeur. The structural elements she attends to are functional: agent, action, place, and time. Based on a sentence-by-sentence analysis of these terms and ratios, she maps a sequence of rhetorical moves that she derives from Ricoeur’s paradigmatic stages of emplotment: birth, reversal, recognition, suffering, rebirth, and rededication. The first paragraph represents the birth of the nation and the second the reversal—the war that threatens to terminate it. The long third paragraph is not explicitly divided among the other stages; their relative sizes cannot be read from her graphics. Warnick’s reading is entirely plausible; her approach is interpretive and open to inspection. However, its assumptions of narrative progression may not be widely applicable to public discourse.


29. According to Reid, this section exhibits Everett’s “two bad habits”: excessive detail and lack of selectiveness in choosing points to refute. Ronald Reid, “Edward Everett and Neo-Classical Oratory in Genteel America,” in Oratorical Culture in Nineteenth-

34. Everett’s speech is published in full in Wills, Lincoln at Gettysburg, 213–48, and in part in Reid, “Unionist,” 175–92. This analysis, however, is based on the version in Edward Everett, Orations and Speeches on Various Occasions, vol. 4. (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1868), 622–59.
35. Although Everett is known to have investigated the site of the ceremony in advance, I have found no evidence that he actually gestured toward the specific places he was naming while delivering the address. The published versions of the speech were based on what he had sent out in advance and he may not have bothered to keep deictic utterances like “over there” or “under that tree.”
38. Johnson, Writing, 184.
40. Reid, “Unionist,” 102–3. See also Stripp, “The Other Gettysburg Address,” who singles out the importance of this section to both Everett and Lincoln.
41. Reid, Edward Everett.
42. Reid, “Neo-Classical,” 44, 49.
43. For op-ed articles, see Charney and Neuwirth, Having Your Say. For psalms, see Davida Charney, Persuading God: Rhetorical Approaches to First-Person Psalms (Sheffield, England: Sheffield-Phoenix Press, 2015). In the classroom, I illustrate how (and discuss why) Gorgias in the Encomium to Helen devotes much more space to persuasion than to the other three possible reasons for Helen leaving her husband.
44. As Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca put it in “On Temporality” (Bolduc and Frank, “Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca’s,” 325): “That which is said first serves to support that which follows, which will be received in a totally different fashion by the audience because it will have been modified in the meantime by the argumentation itself or by other influences.”
45. Johnson, Writing, 16.