

ELEAr

Trad. Arr.

Will Owen

variation in verbatim theater

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Introductory Information

Concept: *ElElAr* -- acronymic for *Lincoln Lyceum Remix* -- is a script for spoken-word performance by a small team of players. It remixes, considerably changing, the script of the speech delivered by Abraham Lincoln on January 27, 1838 at the Lyceum of Springfield, Illinois. The subject of the speech was "The Perpetuation of Our Political Institutions". This re-mix keeps the order in which the excerpts included here appeared in the original, though it modernizes their wording (for example, "men" when meaning everybody, is changed to "persons" etc.). In addition, like in song remixing/variation composition, the rhetorical tempo of the original undergoes considerable tweaking and new interpolations are added to the traditional, original song. An excellent yoot from Britain's National Theatre "[An Introduction to Verbatim Theatre](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ui3k1wT2yeM)" [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ui3k1wT2yeM>] proposes a continuum of verbatim theater practice: from an as-close-as-possible re-presentation of the words, accents, character, etc. of (usually recorded) originals, to a selective (often used in historical works) excerpting of original documents and other records, and on to a more interpretative-with-additions re-imagining of originals (the case here, in this variation on a touchstone expression of traditional American political values and thought). Both the excerpts of the original included here and the updating interpolations have been loosely scripted in a chunked-with-section-markings sort of long-line free verse in order to more easily adapt them to contemporary, more rhythmically marked, spoken performance usage, and to provide structuring guideposts for performance teams' exploration of the script. Performers of this variation -- or study -- in verbatim theater, may find useful a remark about its provenance: it was devised for acting students interested in bringing practices from their Performing Arts studies into their Politics and Government, Political Science, American History, etc. studies. Techniques derived from theater-making are now integrated into everything from psychotherapies to language learning to leadership workshops, and this verbatim theater script is simply an application of spoken-word performance techniques to political studies. This is an interpretative work of verbatim theater, it is not at all usable as documentary/historical impersonative theater that in some way re-presents the speaker of the (considerably altered) original in his moment in the past. Rather, its aim is a performance event in which the stage personas devised by the performers articulate, as if their own, Lincoln's political ideas

for a right-here-and-now performance moment. Indeed, in addition to what's scripted here, performers can very successfully add their own devised/improv asides and commentary, on current political developments in particular. Such a fusion of verbatim, devised, and slam-improv practices can make for contrasting performances by different teams, while also enabling dialogue with the members of the audience. The variation proposed here can easily be compared to the original (for example, one of many online copies [here](http://www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/speeches/lyceum.htm) [http://www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/speeches/lyceum.htm])...such comparison also intended to engender debate and questioning, particularly as regards objection to the liberties taken with the original to re-mix its meaning.

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EIEIAR

PERFORMERS

~ As a subject for my/our remarks now: *the perpetuation of our political institutions* is selected. ~

~ The fierce attachment of the people to our political institutions and their purpose of securing equally rights for all -- me and you -- kept ardent, 'z'only way to keep'em, true-stayed on course.

The first danger to their strong perpetuation is the loss of trust in government because its leaders' lawlessness and self-serving action makes the state the minion of partisan, faction's cause.

The second danger stems from irr'parable division among the people that strived to be from many one -- the fading of some dream of all-in inclusion, legacy of myriad history, by all our forebear's' done done?

And 'gainst the first what only can prevail is caring obedience by critical many to all the laws, and 'gainst the second: to turn together without fail to make for future's history a new memory that awes.

A free people dies only by its own, self-inflicted fall; in eternal vigilance stay woke -- or sleep, not free at all. ~

~ In the great journal of all that happens under the sun, we, the American People, find our account running, and in peaceful possession of a rich portion of the earth, as regards extent of territory, fertility of soil, and healthfulness of climate.

We find ourselves governed by a system of political institutions apt to lead us more essentially to arduous struggle for civil liberties and individual rights

better secured for all than any other system
of which the history of former times can tell us.

We, when mounting the stage of existence
found ourselves the inheritors of this
fundamental blessing of possibility.
We didn't work for its acquirement
nor did we toil for its establishment
here with us, in all our histories now.

This system and its purpose are a legacy
bequeathed us by courageous ancestors
remembered by us now -- all who fight
this fight have a small, essential, part --
remembered by us now for their love for freedom.

That work was theirs -- noble glory, cruel suffering,
ordinary persisting -- and they performed it,
our myriad history, to author themselves,
and through themselves, us, who now --
like to have and to hold -- are their legacy
of native, settler, slave and immigrant. ~

~ And they upreared upon this continent
a new nation conceived in liberty
and dedicated to the proposition
that all are equal in rights and dignity,
a political edifice of secured rights
that ever falls short of equally for all.

And now we're up, called out cold
to add our action to this hammer hard
continuity of constant vigilance and struggle,
and transmit this thirst for liberty to our own
successor children -- left up to us,
us living here, to save this last best hope --
this political system and its ideals undecayed
by cank'ring time, untorn by usurpation,
to the onward generations that may live --
if caring and careful -- upon this Earth.

This passing on of our blessings -- the hope
and the dustbuckling -- for equal-for-all,

for equal-for-all is a task of gratitude
to those whose shoulders, each of us stands on. ~

~ What is the danger to our political institutions?
How then shall we perform our task of preservation?
From where shall we expect th'encroachment of danger?
By what means shall we protect against it?

Can we expect a some foreign military giant
to attack, invade, and crush us in a war?
Doubtful. Who would want to own our problems.

All the military might of the great globe,
combined, with all their arsenals of weapons,
and with an Alexander Buonaparte in command
could not by force, take a drink from the Ohio
or make a track on the Blue Ridge,
in a fire-fight of thousand years. ~

~ At what point then is the approach of danger to be expected?
The answer, my friends, is here, in you and me.
It won't come from abroad. If destruction be our lot,
we'll ourselves be its author and finisher.
A free people, either lives on, or dies by suicide.

We can't be over wary. Surprise is combat's quickest killer,
and the racked-out pogue-slackers
be blown away before they know it.

There is, even now, something of ill-omen within us,
insistent, manoeuvring to strike -- staking out
the killing field of fire -- silent and lethal,
abetted by those intent on making sure we don't get woke.

I/we mean the increasing disregard for law
which pervades the country -- the growing
disposition to substitute the wild and furious passions
in place of the calm judgment of lawful searching and deciding;
and it's the worse than savage revanchist vengeance
of the hurt and angry mobs and hurtful big-guy oligarchs
who would make power and law serve without accountability
all their dearest fears and whims, ever venging
their tenderly nurtured, blind emotion out on others,

silencing and dismissing liberty's sacred duty
of equal and impartial justice for all persons.

This disposition is awfully fearful in any community;
and that it now exists in ours, though grating
to our feelings to admit, it would be a violation of truth,
and an insult to our intelligence, to deny.

Accounts of transgressions, truculent and prepotent,
committed by so many form the every-day news of the times.
It would be tedious, as well as useless, to recount
the humdrum repetitive, tawdriness of them all.

And such are the effects of dulling innurement
that such crimes, become habitual, just snowball away
becoming more and more frequent and less and less noticed
among us as a people lately famed for love of law and order;
and the stories of which, have even now grown too familiar,
to attract any thing more, than an idle click and comment. ~

~ But you are, perhaps, ready to ask,
"What has this to do with the perpetuation
of our political institutions?"

I/we answer, it has much to do with it.
Its direct consequences are, comparatively speaking,
but a small evil; and much of its danger consists,
in the proneness of our minds, to regard
its direct, as its only consequences.

Abstractly considered, all these transgressions
by those of us in power are each a cut of little consequence,
but all together in their effect are like
a body politic laceworked by a thousand petty wounds
that, in time, leave it anemic, listless, lethal-veiled,
leaking freedom's lifeblood till libertyless we die.

And so it goes; the innocent, those who have ever set
their faces against violations of law in every shape,
alike with the guilty, fall victims to the ravages
of unaccountable unlawfulness by mobs or individuals;
and thus it goes on, step by step, till all the walls

set up for the defense of the persons and property of individuals, are trodden down, and disregarded, dissed to death.

But all this even, is not the full extent of the evil. By such examples, by instances of the perpetrators, of such acts going unpunished, the lawless in spirit are encouraged to become lawless in practice; and having been used to no restraint, but dread of punishment, they thus become, absolutely unrestrained. Having ever regarded Government as their deadliest bane, they make a jubilee of the suspension of its operations; and pray for nothing so much, as its total annihilation. ~

~ While, on the other hand, honest persons -- the every day decent and collaborative folks -- who love tranquility, who desire to abide by the laws, and enjoy their benefits, who would gladly spill their blood in the defense of their freedom and their country; seeing their property destroyed; their families insulted, and their lives endangered; their persons injured; and seeing nothing in prospect that foretells a change for the better; become tired of, and disgusted with, a Government that offers them no protection; and are not much averse to a change in which they imagine they have nothing to lose.

Thus, then, by the operation of this undemocratic spirit, which all must admit, is now abroad in the land, the strongest bulwark of any Government, and particularly of those constituted like ours, may effectually be broken down and destroyed.

I/we mean the attachment of the people to their political institutions' securing of their rights.

Whenever this effect shall be produced among us; whenever the vicious portion of population shall be permitted to break the law flaunting their impunity, dismissing the law's legitimate authority; depend on it, government by of and for, that secures rights for real cannot last. When that happens and keeps happening the feelings of the best citizens will become more

or less alienated from government; and thus it will be left without friends, or with too few, and those few too weak, to make their friendship effectual.

That consequent loss of the people's attachment to their government and founding purpose is the first danger to our political institutions.

And, incidental to that, at such a time and under such circumstances, strongmen of sufficient talent and ambition will not be wanting to seize the opportunity, strike the blow, and overturn that ardent project of true freedom in secured liberty which has for long been the hope that encourages, admired by all who yearn for breathing free, throughout the world. ~

~ I/we know the American People are much attached to their Government and its rights-securing purpose. I/we know we would suffer much to preserve that. I/we know we would endure hardship long and patiently before even thinking of exchanging it for another.

Yet, notwithstanding all this, if the laws be continually despised and disregarded, if the rights to be secure in our persons, property, citizenship's dignity and common good are held in no better tenure than plutocrats' caprice -- in such disrespect that all sway and say-so is held unaccountable, like gun-slung by the prepotent and high-and-mighty who recognize no legitimacy to the limits the law sets on the indulgement of their high-hand ways -- the alienation of the people's affections from their Government and expectation of justice by its actions is then naturally consequent, and to that -- abandonment of hope in the justice of their government's actions -- sooner or later, even good citizens will succumb. That then, is one point at which danger may be expected. ~

~ The question then recurs, "How shall we fortify against it?" The answer my friends is crazy simple, and crazy difficult.

Let all here in these sort-of-still-united states,
every lover of liberty, every well wisher to his posterity,
commit never to violate in the least particular
the laws here duly established, and never to tolerate their violation.
As the patriots of resolution to make good on freedom's promise,
and their successors to this day -- who's now
in the line of freedom's fight? -- did to support
the principles of liberty under law --
Declaration of Independence, Constitution and its laws --
let every American pledge life, means, and honor
to the unending battle of protecting and defending
the rights of all to rights rightly secured.

Let all who walk the walk of freedom's talk
keep precious -- identitarily -- in mind and heart
that to violate the law is to endanger
their own and their children's freedom.

While ever a state of feeling, such as this,
shall universally, or just, very generally, prevail
throughout our national community, in vain will be
all effort, and fruitless every attempt,
to bring down our personal freedom and mutual liberties. ~

~ This pressing to urge strict observance of all the laws,
is not to say that there are no bad laws,
nor that reasonable -- and so therefore strong --
grievances may not arise, for the redress of which,
no legal provisions have yet been made --
for it's only under law that grievances can
justly and effectively be redressed.

Bad laws, when they exist, should be repealed
as soon as possible; still, while they continue in force,
for the sake of example, they should be proudly observed.
So also in questionable instances. When such arise,
let proper, legal provision be made to remedy them
with the least possible delay; but, till then, let them,
if not too intolerable, be abided with, and strongly.

There is no reasonable grievance that is not fit for a hearing,
impartial yet generous, in view towards an action
of reasonable redress, even if for the unreasonably wrong.

In general, in any case that arises, one of two positions is more preponderantly true; that is, the thing is right within itself, and therefore deserves the full protection of the laws and by all good citizens; or, it is largely wrong, and therefore proper to be prohibited by legal enactments; and in neither case, is the interposition of arbitrary, self-interested preference, either ever necessary, justifiable, not abusive, nor excusable. ~

~ But, it may be asked, why suppose danger to our political institutions now? Have they not been preserved, toughly knotted, thickly gnarled, ragefully difficult to change -- but still, changed and adapted all the same? -- for two centuries and more so why not fifty times as long?

We hope there is no sufficient reason. We hope all dangers to this project of ever more equally secured rights for all may be overcome; but to conclude that no finish-it-off kill-danger to its political ideals and institutions ever may arise, would itself be extremely dangerous.

There are now, and will hereafter be, many causes dangerous in their tendency, which have not existed heretofore; and which are not too insignificant to merit our attention.

That our institutions of government, in original form, should have been maintained from their founding until now, slowly evolving, to hew ever better to their established purpose of rights under law equally secured for all is much to be wondered at because in that so remote, near-unimaginable foreign country that is our past the people there customarily, in the folkways of their time, did and thought so many things so world-differently from us now.

But so many fought to make it better -- struggled to be the change they saw was needed -- making it more live up to... for changing times and ways --

our forebearers who gone before held out their hand
to serve the thirsty that Earthfresh, clear water
from the wellspring of our freedom's cause:
where you're standing now, first in the lines
that braid back through them all so many. ~

~ Their all was staked upon it -- identitarily --
their destiny inseparably linked with it,
for their ambition aspired to play out
before an admiring, emulating world
a real and practical demonstration of the truth
that everyday people, in trust among one another,
keeping faith with their committment to obey their laws
can govern themselves all equal in civic power,
and civil rights, and dignity of citizenship,
duly empowered to make a difference under law.

Caring, voluntary, and honest observance of the law
by more than many since never will it be by all
is all that has the power to check the rage
of fearful crowds and those who, unaccountable,
would lord over us all through the anger of their mobs,
fury of their greed, and entitlement to power. ~

~ Only the hurting, sucker-punched siren-songed
find it unreasonable to expect, that some men
possessed of genius for inciting fear
and for kindling resentment, and with ambition --
and deception -- keen on winning and keeping power
will at some time, spring up among us?

And when such does, it will require the people
to be insightful, united with each other,
and attached to the government and laws,
and generally intelligent, to successfully
frustrate such designs. Impunity is such men's
paramount object, without it their emprise
is seen through, even by their loyalists,
for thuggy, ordinary fright-plying, and faced down.

And though some of them might, as willingly,
perhaps more so, acquire and deploy their sway
by doing good as much as harm, they need -- need --

to keep their minions fearing or they themselves
descend to chronic quaking in their boots,
making them ever less appeasable and more so dangerous
as their followers are gained by doubts
and so must be whipped back up to full conviction
by ever more satisfying, bigger lies.

Until -- irony of oligarchdom -- the cruelties
needed for ensuring fear, the habitual thrill
of prepotent transgression, building its momentum
drives them ever on to pull down the noble house
of rights of others respected as one's own
by justice' blindness under rule of law,
that house of honest dignity and proud respect
they so longed to occupy to elevate their villainy.

Here, then, is a cause for worry, highly dangerous,
and such a one as could not have well existed heretofore.
So then, when the people, suspecting its corruption
to securing justice for only the connected few
give up on their attachment to their government,
depend on it, government by of and for,
that strives to secure rights for all real cannot last,
as it falls into the hands of the fear-monger few
for whom the only rights that really matter are their own. ~

~ And the second of the dangers to the perpetuation
of our political institutions is the fading
of a shared vision-project keyed to a myriad,
common history: our mothers and fathers,
and theirs and theirs and theirs -- how we got here
and what for, and what they did to fight for freedom.

The hurlyburly history of the recent past,
so disordered in the copiousness and churning
of our way of memory today, yet scintillates --
like starspark shards for each of us --
preserving for every ancestor we can remember
a pictured place bespeaking era, cause,
and social chronicle they lived
in the tumult of the fourscore years
that saw our worldframe understanding go

from history of states and nations
to that of all individuals on Earth.

This fading -- still unreplaced -- myriad-storied,
but yet master-braided -- exclusionistly self-regarding
(maybe had to be) -- uni-tied history and progress --
of good war, parted waters, sisterhood rebellion,
and free world, growth prosperity, rights revolution,
freedom and democracy and all-that-and-the-rest --
such pride -- ever overweening -- in our toptip global triumph,
leading all, unchallenged, to a new age in our image...
all that, that once was but is now no more
did much in maintaining our political institutions.

~ This rise to power and peacekeeping empire --
also aegis of bounteous, luxuriant individualness --
like an atmosphere of shared national purpose
had a powerful influence upon our passions as a people
as distinguished from our judgment.

By this influence, the jealousy, envy, and avarice,
incident to our nature, and so common to a state of peace,
prosperity, and conscious strength, were,
for the time, in a great measure smothered
and rendered inactive; while the deep-rooted
principles of hate, and the powerful motive of revenge,
instead of being turned against each other,
were directed exclusively against the enemies of freedom,
the obstructors of liberation, and renegades to our way of life.

And thus, from the force of circumstances,
the basest principles of our nature, were either
made to lie dormant, or to become the active agents in the
advancement of the noblest cause --
that of establishing and maintaining
political and all the other, mutually consented,
individual human liberties under law. ~

~ But this state of feeling must fade,
is fading, has faded, with the circumstances
that produced it -- but every age that ends,
ends in the undercurrent stirrings,
blindly felt, of that that will succeed it.

I/we do not mean to say, that the scenes
of our recent triumph in entraining --
for better and for worse -- the world
in our image are now or ever will
be entirely forgotten; but that like
every thing else, they must fade
from the memory of the world, and grow
more and more dim by the lapse of time.

In history, we hope, they will be read of,
and recounted, as long as good books
shall be read; but even granting that they will,
their influence cannot be what it
heretofore has been. Even then,
they cannot be, so universally known,
nor so vividly felt, as they were
by the generations just gone, or soon to go,
to rest who lived the making of America great. ~

~ Now, at the ending of that era, nearly all the old
and their parents and theirs had -- willing or not --
been participators in its scenes of change.
The consequence was, that of those tides
of worldwide change and tidings of them,
in the form of mother, father, in-law or other
related one, a living history was to be found
in every family -- revered -- a history
bearing the indubitable testimonies
of its own authenticity, in its hurts and joys
defeats and triumphs, crushings and survivals,
and ordinary botchings and successes, all
in the midst of the very scenes related --
a history, too, that could be read and understood
alike by all, the wise and the ignorant,
the learned and the unlearned. But those,
his-her past true stories are long over and done.
They can be read, remembered, but not lived.

The hees and hers who lived them were a fortress
of courage and of strength; but now,
what no invading foe could ever do,
the silent artillery of attriting time has done.

Even greatness under time's great leveling gets gone,
clearing the ground for a different greatness
to be built anew. That's the way it is.

So who's now standing in that long braided line?
now they're all gone -- and all the way back
to those who founded our political institutions,
that have served so stoutly as the frame and stage
for the understanding and the playing -- explosive --
of our political and social history. ~

And now our work's to reanchor anew
the rights securing purpose of our institutions --
a structure most of us here agree is needed still
to frame and harbor the greatness task
bequeathed by those 'way back when, with Washington,
embarked upon this ever unfinished experiment

They were a forest of giant oaks; but the all-resistless
hurricane has swept over them, and left only,
here and there, a lonely trunk, despoiled of its verdure,
shorn of its foliage; unshading and unshaded,
to murmur in a few gentle breezes, and to combat
with its mutilated limbs, a few more ruder storms,
then to sink, and be no more until
. the devastated ecosystem there was is anew restored.

~ They were the pillars of the temple of liberty;
and now, that they have crumbled away,
that temple must fall, unless we, their descendants,
supply their places with other pillars,
hewn from the solid quarry of sober reason.

Passion has helped us; but can do so no more.
It will in future be our enemy. Reason,
cold, calculating, unimpassioned reason,
must furnish all the materials for our future
support and defence. Let those materials
be moulded into general intelligence, sound morality,
and in particular, a reverence
for the Constitution and its laws.

To those who heavenward roll their eyes, incredulous,
at my/our credulity -- fit for pollyannas --
I/we say: coldly assess the realistic alternatives --
some coldly have, and are equally coldly implementing them.

So dedicated, let us improve -- perpetuate -- our political
institutions, onward, on to next,
to become ever more free, perfecting,
to the last, the constructing forms of liberty
to realize the work -- ever unfinished, always re-begun --
of who I/we see as founding the political project
of equal rights secured equally for all --
band of siblings, new-founding family,
ever fittingly remembered so
this time of our abiding memory may last on,
nurtured by the sacred fire of liberty, entrusted...

bringing me/us back to where I/we started from. ~

~ The fierce attachment of the people to
our political institutions and their purpose
of securing equally rights for all -- me and you --
kept ardent, 'z'only way to keep'em, true-stayed on course.

The first danger to their strong perpetuation
is the loss of trust in government because
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is caring obedience by critical many to all the laws,
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to make for future's history a new memory that awes.

A free people dies only by its own, self-inflicted fall;
in eternal vigilance stay woke -- or sleep, not free at all. ~

~ Upon these truths does the proud edifice
of freedom stand, founded as on a rock of ages;
and as truly as has been said of the only
greater institution, hard-won human progress,
"the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." ~

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