McMurtry. In the spring of 1875, as the tenth anniversary of her husband's death approached, Mary Lincoln suffered enormous depression and migraine headaches, for which she took doses of chloral hydrate large enough to explain at least some of her behavioral extremes. Even though Baker describes Mary Lincoln as "both unwilling victim and . . . an agent provocateur" (p. 332) during the months leading up to her trial, she remains highly critical of that trial, noting that the beleaguered woman was inadequately defended and that the doctors who pronounced on her health were Robert Lincoln's friends and had never personally examined her.

Both works conclude with negative comments on the inadequacy of nineteenth century institutional solutions to mental illness. Read together, they convey the essential fascination of the historian's task: the unraveling of puzzles to which there seem to be no end. Was Mary Todd Lincoln merely a sad victim of her son's (and the culture's) increasing intolerance of eccentricity? Did her depressions come dangerously close to threatening her life? How embarrassed was Robert Todd Lincoln by his mother's bizarre dress and fiscal irresponsibility? What emotional damages had he suffered from the tragic deaths of his father and three brothers? Readers interested in such questions will want to read both of these books.

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Mary Todd Lincoln: A Biography. By Jean H. Baker. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1987. Pp. xv, 429. Illustrations, notes, index. $19.95.)

Unlike most women of her time, Mary Todd Lincoln looked at her life in terms of wins and losses and scored them both in bold relief. Unfortunately for her and those around her, the defeats greatly outnumbered the victories. An exceptional woman of many aspirations and one who enjoyed being different, Mary Lincoln became a victim of a series of personal tragedies or "abandonments" and an array of "destructive conventions of Victorian domesticity" (p. xv).

Perhaps Mary Lincoln's fascination with politics made her view her life in such an "unwomanly" way. In Lexington, Kentucky, as a girl, she had used politics to foster a relationship with her father; years later, in Springfield, Illinois, politics provided the background for an on-again-off-again courtship with Abraham Lincoln. Independent, educated, and articulate, Mary Lincoln often listened to long speeches on the courthouse square and regularly talked about issues in the offices of the Sangamon *Journal*. Before mar-

rying Lincoln she had been courted by others active in Springfield's political life, including Stephen A. Douglas. In the end, however, she married a man "of potential majesty" (p. 93), one who during the fall of 1842 gave her a list of election returns for the last three legislative races. Although few women would have appreciated this gift, Mary Lincoln "tied it in a pink ribbon" (p. 94) and cherished it.

Jean H. Baker, who teaches history at Goucher College, tells the story of Mary Todd Lincoln's life in an honest but sympathetic manner. She spends a good deal of the first part of the book showing how Mary Lincoln's character was shaped by her experiences as a member of the Todd family, highlighting in particular the painful death of her mother and the subsequent hostility of her stepmother. Besides emphasizing her subject's genuine interest in politics, the author also portrays Mary Todd Lincoln as a loving, often indulgent, mother; and, once in the White House, as "full of the smiles and lively conversation that were her hallmark" (p. 165). Baker describes the energetic and extravagant way she carried out her duties—redecorating and refurbishing the President's House, entertaining Washington politicians and visiting citizens, and buying elegant clothes for lavish receptions. Mary Lincoln had become the "First Lady," and she enjoyed her new role and the attention it brought. As luck would have it, however, she won her position at a time not only when Americans expected wives to remain out of the spotlight but also when a divided country was worried about the cost of war.

In February, 1862, two weeks after a superb party, Mary Lincoln's good times and good fortune took an abrupt turn for the worse with the death of her eleven-year-old son Willie. His demise from typhoid fever, his mother believed, resulted from her merrymaking in the White House. Three years later, when her husband was assassinated at Ford's Theater, she again held herself responsible for the loss. Her ambitions for him had cost his life. An overwhelmed Mary Lincoln, who had a knack for doing "the wrong thing well" (p. 40), made a spectacle of herself through an extended period of grieving, a heavy reliance on spiritualism, continuous battles with members of Congress over a pension, travels hither and yon in search of cures for her illnesses, and a humiliating attempt to sell her wardrobe through a public sale in New York City.

All of these events make for compelling reading. It is the penultimate chapter on Mary Lincoln's "Trial and Confinement," however, that leaves one astonished. The wretched insanity laws coupled with the lamentable actions of son Robert intermittently evoke feelings of sympathy and respect for a woman who could be exceedingly trying. Had she had a daughter, one wonders, would Mary Lincoln's losses of a husband and three sons have been so crushing?

Baker has written a fascinating study of a difficult woman. It successfully combines the usual elements of political biography with newer themes in social history. Discussions of such topics as nineteenth century childbirth practices, domesticity, mourning customs, spiritualism, and mental illness interwoven with heartbreaking episodes in Mary Lincoln's life provide for a strikingly perceptive biography of a maligned First Lady.

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Freedom. By William Safire. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1987. Pp. xxi, 1125. End maps, illustrations; *Underbook: Sources and Commentary.* $24.95.)

The sight of William Safire's 1125-page book on this reviewer's desk provoked a friend to remark that it looked like *War and Peace.* Both are very large volumes; no other significant parallels may be drawn. Leo Tolstoy took the institutionalization of human rage and raised it to the level of an anagogical examination of an aspect of the "human condition." Safire, laboring upon so elevated a title as *Freedom*, rarely escapes from a preoccupation with personalities.

The publisher has announced Safire's work as "a novel of Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War." The narrative actually ends with the Emancipation Proclamation (which brought freedom to no one) and so follows events only to January, 1863. Upon the war itself, however, the author reveals a disconcerting lack of accuracy. Civil War scholars will be jolted to find Safire imagining that it was General William Farah ("Baldy") Smith who commanded Ulysses S. Grant's left at Fort Donelson, while all observers of the battle remark upon the stark visibility, during that struggle in the darkness, of the flowing, snow white hair of that grand old warrior, General Charles Ferguson Smith. Smiths, with apologies to the race, are easy enough to confuse and so, probably, are Hills (in describing their respective personalities Safire has manifestly confused A. P. Hill with D. H. Hill); but it is difficult to understand how the author can think that the infamous Confederate penitentiary, Libby Prison, located in Richmond, Virginia, was operated by the Union. "The hellhole every Johnny dreaded," he christens it, in comparing it unfavorably to "the South's own Andersonville," which did not come into existence until November of the following year (p. 797). While a certain, though undefined, license is allowed the historical novelist, factual errors of this sort—there are others—seriously vitiate enjoyment of the book.

But a reassessment of military operations is not Safire's first purpose. The focus of his effort is an examination of the mind of