



Lincoln Lore

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WITH MALICE TOWARD NONE BEARS LINCOLN NO MALICE

There they were, right on schedule. In beautiful dark-red jackets portraying Lloyd Ostendorf's recently discovered photographic plate of Abraham Lincoln, they were neatly stacked in all good trade book stores and even in some of those not-so-good chains which handle only books which promise, by scholars' standards at least, a very large sale. A year ago, Harper and Row had promised them for Lincoln's birthday, 1977. *With Malice Toward None: The Life of Abraham Lincoln* by Stephen Oates had arrived.

Never was a book better served by its publisher. A year ago, the wire services carried a photograph of Professor Oates accompanied by stories that humble Abe was not so humble after all — that he did not even like to be called "Abe," in fact. He had not liked to talk about his youth and family origins. In his ambitious rise to frontier affluence and professional status, Oates told us, Lincoln did his utmost to forget his roots. The article usually said that Oates had been working on a life of Lincoln for seven years and that it would appear on Lincoln's birthday next year. It so appeared, and so did author Oates on NBC's morning news show for a typically shallow television interview which probed — among other searching questions — why anyone should want to write a biography of Abraham Lincoln after Carl Sandburg's work. Television interviews sell books.

Stephen Oates is a biographer, not a Lincoln man. This much ballyhooed book is clearly meant, nevertheless, to be in that tradition of great one-volume biographies that includes Benjamin P. Thomas's *Abraham Lincoln: A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1952) and Reinhard H. Luthin's *The Real Abraham Lincoln* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1960). The difference is that Thomas and Luthin served their apprenticeships within the field of Lincolniana. Thomas wrote *Lincoln's New Salem* (Springfield, Illinois: Abraham Lincoln Association, 1934); *Lincoln [Day-by-Day], 1847-1853* (Springfield: Abraham Lincoln Association, 1936); and *Portrait for Posterity: Lincoln and His Biographers* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1947) before tackling his one-volume synthesis, probably the favorite to date among Lincoln aficionados forced to recommend or assign a one-volume biography. Luthin's solid book has always been underrated because it is stodgily written and repetitious (a student of Luthin's told me he had a thick German accent; that linguistic heritage may well account for his prose style). The books that Luthin wrote before *The Real Abraham Lincoln* were substantial contributions which have stood the test of time because they were based on prodigious research. *Lincoln and the Patronage* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943) and *The First Lincoln Campaign* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1944), written with co-author Harry J. Carman, are still standard works in the field which merit study.

Oates is a newcomer to the Lincoln field but not, certainly, to history and biography. He wrote a much acclaimed biography of John Brown entitled *To Purge This Land with Blood*, a history of the Nat Turner revolt called *The Fires of Jubilee*,

and six other books.

By my tone to this point I have been trying to suggest the cool — not to say, hostile — attitude with which I approached this book. Let's face it, all things being equal, one would have preferred to see a long-time toiler in the Lincoln field write the update of Thomas and Luthin that so many people knew was needed. One would have liked to see a Lincoln "regular" reap the rewards of Harper and Row's diligent salesmanship. And one would have thought that experience in the field would have helped the quality of the book.

Credit must be given where credit is due, however. Stephen Oates has given us a lively, sensitive, and sensible biography of Lincoln which takes into account the changes in the field which have made Thomas and Luthin seem less than perfect. Moreover, he has attempted that most difficult of tasks, a true biography, a book which seeks to tell us what the man was like not just what roll call analysis suggests his interpretation of constituent will was, not just what his Presidential policies were, and not just the way his intellect described the world. Oates tries to tell us what made Lincoln angry, what depressed him, and what embarrassed him — when he was humble and when he threw his weight around.

This is no easy task when an author deals with a man who had no intimate friends after 1842 (when he and Joshua Speed let their friendship, in Lincoln's own words, "die by degrees"). This is no easy task in the case of a man of whom his campaign manager and circuit-riding friend, David Davis, could say, "He was the most reticent and secretive man I ever saw or expect to see." This is no easy task in the case of a man whose law partner claimed special knowledge of the man and yet also said that he was the most "shut-mouthed" man who ever lived. "He always told only enough of his plans and purposes to induce the belief that he had communicated all," said Leonard Swett of Lincoln, "yet he reserved enough to have communicated nothing." Said Ward Hill Lamon, "He made simplicity and candor a mask of deep feelings carefully concealed, and subtle plans studiously veiled."

Given such formidable obstacles, Oates does well to put as much flesh on Lincoln as he does. He is a sensitive and subtle reader of *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1953). Take the case of Lincoln's parents and childhood. In the course of saying what he did in the early promotion of the book — that Lincoln forgot his roots as fast as he could — Oates came across as a debunker. Indeed, an editorial he wrote for the *New York Times* on Lincoln's birthday this year, denied Lincoln access to "The Academy of Saints" (see *The New York Times*, February 12, 1977, section C, page 21). This is the part of his publishers' promotional scheme which, in my opinion, went awry. A substantial number of the steady purchasers of Lincoln books are *Lincolnphiles* who are hostile to debunking. This market does not want to buy a book to hear its hero vilified and abused.

In point of fact, Oates is not a debunker at all. What he says about Lincoln's escape from his frontier past to professional

dignity has been needing to be said for some time. In reconstructing the reputation of Thomas Lincoln, for example, from the accusations that he was a shiftless n'er-do-well, Lincoln scholars have done an important piece of work. This Foundation itself has played a big role in this particular revision of the historical record. Nevertheless, some have carried the revision too far and ignored Abraham Lincoln's obvious — and somewhat painful — expressions of disdain for his rural past. He, not the historians who were wrong about Thomas Lincoln, called his education in Kentucky and Indiana "defective." He, not the historians, termed the schools in Indiana, "schools so-called." He, not the historians, made it clear that he learned respectable grammar only after he had left his father's roof. Lincoln, and not the historians, limited Thomas Lincoln's literary achievements to the feat of learning to sign his own name "bunglingly." To stress the radical separation from his youthful past — to stress the obvious estrangement from his father — is only fitting and proper. It is not debunking iconoclasm, for it is not new, really. Oates maintains this as a theme of at least the first half of his book and treats the scene well when the mature Lincoln is confronted by his rural past at the Republican state convention in Decatur, which gave him Illinois's nomination for the Presidency in 1860:

... more highjinks followed. Lincoln's cousin John Hanks and another fellow marched down the aisle carrying a banner tied between two rotted fence rails. "Abraham Lincoln, the Rail Candidate for President," the banner read. "Two rails from a Lot of 3,000 Made in 1830 by Thos. Hanks and Abe Lincoln — Whose Father was the First Pioneer of Macon County." At that the delegates broke into a thunderous demonstration, stomping and shoving so hard that part of the roof awning collapsed on top of them. When the crowd called for a speech, Lincoln pointed at the banner and said, "I suppose I am expected to reply to that." As much as he detested "Abe" and disliked hickish symbols, he let it all go, remarking that he didn't know whether he'd split those two particular rails or not, but he'd mauled better ones since becoming a man. Again the delegates shouted and whooped and flung their hats in the air. And so the "rail splitter" image was born, the symbol of Lincoln as humble "Abe" of the common people, a homespun hero brimming with prairie wit and folk wisdom — a symbol Lincoln's backers hoped would give him an electric popular appeal.

A near sub-theme of the book concerns Lincoln's bouts with the "hypo." We know these as fits of depression or periods of melancholia, but Lincoln, after his friend and physician Dr. Anson Henry, called it hypochondriasm. His worst period is well known, after the "fatal first of January," 1841, when he broke off his engagement to Mary Todd and when Joshua Speed prepared to return to Kentucky. But, if we are to believe Oates, they reoccurred, though with less severe symptoms, with some frequency:

Even as he grew older, Lincoln continued to suffer from the hypo, from spells of melancholy that troubled his friends and associates. In the midst of conversation, they observed, he would slip away into one of his moody introspections, lost in himself again as he stared absently out the unwashed windows of his office, brooding over untold thoughts and secret storms, until he who viewed each human life as a pawn in the hands of an unknowable God, as a doomed and fleeting moment in a rushing ocean of time, would start muttering the lines of "Mortality." As his colleagues looked on in worried astonishment, his face would become so despondent, his eyes so full of anguish, that it would hurt to look at him.

But abruptly, "like one awakened from sleep," Lincoln would join his visitors again — his mood swings were startling — and joke and quip with them until laughter lit up his cloudy face. For humor was his opiate — a device "to whistle down sadness," as a friend said.

Mary Lincoln, of course, had to deal with the problem too.

Then there were his mood swings, his habit of withdrawing into himself, of being glum and remote when she wanted to talk. She did not understand his hypo any more than his friends did and was irritated by his spells of abstraction.

They might come on at the dinner table, where he would stare off into space, impervious to conversation and Mary's glances. Or he would go off and sit in his rocking chair, immersed in himself as he mulled over some law case or the state of the Union, mulled over the meaning of life and the inevitability of death, his death and that of his wife and children, until he would shake such thoughts away and pull himself back to his house, this room, his playing sons, his anxious wife. Once a spell even came over him while he pulled one of his boys in a wagon. Lost in thought, he tugged the wagon over an uneven plank sidewalk and the child fell off. But Lincoln was oblivious to the fallen boy and went on with his head bent forward, hauling the empty wagon around the neighborhood.

He had an attack when he lost the United States Senate seat to Lyman Trumbull in February, 1855, during the Sumter crisis, upon the resignations of Southern-born officers like Robert E. Lee and John Bankhead Magruder in 1861, after the disastrous defeat at First Bull Run, and after the slaughter of Fredericksburg in December of 1862. The crush of work and the pace of nearly day-to-day crises helped Lincoln avoid prolonged spells of depression during the Civil War because he usually got out of them by throwing himself into his work, and there was more work to do than ever before in his life.

Oates portrays Lincoln — especially as President — as more prone to anger than any sentimentalized portrait of him ever does. Virginia's John Bankhead Magruder came to see Lincoln and "stood right here is his office and 'repeated over and over again' his 'protestations of loyalty,' only to resign his commission and head for the South. It gave Lincoln the hypo. He referred to Lee, Magruder, and all like them as traitors." When Baltimore leaders objected that Union soldiers could not "pollute" Maryland's soil, Lincoln exclaimed, "Our men are not moles and can't dig under the earth; they are not birds, and can't fly through the air. There is no way but to march across, and that they must do." He "bristled," says Oates, when they urged him to make peace with the South:

You express great horror of bloodshed, and yet would not lay a straw in the way of those who are organizing in Virginia and elsewhere to capture this city. The rebels attack Fort Sumter, and your citizens attack troops sent to the defense of the Government, and the lives and property in Washington, and yet you would have me break my oath and surrender the Government without a blow. There is no Washington in that — no Jackson in that — no manhood nor honor in that.

Lincoln "became furious" when he learned that Mary had overspent a Congressional allowance to redecorate the White House: "It can never have my approval. I'll pay it out of my pocket first — it would stink in the nostrils of the American people to have it said the President of the United States had approved a bill over-running the appropriation of \$20,000 for *flub dubs* for this damned old house, when the soldiers cannot have blankets." Though he generally gave military expertise the benefit of the doubt and deferred to the judgments of the generals even when he thought them mistaken, the generals could make him very angry when Lincoln was sure he was right. After General Meade failed to pursue Lee's retreat from Gettysburg, Lincoln was apoplectic. He read Meade's message boasting of driving the invader from Northern soil. "Drive the *invader* from our soil," Lincoln exclaimed. "My God! Is that all?" He told his son Robert, "If I had gone up there, I could have whipped them myself." He thought that "there is bad faith somewhere" in failing to annihilate Lee's "traitor army." Halleck informed the victorious general of the President's "great dissatisfaction."

Lincoln tried to forget feuds, saying, "A man has not time to spend half his life in quarrels." And he disliked violence, as Oates tells us:

As Lincoln told an Indiana senator, the war was the supreme irony of his life: that he who sickened at the sight of blood, who abhorred stridency and physical violence, should be cast in the middle of a great civil war, a tornado of blood and wreckage with consequences beyond prediction for those swept in its winds.

But anyone capable of fighting the Civil War with the ten-

acity and clear-sightedness of Lincoln (he carried a copy of Sherman's famous orders which inaugurated the March to the Sea and the era of Total War in his pocket the night of the assassination) had to have something of Jackson in him, a stern streak. The biography is very properly called "With Malice Toward None," but when Lincoln asked the serenading band to play "Dixie" the night of April 10, 1865, he did so, he said, because "it is our lawful prize." When the Cabinet discussed punishing Confederates, Oates says, "Lincoln made it clear that he wanted 'no bloody work,' no war trials, hangings and firing squads — not even for rebel leaders. But he would like to 'frighten them out of the country,' he said, 'open the gates, let down the bars, scare them off.' He waved his hands as though he were shooing chickens." On that day, he agreed in principle with Stanton's plans for military reconstruction.

Lincoln wielded power when it was necessary, and *threatened* to use it when that seemed necessary too. When he began to angle for the Presidency seriously in 1860, Illinois Senator Lyman Trumbull forgot his debt to Lincoln for throwing him his votes in the 1854 contest for the United States Senate seat and was supporting Supreme Court Judge John McLean, a perpetual contender and now something of an old fossil. Lincoln had been to the Cooper Institute now and knew that he was well enough known to be a serious contender. He began to work hard on support outside the state. One thing he did not need was a disunited Illinois delegation, and "he bluntly advised Trumbull to 'write no letters which can possibly be distorted into opposition, or quasi opposition to me,' because that would cost Trumbull the support of Lincoln's own 'peculiar friends.' Up for re-election as senator that year, Trumbull took the hint and stopped promoting Judge McLean. But frankly he didn't think Lincoln could defeat Seward."

Oates stresses that in the 1850's Lincoln could be counted on to supply precise statements of the moral position of most Republicans and with eloquence. Indeed, it was his oratory and writing ability which made him a national political success. During the Civil War this ability served to keep up his relations with the liberal wing of the Republican party.

Nowhere is the freshness of Oates's approach more easily discerned than in his stress on Lincoln's close working relationship with Massachusetts's liberal Senator Charles Sumner during the Civil War. Their first contacts came naturally as a result of (1) Sumner's being Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and (2) the fact that Lincoln had a headstrong and domineering Secretary of State, William H. Seward. Lincoln balanced Seward's belligerence towards Great Britain against Sumner's impulse to pacify and mollify. "You must watch him and overrule him," Sumner warned. In exchange for Sumner's advice on foreign policy, Sumner got access to the President. Their relationship, like most of Lincoln's relationships, had its ups and downs. When Lincoln condemned Secretary of War Simon Cameron for issuing an unauthorized report suggesting emancipating and arming Negroes, Oates says,

abolitionists and Republican liberals openly condemned Lincoln's stand against federal emancipation and exerted all their powers of persuasion to change his mind. Chief among them was Charles Sumner, who visited Lincoln regularly and beseeched him to stop protecting the very institution that had caused the rebellion. One day, as Lincoln sat in the Senate galleries, Sumner gave an impassioned eulogy to Edward Baker . . . Gesticulating dramatically, Sumner described how Baker had died at Ball's Bluff and then — looking straight at Lincoln now — Sumner cried that slavery was "the murderer of our dead Senator [Baker]." A correspondent said that Lincoln started violently at Sumner's remark, quite as though he had been stabbed.

Willing to compromise, Sumner supported Lincoln's plan for gradual and compensated emancipation in Delaware. When it stalled, Lincoln told Sumner that "the only difference between you and me on this subject is a difference of a month or six weeks in time." "Mr. President," Sumner replied, "if that is the only difference between us, I will not say another word to

you about it till the longest time you name has passed by." Despite occasional policy differences, their personal association — and Sumner's friendship with Mary Lincoln — survived right up to the time of Lincoln's death (and after, in the case of Mary).

The very fact that Oates calls Lincoln's critics on the left "liberal Republicans" indicates his principal revision of the war years — gone is the artificial story of tremendous conflict and tension between Lincoln and members of his own party. Lincoln was recognized by Republicans as a liberal Republican, sound on slavery, for his entire career.

A practitioner of biography on a large scale, Oates is also a master of the thumbnail biographical sketch. The book is dotted with delightful little portraits of men who played important parts in Lincoln's life. Again, Charles Sumner provides a nice example, when he first appears on the scene as an advisor to Lincoln on policy toward England:

An arch, sophisticated bachelor with B.A. and law degrees from Harvard, Sumner even looked English, with his tailored coats, checkered trousers, and English gaiters. He was so conscious of manners, he admitted, "that he never allowed himself, even in the privacy of his own chamber, to fall into a position which he would not take in his chair in the Senate. 'Habit,' he said, 'is everything.'" A humorless, high-minded man, he hated slavery and spoke out with great courage against racial injustice to black people. Back in 1856, he'd almost been beaten to death by Congressman Preston Brooks of South Carolina and had gone off to Europe to convalesce. He had rich brown hair streaked with gray, a massive forehead, blue eyes, and a rather sad smile.

Mary was terribly impressed with him. And so was Lincoln. His adversary in foreign policy circles, William Seward, also gets a nice portrait:

. . . now that Seward had given up trying to run the administration, Lincoln liked him as a man and thoroughly enjoyed his company. Sixty years old and slightly stooped, Seward resembled a jocular bird chewing on a Havana cigar. His nose was hooked in a beak, his ears stuck out, his voice was husky, his eyebrows thick and grizzly, and his silver hair always disheveled. He was a celebrated raconteur, loved to pun and banter, often braying so hard at his own wit that it left him hoarse. A chain talker, he entertained guests at his house on Lafayette Square with "A regular Niagara flood" of chatter, gossip, and uninhibited profanity. And how he could entertain, throwing lavish dinner parties that lasted four hours and went through eleven courses, complete with imported wines and brandy. Yet he was a man of many moods — now an effusive storyteller, now a cynic, now a show-off, now a tough and serious administrator. In all, he was a man of immeasurable self-esteem, so certain of his own greatness that he tipped his hat to any stranger who appeared to recognize him.

Befitting the stature of Sumner and Seward and their importance in the Lincoln story, these sketches are longer than most, but they are typical of the attention to character, habit, and appearance in Oates's descriptions of Lincoln's acquaintances.

As these sketches may indicate, Professor Oates writes in a very lively style. Those who fear from Oates's academic credentials that this will be a scholarly tome with Teutonic footnotes are in for a very pleasant surprise. This professor's style happens to be conversational. He uses contractions (he'd, didn't, hadn't, and so forth) regularly. He uses sentence fragments regularly — for example: "Now to get these operations in motion before autumn set in" (page 257). He uses marks of elision to indicate pauses: "McClellan was in bed . . . faking illness, fumed some Republicans, so he wouldn't have to fight" (page 283). He concludes sections with sentences suggestive of ominous and foreboding events. When Lincoln visited the Confederate capital after its fall and less than a week before his assassination, he returned to Washington with a happy party aboard the steamer *River Queen*:

Mary rejoined Lincoln at City Point with a "choice little party" that included Sumner and Lizzie Keckley. They'd come down a few days ago and toured Richmond themselves; and the sight of the rebel capital and transformed

Sumner "into a lad of sixteen." On the journey back to Washington, they had a long discussion about Shakespeare, and Lincoln entertained the group by reading the scene in *Macbeth* where Duncan is assassinated.

With Malice Toward None is a book in the Thomas and Luthin tradition, and, of course, Oates has the advantage of being able to use his predecessors' work. His discussion of the executive routine at the White House follows Thomas's chapter on that subject very closely, as well it might, since that is the finest chapter in the last couple hundred pages of *Abraham Lincoln: A Biography*. Here is a sample of how close the two books can be, this time on Lincoln's last cabinet meeting:

the Southern people. Lincoln spoke kindly of Lee and other officers and especially of the enlisted men in the Confederate army who had fought bravely in a cause they held dear. Stanton presented a plan of reconstruction which would have wiped out old state boundaries, but Lincoln did not favor it. He was glad that Congress was not in session, for he hoped to have friendly relations re-established before it met. "There are men in Congress," he observed, "... who possess feelings of hate and vindictiveness in which I do not sympathize and can not participate." He hoped there would be no persecutions, "no bloody work"; enough blood had been shed. No one need expect him to take part in vengeful dealings, even toward the worst of the secessionists. "Frighten them out of the country," he said, "open the gates, let down the bars, scare them off" — he waved his great hands a though shooing sheep out of a lot.

[Oates] On other reconstruction matters, they deferred the question of Negro suffrage, knowing that it would require extended debate. As for punishing the rebels, Lincoln made it clear that he wanted "no bloody work," no war trials, hangings and firing squads — not even for rebel leaders. But he would like to "frighten them out of the country," he said, "open the gates, let down the bars, scare them off." He waved his hands as though he were shooing chickens.

At other times, especially when dealing with the war years, Thomas seems a bit overwhelmed by the crush of events and loses sight of Lincoln as a man. When treating the draft riots of 1863, for example, Thomas's paragraphs get choppy (six on the one page describing the draft law and its social results). He describes Lincoln's dealings with New York's Governor Seymour at the time of the riots this way:

Greeley and other Republican editors reviled Seymour as a Copperhead, but Lincoln treated his opposition as born of honest conviction. He would welcome an opinion from the Supreme Court, he replied to the Governor, but he could not wait for it. He must have soldiers, for the enemy was driving every able-bodied man into the ranks "very much as a butcher drives bullocks into a slaughter-pen." He would give New York all possible credits for enlistments, but the draft must go on.

Lincoln was not responsible for the deficiencies of the draft law; he was obliged to administer it as Congress had framed it. But much of his time had to be spent in explanation and adjustment of various governors' complaints. "My purpose," he wrote to Seymour, "is to be . . . just and constitutional; and yet practical, in performing the important duty, with which I am charged, of maintaining the unity, and free principles of our common country." About a month later the draft was quietly resumed in New York City.

So ends this section in Thomas's book. It seems brittle and stiff and legalistic in tone, when compared to Oates's section on the same subject:

What did Lincoln want, Seymour raged, New York City ablaze with riots? The city cut off from the outside world and "given over to a howling mob?"

Of course Lincoln didn't want any more mob outbreaks — it was terrible, he said, for working people to maul and murder other working people as they had in New York City. But he told Seymour he would not suspend the draft, not when the enemy was forcing all available men into his ranks, "very much as a butcher drives bullocks into a slaughter pen," in hopes of attacking again and destroying all the Union had gained at Gettysburg . . .

In mid September Lincoln prepared a two-fisted defense of the draft, arguing that it was not only Constitutional, but based on sound historical precedent as well. Did not the Founding Fathers resort to conscription in the Revolution and the War of 1812? Are we not now to use what our own Fathers employed? "Are we degenerate? Has the manhood of our race run out?" He was resolutely determined, he informed the Cabinet, to stand behind the draft — and to deal with officials who obstructed it as he'd dealt with Vallandigham: he would banish them all to the Confederacy.

Hay was amazed at how tough Lincoln was becoming. "The Tycoon is in fine whack," Hay said of the President. "He is managing this war, the draft, foreign relations, and planning a reconstruction of the Union, all at once. I never knew with what tyrannous authority he rules the Cabinet, till now. The most important thing he decides & there is no cavil." "He will not be bullied — even by his friends."

The passage from Oates has not lost sight of the man who dealt with the draft problem and, for my money, he is more nearly the sort of man who could win the largest war in American history.

In addition to being able to use Luthin's and Thomas's works, Oates benefits from much research conducted since their time. His book is notably better for being able to use Justin and Linda Levitt Turner's *Mary Todd Lincoln: Her Life and Letters* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972) and David Donald's biography of Charles Sumner, for example.

It is not without its peculiar weaknesses. Lincoln's ideas are hard to find. Even though he was not a philosopher or in any sense a systematic social thinker, still his world view merits some systematic exploration, analysis, and rendering. It is hard to understand from Oates's book where all the policies came from and how they all fit together at any moment.

Ironically — given Oates's reputation as a debunker — another weakness is that the book is so pro-Lincoln that it sometimes takes Lincoln's view of his enemies uncritically. Oates gives Stephen Douglas very short shrift, and there is nothing like the appreciation of Lincoln's rival one can find in David Potter and Don E. Fehrenbacher's, *The Impending Crisis*, which manages to admire both men by understanding both of them.

It smacks of a twentieth-century academic's secular prejudices to ignore that innermost of subjects, religion, in a book which seeks to reveal the inner man. There is a brief mention of religion early in book, and Oates never mentions it again. This defies the pattern of increasing evidence of religiosity which most scholars have found in Lincoln's life, and it defies the evidence of some of the witnesses on whom Oates commonly relies for other points in Lincoln's life, Mary Todd Lincoln and Noah Brooks, for example.

Finally, of course, one can object that there is little that is new in the book — that is, little that stems from Oates's own research in original sources. Yet this can hardly be a weakness in a book which, despite the media hype for selling it, was surely not meant to come up with anything new on its own. It was meant merely to incorporate all the changes that have taken place in the twenty-five years since Thomas's book appeared. Oates even adopts Thomas's footnote format, which is to have no footnotes but to bunch the references by section, suggesting where all the directly quoted material appears.

Nevertheless, one can achieve something "new" by accumulation of details garnered from others' work. This is what makes a successful and original synthesis. The presentation of a tough and Jacksonian Lincoln in a book which nevertheless admires Lincoln is rather original, I think, and satisfies a demand in the field. It has long been difficult to figure out how a tender-hearted Lincoln ever won that war; Oates explains it and does so without diminishing the size of Lincoln's heart. The book does not achieve the pinnacle of success in synthesis that David Potter and Don Fehrenbacher do in another book published by Harper and Row, *The Impending Crisis*, but that book is a masterpiece. If work in the Lincoln field never dipped below Oates's high standard, the field would be a dazzling one indeed.

Lincoln students should greet Stephen Oates, who is no debunker and who is a capable biographer, with open arms and with no malice at all. He has served us well.