Lincoln's Sense of Humor, by Richard Carwardine. Concise Lincoln Library. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2017. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. 171 pp. $24.95 hardcover.

Reviewer Mark Wahlgren Summers is professor of history at the University of Kentucky. He has written several books about politics during the Civil War, Reconstruction, and the Gilded Age.

What, another book about Lincoln's jokes? jaded critics may carp. With the same publisher having issued a volume on the same subject just three years ago, never did the words, "Stop me if you've heard this one," seem fitter. In fact, with oft-addressed subjects, like twice-told tales, everything depends on how a person tells it. Richard Carwardine's book not only tells it shrewdly but with fresh insight; amazed readers will realize that they *haven't* heard this one—not to mention some Lincoln stories definitely not clean enough for a PG-13 rating.

Carwardine's subject, Lincoln's sense of humor, takes in more than the jests he let loose; it covers what tickled his funnybone and how his appreciation of a good laugh both revealed his character and shaped his response to the world. Carwardine reminds us, as other scholars have, that Lincoln's sense of humor softened his sorrows. In office, it let him deflect, distract, and deflate pests who laid demands on him that he had no wish to oblige. Carl Sandburg could have told us that much. Where Carwardine excels is in examining how Lincoln's comic style refined over time. Satire mean enough to reduce one rival to "blubbering" gave way to a gentler needling, where mockery of himself and a fund of anecdotes kept what victims there were from taking personal offense. As the slavery issue became dominant, the jokester of the Illinois courthouse and back room learned subtler ways of applying humor that made it a far more dangerous weapon than before—and learned when to shy clear of it entirely.

Lincoln's sense of humor also proved a tool of infinite variety, from Joe Miller's joke-book chestnuts to wordplay, puns, absurdities, irony, tall tales, logic run amok, and misapplied biblical quotations, and nobody laughed harder at his own knee-slappers than Lincoln himself. But even his story of the crows so terrified of a scarecrow that they brought back the corn they had taken two years back had a point, not just a punch line. That was why Lincoln admired the outbursts of David Ross Locke's Copperhead bounder, "Petroleum V. Nasby," expressing in preposterous, grammatically challenged form the bigotry and hypocrisy of so many white northerners.

Looking back, Americans cherish Lincoln's humor, even the puns so awful that they rank as wartime atrocities. In fact, all too many of the president's contemporaries felt easier about electing a rail-splitter than

a side-splitter. In a time of savage war, critics saw Lincoln's most humanizing trait as his most inhumane: for them, nothing so ill-befit a front line as a punch line, especially a smutty one. If funning was a personal asset for the "Widow-Maker of the nineteenth century," as one Democratic paper called him, it was a political liability.

Nobody will regret reading this book for the jokes alone; they glint on every page. Unlike Lincoln himself, not all of them belong to the ages. But it is no small recommendation in a history monograph to predict that somewhere, every reader will give a yelp of appreciative laughter.

"This Infernal War": The Civil War Letters of William and Jane Standard, edited by Timothy Mason Roberts. Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2018. xi, 359 pp. Illustrations, appendix, notes, bibliography, index. $34.95 hardcover.

Reviewer J. L. Anderson is associate professor of history at Mount Royal University. He is the author of "The Vacant Chair on the Farm: Soldier Husbands, Farm Wives, and the Iowa Home Front, 1861–1865" (*Annals of Iowa,* 2007) and coeditor of *Union Heartland: The Midwestern Home Front during the Civil War* (2013).

Between September 1862 and June 1865, William and Jane Standard exchanged more than 200 letters. While William served as an officer in the 103rd Illinois Volunteer Infantry, Jane managed the household and family property, cared for three children, and took in boarders. Their letters are filled with news of neighbors, family, battles, casualties, farming, politics, and the changing material conditions of life on the home front and in the war's Western Theater. William and Jane vehemently opposed the war, regularly condemning Lincoln, emancipation, the Republican Party, and Republican neighbors and family members whose lives intersected with theirs.

Readers will see the myriad problems married couples faced when husbands departed. Jane was surprised on several occasions by the appearance of creditors who sought payment for debts that she did not know they owed. On another occasion, Jane recovered the family's stolen wagon. She bought and sold livestock, hay, and fodder, butchered hogs, and paid taxes and creditors. Ultimately, Jane collected relief money from the county, allowing her to pay property taxes and remain at home.

As much as William hated confiscation and emancipation, he was an active participant in the evolution of hard war. He was an expert forager, "cramping" pork, turkeys, chickens, horses, and other items. His sympathies were clearly on the side of white southerners, and he made frequent disparaging remarks about enslaved African Americans and freedmen. But he also recognized that white southerners were divided