

TRUE Review

Vol 18, No. 4
Whole Number 71
November 2008
\$2.50
ISSN 1083-8511

The Long, Dark Night Of The Soul

There's a common expression for those who live in Chester County, Pennsylvania - you are either very rich or very poor. There's nothing in between, because the middle class is gone.

This is not very good.

Sadly, we have been seeing the death of the Middle Class for quite some time.

I think we need some answers to some dire questions.

The end of the Middle Class probably started with NAFTA, the Never Again Feel Totally A-OK agreement, or Not-FA, mistakenly called the North American Free Trade Agreement. Not-FA was signed by our leaders who were purchased by special interest groups lobbying to keep them in power and thus, by association, continue to keep the rich rich and the poor, poor.

Not-FA was an attempt to find a way to get the cheapest labor possible so that the profit margins could be expanded. As a result, manufacturing jobs - the lifeblood of any economy since the days of Egyptian pyramid work crews - were lost. If you have nothing but a service economy, you are lost. Just ask the Egyptians.

For quite some time, pundits of the not-FA predicted that the more jobs we lose - manufacturing jobs, that is, where we actually produce something other than burgers and pizza - the closer to financial disaster we get.

I think the current recession we are in is a sign of a deeper malady. It just feels like we crossed a threshold. A feeling that there is no going back. A terrible, sinking feeling that "economic recovery" will come slowly if at all. The disaster the anti-NAFTA people believe would befall us is all around us.

What amazes me is the bailout proposals that have been requested are asking the tax payers to foot the bill for all the corruption by the banks

and the sub-prime criminal acts that have ensued. And the public is not buying it. We don't want to foot the bill. We want to avoid the bill at all costs.

We, the taxpayers, are broke. How can we - and why should we? -- pay for the criminal acts of the banks? That's question one.

In a book I reviewed in True Review 48 in April 2001, THE COMING INTERNET DEPRESSION, by Michael J. Mandel (Basic Books, 0-465-04358-5), the author noted some of the causes of the Great Depression. What happened was the feds would not offer a bailout. They figured the banks did immoral things, such as loan money against existing equity in a house, offer purchases with no money down, take "capital" and invest heavily in high-risk stocks . . . terrible things. The more things change . . .

It is getting terribly eerie how we parallel those dark days of the late 1920s and early 1930s, when the feds "punished" the banks for their behavior. They did so the same way we do now as we watch the auto makers stand in line for national economic bail-outs. The news today is that housing contractors want to do the same. Are we gonna care?

Major banking decision makers recently moved a meeting to Hawaii. Those seeking bailouts came to Washington on corporate jets. As one comedian remarked, couldn't they all "jet-pool"?

The immoral and unethical choices will exist, according to many market commentators, because people realize that Mamma Government will always bail us out. They did it before, and will do it again. So why should businesses bother being good and upright? That's question 2.

Executive compensation. I know of a major company near my hometown in Lancaster, Pennsylvania that has reported something like 14 quarters of a downturn. Yet the CEO gets close to \$7.5 million in compensation. Excuse me? Why would anybody get any amount of money over \$500,000 when a company is on the skids? (As if \$500,000 is bad money.) Can you imagine how many jobs, and how much economic incentive, \$7 million would bring to any city? How many jobs would that create if we would stop being so damned greedy? That's question 3.

I have a friend from Germany. Get this: in Germany, you automatically get six weeks of vacation (in America, you're lucky to get 10 days). The cost of healthcare is four times higher in America compared to Germany, yet the Germans are healthier. They have 20 holidays. Their pay is double what it is in America. Their health care is free. Their college education is free. They believe their free time is more valuable. They are smarter than us.

How do they do it?

They make the greedy sickos we call multi-national corporations over here PAY for social services. They give their CEOs a decent \$200,000 a year, tops. I mean, how much money do you need for shaking hands and smiling a lot? Their system is sane.

Why isn't ours?

Question 4: why can't we be like them?

— Andrew Andrews, Publisher

The Unfortunate Internet

Book Reviews

By Andrew Andrews

THE MYSTERY OF GRACE, by Charles DeLint. TOR, 2009, 272 pp., \$24.95. ISBN 10: 0-7653-1756-7

Late in the fall, at least here in south central Pennsylvania, a very strange feeling persists: the shadows formed on the trees are longer. Sunsets are more stunning. The time "between" sunset and sundown stretches out. Warm and cold breezes flirt about, bringing a distinct chill in the air.

It's a frightening time, perhaps, because those of us who live here know what's coming: darker and longer nights. Chillier days. The leaves are falling. Burials abound.

Charles DeLint is long known not only as a great F&SF Magazine book reviewer but as the best practitioner of the type of writing we know as "urban fantasy." It's the type of fantasy that draws on a certain real-life, city born-and-raised grittiness, where the ordinary person is thrust into the fantastic. So far, De Lint has never cast his stories in the Southwest (where

the sun seems to shine at all times of the year) until this tale. But those lands aren't foreign to the creepiness that is late fall, Halloween, and the gloominess that permeates.

In the fictitious California town of Solona, Altagracia Quintero - otherwise known as "Grace" by her family and friends - is in the wrong place at the wrong time. During a store robbery gone wrong, she is shot and killed.

It's not long after that Grace, as a wandering soul captured by the paranormal energy of the Alverson Arms Apartments, meets up with the unsuspecting John Burns - down on his luck with life and relationships - at the Solona Music Hall. Grace, coming to grips with her death and her new life as a ghost of Alverson Arms, learns she is also part the two most extraordinary times of the year for her "ghosts-in-arms": Los Dias de Muertes - the Days of the Dead.

In many religions, both Halloween and May Day fall into the time when the walls separating the dearly departed from us,

the living, break down, and the spirits cross over into our reality. These include the Wiccan beliefs of Samhain (Halloween, honoring death) and Beltane (May Day, honoring spring, with its new life) — two days when the veils between the worlds are the thinnest, as a character in MYSTERY OF GRACE explains.

Grace, heavily into auto restoration, with a FoMoCo tattoo on her leg, falls in love with John. They both have a lot in common - except, in this case, Grace is dead. John learns that she was murdered and discovers, by talking to a spirit man, of sorts, that John's best opportunity to see Grace again would be April 30, or Walpurgis Night, according to pagan customs, when spirits roam the night. Many celebrate with a Witch's ball (also called Drudennacht in Germany and Vappu in Finland), the "in-between" time.

Again, John sees Grace during Walpurgis night - and knows her history. But how to be with her? He is haunted by his love for Grace and his yearning to some-

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TRUE REVIEW, a review magazine, is published quarterly by Gallifrey Press, 404 Hockersville Rd., Hershey, PA 17033, (717) 940-2724. ISSN 1083-8511. E-mail andy@truereviewonline.net. Single issue price is \$2.50.

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This issue published November 2008. Issues appear quarterly. Subscriptions are \$8.00 per year. Single copy price is \$2.50, mailed first class.

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how be with her forever – but to what sacrifice?

De Lint comes up with “novel lite” fare, with age old “boy meets girl” that is enjoyable – maybe not as enriching or involved as you might suspect, but De Lint remains in a class of his own, making the characters who surround Grace and John real and believable. If you have characters that speak to you, then you have the makings of a classic. I think “The Mystery of Grace” is our modern-day classic Southwest tale, urban fantasy done well by the master himself.

FAST FORWARD 2, ed. by Lou Anders. Pyr/Prometheus, 2008, 360 pp., \$15.00. ISBN 978-1-59102-692-1

What won’t most SF readers love about an anthology that promises us “dangerous stories” about our future?

Some of the stories in the second volume of the FAST FORWARD series actually make their mark as “dangerous” in talking about proposed futures. I enjoyed the following:

- “The Kindness of Strangers” by Nancy Kress. Rochester, New York, is like most U.S. cities in this tale – either obliterated by an alien invasion or vastly reduced as a result thereof. The aliens, much like “The Day the World Stood Still,” are here to either give us a path to avoiding destroying each other and the rest of civilized space or are simply keeping us caged because they think we are so vastly inferior, we are merely pets for their amusement. Maybe a little of both.

- In “Alone with An Inconvenient Companion,” by Jack Skillingstead, genetic modifications can be made to reform almost any living entity. It is difficult to tell the mechanical from the real – at some point there may be no distinction. And how will relationships form? Even between two lonely people meeting up at a genetics convention?

- In “Adventure” by Paul McAuley, a man undergoing a mid-life crisis after his divorce ventures far on a spiritual journey to discover what is REALLY important in his life,

- In “The Gambler” by Paolo Bacigalupi, what is news? And why would one journalist believe so much of it? In this,

Internet news feeds and Nielsen ratings can make or break careers. One journalist stands for what he believes in.

THE COLLECTED STORIES OF ROBERT SILVERBERG: VOL. 3, SOMETHING WILD IS LOOSE, 1969-1972, by Robert Silverberg. Subterranean Press, 2008, 408 pp., \$35.00. ISBN 978-1-59606-143-9

Some of these stories, already collected elsewhere in Silverberg’s ovure, show us an author in the midst of transcendentalism. At this point in his career, Silverberg moved from looking at great gadgets and fantastic futures of mankind to the fantastic futures, filled with his search for religious meaning to existence.

It can be pointed out that many of these stories bear witness to Silverberg the Pontiff – after reading, long ago in some collection or other (I don’t remember which – perhaps one of the Nebula Awards anthologies?) “Good News from the Vatican” – that this Jewish author knows a lot more about Roman Catholicism than many Catholics. But of course, what the author doesn’t point out is that Jesus was a Jew, yet Silverberg the author perceives himself as a mere dabbler in Catholic history (well, unless he is the first to predict a robot Pope at some point in our future).

SF as the religion of modern times? Perhaps that was what SilverBob was trying to accomplish with many of these tales, of which we see Author as Pontiff – deeply spiritual, deeply religious tales.

In “The Reality Trip,” an alien who studies the strange planet Earth has to take the form of a human but ends up falling in love – and the woman does love him, even knowing she can see how inhuman he really is.

In “Going,” a brilliant composer, in an age where people live so long they can select their date of death, grapples with his decision. Should he stay or should he go?

In “Push No More,” what Silverberg believes is a precursor to his classic 1972 Nebula- and Hugo-Award nominated novel DYING INSIDE, a teenage boy (much like the David Selig of DYING) who has poltergeist capabilities (Selig was

a telepath instead) finds himself losing his powers. What becomes of him?

In “The Feast of St. Dionysus,” an alienated Mars astronaut, returned from a catastrophic mission in which he loses two colleagues to a freak sandstorm, discovers a village in the New Mexican desert where thousands of people have gathered to worship and to praise. Is this merely a “vision quest,” a way for the emotionally distraught astronaut to cope with the tragedy . . . or something more real?

In his own words, Silverberg points out, in this continuing series of career-making stories, how crazy the times were in the late 1960s: suburbia was coming apart at the seams. Trust in our great leaders was waning. Troubling times were ahead. So what else is new?

Silverberg writes, “The stories in this volume were written in those troubled times when there was no longer any safe zone in the world – the years from 1969 to 1972. People wore strange clothes and strange hair, doped themselves with strange drugs, read and wrote strange things.” The times were the result, Silverberg concludes, of an emotion-filled backlash triggered by the Kennedy assassination, the loss of a young leader, the end of our innocence, the recognition that we would need more to make it than our daily doses of Ovaltine. We would need new ways of thinking, breaking new frontiers . . . making that spirit quest to deal with the future coming at us. In many ways, perhaps it already has. Then, again, perhaps it hasn’t. Yet.

THE COLLECTED STORIES OF ROBERT SILVERBERG: Trips, 1972-

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Book Reviews by Debra Jackson-Andrews

JOHN ADAMS, by David McCullough. Simon & Shuster, 2001, 651 pp., \$20.00. ISBN-13: 978-1-4165-7588-7

Give Me Liberty, Give Me Freedom, And Give Me A Latte

About the age of 40, you begin to realize that you remember very little about the things you learned in school. You are, in fact, "not smarter than a fifth grader," and you don't need TV's Jeff Foxworthy to remind you. Deciding it was time for a refresher course (and a little refreshment), I signed up for "stuff I should have learned back then but was too dumb to appreciate" classes with catchy names like "Learning and Lattes," held in cool coffeehouses.

Over the past several years, I've fallen into a rut. My reading has been mostly fiction, fairly easy reads, nothing too complicated. In an effort to "stretch," two months ago I picked up a copy of *JOHN ADAMS* by David McCullough. This is a big book — 656 pages. It's a living, breathing version of your high school history class, but way more interesting. McCullough makes his colonial cast of characters come alive with glorious insight, based on first-person accounts, into the inner thoughts and feelings of our second President, John Adams and his famous friends and his one true love, Abigail. Along the way, you get a birdseye view of the exciting but turbulent years prior to, during, and several decades after the birth of our nation.

The book delves into the psyche of other famous citizens such as Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson, a man obsessed with facts and figures, such as the weather. The beauty of Monticello today offers up little to remind us that Jefferson always lived beyond his means, that he ended up in such financial distress that he agreed to have the Virginia legislature create a special lottery to save him from ruin. (It didn't.) His home and possessions were sold in an auction on the lawn of the mansion after his death.

I finished this book this past weekend

(in mid-November). Perhaps it's no coincidence that we're heading into the Thanksgiving holiday. After reading this book, I'm reminded we really need to be thankful that:

• McCullough wrote this book.

• Life and love never really change, only the players do. In his youth and teen years, John Adams had lots of doubts about everything. He was shy around the ladies. He questioned his career choices. Who among us can't relate to those things?

• Coffee and books compliment each other. Just ask fans of Starbucks, Borders, and Barnes and Noble.

• People in Adams' day enjoyed writing letters. And write they did — to everyone and a lot. It is to their credit we have the record of history we have today. McCullough writes that John and Abigail alone sent more than 1,000 letters to each other in their lifetimes.

• Abigail Adams was one smart cookie. She was John's ballast. She understood the importance of his mission and never stood in his way when he needed to cross the ocean in pursuit of freedom. Left alone in Massachusetts for months and sometimes years on end, she dutifully ran the farm and handled everything. She gave him a really long rope. When he got to the end of it, he would beg her to come to him. This is a great love story.

• Adams was a brilliant man with simple values that are as credible today as they were several centuries ago. Writing to his granddaughter Caroline, he noted, "Do justly. Love mercy. Walk humbly. This is enough." Yes, it is!

• Adams sat for his portrait with notables such as John Singleton Copley and Gilbert Stuart. Like many of us who run for cover when a camera-wielding relative appears, Adams didn't care for having his image painted. "Speaking generally, he said, there is no penance like having one's picture done." Ditto, John. But thanks for doing it anyway.

• Benjamin Franklin liked to fly kites. Love that electricity. But did he ever envision caps on electricity?

• Jefferson built Monticello. True, he

basically went bankrupt doing so. But what a great house!

• Adams and Jefferson met. Adams and Jefferson's lives were intertwined. McCullough noted that the men first met as fellow patriots united in the cause of independence in the mid 1770s. They became friends later as diplomats in Europe. In the early 1800s they became political rivals and then enemies who didn't speak for more than 10 years. They reconciled through a mutual friend in their retirement years. As the last surviving signers of the Declaration of Independence, both were in great demand for appearances at the 50th anniversary of the signing. They could not travel or make appearances because of failing health, but they held on to see one last Fourth of July. Ironically, Adams and Jefferson died within hours of each other on the same day — July 4 1826, the 50th anniversary of independence. (No, Virginia, I don't believe in coincidences.)

• We have a great standard of health care, even if it is expensive. Yellow fever and other afflictions ran rampant over the city of Philadelphia and thousands died. Europe was often dirty and foul-smelling. Abigail is thought to have contacted yellow fever (malaria) and John possibly typhus while in Europe. A simple cut could lead to amputation or death. An account of Adams daughter Nabby's bout with cancer and her mastectomy with no anesthesia is simply unimaginable.

• Travel is relatively easy. Roads, if you could call them that, in colonial times were bumpy and muddy. What takes hours today was a journey of days or weeks back then. A journey by ship was a nightmare, literally taking your life in your hands. You go to the port (again several days travel) and the ship isn't there. It shows up a week or a month later. You wait. A transatlantic trip today takes a week. Back then it took a month, if you're lucky. You're battered by storms and chased by pirates and some thoroughly ticked off British soldiers and finally you get to your destination, months later — if you're not abducted at sea and taken hostage. Unlike today when you grab a snack or reserve a table, in those days you took your own cow and all your

Continued back cover

1973, a turning point in Silverberg's storytelling career, will soon be published.

NOW AND FOREVER, by Ray Bradbury. William Morrow, 2007, 209 pp., \$24.95. ISBN 978-0-06-113156-1. Also HarperCollins, 2008, 221 pp., \$7.99. ISBN 978-0-06-113157-8

Two novellas are collected in **NOW AND FOREVER: SOMEWHERE A BAND IS PLAYING** and **LEVIATHAN '99**. In **SOMEWHERE**, the story is akin to the "Twilight Zone" TV episode, "A Stop At Willoughby." One man takes an unusual train ride to a town called Summerton, Arizona, where the vitriolic and bucolic Midwest comes to a Colliers-Magazine type life for James Cardiff, writer, reporter, and explorer. There he meets the driver of a horse taxi, pulling a wagon with the words "Kelly's Bakery" written on it, and a man by the name of Elias Culpepper, who introduces him to the town. Just so happens, however, that developers are on their way, and Cardiff needs to warn them.

LEVIATHAN '99 is Bradbury's homage to Moby Dick. It replaces the tale of a mad sea captain who chases a whale with one of a mad space ship captain intent on destroying a renegade comet. Bradbury attempts a story many times told, but puts his customary wonder and zealousness to it.

ENCHANTMENT PLACE, ed. By Denise Little. DAW, 2008, 338 pp., \$7.99. ISBN 13: 978-0-7564-0510-6

Interesting stories about interesting creatures in a modern-day shopping mall.

"Poop" has magical significance for a variety of denizens - it has to be patented as the resource it is - in "The Poop Thief" by Kristine Kathryn Rusch.

Many other tales of creatures and goodies in a mall setting abound in this collection.

IMAGINARY FRIENDS, ed. By John Marco and Martin H. Greenberg. DAW, 2008, 304 pp., \$7.99. ISBN 13: 978-0-7564-0511-3

Each of us has had an imaginary friend growing up. Could have been our shadow or maybe something else.

These 13 tales reflect the imaginary friends we could have made.

In "A Good Day for Dragons" by Rick Hautala, even a fire-breather needs companionship, sometimes. In "Say Hello to My Little Friend" by Kristine Kathryn Rusch, a waitress meets the man of her dreams - Weird But Beautiful (WWB). However, she watches WWB lose so many potential dates because of his come-on line about his "little friend" Trouble is, WWB refers to Marty, a meek little guy who can disappear at will. It is all part of a drinking bet that WWB hopes to cash in.

In "Best Friends Forever" by Tim Waggoner, Ron Garber used to have a playmate - in this case, a play pet - called Biff (his version of Best Friends Forever), a St. Bernard stuffed animal. His daughter Lily sees it too - the imaginary Biff just won't go away. What to do about Biff, and get to the next job interview on time, challenges Ron. But the bigger challenge lies in a catastrophic event that brings Biff back yet again.

In "The Big Exit" by Bill Fawcett, Jeremy, behind enemy lines, relies on the reconnaissance work of an imaginary guardian angel. Can angels save a life? And is the sacrifice of an imaginary friend worth it?

LOOKING BACK: 75 Years of Eagles History, Special Edition, by Eli Kowalski. Sports Challenge Network, 2008, 272 pp., \$24.95. ISBN 978-0-615-21091-9

LOOKING BACK is loaded with Eagle Football history trivia and memorabilia - covers of newspapers and magazines since the team's beginning in 1933, anecdotes by players and journalists, a history of the team, its owners and uniforms, logos, colors, style, national games - many, many of which I remember watching as a lifelong fan. For any lovers of professional football, this book brings back many happy memories.

THE PIRATE DICTIONARY, by Terry Breverton. Pelican Publishing, 2004, 2006, 189 pp., \$14.95. ISBN 978-1-589802-4-38

It is truly amazing how much lingo in America is derived from our seafaring days. Just look up the phrase "the whole nine yards." You think it has something to do with football? No, according to the book, on page 186, "Yards are the timber spars at right angles to the masts, supporting square sails. (Either side of the mast is called a yard-arm). A fully rigged three-masted ship had three major sails upon each mast. If all nine sails were being used, the 'whole nine yards' were working."

You'd be surprised at the number of words we use that are derived from the days of yore. Check it out!

FAST SHIPS, BLACK SAILS, ed. By Ann and Jeff VanderMeer. Night Shade Books, 2008, 245 pp., \$14.95. ISBN 978-1-59780-094-5

Many of the tales weren't up to par, not for the expected quality from the editors of **FAST SHIPS**. But the following two were worth the price of the whole collection:

"Iron Face" by Michael Moorcock. In this dense vignette, a visit to the wild depths of Venus proves profitable for this pirate legend of space. Not only the seven seas, but the nine planets will figure in the magnitude of future piracy.

"A Cold Day In Hell" by Paul Batteiger. A battle is set to ensue between the Pirate Captain Frost and the Pirate Hunter Captain Drake in this riveting tale of winter-set (as contrasted to the almost cliché-like tropics-set) pirate tale.

RECOMMENDED

STAR TREK: STAR CHARTS, The Complete Atlas of Star Trek, written and illustrated by Geoffrey Mandel. Pocket Books, 2002, 96 pp., \$17.95. ISBN 0-7434-3770-5

Mandel is the ultimate fan of Trek, as he literally puts down the charted courses of various Trek captains. Definitely a labor of love - an elegant look at the Trek universe.

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THE UNITED STATES OF ATLANTIS, by Harry Turtledove. ROC/Penguin, 2008, 438 pp., \$25.95. ISBN 978-0-451-46236-7

THE SON OF MAN, by Robert Silverberg. Pyr/Prometheus, 2008, 225 pp., \$15.00. ISBN 978-1-59102-646-4

THE GRIN OF THE DARK, by Ramsey Campbell. TOR, 2008, 381 pp., \$25.95. ISBN-13: 978-0-7653-1939-5

ODDEST OF ALL, by Bruce Coville. Harcourt, Inc., 2008, 235 pp., \$16.00. ISBN 978-0-15-205808-1

THE MAN WITH THE STRANGE HEAD, and Other Early Science Fiction Stories, by Miles J. Breuer. University of Nebraska Press, 2008, 462 pp., \$21.95. ISBN 978-0-8032-1587-0

We are still looking for books from small press publishers, including Wheatland, Wildside, Subterranean, Night Shade Books, and others. I am going to spread this coverage out over this issue and the next. Don't delay!

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own food on board. And if the cow died, as Abigail's did on one of her journey's, you throw it overboard and eat your cornflakes with no milk.

• Life is still funny. Adams and Ben Franklin set out on a trip from Philadelphia to Staten Island, N.Y. The roads were very crowded. Reaching New Brunswick, their inn was so full they had to share the same bed in a tiny room with only one small window. In a scene reminiscent of the film, "Planes, Trains, and Automobiles," where Steve Martin suffers in silence over John Candy's bedtime routine in their motel room, John Adams and Benjamin Franklin battle over the benefits of "fresh night air." Adams moves to close their window and Franklin objects, declaring they would suffocate. Adams was afraid of the evening air. Franklin suggests he open the window and come to bed and he will explain his theory on colds. Adams indicates he's familiar with his theories, they didn't match his own experiences, but he listens again. So the two gentlemen end up lying side by side in the dark with the window open while Franklin expounds "upon air and cold and respiration and perspiration" and Adams, amused, falls asleep.

• We live in country where we can start all over again, and be remembered in a kinder vein. Adams was a "one-term" president, losing a possible second to Thomas Jefferson. In McCullough's words, "To his credit, Adams left Jefferson a nation 'with its coffers full,' and with 'fair prospects for peace with all the world smiling in its face, its commerce flourishing, its navy glorious, its agriculture uncommonly productive and lucrative.'" In turbulent times, Adams held a steady course. He showed that a strong defense

and a desire for peace were not mutually exclusive but compatible. He is responsible for the birth and early growth of our navy. There was no scandal or corruption and he achieved a rare level of statesmanship during his term. To his credit, he chose not to go to war with France when it would have been highly popular and politically advantageous in the short term. As a result, the country was spared a disastrous mistake. Adams was subjected to some of the most malicious attacks ever endured by a President. He was beset by personal disloyalty and political betrayal, the loss of several family members, and his own physical ailments. However, his bedrock integrity, his spirit of independence, his devotion to country, his marriage, his humor, and a great underlying love of life were all very much intact as he left office. Why this man isn't on Mt. Rushmore is beyond me. Is there still room?

We tend to remember the first — the most recent — and those Presidents who did something "really big or really stupid." Sadly, John Adams, who did many important things, is often overlooked. Tucked in between a couple of tall, good-looking Virginians (Washington and Jefferson), who in many ways didn't have near the important impact that Adams did, Adams accomplishments languished. McCullough has righted a wrong and brought Adams' life and achievements to light.

JOHN ADAMS is an extraordinary book providing an extraordinary account of extraordinary times. It should be required reading in high school. It captures the struggles and the human foibles of our ancestors and brings home the point that we, as Americans, have a lot to be thankful for. Bravo, Mr. McCullough! To lattes and learning and liberty!

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