

JOHN ADAMS FILE

1. Article titled "Friends at Twilight" by Joseph J. Ellis; May/June 1993 issue of American Heritage Magazine.
2. Miscellaneous articles on Monticello and Thomas Jefferson; the Celts.....Shakespeare.

quies were even printed in full; *Hamlet* contained, each wrapped in its own giant balloon, the full texts of "O! that this too too solid flesh would melt" and "To be or not to be." Difficult words were starred with asterisks and helpfully glossed at the bottom of the page. As a result, I knew the plots of four Shakespearean tragedies by junior high school and could navigate the language with reasonable comprehension. My English teachers thought I was very bright and a model of industriousness. I did not disabuse them.

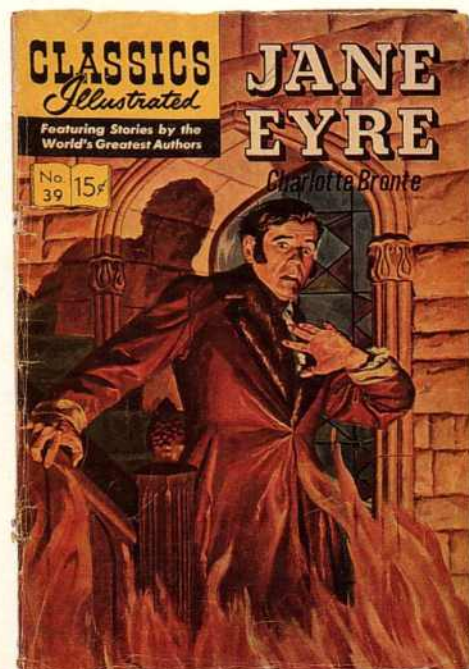
Perhaps the most enduring value of consuming lots of *CIs* is the sugarcoated-history syndrome. Without realizing it, adventure-seeking readers are absorbing a huge amount of information (most of it accurate) about costumes, mores, and geography. They know what a medieval Saxon fortress looks like (Ivanhoe's father's home), and Irkutsk, and Gaul, and the China of Kublai Khan. They also are exposed to an impressive array of historical contexts. How many schools teach about the revolt of the Ukraine against Poland (*With Fire and Sword*) or the Swiss struggle against Austria (*William Tell*) or "the '45" in Scotland (*Kidnapped*) or the Sepoy Rebellion (*Tigers and Traitors*)? The average ten-year-old steeped in the *CI* could tell you all about these people, places, and events. If such exposure does not represent sufficient cultural diversity, it certainly represents more than many Americans ever experience.

Which gets us to this reader's conclusion about *Classics Illustrated*. In a world where information continues to increase, while video-addicted students read only when assigned to do so, all means are justified that make any remotely respectable texts appear exciting and accessible. For every student who will fake a book report and forget it, there are more who will be exposed to reading, literature, and history and who may catch a bit of the fever. I wish the best of luck to the new *CIs*, which face a problem the old ones never did. Ironically, because they are more faithful to the text and more visually sophisticated, they are something officially sanctioned as good for you rather than something slightly naughty (with predictable results: When an adult I know gave three nouveau *CIs* to his nephew for Christmas, they went unread). It would be nice if the new *Classics Illustrated* could somehow be condemned from the pulpit of authority, or sold in back alleys. Then they might be read as avidly as the old ones, and their value in thirty years would be much greater than their quadrupled price in some shop selling nostalgia of the nineties. ★

Donna Richardson, an associate professor of English at St. Mary's College of Maryland, is the author of many articles on romantic poetry, especially that of Percy Bysshe Shelley, and of a book on teaching poetry: *Visual Paraphrasing of Poetry* (University Press of America).



Heathcliff and Cathy spy on Hindley and Catherine's bickering at Thruscross Grange in *Wuthering Heights*.



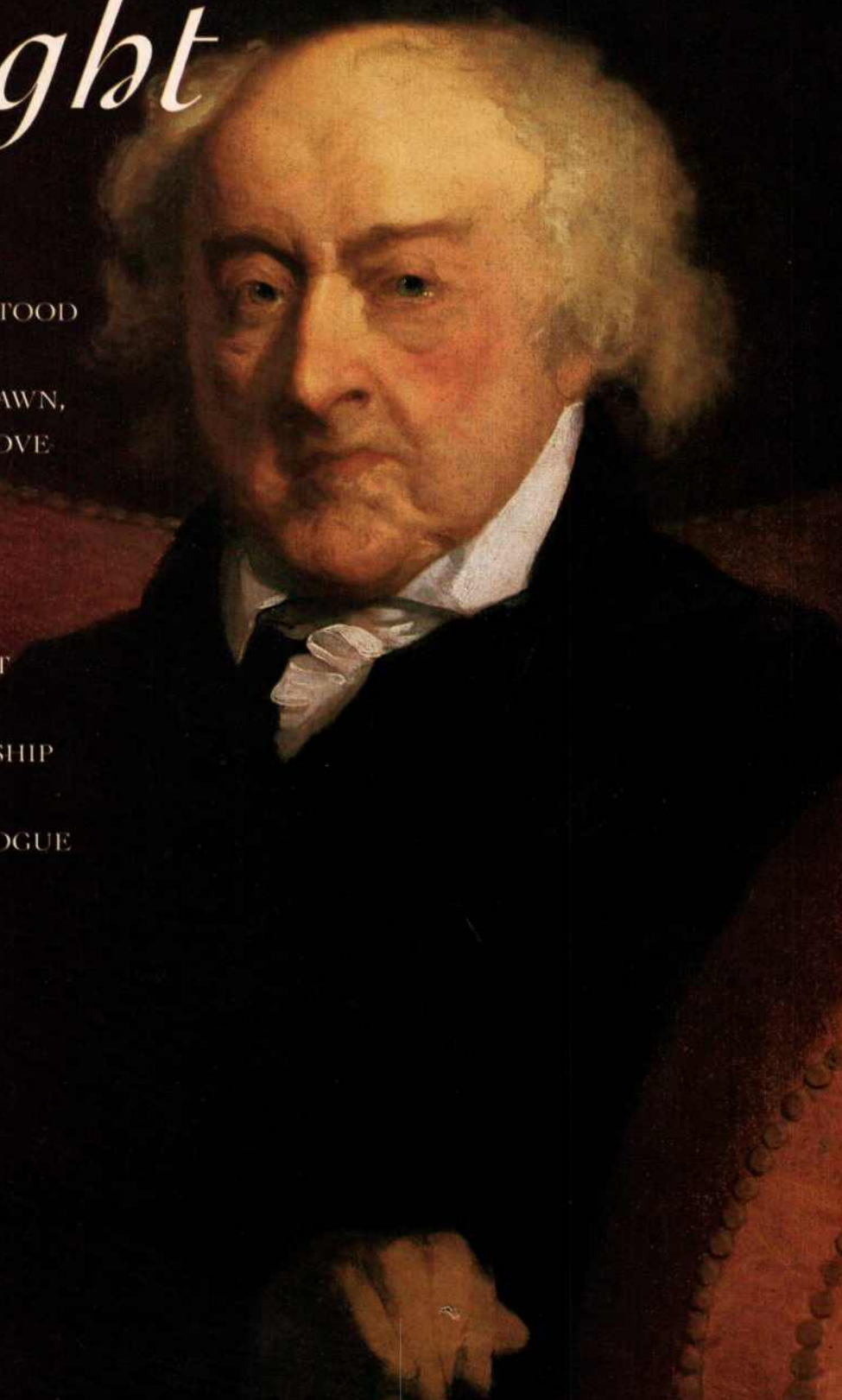
Above, Rochester terrified. Below, a suggestion at the end of later editions.

NOW THAT YOU HAVE READ THE CLASSICS *Illustrated* EDITION, DON'T MISS THE ADDED ENJOYMENT OF READING THE ORIGINAL, OBTAINABLE AT YOUR SCHOOL OR PUBLIC LIBRARY.

# *Friends at Twilight*

**J**OHN ADAMS  
AND THOMAS  
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TOGETHER IN  
AMERICA'S PERILOUS DAWN,  
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AND AN ELOQUENT  
SUMMARY OF THE DIALOGUE  
THAT WENT ON WITHIN  
THE REVOLUTIONARY  
GENERATION—  
AND THAT CONTINUES  
WITHIN OUR OWN.

by **Joseph J. Ellis**



ever the celebration of Washington's birthday was reported in the Boston newspapers, Adams cringed and usually fired off a letter of protest. "The feasts and funerals in honor of Washington," he wrote Rush, "is as corrupt a system as that by which saints were canonized and cardinals, popes, and whole hierarchical systems created."

**W**hen an aspiring historian asked Adams if Washington's famous decision to repudiate the offer of king or dictator-for-life after the war did not deserve admiration, Adams replied stiffly that had Washington accepted the offer, "he would have become the contempt and abhorrence of two thirds of the People of the United Colonies," who collectively deserved the lion's share of credit for the successful Revolution. Adams constantly bemoaned "the pilgrimages to Mount Vernon as the new Mecca or Jerusalem." When John Marshall's mammoth biography of Washington appeared, Adams described it as "a Mausoleum, 100 feet square at the base, and 200 feet high," and "as durable as the Washington benevolent Societies."

And of course, Washington was the supreme example of "eternal taciturnity." At times, especially in letters to Rush, Adams came close to suggesting that Washington was primarily an actor, playing a role he never fully understood: "We [in the Washington administration] all agreed to believe him and make the world believe him." Adams described a conversation he had with Secretary of State Timothy Pickering, in which Pickering claimed that Washington often dozed in cabinet meetings, never read dispatches, wrote few, if any, of his own speeches, needed chalk marks on the floor to know where to stand at receptions and levees, and was, in general, an illiterate, intellectually incompetent cipher who was propped up in public by his staff. But Adams was careful to put these scandalous (and, to our post-1980s, familiar) accusations in Pickering's mouth rather than his own. Adams hinted at his own sense of intellectual superiority to Washington, suggesting that as far as he could tell, all of Washington's philosophy was derived from a cursory reading of Rollins's *Ancient History*. Beyond that level of glancing criticism, Adams was unwilling to go, preferring to "take my deepest secrets to the grave." Washington should be esteemed but not adored. He was an object lesson in the efficacy of enigma. But he was also the one American leader whom even Adams grudgingly acknowledged as an overall superior in terms of virtuous public service. —J.J.E.

Southern gentlemen who thought it [the Louisiana Purchase] constitutional," he explained to his daughter-in-law, "ought not to think it unconstitutional in Congress to restrain the extension of Slavery in that territory." The primary issue for Adams was the moral imperative against slavery and, even more telling, his clear sense that the Revolutionary generation had never intended that the evil institution spread beyond the South. (This was eventually the position that Lincoln took in the 1850s.) In 1820 Adams was alerting several of his correspondents, though not Jefferson, that "we must settle the question of slavery's extension now, otherwise it will stamp our National Character and lay a Foundation for Calamities, if not disunion."

Jefferson seemed to resent the very existence of the debate, as if the eloquent silence he had maintained on the unmentionable subject should become national policy. Although he supported what he called the rights of slaveholders to live in Missouri, his major concern was federal power—the issue Adams considered secondary—which he began to describe as an encroachment on Southern rights reminiscent of British intrusions in the pre-Revolutionary years. "In the gloomiest moments of the Revolutionary War," he wrote in 1820, "I never had any apprehensions equal to what I feel from this source." His pronouncements became more pessimistic and morbid, outdoing even Adams at his most apocalyptic. "I regret that I am now to die in the belief that the . . . sacrifice of themselves by the generation of 1776, to acquire self-government and happiness," he warned, "is to be thrown away by the unwise and unworthy passions of their sons, and that my only consolation is to be that I live not to weep over it." Even his beloved University of Virginia, which he had originally conceived as a national center of learning, became for Jefferson a bastion of Southern ways to protect Virginia's rising generation against the seductive infidelities of Harvard and Yale, where abolitionists, bankers, unscrupulous merchants, and Federalist fanatics acquired their bad manners and destructive ideas.

**I** look back with rapture to those golden days," Adams wrote to him in 1825, "when Virginia and Massachusetts lived and acted together like a band of brothers and I hope it will not be long before they may say redeunt saturnia regna." But the golden age Adams referred to was gone for Jefferson, blasted into oblivion by sectional politics and what seemed to him a Northern conspiracy to make the unmentionable subject of slavery the dominant topic of the new age. Although Jefferson surely knew that Adams was one of the conspirators, just as he knew that John Quincy embodied the Federalist persuasion that so threatened the survival of the States' Rights, he sustained his commitment to the correspondence to the end, avoiding

his favorite. "Montezillo," he said, "is a little Hill. Monticello is a lofty Mountain."

John Quincy, sensing the wounded pride that festered beneath such jocular gestures, suggested that his father write his autobiography in order to set the record straight and deal directly with his personal demons. The result was less like a crafted work of literature than an open wound; like the life it chronicled, Adams's biography was impulsive and candid. After an opening section that described his early years, Adams got down to the serious business of eviscerating his enemies.

Alexander Hamilton was the chief villain. The fact that he had only recently died in a duel with Aaron Burr was no cause for mercy. Adams claimed to feel no obligation "to suffer my Character to lie under infamous Calumnies, because the Author of them, with a Pistol Bullet through his Spinal Marrow, died a Penitent." Hamilton was a "Creole Bolingbroke. . . . Born on a Speck more obscure than Corsica . . . as ambitious as Bonaparte, though less courageous, and, save for me, would have involved us in the foreign war with France & a civil war with ourselves." Writing to Judge Francis Vanderkemp at the same time, he amplified his accusations: Hamilton was "a bastard brat of a Scotch pedlar" who lived constantly "in a delirium of Ambition."

Tom Paine ranked second only to Hamilton in Adams's rogues' gallery. He was "a Disastrous Meteor," "a disgrace to the moral Character and Understanding of the Age." Everyone knew that Benjamin Rush had given him the title for his wildly popular pamphlet, *Common Sense*, and that the arguments about the inevitability of American independence that Paine advanced had, in fact, been circulating throughout the Colonies since 1760. Paine was "the Satyr of the Age . . . a mongrel between Pigg and Puppy, begotten by a wild Boar on a Bitch Wolf."

The verdict on "the American untouchables"—Jefferson, and Washington—was less vitriolic but sufficiently equivocal to sense Adams's ego throbbing just beneath the surface. Both American "greats" served as an illustration of the principle "that Eloquence in public Assemblies is not the surest road, to Fame and Preferment, at least unless it be used with great caution, very rarely, and with great Reserve." This was the lesson of "eternal taciturnity" that Adams preached to anyone who would listen, and it derived from his realization that as "the Atlas of Independence" who made the fierce and ferocious speeches that

were needed to assure separation from England in 1774 and 1775, he inevitably made lifelong enemies. Men who played leading roles in controversies became controversial. Jefferson, on the other hand, "had attended his duty in the House [the Second Continental Congress] but a very small part of the time and when there had never spoken in public." Adams recalled, with a mingled sense of admiration and accusation, that "during the whole Time I sat with him in Congress, I never heard him utter three sentences together."

Jefferson was acknowledged as a stylist; Adams claimed to have "a great opinion of the Elegance of his pen and none at all of my own." It was for this reason that Adams, as chairman of the subcommittee encharged with the task,

had chosen Jefferson to write the Declaration of Independence. Jefferson, according to the Adams version of history, was no more than an important clerical ornament. Like Paine, he put into words the sentiments and ideas that others—like Adams—had hammered out in combat with lukewarm Whigs and surreptitious Tories in the real but unrecorded conversations within the corridors and subcommittees of Philadelphia. "I admire Bonaparte's expression 'The Scenery of the Business,'" he wrote Rush. "The scenery has often . . . at least



Adams (far left) and contemporaries in a detail from Trumbull's view of the drafting of the Declaration.

in Public Life, more effect than the Character." Then he added, more explicitly, "Was there ever a Coup de Theatre, that had so great an effect as Jefferson's Penmanship of the Declaration of Independence?" Propagandistic documents like Paine's *Common Sense* and Jefferson's Declaration of Independence were "a theatrical side show. . . . Jefferson ran away with the stage effect . . . and all the glory of it." Even to Jefferson himself, Adams belittled "the importance of these compositions," claiming that they were "like children's play at marbles or push pin. . . . Dress and ornament rather than Body, Soul and Substance."

Of course, the ultimate "untouchable," transcending mortal appreciation or analysis, was George Washington. In his autobiography even Adams regarded Washington's reputation as off limits. Indeed, there were two subjects—the institution of slavery in the South and the symbolic significance of Washington—that Adams considered too elemental and too fraught with danger to explore candidly in any writings that might find their way into the public press. Still, in private letters to trusted friends Adams expressed his unease with the emerging mythology about cherry trees and godlike wisdom. When-



# Short Walk on Guadalcanal

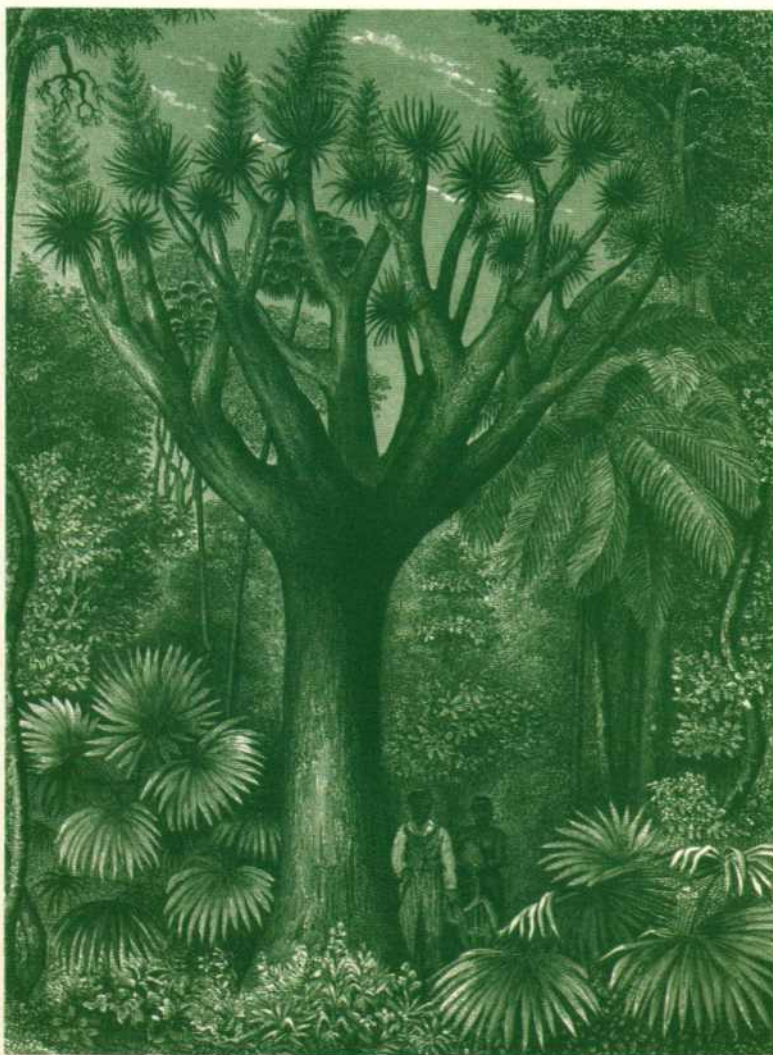
J. L. O. Tedder missed the battle,  
but his peacetime pursuits are heroic enough

by Thomas Fleming

*Every* so often one comes across a writer who should be awarded the literary equivalent of the Victoria Cross or the Medal of Honor—one who gazes into the jaws of a hellish assignment and goes forward, resolute paragraph after resolute paragraph, knowing that there is no light at the end of the tunnel, that the end will be cruel and the reward negligible.

Such a man is J. L. O. Tedder, the author of *Walks on Guadalcanal*. I picked up his sixty-two-page booklet at the government tourist office in Honiara, the principal city of Guadalcanal as well as the capital of the independent nation known as the Solomon Islands.

My wife and I had flown to Guadalcanal to do research on *Time and Tide*, the novel I



was writing about the Navy during World War II. After hours of staring at the blank Pacific, we suddenly descended on an island where walking did not seem a very good idea. Most of Guadalcanal, except for the coastal plain around Honiara, where U.S. Marines and Japanese infantry blasted bullets and shells at each other for six months half a century ago, resembles a gigantic corrugated roof. A series of precipitous mountains rise and fall across nine-tenths of the island's ninety-two-mile length, their slopes covered by the densest imaginable vegetation.

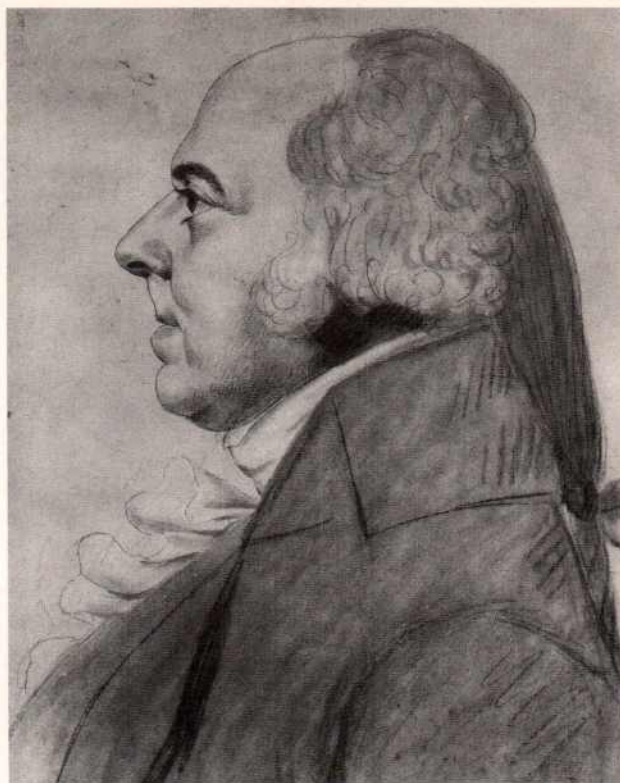
We toured the battlefields and drove out to Cape Esperance, where we got a graphic view of Savo Island, off which two of the war's most ferocious

Greece. Adams was a noble descendant of the original Puritan settlers of New England; Jefferson could trace his ancestry back to the Cavalier dynasty of Virginia. The correspondence between the Sage of Quincy and the Sage of Monticello—and these titles were now recognized as semiofficial designations—even revealed compensating differences between the writing styles of the two patriarchs; Adams's prose was "plain, nervous and emphatic, and striking with a kind of epigrammatic force," while Jefferson's "light and flowing with easy and careless melody." In short, Adams and Jefferson represented a kind of matched pair of minds and dispositions that allowed the infant Republic to meet diverse challenges because "whatsoever quality appeared deficient in the one, was to be found in the character or talents of the other." Finally, an important emphasis for several of the eulogists was the claim that both the New Englander and the Virginian embraced a truly national vision and that "the two great chieftains of the North and South" thereby served as telling symbols of the need to defy sectional divisions.

One could already detect the sectional bias that their lives allegedly warned against in some of the funeral orations. The eulogist in Charleston, South Carolina, ignored Adams completely, while New England's memorialists accorded him decisive primacy as the one true father of the Revolution. Nevertheless, taken together, the testimonials delivered throughout the summer and fall of 1826 reflected a clear consensus that the two recently departed sages had made roughly equal contributions to the shaping of American history and deserved to be remembered as they had lived—even more remarkably as they had died—as equal partners in the grand, unfolding saga of America's experiment with republicanism. There would be other heroes, of course, and Daniel Webster's bombastic testimonial before four thousand Bostonians at Faneuil Hall suggested that he had hopes of being one of them. But nothing quite like this brilliant pair of compatible opposites was likely ever again to appear on the national scene.

Adams and Jefferson became the supreme embodiment of the American dialogue: Adams was the words and Jefferson the music of the ongoing pageant begun in 1776; Adams the "is," Jefferson the "ought" of American politics. Not only were the respective reputations of Monticello and Quincy able to bask in the reflected glory of the other, but their differences defined the proper limits of posterity's debate over the original intentions of the founding generation. ★

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**Adams in 1797, top, Jefferson in 1804, by Charles-Balthazar-Julien Fevret de Saint-Memin.**



## *Adams* never knew the depth of the tragedy Jefferson felt.

the troublesome topics, concealing his mounting bitterness and despair, maintaining pretenses. The friendship symbolized by the correspondence would thus serve as testimony to posterity about the way it had once been within the generation that he and Adams symbolized.

Adams never knew the depth of the tragedy Jefferson felt or the irony of their shifting circumstances. From 1820 onward Jefferson—America's most attractive apostle of optimism—was trapped in a spiraling despondency. He had lost the faith that his very name was destined to epitomize and became an example of the paranoia and pessimism that Adams had recently overcome. He was racked by rheumatism and the painful intestinal disorder that would eventually kill him, and his physical condition deteriorated more rapidly than that of his older friend at Quincy. Jefferson's personal debts continued to mount, for he had never mastered the reconciliation of his expensive tastes with the financial facts of his household economy. His addiction to French wine, like his affinity for French ideas, never came to grips with the more mundane realities. Infirm, insolvent, and depressed about the future he had always trusted had somehow taken a wrong turn, Jefferson lived out his last days amidst two hundred slaves he could not free without encumbering his heirs with even greater debts, without his magnificent library, which he had been forced to sell for cash, on the deteriorating grounds of the once-proud Monticello, which was decaying at the same rapid pace as his own democratic hopes.

As the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration of Independence approached, Adams and Jefferson were deluged with requests to attend official celebrations of the national birthday. Both men responded by pleading old age and ill health, offering regrets, then providing self-consciously eloquent testimonials that they knew would be read out loud to the assembled guests. It was an ironic opportunity for Adams, who had spent much of his retirement criticizing the historical significance of the declaration as anything more than an ornamental epilogue to the real story of the American Revolution. But the annual celebration on July 4 was now too well established to make his criticism sound like anything more than small-minded carping.

Although he received requests to participate in what was being called the "Jubilee of Independence" from as far away as Washington, Philadelphia, and New York, his most

resonant reply went to the organizers of the Quincy celebration. After lamenting that his physical condition precluded attendance, Adams defied the customary sentiments and solemnities by declaring, in effect, that the ultimate meaning of the American Revolution was still problematic. He acknowledged that the Revolutionary era had been a "memorable epoch in the annals of the human race," but he insisted that the jury was still out on its significance. He warned that America was "destined in future history to form the brightest or the blackest page, according to the use or the abuse of the political institutions by which they shall in time to come be shaped by the *human mind*."

Posterity, in short, would not only judge but would play an active role in shaping the outcome. This was a disconcerting message for patriotic celebrants gathered to dispense praise rather than accept a challenge.

**M**eanwhile, down at Monticello the other great patriarch was receiving the same kinds of requests. Jefferson was also too old and infirm to leave his mountaintop, but he, more than Adams, sensed that this might be the last occasion to register his personal stamp on the public understanding of just what the American Revolution had meant. His most eloquent reply was sent to the committee responsible for the Independence Day ceremonies in Washington. Although his intestinal disorder had become nearly incapacitating, and despite the pessimism that had overtaken him, Jefferson worked over the draft of his reply with great care, correcting and revising with the same attention to detail that he had brought to the original draft of the Declaration, producing one of his most inspired and inspiring renditions of the Jeffersonian message.

After gracefully excusing himself from the ceremonies at the nation's capital, he regretted his absence from "the small band, the remnant of that host of worthies who joined with us on that day, in the bold and doubtful election . . . between submission and the sword"; then he offered his distilled understanding of just what the band of worthies had done: "May it be to the world, what I believe it will be, (to some parts sooner, to others late, but finally to all,) the signal of arousing men to burst the chains under which monkish ignorance and superstition had persuaded them to bind themselves, and to assume the



## *The two men* came to embody the American dialogue.

blessings and security of self-government. . . . All eyes are opened or opening to the rights of man. The general spread of the light of science has already laid open to every view the palpable truth, that the mass of mankind has not been born with saddles on their backs, nor a favored few, booted and spurred, ready to ride them legitimately, by the grace of God. These are grounds of hope for others; for ourselves, let the annual return of this day forever refresh our recollections of these rights, and an undiminished devotion to them."

Both the language and the theme were vintage Jefferson and were immediately recognized as such when read aloud before the distinguished gathering in Washington on the Fourth. The fresh, vigorous statement contrasted sharply with Adams's more cautious message. For Jefferson the American Revolution was the opening shot in a global struggle for liberation from all forms of oppression, a struggle whose final victory was foreordained. Jefferson's formulation held that something wonderful and elemental had *already happened*, that the individual energies released by America into the world during the preceding fifty years would run their predestined course regardless of human foibles. Now that the American Revolution had propelled the country into its role as the global model for what he called "self government," the fate of the American political experiment was no longer in doubt or even in human hands.

The Adams formulation suggested exactly the opposite. He emphasized the precarious and fragile character of the American experiment in republican government, challenging subsequent generations of Americans to meet the inevitable threats to national survival with the same realistic rationality that his and Jefferson's generation had managed to muster at the very beginning. The destiny of the new nation was contingent upon wise and skillful leadership if it hoped to avoid the same fate of all other republics.

**W**hatever superiority Adams's version may have had as an accurate expression of his generation's best wisdom about America's prospects, the rhetorical superiority of Jefferson's was obvious. Anyone poised to assess their relative appeal to posterity would have been forced to conclude that Adams's chances were just as problematic as his diagnosis of America's future.

But before the historic reputations of the two patriachs could diverge, their lives were joined one final time. On the evening of July 3 Jefferson, whose health had been declining since February, fell into unconsciousness. He awoke momentarily that night and uttered his last discernible words: "Is it the Fourth?" As midnight approached, his family, which had gathered around his bedside for the deathwatch, offered a prayer for "a few minutes of prolonged life." As if in response, life lingered in him until the next morning, and he died at twenty minutes past noon on July 4.

Meanwhile, Adams rose at his customarily early hour wishing to keep his routine despite the special distinction of the day, and asked to be placed in his favorite reading chair in the study. Around midmorning, however, he began to falter, and family members moved him back to his bedroom. He lapsed into unconsciousness at almost the exact moment that Jefferson died. The end then came quickly, at about five-thirty in the afternoon of July 4. He awakened for a brief moment, indicated his awareness that death was near, and, with obvious effort, spoke his last words: "Thomas Jefferson survives."

News of the nearly simultaneous death of America's two most eminent elder statesmen seeped out to the world over the next few weeks, and nearly every commentator described it as an act of divine providence. Amid all the plans for memorial services honoring the paired patriarchs, one of the few sour notes came from Horace Binney, the old Philadelphia Federalist, who despised Jefferson and recalled the long-standing political differences between the two men. "The most extraordinary feature of their history is that of a joint consociated celebration," Binney noted. "Their temper and dispositions toward one another would at one time have made a very tolerable salad . . . [and] it never entered into my conception . . . to admit one and the same apotheosis."

Actually the notion that Adams and Jefferson represented opposing impulses in the life of the early Republic that blended together like the oil and vinegar of "a very tolerable salad" was one of the dominant themes in the eulogies. Adams was "the bold and eloquent debater . . . big with the fate of empires" while Jefferson was the skilled writer who "embodied the principles of liberty in the language of inspiration." Adams represented the vigorous values of Rome; Jefferson the deep serenities of

Miscellaneous Items on Thomas Jefferson available at museum