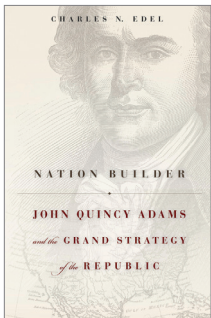


# bookNOTES



## Nation Builder: John Quincy Adams and the Grand Strategy of the Republic

Charles N. Edel '97

HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS

\$29.95



Video Profile: Charles N. Edel '97 — Watch an interview with the author of *Nation Builder: John Quincy Adams and the Grand Strategy of the Republic* and hear about his interest in the political and philosophical ideas of the sixth president of the United States. <https://vimeo.com/120610855>

Charles N. Edel opens his incredibly thorough and thought-provoking biography of John Quincy Adams with the future president in London. In the summer of 1816, Adams, serving as US minister to Great Britain, enjoyed a respite from the busy political world in which he regularly immersed himself. With the War of 1812 behind them, the United States, too, enjoyed a measure of peace and growing

prosperity and power as the individual states coalesced firmly into the republic Adams championed throughout his career. In these first lines of *Nation Builder: John Quincy Adams and the Grand Strategy of the Republic*, Edel sets the stage for a richly engaging study that positions Adams, best known as the nation's sixth president, against the background of the emerging United States.

It is a contrast and setting most well-conceived. For the casual student of American history, John Quincy Adams, with his one-term presidency, is regularly overshadowed by the larger and nationally celebrated "Founders" George Washington, John Adams (the second president and John Quincy's father), Thomas Jefferson, and James Monroe. It's easy to miss the younger Adams's role during the glories of the American Revolution and writing of the US Constitution, in Jefferson's westward expansion plans and faulty foreign policy response to British naval aggression, or in the declarative significance of Monroe's "Doctrine" for control over the Western Hemisphere. As Edel writes, however, it is clear that John Quincy Adams was not only present at these critical moments that forged the nation—in Paris with his father at the behest of the Continental Congress, at the subsequent signing of the Treaty of Paris with Great Britain, influencing Monroe's famous statement on our foreign policy—but also often the instrument of change in the most significant moments of early statesmanship of the republic. As Edel writes within the Introduction, Adams believed it "his duty to steer the nation's course towards justice." With his combined political and

moral vision of that justice, Adams, through Edel's pages, comes alive as a visionary, active, and self-searching politician. One who took into account a "personal...national...and moral" strategy in guiding the political aims of the growing nation while protecting its fragile security in the face of ongoing European aggression.

Edel wisely divides *Nation Builder* into six chapters, with each of the first five based upon a historic phase of Adams's life. Particularly illuminating for its intimate familial glimpses, "Chapter One: The Fires of Honorable Ambition" explores the deeply influential guidance of Adams's parents, John and Abigail. In this, as in the entire work, Edel draws upon the extensive primary information available to a scholar of any member of the early Adams family—journals, letters, diaries—and through carefully chosen quotations, examines the puritanical upbringing, parental instruction, and practical foreign experiences the young Adams received at the hands of his parents. Clarifying John Quincy's classical education, Edel references Adams's reliance on Biblical training and the ever-present wish of his parents that he should serve his country with purpose. Fascinating and often-overlooked details of Adams's childhood years in Paris and his mission to the court of Catherine the Great of Russia reinforce Edel's argument that Adams's training for his "grand strategy" began in the broad education and international exchanges he experienced as a boy.

Subsequent chapters chronicle Adams's early years as a foreign policy leader—in the Netherlands, in England, and as US secretary

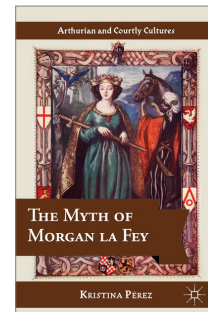
of state—his focus on the development of the American economy, and his struggle to manage the “slavery question.” Edel brings Adams alive with his wise insight into the man’s personality and well-documented selections from Adams’s copious fifty-one volume diary. From these, the reader learns of Adams’s incredible self-discipline—from daily swims in the Potomac River to his habitual rising at dawn—as well as his irascible personality that softened over time and partly through the influence of his wife, Louisa. Adams’s presence at seminal events in our country’s early history—including foreign policy decisions at Paris, Ghent, and London, trade concerns in the Great Lakes, or the acquisition of Florida—inform the reader of just how important a man Adams was.

Early in the first chapter, Edel argues that Adams’s father, John, “thought that a statesman ‘should have had an education in classical learning, and in the knowledge of general history....’” Edel adds that the reading of history lay “at the heart of Adams’s education” and was viewed by the elder Adams “as a policy tool.” As a teacher of history proud to have taught author Charles Edel in his own early years, I could not agree more. In our present age of balancing international responsibilities with the interests of a surging population demanding more of its “democratic republic,” it is well worth the time to review the strategies of the leaders who built the foundation for this nation. Edel closes each chapter with summations reconciling the actions detailed with the strategies learned and applied. The reader can easily select the comprehensive chronological

time frame of interest or enjoy the entire biography start to finish—my humble recommendation! Over seventy pages of notes accompany the book, providing ample opportunity to pursue avenues of particular importance and ready links to the Adams Family Papers electronic archive.

I confess to being an ardent Jefferson fan, loyal for years to our third president’s political and cultural influences. Following this wonderfully informative read of *Nation Builder*, this teacher of history finds herself awakened by the words of her former student and attuned anew to the impressive contributions of John Quincy Adams. True indeed to the idea of the importance of history in education, *Nation Builder* informs, reinforces, and fully documents the contributions of the “grand strategy” Adams revised throughout his career. We continue to derive many benefits from his evolving plans, and reading *Nation Builder* clearly and explicitly reinforces the important role John Quincy Adams held in our country’s history and should be on the bookshelves of anyone intrigued by the United States—past and present.

*Ann Snowden Johnson*  
*History*




## The Myth of Morgan La Fey

*Kristina Pérez '98*

PALGRAVE MACMILLAN

\$95.00

-  Video Profile: Kristina Pérez '98 — Watch an interview with the author of *The Myth of Morgan La Fey* and hear about her research and conclusions about this central character in the Arthurian legend. <https://vimeo.com/134793425>

Enthusiasts of the Arthurian legend and of goddess archetypes in mythology will delight in Kristina Pérez’s scholarly monograph *The Myth of Morgan La Fey*. Pérez, a Cambridge University-trained medievalist, breathes fascinating life into the wide-ranging representations and sex/gender implications of King Arthur’s sister and occasional paramour, Morgan La Fey. For those who don’t know much about her (and I was of this unfortunate number), Morgan is a powerful and contested figure within the legend—variously depicted as an enemy of Arthur,

a merciful healer who carries him off to Avalon after he is mortally wounded at the Battle of Camlann, his sister, a fairy goddess, and a fierce antagonist of Guinevere. Beyond Arthur, Morgan also has an array of relationships with other men in the legend—e.g., she is the aunt/mother of Mordred and an object of love/hate to Lancelot. Pérez rejects the notion that Morgan's multiplicity is merely the product of pre-modern literary accretions over several centuries of legend-building through sources such as the Post-Vulgate Cycle, Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini*, and Thomas Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*.

Drawing from feminist psychoanalytic theory, Pérez contextualizes her subject as a potent symbol of the female as mother that can be traced back to the figure of Morrigan, the Celtic Goddess of Sovereignty. In particular, Melanie Klein's work on object relations is drawn upon to explore how the varied depictions of Morgan resist the binary fracturing of female identity into either mother or lover, virgin or vamp. According to Klein, children react to the frustration of weaning by splitting their mothers into the "good" breast and the "bad" breast. Significant emotional energy is expelled trying to regain the "good" mother and to avoid her destructively menacing counterpart. Morgan's embodiment of the "Orestian Position," which is the term Klein borrowed from Greek tragedy to connote the fracturing of the mother into "good" and "bad" selves, is a consequence of the Arthurian hero's inability to accept her as his dominant mistress. Pérez writes, "The reality that she can disappear at any moment—taking the wealth, prestige, and power she has granted the hero with her—remains an omnipresent dread at the heart of the romances and the Courtly Lady." Morgan is unique in that she remains an uncontainable and commanding

female figure, collapsing the lover/mother dichotomy into a single fold. This power helps explain why she consistently evokes ambivalence and anxiety for the heroes with whom she interacts and for the authors of the legends themselves.

The final chapter of the book examines representations of Morgan over the past two centuries. In addition to examining her appearances in Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* and T.H. White's *The Once and Future King*, Pérez looks at representations of Morgan in contemporary theater and film, demonstrating how her modern representations reflect "moments of cultural change in the definition of Woman, female sexuality, or motherhood—and their corresponding legal ramifications." In particular, Pérez focuses on the problematic legacy of hysteria on the female body and its sexual/reproductive functions. Despite the fact that women have gained sociopolitical power and freedom since the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, Morgan La Fey continues to be denied the full breath of her humanness on the literary page, Broadway stage, and Hollywood screen. As a medievalist, Pérez understands the progressive value of studying the past when it comes to locating life-affirming models of humanness (and in this case, femaleness) that accommodate persons in the fullness of their depths and varieties. To quote the feminist psychoanalytic philosopher Luce Irigaray, "Is it not true that in this age of sophisticated technical apparatuses we still frequently turn to the Middle Ages in search of our images and secrets?" Pérez's answer is yes.

*Andrew McCarron*  
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