



The Man Who Loved Doughnuts

By Dennis McCort

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Can a single, depressed, thirty-something English professor who's failed to get tenure at a mediocre upstate university salvage a sinking career, not to mention a sinking life? *The Man Who Loved Doughnuts* asks this question and takes a comic stab at an answer. This droll coming-of-age novel, narrated by its hapless, hard-drinking hero, Elliot Mack, follows him on a lost weekend in the Big Apple as he tries to sort out his options and get his bearings—financial, emotional and spiritual—or, as he puts it, to figure out “What the hell’s going on here?”

Mack endures a gauntlet of boozy and hallucinogenic misadventures in and around Manhattan, including culture shock in Koreatown; a bizarre encounter with a bagel-baking Zen master in Washington Square Park; a disastrous visit with his brother Morgan, a highly successful history professor at NYU; an opportunity for sweet revenge at JFK Airport on the professor who sabotaged his tenure case; and a chance to fall in love with the sassy girl who rides “a human carousel” back at the park.

These episodes form the picaresque narrative arc for the novel’s reflective, comic and satiric themes. To wit: the prideful professorial ego and its flipside of guilt, the learned stupidity of academe versus the “unschooled” wisdom of Zen, and the stunning absurdity of so many mores and rituals of academic life (this latter the overripe fruit of the author’s forty years at the university.)

Ultimately, clueless Mack stumbles onto dawning self-awareness, not unlike the character inspiring his creation, Holden Caulfield, in J. D. Salinger’s *Catcher in the Rye*. My story of an older, but only marginally wiser, Holden is an affectionate pastiche of the book many regard as “the great American novel.” It is the author’s offering to “Salingerians” everywhere.

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Daniel Reynolds:

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Laveta Blodgett:

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