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SECOND IN A SERIES  
ASKING:

CAN THE LITERARY LIFE  
EXIST IN A POST-1984  
NATION?

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WHAT DO  
DWIGHT GARNER, REBECCA SOLNIT,  
AND ADAM ENGEL  
REVEAL ABOUT THIS ENORMOUS  
AND IMPORTANT QUESTION?

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OR

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WHAT'S WRONG WITH SELF-PUBLISHING?  
AND WHY IS IT MORE IMPORTANT NOW THAN EVER BEFORE?

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## PROLOGUE

Some will remember that back on February 11 of this year, [I announced](#) that I was going to discontinue writing political essays and articles and that I was going to return to literary work.

Here's part of what I said. Let's take a look and see how true to it I've been—or not been:

I'm going to, as I've hinted before, give up writing about "politics," at least for now. There are many others far better than I at doing it, and I'm leaving it to them to keep on—[Rand Clifford](#), [Mike Whitney](#), Chris Floyd, [Jerry Mazza](#), [Mickey Z](#), [Paul Craig Roberts](#), Wayne Madsen, Linda S. Heard, Sheila Samples, [Karen Kwiatkowski](#), [Sherwood Ross](#), [Glen Ford](#), Margaret Kimberly, [Tim Gatto](#), Dave Lindorff, and many others. And there *are* in fact even *some* highly significant reasons for a degree of hope that truth will in fact be given a hearing widely enough heard to make a real difference—at such time, for example, as the [qui tam case being brought against the hopelessly corrupt National Institute of](#)

[Standards and Technology by the great scientist and researcher, Dr. Judy Wood](#) actually comes to trial, or at such time as the [similar case being brought by Dr. Morgan Reynolds](#) does the same.

Meanwhile, I myself am again a novelist and will become again a literary writer. . . . Further, I'm going to propose a series of pieces—this being the first—that in one way or another ask the question that I put up at the beginning of this piece: “Can the literary life still exist in a post-1984 nation?”

I don't know. I think it's one of the absolutely most important questions of the day and time we live in. I've written plenty about it before, even in several of my “political” pieces, and certainly in [A Nation Gone Blind](#).

Let me put it this way: If it's a question that we in fact cannot honestly answer *in the affirmative*, then there's no question either but that we're doomed, both culturally and politically. What I plan is to do every conceivable thing in my power to show that it's a question that *can* be answered in the affirmative. And then what I plan to do is everything in my power to act accordingly.

Stay tuned.



All right, there it was, the gauntlet I threw down—for me myself to pick up. I haven't yet answered the great “post 1984 question,” but I've done a lot of work *toward* answering it, and I very much fear that I'm getting closer. I fear it because that answer is a dreadful one. And the truth is that if it's going to have any *real* positive effect, not only is the question itself going to have to be asked many, many, many times, but the answer is going to have to be given even many more times than *that*.

What have I done since last time? Well, I've started a press—The Oliver Arts & Open Press, which has its [eloquently beautiful web site here](#). Please have a look and poke around. There will be much more added to it regularly—given time, peace, and good fortune.

In case it's not obvious at the outset, Oliver is, from sole of boot to top of cap, an opposition press. It's been brought into existence in an attempt to prove—what a *coincidence!*—that there *can* be a meaningful literary life in a post-1984 state, even while at the same time I myself, founder, editor, publisher, and president of Oliver, am becoming more and more—and more and more beyond *that*—doubtful that there *can* be or ever again *will* be.

This conflict between what I want and what I fear is something we'll have to clear up as we go along in this series of pieces. Speaking of opposition, though, one of the writers I mentioned above, the greatly gifted Tim Gatto, has in fact become Oliver's inaugural author, with his intensely personal, compulsively readable, and—yes—highly political and extremely oppositionist book, *From Complicity to Contempt: An American Writer and Veteran Speaks Out Against American Lies*. You can read about—[and buy—the](#)

[book right here](#) on Oliver’s own site. And while you’re at it, you can also read a splendid Tim Gatto “sampler” [just by clicking here](#).

And you can also, as with any other titles published by Oliver, get Tim’s book from every brick-and-mortar bookstore in America, Europe, or the United Kingdom (if you happen to be in one of those places) just by asking for it. And you can also buy it [from online sellers](#) everywhere.



All of this may seem promotion for The Oliver Arts & Open Press more than prologue to answering the looming and insuperably great question we have about literature, literary life—and therefore about truth—in a post-1984 nation. Again, trust me: Oliver and The Question are *not* unrelated matters.

For example, speaking of oppositionism, get a load of this: The fact is that Oliver’s *second* published author is—yes—none other than me myself. Now, is that or is that *not* the most shameful example of “self-publishing” you’ve ever heard of or seen?

You’ll pardon me, I trust, while I ask you to hold on just for a minute. I seriously think a word or two are in order about those two cursed and accursed words, “self-publishing.” Or, to put it another way, maybe the two cursed and accursed words should be identified as “self” and “publishing.”

First huge point: If everyone *doesn’t* know this, well, they’re going to know it now, after they read this next sentence, containing one of Larsen’s Laws: The *only thing* that brings essence and value to *any* piece of writing,<sup>1</sup> fiction or non-fiction, political or other, is that that piece of writing be *true*, that it be *wholly* true, and that it be nothing *other* than true.

Sound familiar?

Well, sure it does. You wouldn’t settle for any lower a standard in a court of *law*—and neither would anyone *else* who’s both honest and moral—so why would anyone willingly settle for less in the equally-great matter of *writing*? of *language*? of the *arts*, salient though not sole distinguishers of mankind from all the other animals?

I’ve written about this idea before—a *lot*, in fact. It’s everywhere throughout [A Nation Gone Blind: America in an Age of Simplification and Deceit](#); it’s in a great many of the pieces I’ve written and posted [on my website over the past three years](#); and it’s also in the [interview I had with myself](#) on the occasion of publishing *A Nation Gone Blind*.

In that “interview,” I asked and answered of and to myself the following:

Q: You’re hard on your colleagues, as well as on your fellow writers, and you’re certainly hard on publishers.

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<sup>1</sup> Ditto for *any* artwork, for *any* work in the entire broad family of the arts—EL.

A: I am. But there's praise, too, for Billy Collins, for example, and the late Robert Creeley, and for the towering Marilynne Robinson. The publishing industry is another matter. My own definition of serious writing, or I suppose you could say my definition of all art, is that it's a matter of telling (or showing, or revealing) the truth in a way that's also true. The form and what the form holds or conveys must both be true. In addition, the truth has to be one expressible in no other way than through the particular art form that's brought it forth.

Q: What truth? The truth about what?

A: Well, about existence, of course. About the nature of existence and of being alive *in* existence, which is the only subject there is for any art, ever. I mean, art doesn't have to be high, ponderous, or philosophical, doesn't have to be *The Magic Mountain*, say, or *The Death of Virgil*, though it certainly can be. It might take up only a tiny little piece of the one subject that nourishes all art—something akin to the glittery-eyed fox fur in “Miss Brill” or the lump of clay in James Joyce's story by that same title, “Clay.” But if it's going to be art, if it's going to be literature, you can bet your boots that that's what it's got to be about, the fact of our existing, and the nature of our existing within existence. And it's got to tell the truth about that and do so in a *way* that's true. And both of those stories do exactly so, you can bet your boots again.

Q: Tall order, that definition of writing.

A: It's been done for centuries. It's been done for millennia.

Q: And today writing doesn't do that?

You'll have to [click on the “interview”](#) if you want to find out what the answer was to that last question.<sup>2</sup>

And now back to that stupid and stupidly maligned phrase “self-publishing.” To put it in a nutshell, what intelligent, sane, and normal person cares a fart-in-a-hurricane's-worth *who* publishes a piece of work if it's a piece that meets the standard of truth and truthfulness, *and* of truthfulness *to* the truth, that we're talking about?

I know that *I* sure don't.

On the other hand, I know perfectly well—and you know perfectly well, too—that most of what's published by anyone *anywhere* consists for the most part of junk, dreck, bilge, and falsehoods. I know that some of you are likely to say I'm being mean, harsh, glib, and simplistic in putting into that last sentence the particular words I did. But forgive me—if you can. I'm mad. In fact, I'm mad as hell. And I'm mad *not* just because the legitimating standards of truth and meaning in the arts that I was born, bred, and raised on have been betrayed—no, not because of that, even though that *is* enough to drive a man mad, as I hope I showed in [A Nation Gone Blind](#). But what makes me *really* mad is

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<sup>2</sup> (A hint: It was “no.”)

something even worse than the wholesale betrayal I've just mentioned. And this is what makes me *really* mad: That lies and the *untrue* are deliberately, constantly, and unremittingly sold, peddled, promoted, and passed off as *being true* by every "mainstream" institution and element that's left in our diseased, demented, and dying nation.

You can be absolutely and positively sure that "every. . . institution and element" includes the entire "industry" of so-called mainstream publishing. Mainstream publishers—all five or six of them, when you whittle them down to their world-gobbling corpo-owners—have no interest in truth of any kind whatsoever, whether of antiquity or of today, whether of politics or of the arts. No, being corpo-people and being corpo-driven, they want one thing and one thing only: They want sales.

Not that there's anything wrong with that, unless sales are *all* you want. And nothing—nothing *whatsoever*—sells better than lies, especially in America and especially today.

These can be lies of omission, lies of simplification, or lies made up of the plain declaration of falsehood.

In what we still sometimes, though with increasing infrequency, call mainstream's "literary" or "quality" publishing, the kinds of lies that are *far and away* the most common, especially in fiction—lies that are *virtually essential in and to any books if they hope to be published in this category*—are lies of omission and simplification. In non-fiction of the same "literary" range within mainstream publishing, plentiful supplies of those first two kinds of lies will be found, but there will be also a considerably greater proportion of the third kind, lies consisting of plain falsehood.



To read most "literary" fiction today is to die a thousand deaths of tedium. Or, on the other hand, it's to give in to a steady diet of "entertainment," or even what's called "intellectual entertainment," this including the realms of historicals of various kinds, memoirs, mysteries, espionage, and other genres that can escape the profit-damning category of "serious" or in any conceivable way "difficult" while still maintaining the label of "respectable."

But art? Literature? Actual literary fiction? Gone. Dead ducks, the lot of them. These are too hard. These are too rarified. These are too demanding. These are too unsellable.

But all of this is only a small part of my complaint. My complaint extends far beyond book publishing alone and into all of the media, including magazine and newspaper publishing, movies, television—and the much more *fundamental* element or aspect of this medium, television *advertising*.

Lies, all lies. All lies all the time.

Some examples, and then we'll bring this prologue to a close. The greatest example is the simple truth about who "did" 9/11—the U.S., that is, attacked itself—a truth that's been obvious now for eight years<sup>3</sup> but that not only has been so overwhelmed by lies that it continues to be buried but has also been so *enormously* lied about that it has successfully made way for the illegal and treasonable crime against humanity known as the Iraq war, the near-atom bombing of Iran, and, now, the illegal and treasonable crimes against humanity known as the wars in Afghanistan and in Pakistan.

The "war on terror," in a nutshell.

But how about some smaller matters. What about the lie that the Iraq war was intended to bring freedom and democracy to Iraq? You can clear that one up pdq simply by reading this extraordinary piece by scholar James Petras, "The US War again Iraq: [The Destruction of a Civilization](#)." You may not sleep well afterward, but that's one of the reasons Petras' article is so important: It doesn't do what the blacked-out corpo-media does all the time: That is, it doesn't lie to you *for the very purpose of putting you to sleep*. No, the Petras article tells you the truth—for the very purpose, if possible, of waking you up.

In another nutshell, *we're* the Nazis now. Petras shows that the U.S. is now so far out of the control of any humane or democratic internal powers that the situation is quite beyond imagination. We, the United States, and we, the *citizens* of the United States—it's *we*, as just said, who are the Nazis now.

Unpleasant to hear, I know. And, thanks to the complicity of the corpo-media throughout the entire United States, it's not something that you *will* hear or will be *able* to hear—unless you deliberately seek it out on the only remaining bastion of news and free speech left to us, the internet.

And that's why The Oliver Arts & Open Press is a web-based press. I beg of you to wish it luck.

Next time, we'll get on to Dwight Garner, Rebecca Solnit, and Adam Engel. Here's some homework for you, though, to undertake in the time between now and then. First, read Ray McGovern's article, "[Blackwater's Unwritten Death Contract](#)."

Second, read Frank Rich's column from the *New York Times* of Sunday, August 23, 2009, "[The Guns of August](#)," and look for the lies, the varieties of lies, and the *kinds* of lies that form the very fabric of the piece through and through.<sup>4</sup>

And finally, a tiny exercise. Some newspaper readers will remember that on Monday, August 17, 2009, the *Times* ran an article about a speech that President Obama delivered

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<sup>3</sup> Please see [this page on my website](#)—EL.

<sup>4</sup> If interest in this assignment leads you to desire more analysis of Rich's lies, you might see my "[The Pernicious Hypocrisy of Frank Rich of the New York Times](#)."

“to an audience of 5,500 members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and their families” in Arizona. The article read, in part:

“We must never forget,” he said. “This is not a war of choice. This is a war of necessity. Those who attacked America on 9/11 are plotting to do so again. If left unchecked, the [Taliban](#) insurgency will mean an even larger safe haven from which Al Qaeda would plot to kill more Americans.

“So this is not only a war worth fighting. This is fundamental to the defense of our people.”

Well, the lies are plentiful enough here to fell an elephant, and for the most part they’re strictly of the “plain old falsehood-in-place-of-truth” type. But something interesting happened—and it helps tell us something about the liars who lead us.

In that Monday’s paper, the article ran under this headline:

### **Obama Defends Afghanistan As a ‘War of Necessity.’**

But when I later did a search for it, the article came up under a different headline. Now the headline was this:

### **Obama Defends Strategy in Afghanistan**

The only thing I can imagine that might account for the change is that the *Times* editors realized that the first headline wasn’t fit to print. Why not? Well, it wasn’t fit to print because the lie it expressed was simply *too true*. That is, the lie was *so true a lie* that it stuck out like a sore thumb. So, in order to get away with the lie, they had to euphemize it. That is, they decided to hide the lie *just a little bit*—so that at least it could *pass* for something pretending to be the truth.

Eric Larsen  
September 7, 2009

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