

2009

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

**HIGH SCHOOL
SENIORS, IN 2008,
LOOK AT A 1971 SHORT STORY
BY ERIC LARSEN**

1
TO THE READER

In the later part of last year (2008), I got the nicest email from someone named Elizabeth Hodges. Elizabeth, it turned out, was an English instructor who thought that a story of mine, “Feast” by name, could be useful in class. She wrote:

Dear Mr. Larsen,

I am delighted to have finally found your website, after some time searching for more information about the author of that marvelous story, “Feast.” I absolutely love that story: with a passion, with a strong conviction that using it in teaching high school and college literature classes adds a bit of humanity to even the coldest heart.

I am once again using the story in teaching Advanced Placement (12th grade) Literature and Composition, at the Palmas Academy, in Humacao, Puerto Rico. I would so appreciate if I could be able to share some of your thoughts on the story with my students as they initiate the class examining rhetorical techniques and interpreting literature. Would you be willing to address some questions they have about your purpose in writing the story, your literary intent, and which elements arose as a natural result of your vision or as more intentional techniques for expressing your message?

It sounds so dry to think of picking apart such a beautiful piece this way, but, for teaching, that deceptively little piece allows a richness of interpretation that just can't be beat. I would appreciate any comments or response from you, and hope to hear that you would consider

accepting a few questions. Invariably the students read it and at first say, I don't get it, or just yuck, and then the Aha!! as we begin to interpret is a beautiful thing.

I hope to hear from you,

Elizabeth Hodges
Full Professor of English
University of Puerto Rico at Humacao

And I replied:

Dear Elizabeth Hodges,

How very nice of you to write, and I'm glad you found my web site as a way of doing it. "Feast" is from far, far back, isn't it! But that doesn't matter. Of course I'd love to give a try at answering any questions your students might have—though for me it would be easier to wait and see what they ask rather than trying to anticipate the questions by writing something maybe too general right now.

I'm so glad you found the story—hardly knew it would be available anymore. Did you find it in that little "Ethnic American Stories"¹ volume, by any chance?

I look forward to hearing from you again—and from your students.

Best,

Eric Larsen

As did she:

How nice of you to respond!! My students will be thrilled. Today we started the story. We will discuss for another day or so, and then I will have them compile their questions into an email.

How exciting!!

A colleague shared the story with me years ago; I have just a photocopied 2 sided sheet.

I will write again soon.

Elizabeth

¹ *Ethnic American Short Stories*, edited by Katherine D. Newman (Simon & Schuster, Washington Square Press, 1975). I was, in truth, embarrassed when Katherine Newman approached me asking if she could include "Feast" in her volume of what was really—though it wasn't yet called that—"multi-ethnic" stories. My place? I was the token Scandinavian-American. I should have declined, but *any* publication back then was irresistible, and so was the hundred dollars that came with it. Still, thirty-four years later I'm so disenchanted with the catastrophic division-and-conquest of almost all American cultural life through multi-culturalism that I've written [*an entire book about it*](#) and have been forced to give up on any but the weakest of bets that [the republic itself is likely to survive](#)—and may already have died. What a thirty-four years these have been.

I was pleased to learn that “Feast” had survived in that particular way— mentioned long ago by one colleague to another, then existing for several decades on “a photocopied 2 sided sheet” before—well, before “hatching” again as if from the dust of its birth in antiquity.²

Elizabeth’s students sent many good questions. And answering them was quite a trip down nostalgia lane for me, looking back from age sixty-seven at a story I’d written at thirty, peering at it as if through a jeweler’s glass.

Here, in any case, is the story:

2

Feast

In the sixth grade I had a teacher whose name was Christine Cutter. Even then I felt she was an earnest and idealistic young woman; a miniature silver cross hung each day from a fine chain around her neck; and she was fond of wearing a blue blazer that had the gold-embroidered emblem of the college she had graduated from sewn over her left breast. The college was named after one of the female saints, and its emblem depicted an open book radiating beams of light outward and also upward toward heaven, which was represented by three hovering gold clouds.

Miss Cutter felt that learning should be a meaningful experience. She endeavored to reveal the excitement of life to us, and to expand our vision to the point where we were aware of the great feast of knowledge the world had to offer. She attempted to bring things into the classroom, and she took us in turn outside to see things in the world. We went on outings to factories and fire departments and courthouses. Once we went to a local dairy, and Miss Cutter was fascinated by seeing the white bubbling milk flowing through transparent pipes under the ceiling.

Before Christmas she announced a special treat. A group of live Eskimos was to visit the class. We would be able to see them in the flesh.

The day they were to arrive started out warm and gray. A light mist was falling, and if you turned your face upward you could feel it touching your skin, but still it was hard to tell if it felt more like cool air or water. By the middle of the morning, from inside the steam-heated classroom, you could see that it was getting thicker; it was starting to form drops and beads as it drifted against the windowpanes. Then it turned to snow, shapeless heavy flakes falling straight down.

We ate lunch as usual in a room in the basement that was used the rest of the day as a gymnasium for the lowest three grades. Suspended under the ceiling there was a jungle of steampipes that made hissing sounds and dripped water down onto the pressboard tables that held our meals.

² *The South Dakota Review*, Autumn 1971.

In the afternoon the disappointment grew general when it became clear that the visitors were going to be late. We read over the chapter on Eskimos again in our book, and Miss Cutter pointed out once more how the women chew on the hides of animals in order to make them soft. Then as we studied further with bowed heads she paced around the room, glancing at the clock and gazing out the steamed windows at the thickly falling snow outdoors. She stood with her arms folded together so that her breasts were like two cats sleeping in a cradle.

She gave us recess in spite of the snow, and let us stay out longer than usual. It seemed dark outdoors and there was a particular hush in the air that seemed to absorb the sound of our voices and make our shouts sound as though they came from a great distance. The snow was already several inches deep over the ground, and heavy and damp.

Some of the girls began building snowmen, and others began games of Fox and Goose. The boys had a game of what we called Victim. Each of us chose a victim and attempted to bring him down in the snow. Everyone was a victim and a chaser at once, although the swiftest runners were seldom brought down.

Tim Greves was hurt. Someone hit him in the face and he had a cut lip and bloody nose. He was very small, even for his age, and he wailed in surprise and fear. The blood went down his chin and onto his coat until Tracy Cook put her arm around his shoulder and bent down and told him to lean forward. Then the blood dripped onto the snow, and she walked with him into the school with her arm around his shoulder.

We milled around not knowing what to do. It seemed strange outdoors, growing darker and the snow falling heavily down through the hushed air. Tracy Cook came back and stood with us. She had light hair and blue eyes, and flakes of snow caught in the lashes of her eyes and clung there a moment before they melted.

A drop of Tim Greve's blood had fallen on the white fur cuff of her coat and she scrubbed at it with snow a moment but then gave up. We were standing by the flag pole and Wendell Cleaver dared people to put their tongues on it. It was made of steel and no one would do it. He grabbed someone and started forcing his face up against it until Tracy Cook told him to quit it and after a minute or two he did. Of course he was doing it for her. We made a game of trying to see the top of the pole, but the snow fell into your eyes so it was hard to keep them open when you turned your face upward to look.

At last Miss Cutter called and we went back inside. It was already the end of the afternoon, and she made us sit down without taking off our coats. It was hot in the room. People's faces were red and burning, and everyone was wiping his hands under his nose. There was the smell of wet wool in the air.

There was only one Eskimo. She was a tiny figure, almost like a doll, padded and bulky in leggings and parka made of brown animal hide trimmed with fur at the wrists and the ankles and waist. There was fur around her hood, too, so that her small round face looked out at us from behind a perfect circle of gray fur. Her skin was weathered

and almost black, soft and creased like the leather on the seats of antique cars. Her tiny black eyes jumped around the room as though she were afraid.

We stared at her.

The bell had already rung, but Miss Cutter placed the tiny Eskimo on a chair in the front of the room. Her feet failed to touch the floor, and her small brown hands, like paws with their short stubby fingers, rested together in her lap. Miss Cutter squatted down beside her and showed her how to open her mouth and bare her teeth. She did it herself several times before the Eskimo understood and opened her mouth up and stretched her lips back with her fingers the way Miss Cutter had done.

Then we filed past one by one and looked into her face. With her little black eyes fixed on us as though in terror, we looked into the opened privacy of her mouth to see the way her small brown teeth were worn down to almost nothing, just rows of stubs flattened and worn away down to the gums.

After we had seen, we went out of the classroom and into the hallway and out the door of the school again. When I stepped out, it seemed colder than before; after the steaming classroom the air was like ice water against my heated face, and I met it with relief and breathed it in as if I were thirsty for its coolness.

Others came out the door. The snow was still falling, perhaps more heavily, and the air was hushed and growing dark; it would be an early dusk. We began running across the snow-covered yard toward where the buses were waiting for us with their engines running and their small yellow lights shining through the snow. There was the jingle of the loose clasps on our boots as we ran, and one of the drivers called out with a curse that we ought to hurry at that because the roads were already hardly passable and school should have been canceled hours before.

3

THE STUDENTS' QUESTIONS, AND MY ANSWERS

1. What inspired you to write the story?

When I was in the second grade, our teacher really did accept a minister's offer to bring two Eskimos to visit our class. I never forgot it.

2. What was your purpose for writing the story?

Well, the biggest purpose was to get a story written, however I could. I wanted to be a writer, but I really hadn't found my own voice or my own real subject. This childhood memory had stayed with me, and had remained vivid, so I finally found a way to make it into a story. The other purpose—within the first purpose—was

to satirize Miss Cutter for being naïve and unintentionally cruel, however well intended. There are lots of satiric details. It's not a very mature story aesthetically, because you can still hear the rhythms and cadences of James Joyce's *Dubliners* stories, a book that I loved and for a long time tried to learn how to write from.

3. What is the true meaning of the story?

That's a hard question. But I think the true meaning is that adults often don't realize what effect some of the things they do may really have on children. Another meaning is that school "taught" this little kid more than Miss Cutter may have realized—and things quite different than she'd have imagined or hoped for.

4. What is the specific theme of the story?

I think the over-riding or enveloping theme is the awakening of a child's consciousness to new meanings, meanings probably unexpected by the adults around him or her. But within *that* theme, there's another, the theme of education itself and also the theme of the false superiority that one race, class, or group may believe it has over another. Miss Cutter never, ever would think of how demeaning it must be to the Eskimo woman to pull her lips open and bare her teeth in front of a room full of children. She didn't even stop to realize how absurd she herself looked—at least to the kid who tells the story—in doing the same thing when she was trying to convey what she wanted the woman to do.

5. Where is the story set?

I grew up in Northfield, Minnesota, and went from first through third grades to what was called the "old building" at the Longfellow school. So the story is set there, in Northfield, in the "old building" and on its playgrounds.

6. "Even then she was..." Why did you write "Even then"? Does it imply that the narrator changed his/her view about her?

The "even then" is to suggest that, although he was still really very young, probably only eleven, he already sensed the zeal to do good that was a part of Miss Cutter's personality and outlook—and part of her philosophy of teaching. Many kids that age might not have realized it or might not have thought about such things, but this one did, "even then." Now, I don't know that I myself, Eric Larsen, realized anything of the sort at that time. Almost for sure not. I was seven in 1948, when the memory actually took place, and the story was published in 1971. That means that the memory was twenty-three years old by the time I finally found a way to write about it. I'd been thinking about it for that long, one way or another. And so a lot of the boy's consciousness comes from, or sort of "leaks down" from the adult author. For that matter, a lot of it is also made up. The weather, for example.

7. Out of all the cultures in the world, why did you decide to put an Eskimo as the one who was visiting the class? Why did you have just one Eskimo out of the whole group come to visit the class? Why did you choose to make the Eskimo a woman?

Well, I chose the Eskimo because that's what really happened that afternoon in second grade. I made her only one person instead of the "group" that had been promised so that I could hint, without saying anything explicitly about it, at the idea of one race dominating over another and diminishing it, the way Native Americans were diminished by Europeans. Of course, the Eskimos are Native Americans. As for having her be a woman, I didn't think about it at all but just imitated what had really been the case—even though in the real case there had been two, a man and a woman. I kept only one partly because it made the narrative simpler, and also because we'd been taught by our teacher that Eskimos' teeth wore down from chewing hides. And only the women did that job.

8. Do the last names Cutter, Cleaver, and Greaves have any significance?

Good question. I mentioned James Joyce earlier on, and in his stories the characters' names often have particular significance. Because I was young and trying to learn by imitation, I thought I could get a feeling of some sort of security—and also substance—in my own writing by imitating that aspect of Joyce. I gave the teacher the last name of Cutter to suggest that she could in fact be very cruel, no matter how religious, idealistic, or well-intended she might be, and no matter how unaware of *being* cruel. Also, I wanted to suggest that she was part of a group or class or ethnicity that had literally "cut up" other ethnicities, again as with Native Americans literally being "cut up" by European-American cultures over decades and decades of war. The same idea is in the name "Cleaver," since he was supposed to be a mean and tough kid. I wanted to include him in more stories but don't know that I ever did. Greaves was intended as an echo of "grieves," because he was little for his age and sensitive. I did end up keeping him for my first novel, although his name got changed there to Erwin Greaves.

9. What was the purpose of the character Tracy Cook? She is mentioned in three paragraphs. Does she have any special significant purpose other than to continue the story?

Well, her significance is a little bit of a stretch, I'm afraid. Back in those years, I had a mad crush on a classmate, for a long time, and that's her, re-named Tracy Cook. She's supposed to be a kind of peace-maker, a kind of nurse, maybe a bit of an angel. But to call her "Angela" or "Florence" or some such thing seemed too obvious so I chose a name instead that was completely common and more or less unnoticeable, so I chose Tracy. But you can still see that I was being driven by my notion that everything had to fit one way or another into the "Cutter" and "Cleaver" theme, since after all, however "good" she is, Tracy is still the "Cook." We were told to look at the Eskimo's teeth to see how they'd been worn down by chewing on hides to soften them for clothing. Of course, the hides came from slain animals. Now, between Cutter, Cleaver, and Cook, the school kids are symbolically having a cannibal feast of the Eskimo woman.

10. Is there a meaning to why Christine Cutter would not let her students go home in such bad weather?

There's meaning in her first name—suggesting Christ and her own religiosity, as well as the harm that Christianity (and other religions) can do and historically have done against other groups and religions—but not really in her keeping the kids in in spite of the snow. My school was “consolidated,” which meant that it had been enlarged in order to take in lots of kids who'd previously been going to very small and even one-room schools out in “the country.” Starting around 1947, kids from out on the farms, including me, all rode buses into town for the school day. So, in order for early dismissal, all the bus drivers had to be alerted and brought back early to their work as drivers. That took some organization, although it did happen from time to time. In my case, in the story, I didn't want early dismissal—because I wanted to keep the symbolism of the gathering storm, the diminishing light, and the increasing darkness—you know, as opposed to the “light” that does and would conventionally symbolize education or “enlightenment.” In this case, the “education” the kid got was actually very dark: he learned how much cruelty there can be not only in life generally but cruelty imposed by one group upon another. A little echo of “Heart of Darkness.”

11. What was the meaning of the blood that dripped on the snow from the little boy's nose and on the white jacket? Does the blood on white depicts a loss of innocence or something pure being stained by such a powerful color?

Well, yes, well observed. The corrupting influence of barbarity touches even the angel Tracey. She tries to do good, but even she gets touched or infected by the brutality of human beings and of groups of human beings against other groups. The girls' games were pleasant and nice, but the boys' games were rough and brutal. When Tracey—symbolized by white—tries to intercede with kindness and gentleness, her “whiteness” gets stained by the red of brutality.

12. Why were the kids told to sit down without taking off their coats?

Because it was so late in the day—the bell had already rung—that there wouldn't be time enough for them all to hang up their coats AND see the Eskimo. And then also, it makes a parallel between the kids and the Eskimo—similarly wrapped in cold-weather clothing. It shows two contradictory things at once—that they're all alike in all being human, yet that they're vastly different in that one group is far bigger than the other and far more “powerful” over the other than vice versa.

13. Why choose the students to be from the 6th grade?

That has to do, again, with how sensitive or perceptive the narrator can possibly be expected—credibly—to be. The real event was in my second grade, but the kid at age

seven would have seemed too young, and probably *would* have been too young, to be believable in regard to having the thoughts and observations he has in the story.

14. Where is the story supposed to take place?

Again, in the Longfellow School “old building” in Northfield, Minnesota. That town in my later novels is called “West Tree” instead of Northfield. Same place, though. The “old” building was razed, to be replaced by the “new” Longfellow building, after my third-grade year. So grades one through three were in the old, gorgeous, moody, wooden building, and four through six were in the far, far less appealing or interesting, much more “modern,” “new” Longfellow. That same “old” Longfellow building—re-named the Emerson building—plays a big part in my third novel, [*The End of the 19th Century*](#).

15. Is this something you experienced in your past life?

Again, yes. A memory from the second grade, transposed in the story to the sixth grade. In actuality, as I mentioned, there were two visitors, not one, and they were escorted in by a local minister—I *think* but am not sure, a Lutheran minister. I dropped one of the Eskimo visitors for reasons I mentioned above, and I dropped the minister because he also would have taken up too much time and space in the story. Would have had to be an altogether different kind of story with that additional character to account for and explain and give motivation to. So I just left him out and let the Eskimo simply be there, inexplicably, when the kids get called in by Miss Cutter.

16. What is the significance of the white bubbling milk at the milk production facility that Miss Cutter was so fascinated with?

Again, the actuality comes from a real memory—this one from the *first* grade, when the teacher, Miss Jackson, took us to a local milk-processing plant. The person who was *really* fascinated with the sight of the milk running through glass pipes overhead was *me*, but I gave that experience to Miss Cutter—partly to connect up with her breasts being like two sleeping cats in her folded arms. Milk and nurturing and sustenance, all associated with whiteness, and with Tracy Cook’s white cuff—all opposed to Cutter, Cleaver, Cook, and the drop of blood.

17. Are you using a sarcastic tone to criticize the teacher’s peculiar methods?

Yes, certainly. But the big task was to do that subtly enough so that the reader wouldn’t get turned to feeling negatively toward Miss Cutter, or be allowed to feel disapproving of her because of the criticism. I mean, the author can’t let the reader start disliking her or suspecting her motives as being destructive or opportunistic rather than idealistic. If that happened, the story would turn into a diatribe or an essay-argument about good and bad rather than remaining a story. That’s the way it is when you read the stories in *Dubliners*. They’re absolutely withering in their satiric devastation of their subjects and characters,

and yet on the surface they're as innocuous and innocent as you can imagine—so that you remain involved in what happens to the characters without quite realizing that what they're doing may be destructive or exploitative or even tragic. Especially good examples of this are “The Boarding House” and “Eveline.” And, of course, “The Dead.”

18. Does the game “victim” foreshadow a student’s fate?

Yes, or, well, not so much any particular student’s fate, except for Tim Greves, who does get hurt. But the intent is to hint at the idea that the kids are students, yes, but that they’re also “victims” insofar as they’re being indoctrinated into the “values” of Miss Cutter and thus are most unlikely to feel the exploitation of the

Eskimo that the narrator does feel. A good book about this idea is John Taylor Gatto’s book, *Dumbing Us Down*. He was a teacher himself for a long time and argues in his book that education can do as much harm as good. The word “education” comes from Latin “e” or “ex,” meaning “out” or “out from,” as in the word “exit,” and “ducere,” meaning “to lead.” So “education” is literally a “leading out,” presumably a leading out from ignorance into a state of knowing. Critics like Gatto object, though, when the “leading out” ends up being also a “leading in” to certain “required” ideas, attitudes, or beliefs. So, in that sense, all the kids in the story are “victims.” The boys are “victims” of the expectation that, *being* boys, they’ll play rough, for example. They’re victims of one another, too, as a result. And all of the kids are victims of the idea that Miss Cutter’s ethnic or national or historic group is innately superior to the Eskimo’s.

19. Does the weather in the story have any sort of meaning or significance? Perhaps, in foreshadowing something?

Yes, I think so—I mentioned some of that up above. I think what it’s foreshadowing—or is supposed to foreshadow—is the darkness of the “truths” that the kids have been exposed to by the highly well-intended and idealistic Miss Cutter.

20. Who are some of your literary influences?

I grew up devouring Hemingway’s short stories, the *early* ones, reading them over and over and over. Same with the stories in *Dubliners*. So, Hemingway and Joyce were huge influences, then also the F. Scott Fitzgerald of *The Great Gatsby* and great figures like Virginia Woolf, especially in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*. But I also was a student for a long time, and read from Homer and the

Greek tragedians on through Aristotle and Plato and Dante on up through Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, the early novel, the Romantic period, and on through Joyce and Beckett. Beckett, curiously enough, is an enormous influence on me and my writing. Since I was a literature prof for most of my life, I had to know a lot about the subject. But the biggest immediate influences on me and my own writing come from the modern symbolists like Woolf and Joyce, but also from traditional American writers like

Stephen Crane and Sherwood Anderson and Willa Cather, and then, at this nearer end, Beckett and other writers—Faulkner high among them—who question whether words and language really can convey meaning at all.

21. What short stories have you read that opened up your literary horizons?

In *Dubliners*, particularly “Araby,” “Eveline,” “Clay,” and “The Dead.” In Hemingway, the very early Nick Adams stories, “The End of Something,” “The Three-Day Blow,” “Big Two-hearted River” parts one and two, and, of later stories, “In Another Country,” “Hills like White Elephants, and “Cat in the Rain.” From Sherwood Anderson, all the stories in *Winesburg, Ohio*, and later “The Egg.” Willa Cather, “Paul’s Case.” Many, many others, more than I can remember right now! Oh, don’t forget Nathaniel Hawthorne’s great stories, among them “Young Goodman Brown.”

(For all twenty-one questions, great thanks are due to the students in Elizabeth Hodges’ senior year Advanced Placement Literature and Composition class: Adrian Rodríguez, Amy Pennock, Bobby Cacho, Chelsea McLaughlin, Cristina Rodríguez, Daniel Vissepo, David Rodríguez, Graeme Giltrow, Kiani Haack, Marika Spackey, Mayleen Santiago, Monica Sánchez, Natasha Levy, Nate Martin, and Valeria Aponte—EL)

4

THOUGHTS ON THE FUTURE

For me, that was fun, and I owe a great debt to Elizabeth Hodges and to her .intelligently inquisitive students. “Feast” *is* immature, young, a bit creaky, certainly self conscious, but nevertheless it’s not an embarrassment. And the fact is, too, that writing to the students about it was one of the few *purely literary* things I’d done since June of 2003—the date of my first reading about the truth of what happened on and leading up to 9/11. It’s true that in 2003 I was already embarked on writing [A Nation Gone Blind](#), a book that’s a mix of the literary and the political. And, shortly before that book appeared in early 2006, I did write my “self interview,” and *that* was another mix of the literary and other matters. Right afterward, it’s also true, I wrote an essay not about Jane Smiley reading books but about books reading Jane Smiley, and *that* was almost wholly a literary essay. Otherwise, though, everything I wrote or had written since June of 2003—*everything*, essay after essay after essay for over two years straight—was, either directly or indirectly, about politics. More exactly, these essays were—and are—about what seems to me the abundant and transparently clear evidence that our nation is being deliberately, purposely, malevolently, and—however irrelevant this adverb may now have become—reasonably destroyed from within.

Whatever I or many, many, many others may have written, however, has failed to prevent the [mighty Wurlitzer from playing on](#), or the lies from drowning out the truth, or the false from

ever more deeply burying the genuine. Nothing that I or a thousand others have written, said, or done about the enormous, overwhelming set of lies that our republic is and has become since the mid-1990s has done the least bit of good or has helped replace a single molecule of the horror-filled cancer with a single molecule of healthy tissue.

But talking about “Feast,” nevertheless, *was* fun, and it has helped give me the courage to make a change in subject and approach, hoping that at least *something* may come of it. 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 once again a novelist and will once again become a literary writer. *The End of the 19th Century* exists. It’s published; it’s being read by some, however few; it has been reviewed and, just maybe, it may be reviewed more widely.

Further, I’m going to propose a series of pieces—this being the first³—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 most absolutely 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 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.

—Eric Larsen
—February 11, 2009

³ And, as it happened, the last. EL (2023)